



## THE SPIRITUAL GEOGRAPHY OF JERUSALEM

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The Muslims' spiritual attachment to Jerusalem is based on the fact that it is part of the Holy Triangle of Islam's spiritual geography, which comprises *Makkah al Mukarramah* (Makkah), *Al Madinah al Munawwarah* (Madinah) and *Bait al Maqdis* (Jerusalem). At the apex of this triangle is *al Bait al 'Atiq* ("the Ancient House") in Makkah – also known as *al Bait al Haram* ("the Sacred House") or *al Masjid al Haram* ("the Sacred Mosque") - which, according to Islamic belief, was built by Abraham, the Father of the Prophets, with his son Ishmael.

However, the "supreme status" of *al Masjid al Haram* in Makkah is interchangeable with that of *al Masjid al Aqsa* ("the Farthest Mosque") in Jerusalem and the two are part of an organic whole. Muslims see a profound unity within the boundaries of Islam's "sacred geography" – a position summed up by Louis Massignon when he explained that no believing Muslim is prepared to abandon his claim to *al Khalil* (Hebron)

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or – particularly – to Jerusalem, which is the Third of the *Haramain* ('Two Holy Shrines' - the other ones being Makkah and Madinah). For Islam, which was born in the desert of Arabia, *Urshalim al Quds* (Jerusalem) is the “meeting point” of the spiritual and the temporal. It proves the truth of God’s Will to Abraham, which was the driving force behind Muhammad’s *al Israa’ wa’l Mi’raj* (the Night Journey and Ascension) to that “distant Temple”, which at that time he believed to be “the *mihrab* (chamber) of Zachariah, and which later became *al Masjid al Aqsa*; it is also destined to be Islam’s final *qiblah* (direction in which Muslims turn to perform the Prayer) at the End of Time, thus replacing the *Ka’bah* in Makkah. Islam cannot abandon its claim to [*al Masjid*] *al Aqsa* without denying the Prophet”<sup>1</sup>.

This reflects the Islamic view that the three Abrahamic religions share a single origin. Moreover, the Muslims’ firm belief in this “sacred geographical configuration” may well be the reason why they attach similar symbolic importance to all the sacred tombs and buildings in the Islamic world. Muslims point to numerous examples and symbols of this unity between *al Masjid al Haram* in Makkah, *Al Masjid al Nabawi* (“the Prophet’s Mosque”) in Madinah and *al Masjid al Aqsa* in Jerusalem.

*Al Israa’ wa’l Mi’raj* was probably the first and most striking demonstration of this spiritual/geographical unity and recalls the Prophet Abraham’s journey from Hebron to the *Ka’bah* in Makkah and back to Hebron. Abraham’s journey was an overland “*Israa’*” (Night Journey) that took place before the Prophet Muhammad’s from *al Masjid al Haram* to *al Masjid al Aqsa*, whence he (Muhammad) ascended to the Heavens, thus completing the final arc of the Sacred Circle of his ancestor Abraham’s journey from the Holy Land to Makkah, by travelling in the opposite direction (from Makkah to the Holy Land).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, by linking the common messages of *Tawhid* (Monotheism) which extend as a continuous thread from Abraham to Muhammad, it also reinforces the ties between the

1 Yoakim Mubarak: *Al Quds Qadhiyah*, translated by Maha Farah Khoury, Middle East Council of Churches, Beirut, 1996, p. 79.

2 Muhammad Mustafa al Bash: *Al Quds baina Ru’yatain* Dar Qutaybah, Damascus, Beirut, 1997, pp. 111-112.

holy places associated with each of the monotheistic faiths, as if – to quote Sayyid Qutb – it is a declaration that Muhammad inherited the messages of all the prophets who came before him<sup>1</sup>.

*Al Israa'* is mentioned in the Qur'an in this *ayat*: "Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from *al Masjid al Haram* to *al Masjid al Aqsa*, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing." (*Al Israa'*, 1). Exegetes differ over precisely how *al Israa' wa'l Mi'raj* should be understood. According to Abu'l Fida, the "People of Allah" disagree over whether it happened as a physical, bodily experience or as a vision; the majority view is that it was a bodily experience, while others say it was a vision. A'isha (may Allah be pleased with her) is reported as saying: "The body of the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) was not taken away, but Allah took [him] on the Night Journey with his soul", though there are also those who claim that "the *Israa'* was [a] physical and spiritual [journey] to *Bait al Maqdis* and from there to the Seven Heavens and the Lote Tree of the Furthest Boundary"<sup>2</sup>.

