

The Relevance and Importance of the Mosque al Aqsa for Various Historic Religions

Posted on May 5, 2018

Introduction

Mosque Al Aqsa is a very famous mosque located in Jerusalem, a city famous worldwide due to its historical significance of the three most significant religions: Islam, Christianity, and Jewish. (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.) The city is also commonly known as Bait ul Maqdas, which can roughly be translated as the holy house. (1st) Jerusalem's fame is not only due to Mosque al Aqsa but also because it has a unique history and topography. The beautiful city is located on a plateau, carefully maintained and looked after by the Jewish Government. Mosque al Aqsa is probably the only monument, the only historic place in the entire world, which is held dearly and with great significance by all three major religions. Each one of these groups believes that the ownership of the mosque belongs to them due to its repeated mentions in their respective religious scriptures and texts. The religious history of all three of these groups includes Bait Al Maqdas in one way or another and convinces them that it belongs to them and them alone.

For Muslims in particular, Bait ul Maqdas holds a lot of significance and importance for several historical religions. A detailed discussion of these reasons is also included in this paper. Focusing on the Muslims and their beliefs regarding the mosque and the events associated with it, an attempt that this paper aims to make, by no means is akin to being ignorant of the significance the mosque holds for the Christians and Jews. It is noteworthy and important, perhaps even necessary, to mention that the Christians and the Jews hold Bait ul Maqdas at the same level of importance as the Muslims do. However, discussing the details and going into the depths of Christian and Jewish beliefs about it is beyond the scope of this paper. Thus, the main focus throughout the paper will be on Muslims, their beliefs, Islamic history, and the important Islamic events and commandments associated with Mosque al Aqsa. Moreover, the reason why the Muslims have so far been unable to gain possession and control over it from the Jews despite having such strong sentiments about it, and the political aspect of those reasons is also a part of this paper.

Importance of Bait al Maqdas for Muslims

Bait al Maqdas is just as important for the Muslims of the present-day world as it was for the Muslims a hundred years ago. There are multiple reasons why Muslims hold the mosque important. First and foremost, most of the Prophets that are known to have been sent on the earth by Allah through various verses of the Quran, are known to have been sent to this particular city, which signifies the

spiritual value of Jerusalem. These prophets were not just sent to Jerusalem but were also assigned their respective missions to be executed within the city among the Israelites. In the Quran, the association of the prophet David with the city has been highlighted a lot. (2nd) According to the Quranic verses, he founded the city and was the first one to bring its holy significance and importance to it. His reign in Jerusalem lasted for about thirty-three years after which his son named Solomon, a man of great talent, strength, and power took care of it. Quran talks about him and his reign in great detail.

During prophet David's reign, the Israelites were divided into a number of fractions amongst themselves and constantly fighting and disputing over various things with one another. However, due to his [leadership capabilities](#) and authoritative charisma, he managed to reunite them and bring them together. This established brotherhood amongst them once again. Brotherhood is something that is valued greatly by Muslims because Allah stresses a lot on maintaining strong ties and good relationships within the "Muslim brethren." Brotherhood and unity amongst the Muslims is a matter of great emphasis and Islam promotes it a lot. Since David reunited the people of Israel, Islam respected his deed a lot.

Solomon, upon Allah's commandment, built the temple which is why it adds to the importance and association of Muslims with the Holy Mosque and Jerusalem. Pursuant to Allah's commandment, he also built Sakina's Coffin. This coffin is said to contain items of religious importance. These items are such that all three major religions, Islam, Christianity, and Jewish hold them dear to them. (2nd)

The prophecy of a number of prophets, the temple of Solomon, and Sakina's coffin are the significant reasons why this city is so dear to Muslims. On top of all these reasons, the most important reason is that it used to be the first Qibla for Muslims. (The Qur'an, 2:144) This means it used to hold the same status for Muslims as the holy city of Makkah. The concept of Qibla in Islam is very interesting and important. It is a specified place, a point on the earth towards which Muslims face while praying. It is very important, in fact, one of the fundamental concepts of Islam since prayer is obligatory for all Muslims and without it, Islam remains incomplete. Initially, while the Muslims were still in Mecca and had not yet migrated to Medina, Bait al Maqdas was the qibla for them. It was ordained by Allah. It was the direction towards which they used to face while praying. However, the Prophet Muhammad knew the importance of the Kaaba and the city of Mecca as well as the fact that they were destined to conquer it soon, he used to stand in such a way that he would face both Bait al Maqdas and the Kaaba at the same time during prayers. When the Muslims migrated to Medina, they only faced Jerusalem since facing the Kaaba at the same time as facing Bait al Maqdas was not possible anymore.

