



Facts About the Temple Mount (Har HaBayit)

Summary

The Temple Mount, located on Mount Moriah in Israel's eternal capital Jerusalem, is the Jewish people's holiest site. It is the site where Abraham bound and prepared to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac; and the angel of G-d provided a ram to sacrifice instead, and blessed Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land. It is the site of the foundation stone of the creation of the world. King David purchased the Temple Mount and brought the Ark of the Covenant to stand there. David's son, King Solomon built the First holy Temple – the Beit HaMikdash – on the Temple Mount, as a place where all persons could come and worship.

Jews wept when the Babylonians destroyed the First Temple, and rejoiced when, 70 years later, Persia's King Cyrus defeated Babylon and permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem to build the Second Temple. After the Syrian Seleucids defiled the Second Temple with idols and pig sacrifices, the Maccabees revolted, overcame the Seleucids, and purified and rededicated the Second Temple and lit the menorah. Herod beautifully renovated the Second Temple and expanded the Temple Mount by building retaining walls, including the Western Wall.

The Temples stood for almost one thousand years (960-586 BCE and 537 BCE-70 CE), and were the center of Jewish religious life. Tens of thousands of Jews flocked to the Temple Mount on Yom Kippur and the three annual Jewish pilgrimage festivals – Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot.

On the Ninth of Av in 70 CE, the Romans destroyed the Second Temple and slaughtered approximately one million Jews – events mourned by Jews around the world to this day. Tragically, the Romans also crushed the Second Jewish (Bar Kochba) revolt (132-135 CE).

Throughout successive foreign invasions by Babylonians, Seleucids, Romans, the Byzantine (Christian) Empire, Sassanid Persians, Arab Caliphates (the Rashidun, Ummayad, Abbasid, Seljuk, Fatimid, and Ayubbid Caliphates), Crusaders, Mamluks, Ottomans, the British, the Jordanians, etc., until the reconstitution of the Jewish state, and to this day, Jews all over the world pray three times a day facing the Temple Mount, incorporating a prayer for the Temple to be rebuilt. The Passover Seder and Yom Kippur Service end with "Next year in Jerusalem." At Jewish weddings, the groom breaks a glass in memory of the Temples' destruction.

Jews began building a Third Temple from 361-363 CE, which was burnt down by Christians when a new Byzantine ruler came to power. Jews also built a synagogue on the Temple Mount

and made plans for a Third Temple during brief Jewish independent self-government under the Persians (614-617 CE), and built synagogues on the Temple Mount at later junctures.

In 638 CE, the Muslim Rashidun Caliphate conquered Jerusalem. In 691 CE, the Muslim Umayyad Caliphate built the Dome of the Rock shrine around the rock that may have been the holiest part of the Jewish Temples. The Umayyads also built the al-Aqsa mosque on the southern part of the Temple Mount in 705-715. In 810, the Muslims walled up the eastern Golden Gate and created a Muslim cemetery outside the gate, to try to block the portal where a Jewish Messiah is expected to someday enter the Temple Mount.

In 1099 CE, Crusaders conquered Jerusalem, massacred Jews, and converted the Muslim buildings on the Temple Mount into a church and Knights of Templar headquarters. Saladin reconquered and re-converted the Crusader buildings into Muslim sites.

During foreign rule, Jews' access to their holiest site – the Temple Mount, and the Western (retaining) wall, varied with the foreign rulers' whims. Jews often suffered harsh restrictions.

In 1929, the Jerusalem Grand Mufti, Nazi-ally Haj Amin al-Husseini incited Arabs to murder and maim hundreds of Jews by falsely claiming that Jews intended to desecrate the al-Aqsa mosque. The British mandatory government then appeased the Arabs by forbidding Jews from blowing the shofar at the Western Wall. Jews regularly defied this, and were imprisoned.

During Jordan's 19-year illegal occupation of eastern Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria (1948-1967), Jordan totally banned Jews from the Jewish people's holy sites, including the Temple Mount and Western Wall. The ban violated the [Israel-Jordan Armistice Agreement](#), which required Jordan to provide "free access to the Holy places." Jordan turned the Western Wall area into a garbage dump and slum.

On June 7, 1967, Israel's brave soldiers miraculously recaptured the Temple Mount in the defensive Six Day War. The joyous cry rang out: "The Temple Mount is in our hands!" IDF Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren sounded the shofar on the Temple Mount, led prayers and sought to build a synagogue there. The Israeli flag was raised over the Dome of the Rock.

But then, in a tragic act of appeasement, Israeli General Moshe Dayan ordered the Israeli flag to be taken down, and ten days later entrusted the Temple Mount's custodianship to the Jordanian Wakf. Under a so-called "status quo," non-Muslims were permitted to visit the Temple Mount, but only Muslims were allowed to pray on the Temple Mount. The "status quo" also prohibits desecration of the site – but alas that was not enforced.

Jews and other non-Muslims can only enter the Temple Mount through [one gate](#) – the Mugrahbi gate near the Western Wall, and its unstable access bridge which blocks two-thirds of the women's section of the Western Wall – while Muslims are able to enter the Temple Mount through all ten other gates.

The Wakf repeatedly violated the “status quo,” carried out massive desecration and destruction of Jewish Temple period antiquities, and converted underground Second Temple period structures into a large new mosque.