Shaddad bin Aws narrates that in the Prophet (PBUH)'s description of his Journey, the steed Buraq transported him until they reached a land with date palms. Then Buraq told him to him dismount and said: "You have prayed in Yathrib (Madinah) and Taibah". The journey then continued until Buraq told him to dismount again. The Prophet dismounted and Buraq said: "Pray", so he prayed. Then they continued their journey and Buraq said: "Do you know where you prayed?" The Prophet replied: "Allah knows best". Buraq said: "You prayed in Bethlehem, where the Messiah Son of Mary was born". Then the journey continued to *al Masjid al Aqsa*, where the Prophet prayed in the place and manner that Allah wished"<sup>3</sup>.

So, in addition to embodying the "oneness of prophetic Revelation", the Prophet's Night Journey acted as a link between the farthest ends

1 Muhammad Muhammad Hasan Sharab: *Bait al Maqdis wa'l Masjid al Aqsa*, Dar al Qalam, Damascus, 1994, p. 333.

2 Imad al Din Isma'il Abu'l Fida': *Al Mukhtasar fi Tarikh al Bashar (Tarikh Abi'l Fida')*, Part 1, Beirut, undated, p. 119.

3 Shihab al Din Abi Mahmud bin Tamim al Maqdisi: *Muthir al Gharam ila Ziyatat al Quds wa'l Sham*, edited by Ahmed al Khatibi, Dar al Jil, undated, Beirut, p. 267.



of Islam's sacred geography – Makkah, Madinah, and Jerusalem and its neighbouring territories (such as Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Son of Mary) with their associations with Moses and David.

### *Al Isra' wa'l Mi'raj*

The “oneness” of Divine revelation is most graphically illustrated by *al Mi'raj* (the Ascension). Ibn Ishaq narrates from Abu Sa'id al Khudri that the Prophet ascended, “rising to the Seventh Heaven, and during his ascent he met the previous prophets. In the First Heaven he met Adam, in the Second he met Jesus Son of Mary and Yahya Son of Zachariah (John the Baptist), in the Third Joseph Son of Jacob, in the Fourth Idris, in the Fifth Aaron Son of 'Imran, in the Sixth Moses Son of 'Imran, and in the Seventh, at the threshold of the ‘Lote Tree of the Furthest Boundary’ he met his ancestor Abraham *al Khalil* (‘the Friend of Allah’)”<sup>1</sup>.

It was also reported that the Prophet led all the prophets in prayer at *al Masjid al Aqsa* – that is to say, in the heart of Jerusalem – an event symbolising not only the “oneness” of Divine revelation, but also the “unity of the sacred geographical configuration”. According to Ibn Mas'oud, the Prophet reported: “...then we went on our way until we came to *Bait al Maqdis*, and before me were arrayed the prophets named by Allah and the prophets not named by Allah; so I led them in prayer, with the exception of these three – Jesus, Moses and Abraham”<sup>2</sup>.

Al Suyuti narrates a Prophetic Hadith from Abu Hatim, which states that Gabriel put the Prophet in front of all those who were in the Mosque: “So I led them in prayer. And when I left Gabriel said: ‘O Muhammad, do you know who was praying behind you?’ I said: ‘No.’ He said: “Praying behind you were all the prophets sent by Allah”.<sup>3</sup> As well as raising the

1 Ibn Hisham: *Al Sirah al Nabawiyyah*, Parts 1 and 2, edited by Mustafa al Saqa, 'Abdul Hafidh al Shibli and Ibrahim al Abyari, 2<sup>nd</sup> impression, Matba'at Mustafa al Babi al Halabi, Cairo, 1955, pp. 306-307.

2 Ibn 'Asakir, Al Imam al Hafidh Abu'l Qasim 'Ali bin al Hasan bin Hibat Allah al Shafi'i: *Tahdhib Tarikh Dimashq al Kabir*, Part 1, edited by Sheikh 'Abdul Qadir Rutbat Badran, 2<sup>nd</sup> impression, Dar al Masirah, Beirut, 1979, p. 329.