Upon migration to Medina, the local Jews secretly held pleasure in knowing that the Muslims were giving so much importance to their holy monument, Bait al Maqdas. Blinded by jealousy for the Muslims due to their rise, Jews started spreading various things among the people that made them question Islam. They purposefully made them think that Islam was not an original religion since it was giving importance to a monument that belonged to another religious group, namely the Jews. It was a very difficult time for the Muslims, especially for Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in

particular because people kept coming up with various kinds of questions related to the qibla to which there was no answer.

During that time, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) used to look up to the sky and seek Allah's help in order to get out of this difficulty and discomfort that he had found himself in. After about sixteen or seventeen months of migration to Medina, while Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) was leading a prayer, Allah, at last, revealed a command ordering the Prophet to change his direction. He was told to face the Kaaba at Mecca instead of Bait al Maqdas in Jerusalem. The whole incident has been mentioned with explicit and specific details in the Quran and marks a very important event of joy and pleasure for Muslims.

The journey of Mairaj is yet another reason for the importance of bait ul Muqadas. Miraj is an Arabic word that translates as ascension to the heavens. It was an event that occurred during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and he made a journey through all the skies and heavens. Bait al Maqdas was the first stop during this heavenly journey. (The Qur'an, 17:1; Grabar, 1996) In the Mosque al Aqsa, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) led a prayer in which all the other Prophets and Messengers of Allah followed him.

During this journey, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) witnessed all the heavens and hells, and he also brought many commandments on how to lead life. It is a reason that this even holds so much importance for the Muslims and there is no debate on it. (5th) Thus, all these incidents and events serve to explain why Muslims hold so much importance, significance, and respect for the Bait al Maqdas, why they think it is special to them, and why they feel they deserve ownership of it.

Conflict Over Mosque Al Aqsa

A beautiful wall surrounds and protects Mosque al Aqsa on all four sides. Israel captured a portion of the west-facing wall and titled it "The Jewish Shrine." Israelites also call this entire area "Temple Mount." It is the third most significant spiritual monument in Islam. (3rd). Since World War I, there has been a dispute among Muslims, Christians, and Jews over the possession of this holy land. The situation has been worsening since then and has taken the form of a full-scale military situation. Israel has forcefully occupied the holy city and a war has been going on since then.

When the war came to an end, the entire area of Palestinian land came under the interim Government of the British. According to the Balfour Declaration, which was signed by the Government, the British were bound by law to provide peace and protection for the Jewish people of the land and ensure their safety and care. A homeland for the Jews was to be found in the Palestinian lands. During this time period, the British government in charge of Palestine began to grant land to the Zionist movement (the Israel lobby) in order to establish settlements.

Soon, the local population manifested their opposition and anger towards the Zionist influence by protesting and raising their voices against it. They had increasingly come to realize what the

consequences of such an increased and intensified Zionist influence could mean for them in the near future. The realization of these concerns compelled them to be united to form the Al Burqa Rebellion of 1929. (3rd) Since that time period, the area has received its fair share of battles, wars, and attacks. There has been great enmity among the Jews and Muslims and a war has been going on since then. There have been a number of major wars. These wars have brought chaos and catastrophe in the regions and countless precious lives have been lost by both Jews and Muslims.

In October of 1990, according to reports issued by the UN, around twenty people lost their lives in an event that has been termed 'Black Monday.' Just six years later, in 1996, roughly sixty people died in the protests that took place in retaliation for the decision to construct a tunnel through the Western Wall.

There have been confrontations on both sides between the Israeli and Palestinian forces and the conflict is more sparked and worse than ever before. (3rd) Jerusalem had always been under the control of Jordan after the British withdrew their control of it in 1946. After the war of 1967, it came under the power of the Government of Israel. The West Bank also came under their possession, but various international bodies told them to let that go. Despite multiple and repeated warnings and threats of attack, Israel refused to give up her control of the West Bank.