Notably, numerous Muslim sources previously acknowledged the holiness of the Temple Mount to the Jewish people, and that the Temple Mount was the site of the Jewish Temples.

Yet today, Palestinian Arab leaders deny that the Jewish Temples ever existed, and deny the Jewish people’s connection to Judaism’s holiest site. Turning over the keys for the hard-won Temple Mount to the Wakf ended up encouraging anti-Jewish violence and Muslim supremacist claims that the Temple Mount, and all of Jerusalem and Israel, are exclusively theirs.

Despite Muslim religious control of the Temple Mount, Palestinian Arabs often falsely claim that Jews are endangering al Aqsa, to incite Arabs to murder Jews, just as occurred in 1929. In 2000, Yasser Arafat used MK Ariel Sharon’s brief walk on the Temple Mount, which had been pre-approved by the PA’s security chief, as a pretext for Arafat’s pre-planned Second Intifada (a.k.a. the “Al Aqsa Intifada”) - in which Arabs murdered or maimed 10,000 innocent Jewish civilians, including many children, in suicide bombings and other terror attacks.

Current Palestinian Authority (PA) dictator Mahmoud Abbas frequently incites terror by rebroadcasting his 2016 call to spill blood to prevent Jews’ “filthy feet” from “defiling” al-Aqsa. Hamas uses the Temple Mount as an excuse to launch thousands of rockets at innocent Jews. An Arab terrorist shot Rabbi Yehuda Glick in the chest, point blank, after calling Glick “an enemy of al Aqsa,” because Glick wants the Temple Mount to be a place of prayer and peace for all.

Palestinian Arabs store and have used IEDs, boulders, flammable substances and guns on the Temple Mount to attack Jews, tourists and Israeli police officers, and to throw boulders at Jews praying at the Western Wall below.

When Moshe Dayan gave the Wakf the keys to the Temple Mount, he claimed that this appeasement would prevent a “holy war.” But Wakf control did not dissuade anyone from attacking Israel. Instead of preventing war, Wakf control impedes international peace. In August 2020, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem issued a [fatwa](#) (Islamic legal ruling) banning Muslims from nations that signed the Abraham Accords from praying at Al Aqsa. Palestinian Arabs verbally abused and [threatened](#) Emirati Muslims who still visited the site. Other Muslims from nations who had made peace with Israel kept away, fearing for their security.

Israel’s 1967 “Protection of Holy Places Law” endorses free access to holy places and prohibits desecration of those places. Israel has also committed to upholding the human right to freedom of religion set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments. Yet, police prohibited Jews from praying on the Temple Mount for decades, to purportedly ensure public order. Jews were ejected from the Temple Mount if they even silently moved their lips in what might be a prayer. Israel’s courts usually deferred to police decisions, and held that Jews’ freedom of worship was not an absolute right.

Recently, there has been some Jewish prayer on the Jewish people's holiest site, the Temple Mount, but it has been extremely limited. Jews cannot bring prayer books, prayer shawls or a Torah to the site; must keep walking; and can only pray in quiet voices (if at all). Jews are only allowed to visit briefly during severely restricted hours, and are often subjected to non-stop, aggressive harassment and intimidation from Arab mobs (paid by Hamas) who crowd around visitors and repeatedly scream "Alluhu Akbar, Alluhu Akbar."

Despite all the restrictions, almost 1,700 Jews quietly prayed while walking on the Temple Mount on Tisha B-Av, 2021.

But worrisomely, even this limited Jewish prayer is at risk from Arab rioters and certain Israeli government officials who recently reasserted the "status quo" denying Jews freedom of worship on the Temple Mount. Some even falsely claimed that the Kotel (the Western Wall) is the Jews' holiest site. Top U.S. Rabbi Meir Soloveichik aptly [wrote](#) about the Kotel claim:

"This is preposterous. The Western Wall, or 'Kotel,' is the retaining wall of the Temple Plaza from the Herodian age. It acquired its special status because it was the one site where Jews were allowed by the Ottomans to gather in yearning for the Temple itself, and to mourn its destruction. *The Kotel is the place where Jews for centuries gathered...to affirm that the Temple Mount is Judaism's holiest site.*"

Fortunately, there is a growing recognition of the importance and justice of restoring Jewish prayer rights and building a synagogue on halachically permissible portions of the Temple Mount. Rabbi Meir Soloveichik joined the call for the Jewish people's religious freedom to be respected on our holiest site, [quoting](#) former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin:

"What our ancestors refused to tolerate from their ancient oppressors, even at the cost of their lives and freedom, is tolerated by the generation of Jews that describes itself as the last of oppression and the first of redemption. A people that does not defend its holy places—that does not even try to defend them—is not free, however much it may babble about freedom. People that permit the most holy spot in their country and their most sacred feelings to be trampled underfoot are slaves in spirit."

Discrimination against Jewish people's right to worship should not be happening anywhere in the world. Certainly not in the Jewish state, on the Jewish people's holiest site. As in King Solomon's time, the Temple Mount should be restored as a sacred place where all – including the Jewish people – can pray and worship G-d.

Prepared by ZOA Director of Research and Special Projects Elizabeth Berney, Esq. and ZOA Israel Office Director Dan Illouz, Esq. ZOA will be publishing further, detailed information about the Temple Mount's history and current situation. Please check back here.