3 Sharab: *Bait al Maqdis*, p. 329.

status of Jerusalem, this also confirms the “oneness” of Divine revelation and reinforces the idea that Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets and the Completer of their Message. Moreover, the fact that the Prophet ascended to the “Lote Tree of the Furthest Boundary” from the Rock in Jerusalem’s *al Masjid al Aqsa* confers even greater sanctity upon *al Aqsa* and Jerusalem.

### The ancient character of its spiritual history and the interchangeability of the Holy Sites

The spiritual unity of the geographical sites is also embodied in the fact that they are all extremely ancient – so ancient, in fact, that their sanctity predates the man-made structures which were built on them. Indeed, some Muslims regard certain of their physical traces that can still be seen today – such as the *Ka’bah*’s Black Stone and *al Masjid al Aqsa*’s Noble Rock - as being celestial in origin. On the change of the *qiblah* direction between Makkah and Jerusalem, some narrations claim that *al Masjid al Aqsa* and the *Ka’bah* were originally built by the angels and that their sacred status predates their construction by human hands. ‘A’ishah reports that the Prophet (PBUH) stated: “Makkah is a city exalted by Allah, Who exalted its Holy Sanctuaries. He created Makkah and surrounded it with angels a thousand years before He created any earthly thing. And He linked it to Madinah and He linked Madinah to *Bait al Maqdis*. Then – a thousand years later - He created the earth as a single [act of] creation”<sup>1</sup>.

A Hadith narrated by Abu Dharr al Ghifari states: “I said to the Messenger of Allah (PBUH): ‘Which mosque was first placed upon the face of the earth?’ He said: ‘*Al Masjid al Haram*’. I said: ‘Then which [one]?’ He said: ‘*Bait al Maqdis*’. I said: ‘How long [was there] between them?’ He said: ‘Forty years’”.<sup>2</sup> In this context “forty years” refers to “holy time”

1 Shihab al Din Abi Mahmoud bin Tamim al Maqdisi: *Muthir al Gharam ila Ziyatat al Quds wa'l Sham*, p. 132, and Dhiya' al Din al Maqdisi: *Fadha'il Bait al Maqdis*, edited by Al Hafidh Press, Dar Dimashq, Damascus, 1985, p. 48.

2 Yaqut al Hamawi: *Mu'jam al Buldan*, Part 1, collated by 'Abdul Ilah Nabhan, Ministry of Culture, Damascus, pp. 379-380.



and cannot be measured in temporal terms. At the same time, the time difference shows the degree of “kinship” between *al Masjid al Haram* and *Al Masjid al Aqsa*. At the same time, however, the Prophet’s Mosque in Madinah is no less holy – nor is it any less ancient in origin - than they are. According to Ibn Ishaq, as the Prophet (PBUH) entered Madinah at the start of his *Hijrah* (Emigration), he was mounted on his camel and let her walk free. When the people took hold of her halter and invited him to alight and stay with them, he said: “Leave her be, because she is commanded” – i.e. she was being led by a Higher Power. Finally, the camel stopped and knelt down at the site where the Prophet’s Mosque stands today<sup>1</sup> and the Prophet (PBUH) ordered that his Mosque should be built there. This is evidence that the sacred character of the place predates the actual construction of the Mosque and that the site was chosen at the command of a Higher Power.

Moreover, when the Qur’an referred to Abraham (PBUH) laying the foundations of *Al Masjid al Haram* - “when Abraham was raising the foundations of the House and [with him] Ishmael, [saying], ‘Our Lord, accept [this] from us. Indeed You are the Hearing, the Knowing’” (*Al Baqarah*, 127) – he was building it according to the Heavenly Model followed by the angels before him. In his book *Al Tijan* Ibn Hisham records that “when Adam built the *Ka’bah* Allah commanded him to travel to *Bait al Maqdis* and build it. So he built it and worshipped in it”.<sup>2</sup> In his *Tafsir* Imam Abu’l ‘Abbas al Qurtubi observes that, with Allah’s permission, the angels may have built *Bait al Maqdis* after they had built *Al Bait al Haram*<sup>3</sup>.