This was deeply problematic, almost embarrassing for the Muslim authorities who had controlled Jerusalem earlier for almost 1300 years. Losing control of Jerusalem, the holy and sacred land, which has an extreme spiritual and emotional attachment, to the Jews was unimaginable for the leaders of the Muslim world. (4th) The Jewish occupation of Jerusalem and Mosque al Aqsa sparked a new conflict between the Muslims and the Jews. It added to the conflict that had already been going on between the two groups since the time period of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him.)

In 1994, Palestinians and Jordanians signed a peace treaty in the name of the Wadi al Araba Peace Treaty. (United Nations Peacemaker, 1994) By signing this treaty, the task of overlooking the maintenance and caretaking of all the religious monuments located in the area including the Mosque al Aqsa was handed over to Jordan. It was a responsibility that the Jordanian Ministry of Foundations was entrusted with. Thus, since Jordanians have control of the area now, Jews are forbidden to enter the mosque.

The only people who have access to the mosque are Muslims and Christians, and that too only in certain cases. (4th) The mosque itself is heavily guarded with tight security by Israeli and Palestinian soldiers. Despite the fact that the issue seems to have been resolved with the signing of the treaty, threats of attack seem to be never-ending and increasing more than ever before. On the surface, after the signing of the treaty, it seems that everything and all the issues and conflicts have been resolved. Muslims have been given their share of control of Jerusalem which is supposed to satisfy their thirst for power in the area. However, what needs to be focused on here is the fact that regardless of whether or not the Muslims are satisfied with what they have been given, the Jews of the area are paranoid.

The Jews have been against the Muslims ever since the Muslims became a prominent group during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him.) The enmity between the Muslims and the Jews is old and began as early as the time when the Muslims migrated from Mecca to Medina. The Jews' enmity and jealousy of the Muslims is deep-rooted and goes back to the fact that Israelites were surprised, almost shocked at finding out that the last, the final prophet from Allah had not come from amongst their tribe. He had been chosen from a tribe that they considered to be lower in status than themselves, which angered them greatly.

Muslims won power over the Jews and gained control after winning various wars and battles with the Quraysh and conquered the city of Mecca. It was a humiliating defeat not only for the people of Quraysh but also for the Jews since they were forced to accept the authenticity of proper Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the fact that Allah had favored a lesser group as compared to themselves. The defeat that the Jews faced at the hands of the Muslims about fourteen hundred years ago has still not been forgotten by them and they are still convinced that they need to avenge the wrong that they had to face at the hands of the Muslim community of the time period.

Today, the Jewish community takes pride in the fact that Mosque Al Aqsa is directly in their control. But they cannot bring themselves to ignore the fact that control of a part of Bait al Maqdas, of the city of Jerusalem, has been handed over to the Muslims. They remain paranoid and expect the Muslims to attack them soon in an attempt to gain control of the Mosque. It is precisely due to this reason that they have fortified the mosque and the area surrounding it. They have placed heavy and fully armed military officials on the boundaries of the mosque so that the Muslims do not enter or even attempt to attack it. (5th)

Their paranoia has roots in the initial history of the relationship between Jews and Muslims which goes back to the time period of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him.) They believe that the Muslims are jealous of them and the strong position of power that they hold in the city, which is why they are thought to be making every possible attempt and using every chance they get to attack the Jews to regain control of the mosque. In holding this strong position, what the local Jews of the area and their government forget is the fact that the issue is not just between the Jews and the Muslims. They forget that there are many other parties involved in it as well and that whatever happens between them and the Muslims concerns and affects others, too. It is precisely for this reason that the United Nations had to intervene in the issue and make an attempt to resolve the prevailing problems. (7th)

Nickolay Mladenov, who happens to be the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, a project based on the sole purpose of resolving the conflict between Israel and Palestine, clearly stated that out of all the [political issues](#) that he had ever been in charge of resolving, the one concerning Bait al Maqdas was the most complicated and difficult one. It was primarily due to the emotional and sentimental aspects of the monument for both sides. According to him, Jerusalem was equally important for both the Jews and the Muslims because it had been given great importance in their respective religions and formed a very important part of their identities, which could under no

circumstances be compromised. (7th)

He made it clear that the United Nations' stance and position regarding Jerusalem were not at all, not even slightly biased or prejudiced, and that the team responsible for working on the issue was doing its best to make sure that both the parties involved were satisfied with the decision that was to be arrived at. It was a herculean task. The maximum that could have been done was a compromise. Thus, the final decision presented was only achieved after extremely difficult negotiations and mutual agreements between both parties.