Shihab al Din al Maqdisi’s view is that al Qurtubi’s assertion is compatible with the *ayat*: “Verily, the first House [of worship] appointed for mankind was that at Bakkah [Makkah], full of blessing, and a guidance for mankind” (*Aal i ‘Imran*, 96). There are also numerous *ayats* indicating the sacred character of Jerusalem, including: “And We delivered him and Lot to the land which We had blessed for mankind” (*Al Anbiya’*, 71).

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Hisham: *Al Sirah al Nabawiyyah*, pp. 495-496. And see bin Jarir al Tabari: *Tarikh al Rusul wa’l Muluk*, Part 2, edited by Mohammed Abi’l Fadhl Ibrahim, Cairo, 1961, p. 396.

<sup>3</sup> Sharab: *Bait al Maqdis*, pp. 298-299.

Some Islamic sources speak of the celestial origin of the Black Stone and the Noble Rock. Al Ghazali quotes a Prophetic Hadith from al Tirmidhi as saying: “The Black Stone is a ruby of the Rubies of Paradise”,<sup>1</sup> while ‘Abdullah bin ‘Umar is reported to have said: “The *Rukn* (Corner) and *Maqam* (Place where Abraham stood during the building) are of Paradise”.<sup>2</sup> In the Islamic view the Rock in Jerusalem – like the Black Stone - is also a celestial model originating in Paradise. Ibn ‘Abbas quotes the Prophet (PBUH) as saying: “Whoever wishes to see a patch of paradise, let him look upon Jerusalem”, while the Companion Anas bin Malik narrated that “Paradise looks with yearning to Jerusalem, and Jerusalem is of the Garden of Paradise”<sup>3</sup>.

‘Ali bin Abi Talib is reported as saying: “I heard the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) say: ‘The most superior of plots of land is Jerusalem, and the most superior of rocks is the Rock of Jerusalem”,<sup>4</sup> while ‘Umar bin al Khattab said: “The Sanctuary is sanctified in the seven Heavens to the same extent as it is on earth, and Jerusalem is holy in the seven Heavens to the same extent as it is on earth”<sup>5</sup>.

There is an extensive succession of narrations on the subject. Some say that *al Masjid al Haram* and *al Masjid al Aqsa* have parallel existences in Heaven and that Jerusalem and Makkah do not enjoy separate symbolic status in the Islamic scheme of things but are “of a single order of sanctity”. Indeed, it is because of this Islamic spiritual-geographical vision that exegetes look to the Qur’anic *ayats* which accord equal honours to both Holy Places and class them as a single whole, such as: “By the fig and the olive. And [by] Mount Sinai. And by this secure city.” (*Al Tin*, 1-3) Abu Hurairah interprets the fig as referring to Mount Sinai, the olive as symbolising *al Masjid al Aqsa* and “this secure city” as meaning Makkah.

1 Majid al Din al Hanbali: *Al Athar al Jalil bi Tarikh al Quds wa’l Khalil*, Part 1, undated, place of publication unknown, copy in the National Library in Aleppo, p. 8.

2 Abu Hamid al Ghazali: *Ihya’ ‘Ulum al Din*, Volume 1, Damascus, 1994, p. 288.

3 Abu’l Walid al Azraqi Mohammed bin ‘Abdullah bin Ahmed: *Akhbar Makkah*, Part 1, Dar al Thaqafah, Makkah, 1965, p. 325.

4 Shamsuddin al Suyuti: *Ithaf al Akhissa bi Fadha’il al Masjid al Aqsa*, edited by Ahmed Ramadan Ahmed, Part 1, Cairo, 1982, p. 101.

5 Majid al Din al Hanbali: *Al Athar al Jalil bi Tarikh al Quds wa’l Khalil*, Part 1, see above, p. 209; and al Suyuti: Part 1, p. 132.



The ultimate example of this “sacred Islamic unity” can be seen in the way *al Masjid al Haram* becomes interchangeable with *al Masjid al Aqsa* as the direction of the *qiblah*. Although Jerusalem was the First *Qiblah*, Divine Revelation then decreed that Muslims should turn towards *al Masjid al Haram*, but Jerusalem will again become the direction of the *qiblah* on the Last Day. On that day the *Ka’bah*, together with everything in it, will be brought to Jerusalem, along with all the mosques on earth.<sup>1</sup>

According to a Hadith narrated by Ka’b: “The Hour will not come until *al Bait al Haram* visits *Bait al Maqdis* and they are led to Allah together, with their people inside them. And the Presentation and the Reckoning [will be] at *Bait al Maqdis*”<sup>2</sup>.

These narrations about the direction and function of the *qibla*- and the transporting of all the mosques at the End of Time to *Bait al Maqdis* – demonstrate the sacred unity between the three shrines and the cities in which they are located.

At the beginning of the Islamic Mission Muslims performed their Prayer while facing in the direction of *al Masjid al Aqsa* in Jerusalem. Turning towards *Bait al Maqdis*,<sup>3</sup> they prayed two *rak’ats* (prayer cycles) before sunrise and two *rak’ats* before sunset in accordance with the religion of Abraham. Muslims believe that Jerusalem was the *qiblah* of all the prophets. Indeed, “from the time that Adam descended to earth Allah did not send a prophet except that He made his *qiblah* the Rock of *Bait al Maqdis*”.<sup>4</sup>

Some Hadiths indicate that the Prophet (PBUH) prayed to the two *qiblahs* simultaneously. According to Ibn al ‘Asakir, while he was in Makkah the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) prayed towards Jerusalem with the *Ka’bah* in front of him. Then sixteen months after he had emigrated to Madinah

1 Al Suyuti: *Ithaf al Akhissa*, Part 1, p. 101.

2 Yaqt al Hamawi: *Mu’jam al Buldan*, Part 1, see above, pp. 377-378.

3 Shihab al Din Abi Mahmoud bin Tamim al Maqdisi: *Muthir al Gharam*, p. 220. See also Ishaq Musa al Husaini: *Urubat al Quds*, PLO Research Centre, Beirut, 1969, p. 79.

4 Mohammed Habash: *Sirat Rasul Allah*, Damascus, 1993, p. 43.



he was [directed to] turn to the *Ka'bah*.<sup>1</sup> During the Meccan period and the beginning of the Madinan period Jerusalem was the Muslims' *qiblah*, and although the Prophet prayed and recited the Qur'an in *al Bait al Haram* during the Meccan period, he instructed the Muslims to pray towards Jerusalem, possibly as a means of showing that as a faith Islam was distinct from the pagan cults whose symbols filled *al Bait al Haram* at that time. Thus when the Muslims faced Jerusalem – the spiritual centre of the People of the Book – this demonstrated that Islam represented a continuation of the “*Din al Wahiy*” (“the Religion of Revelation”). Then after the Prophet (PBUH) emigrated to Madinah, he continued to pray facing Jerusalem until the Divine Command came to change the direction of the *qiblah* to the *Ka'bah*: “...and We will surely turn you to a *qiblah* with which you will be pleased. So turn your face toward *al Masjid al Haram*. And wherever you [Believers] are, turn your faces toward it [in prayer]...” (*Al Baqarah*, 144).

Karen Armstrong describes this change of direction as a sign that the Muslims were returning to the original Abrahamic creed before the Jews and Christians split into two and were rent by internecine fighting, and she sees it as an attempt to restore the lost unity through the symbol of *al Bait al Haram*, which was rebuilt by Abraham, the True Muslim<sup>2</sup>.

Muslims also cite other extensive evidence confirming the links between Islam's spiritual/geographical sites. Abu Hurairah reports that the Prophet said: “Do not break camp except to [go to] three mosques: *al Masjid al Haram*, this mosque of mine and *al Masjid al Aqsa*”<sup>3</sup>. For Muslims there is also a strong connection between the Spring of Zamzam in Makkah and the Spring of Salwan in Jerusalem and there are numerous Hadiths on the subject. Khalid bin Ma'dan quotes the Prophet (PBUH) as

1 Shihab al Din Abi Mahmud bin Tamim al Maqdisi: *Muthir al Gharam*, p. 214.

2 Karen Armstrong: *Al Quds: Madinah Wahidah wa 'Aqa'id Thalath* (Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths), translated into Arabic by Fatimah Nasir and Mohammed 'Anani, Suttur, Cairo, 1998, p. 377.