Despite the fact that at the time the Israelites and their government agreed to provide the Palestinians with a part of their city and let them have control over it, they have become increasingly terrified in recent years. They tend to forget that the United Nations has power in the region and that their teams and various relevant bodies can take extremely strict and severe action against any party that breaks or violates any part of the Wadi al Araba Peace Treaty.

The Treaty had various clauses regarding many different issues that existed between Israel and Palestine. The treaty made clear as to which party got control of what part of the city. It had separate rules regarding the water bodies and their control and usage. What was to be allowed to the Palestinians was clearly defined and what part was to remain under the Jews was also specified. Similarly, a map was drawn in which the Muslim parts and the Jewish parts of the city were clearly highlighted. One group could not cross those borders and enter the areas reserved for the other party. On top of everything, it was specifically mentioned that peace would prevail between both parties and that they would maintain cordial relations with one another. Furthermore, both parties were told that they were to provide help and reach out to the refugees who migrated to Jerusalem. They were to take care of them and to look after them together with each other's cooperation and help. (8th) There were other clauses of the treaty as well regarding the environment and foreign relations, but the few important ones that contain the entire gist of the whole document have been mentioned.

Both parties mutually agreed upon all the clauses that were devised, agreed upon, and proposed by the United Nations bodies. They were approved, after which both the Jews and the Muslims agreed to sign it. Though the main purpose of the Treaty was to establish and promote peace between both parties, one major thing that it managed to accomplish in favor of the Muslims was to facilitate and allow their entry into the region. Entering into the area and gaining access as well as control over various things was the first thing for them in their long-term mission of conquering the entire area and eventually the Mosque al Aqsa.

With the first step having been achieved, the next ones do not seem all that impossible anymore. But the might and power of the Jews is not to be underestimated. They are also fully prepared against any sort of potential attack on them by the Muslims. They are powerful enough to fight back and even win against the Muslims. It, by no means, is to say or imply that they are courageous and not at all terrified of the Muslims' powers and their gaining control of what the Jews believe rightfully belongs to

them. (7th)

A large proportion of the media coverage and reports of recent times has emphasized and highlighted only one aspect of the entire picture of the current scenario of the area. It only focuses on those areas of the city where there is “exclusive Muslim control.” (6th) This bias of the local media and news reports of the area is directly reflective of the Jewish fears of potential Muslim attacks and their eventually gaining control over the entire area. It clearly shows two important things: firstly, that the Jews are scared of the Muslim powers, and secondly the level of insecurity and possessiveness they have for what they believe rightfully belongs to them.

The Jews also fear division, which they do not want. Some division has already taken place, clearly against their will, but they do not want their land to be divided any further as division would rob the area of its true sentimental, spiritual, and religious essence and significance. Because of the Wadi al Araba peace treaty, the Muslims know that they are never going to be able to attack the Jews and the lands that they occupy in Jerusalem. Nor can they attack the Mosque al Aqsa as they are fully aware of the consequences that they will have to face at the hands of the United Nations if they do so. They are aware of the greater power of the international body that governs them in this regard and they are reluctant, in fact fearful, to violate the rules that have been established and put into place by them.

The case for the Jews in this regard is, however, the complete opposite. They still make attempts to drive the Muslim forces out of their land and keep trying to come up with discreet ways and strategies to tactfully do that without outrightly violating the treaty and its clauses. The ever-increasing attempts by the Israelites to gain full control of the Mosque al Aqsa as well as the rest of Jerusalem are very clearly reflective of their boldness and adamant to complete their mission of gaining complete control of the entire Palestine. It also shows the enmity that they have for the Muslims and the intensity with which they are repelled by them.

One can also argue that they even have this plan in their minds is the fact that they are fully aware of the weaknesses of the Arabs and Palestine and the lack of cooperation and unity that exists between them. Though they do fear them, at the same time, they are also aware that they have the potential to fight the Muslims and bring them down. (6th) Currently, at this point in time, the political situation in the area is such that the Israelites’ fanatic extremism is at its peak. It has been as provoked as it has never been before and at the same time the defense and protective forces of both the Arabs and the Palestinians are at their weakest. They have never been more divided. The Israelites are completely aware of it and the edge that it gives them. Various reports have shown that they will never let this golden opportunity go to waste. They will avail it as much as they can and make sure that they attack the Muslims in such a way that would guarantee the occupation of not only Jerusalem but the entire Palestine without them having to face any sort of a sentence from the United Nations at having violated the treaty which was signed many years ago from now.