3 Shihab al Din Abi Mahmud bin Tamim al Maqdisi: *Muthir al Gharam*, see above, p. 54, and Ibn Kathir Abu'l Fida' al Hafidh: *Al Bidayah wa'l Nihayah*, Part 9, Maktabat al Ma'aref wa'l Nasr, Beirut, Riyadh, 1966, p. 253.



saying: “Zamzam and the Spring of Salwan in *Bait al Maqdis* are of the springs of Paradise”<sup>1</sup>.

Inspired by the notion of unity between Salwan and Zamzam (and Jerusalem and Makkah), the poet Abu'l 'Ala' al Ma'arri wrote:

“And in the Spring of Salwan in its Jerusalem sanctuary

There is a taste which makes [a person] imagine that it is from Zamzam.”

Umm 'Abdullah, the wife of Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal is reported to have said: “If anyone goes to Jerusalem, he should go to the *mihrab* (prayer niche) of David and pray there. And he should bathe in the Spring of Salwan, because it is from Paradise”.<sup>2</sup> Islamic symbolic imagery of the unity between Jerusalem and Makkah has even suggested that “Noah’s Ark sailed round and round *al Bait al Haram* for a week. Then it sailed round and round *Bait al Maqdis* for a week. Then it came to rest on [Mount] Judi”<sup>3</sup>.

For Muslims, *Bait al Maqdis* is one of the three holy places in which performing the Prayer yields additional rewards. According to Abu'l Darda', the Messenger (PBUH) said: “Prayer in *al Masjid al Haram* is worth a hundred thousand Prayers. And Prayer in my mosque is worth a thousand Prayers. And Prayer in *Bait al Maqdis* is worth five hundred prayers”.<sup>4</sup> It is also one of the three mosques that is guarded by the angels; 'Alqamah narrates from 'Abdullah bin 'Umar that the Prophet (PBUH) said: “Allah has [specially appointed] angels – an angel appointed to [guard] the *Ka'bah*, and angel appointed [to guard] my mosque and an angel appointed [to stand guard] at *al Masjid al Aqsa*”<sup>5</sup>.

1 Sharh Jalal al Din al Suyuti, *Sunan al Nasa'i*, Part 2, Cairo, undated, p. 37. Compare this with Abu 'Abdullah al Bukhari's *Sahih*, Part 2, Cairo, 1387 AH, p. 324.

2 Sharab: *Bait al Maqdis*, p. 171.

3 Ibn al Jawzi Abu'l Faraj bin 'Ali: *Fadha'il al Quds*, edited by Jibril Sulaiman Jabur, Beirut, 1979, p. 79.

4 Al Suyuti: *Ithaf al Akhissa*, p. 337.

5 Sharab: *Bait al Maqdis*, p. 337.

## Symbols of the veneration in which Jerusalem is held

When the Muslims' *qiblah* was changed from Jerusalem to Makkah, this had no effect upon the religious status of Jerusalem and Jerusalem's "spiritual heart" (*al Masjid al Aqsa*) in Muslim eyes. According to Islamic beliefs, the *qiblah* will return there at the End of Time; moreover, Ibn 'Abbas is reported as saying, "There is not a single inch in Jerusalem where a Prophet has not prayed or an Angel not stood"<sup>1</sup>

Some Muslim sources see Jerusalem's status as being even higher than Madinah's, despite the fact that it is listed third in the Islamic-spiritual geographical order. The following Hadith is narrated from 'Imran bin Husain: "I said 'O Messenger of Allah, what is better [than] Madinah?' He said: 'What about if you should see *Bait al Maqdis*?' I said: 'Is it better?' The Prophet (PBUH) said: 'And how not, when everything in it is visited and visits, and souls are guided to it? And the spirit of *Bait al Maqdis* does not guide except to Allah, who honoured Madinah (Yathrib) and graced it with me, and I am in it alive and I am in it dead. If that were not the case, I would not have emigrated from Makkah. Indeed, I did not see the moon in any land except that it is better in Makkah"<sup>2</sup>.

Islamic folk literature tells of a Messianic vision which prophesies that Jesus will return to Jerusalem at the End of Time and kill the *Dajjal* ("Antichrist"), or "the One-eyed *Dajjal*". This prophesy is supported by several Hadiths attributed to the Prophet, which also state that Jerusalem will be the Place of Congregation of the Dead and the Resurrection. Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal and Ibn Majah narrate this report from Maimunah, the wife of the Messenger (PBUH): "When the Prophet (PBUH) was asked: 'Give us a *fatwa* on *Bait al Maqdis*', he replied: '[It is] the Land of Congregation of the Dead and the Resurrection. Go to it and pray in it, because the Prayer there is as a thousand Prayers'"<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal: *Al Musnad*, Part 4, Cairo, 1317 AH, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> Yaqt al Hamawi: *Mu'jam al Buldan*, Volume 1, p. 379.

<sup>3</sup> *Sunan al Nasa'i*, see above, p. 34.



It is reported that the Companion ‘Ubadah bin al Samit (d. 34 AH/654 CE) stood on the eastern wall of *Bait al Maqdis* after ‘Umar’s conquest of Jerusalem and wept. Some people asked him: “Why are you weeping O Abu’l Walid?” He replied: “The Prophet (PBUH) informed me that from here he saw *Jahannam* (Hell)”.<sup>1</sup> Some esoteric interpretations of certain Qur’anic *ayats* also indicate this. For example, in the *ayat*: “And listen on the Day when the Caller will call out from a place that is near” (*Qaf*, 41), the Caller has been understood to be Israfil, who “summons the Congregation of the Dead from *Bait al Maqdis*, which (i.e. *Bait al Maqdis*) is the centre of the earth”.<sup>2</sup>

‘Abdullah bin ‘Umar (d. 65 AH/684 CE) is reported as saying: “The wall mentioned by Allah in the Qur’an – ‘And a wall will be placed between them with a door, its interior containing mercy, but on the outside of it is torment’ (*Al Hadid*, 13) – is the eastern wall of *Bait al Maqdis*. Its interior – i.e. the Mosque - contains mercy and the outside of it - the torment - the Valley of *Jahannam*”<sup>3</sup>.

The same theme occurs in numerous Prophetic Hadiths, the main focus being the Resurrection of the Messiah in Jerusalem. The Muslims will all congregate there and the Messiah, who will be at the head of them, will slay the *Dajjal*, who will be supported by seventy thousand Jews. According to one such version, Umm Sharik bint Abi’l ‘Akr asked the Prophet: “O Messenger of Allah, where [will] the Muslims be [at that time]?” He replied: “At *Bait al Maqdis*, and the Imam of the Muslims on that day will be a godly man. And when he says *Allahu Akbar* and enters the state of Prayer, Jesus Son of Mary will descend. And when the [godly] man sees him he will know him and stand back so that Jesus (PBUH) is [immediately] behind him. [But] Jesus will then place his hand between his shoulders and say to him: ‘Step forward and pray, because [the Prayer] has been called on your behalf.’ He will then lead them in Prayer, and when he turns to leave,

1 Shihab al Din Abi Mahmoud bin Tamim al Maqdisi: *Muthir al Gharam*, p. 219. And see al Bash: *Al Quds baina Ru’yatain*, p. 116.

2 Shihab al Din Abi Mahmoud bin Tamim al Maqdisi: *Muthir al Gharam*, see above, p. 146, and Dhiya’ al Din al Maqdisi: *Fadha’il Bait al Maqdis*, pp. 44-45.

3 Shihab al Din Abi Mahmoud bin Tamim al Maqdisi: *Muthir al Gharam*, see above, p. 74.

Jesus will say: ‘Open the door.’ So they will open it and the *Dajjal* will be behind it; with him there will be seventy thousand Jews, all of them armed and carrying swords. And when he looks at Jesus (PBUH) he will melt as lead melts in fire and as salt dissolves in water. Then he will go out fleeing and Jesus will say: ‘I owe you a blow which I must not fail to deliver’, and he will catch up with him at Allah’s eastern door and kill him”.<sup>1</sup> Following this, the Messiah will fill the earth with justice where it had previously been filled with injustice, oppression and mutual hatred, “so that the new-born baby will come face to face with the lion and suffer no harm and the wolf will walk among the sheep without eating them, and he will fill the earth with peace”.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to this, there are numerous Islamic narrations of sacred and symbolic significance about taking up residence in the city of Jerusalem. Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal reports Dhu’l Asabi’ as saying: “I said: ‘O Messenger of Allah, If we should suffer such as to remain [alive] after you, where do you command us [to go]?’ He said: ‘You should [go to] *Bait al Maqdis*. Perchance you will have offspring who frequent that Mosque”.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, some recommend that the *Hajj* (Greater Pilgrimage) to *al Bait al Haram* should start from *Bait al Maqdis*. According to a Hadith narrated by Abu Dawud and Ibn Majah: “A person who embarks upon a *Hajj* or an ‘*Umrah* (Lesser Pilgrimage) from *al Masjid al Aqsa* to *Al Masjid al Haram* will receive Allah’s forgiveness for his past and future sins”.<sup>4</sup>