Problems for the Muslims

As has already been discussed above in a lot of detail, there are numerous reasons why the Muslims, both Arabs, and Palestinians, have up until now been unable to gain control of the Mosque al Aqsa despite desperately wanting to and despite the mosque having so much symbolic importance and significance for them in their religion. The Muslims' actions regarding the mosque and Jerusalem as a whole have been restricted by a lot of factors. First and foremost, there is the peace treaty that the United Nations has signed with the Israelites. The United Nations, being the authority over both involved parties has the power to remove them from various international bodies and to take severe action against them if they violate any of the clauses or points made clear in the treaty. Since the purpose of the formation of the United Nations was to prevent any sort of battle or war from breaking out in any part of the world, it has done as best as it could to maintain peace in the disputed land of Jerusalem. (7th)

But the issue is obviously much more complicated than that. As part of the colonial project, the Zionist movement was a very important aspect. In 1898, when the Europeans first entered Jerusalem, they were only concerned about maximizing their own power and gaining control of as much land as they possibly could. They could only do that by collaborating with the local Jews in the area and bringing them on their side as they have done in other parts of the world, including Africa and South Asia. They convinced the Jews that it was important for them to conquer Palestine and bring the Muslims down. They reminded them of their previous enmity with them and convinced them that they needed to avenge the injustices the Muslims had done to them centuries ago. (6th)

They formulated a plan that came to be known as the Zionist movement, the main aim and purpose of which was to take over Palestine and conquer the Muslim lands gradually. However, the Jews soon found themselves sharing their own land with those whom they considered their most repulsive enemies, something which was beyond what they could bear. Thus, they decided to attack the Muslims. They would probably have done that long ago had it not been for the United Nations to intervene and prevent them from doing so.

Thus, herein lies another important obstacle for the Muslims in acquiring Mosque al Aqsa. The enemies they are up against are extremely powerful, their military forces are unbeatable. They know that even if it were not for the United Nations, they would never be able to win a war or even a small battle against the Israelites because of their might and power. One of the most important reasons for that is the fact that they themselves are not united as a group. The Muslims of today are extremely divided and have many further groupings amongst themselves. They let their differences take precedence over their unity and the power and strength they could have had had they been united in their mission. However, since that is not at all the case, they do not have enough power, strength, or even the will to fight the Israelites to occupy and win over the Mosque al Aqsa. There are very few groups of Muslims who are passionate enough, primarily the Palestinians, but the rest of the Muslim world is not ready to lend a helping hand to them so that they can achieve their mission.

Conclusion

To encapsulate all that has been discussed so far, Bait al Maqdas holds great significance for three different religious groups of people namely Jews, Christians, and Muslims. All three of these groups want control of the Mosque and want it to be under their control. However, currently, the city of Jerusalem is disputed between the Muslims and the Jews. The United Nations supervises the situation in the area and ensures that things between the two groups do not get out of hand and that war does not break out in the land. One way in which war has been attempted to be put off is by making both the parties sign a peace treaty with one another in which both of them agreed not to wage war against one another and maintain civil and cordial relations with each other to maintain peace and order in the area.

The Muslims desperately want to gain control of the mosque because of the symbolic, Islamic value that it has for them, but they have been unable to do so because of the treaty that they have signed with the Jews which prevents them from taking any sort of action against them. Things have been made much more complicated than they already were by the Zionist agenda and the Europeans who once colonized the regions. They convinced the Jews that in order to avenge the injustices the Muslims did to them, they needed to attack them and take over the Palestinian land to deprive them of the freedom and liberation that they currently have.

Since the Jewish forces are so powerful as they are, the Arabs and Palestinians are unable to defend themselves and are very vulnerable, one of the reasons for that being their lack of collaboration, communication, will, and unity with one another. Thus, despite the fact that the Mosque holds great importance for the Muslim community of the world, the Muslims have been unable to win it over from the Jews and liberate it from the Jewish influence and control due to the current political complexities that are prevalent in the area. (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.)

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