There are many traditions that guarantee Jerusalem’s special status in the Islamic consciousness, including its association with some of the prophets. Taking certain stories from the Qur’an as their starting point, some reports maintain that Moses spoke to Allah in the land of *Bait al Maqdis*, David and Solomon turned to Allah in repentance in *Bait al Maqdis* and it was there that Allah restored Solomon’s kingdom to him,

1 Ibid. p. 74.

2 Ibn ‘Asakir: *Tahdhib Tarikh Dimashq*, pp. 192-193.

3 Ibid. p. 193. Also Dhiya’ al Din al Maqdisi: *Fadha’il Bait al Maqdis*, see above, pp. 65-76, Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal: *Al Musnad*, see above, Part 8, p. 117, and *Sunan al Nasa’i*, see above, Part 3, pp. 111-112.

4 Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal: *Al Musnad*, see above, Part 4, p. 67.



Allah gave Zachariah the good news of the birth of his son, Allah subjected the mountains and birds to David, the prophets performed their sacrifices, Mary was given winter fruit in the summer and summer fruit in the winter and Jesus was born and learnt in the cradle. It was also in the land of *Bait al Maqdis* that the table set with viands was made to descend for Jesus and Mary died and was buried.<sup>1</sup>

The whole of the *al Masjid al Aqsa* area – including the Noble Rock - is particularly holy because of *al Israa' wa'l Mi'raj*. There are numerous traditions specifically about the Rock, including the Islamic belief that it is the site from which the Prophet (PBUH) ascended to the Lote Tree of the Furthest Boundary. This is one of the reasons why the Rock has enormous symbolic spiritual significance for Muslims.

Other instances of its sacred character include this example from Fudhayl bin 'Ayyadh: “When the direction of the *qiblah* was changed (to *al Bait al Haram*), the Rock said: ‘O Allah, am I still the *qiblah* of Your worshippers, even if You sent the best of Your creation (the Prophet Muhammad) and their *qiblah* was diverted from me?’ [Allah] said: ‘[I give you] glad tidings that I am placing My throne upon you, and assembling my creation at you, and judging My affair upon you, and dispersing My worshippers from you’”<sup>2</sup>.

According to a Hadith attributed to Ka'b: “There is not a spring of sweet water [in the world] that does not [originally] emanate from under the Rock of *Bait al Maqdis*”,<sup>3</sup> while a Hadith narrated by Muqatil regards the Rock as the centre of the world (“The Rock of *Bait al Maqdis* is the centre of the world”) and another Hadith states that when the Prophet (PBUH) was asked by 'Abdullah bin Sallam how *al Masjid al Aqsa* got its name he replied: “Because it is the centre of the world, neither more nor less”<sup>4</sup>.

1 Majid al Din al Hanbali: *Al Athar al Jalil bi Tarikh al Quds wa'l Khalil*, see above, p. 143, and Sharab: *Bait al Maqdis*, see above, p. 337.

2 Majid al Din al Hanbali: *Al Athar al Jalil bi Tarikh al Quds wa'l Khalil*, see above, p. 52.

3 Shihab al Din Abi Mahmud bin Tamim al Maqdisi: *Muthir al Gharam*, see above, p. 380.

4 Ibid: p. 218.

In a reflection of the Rock's symbolic spiritual status and its closeness to Heaven, some Muslims even imagine the site of the Rock as being physically above the earth. It is narrated from al Kalbi that the Rock is "the closest point on earth to Heaven by a distance of ten miles", while a narration from 'Ali bin Abi Talib, Ibn 'Abbas and Hudhaifah states: "The location near to Heaven is the Rock of *Bait al Maqdis*"<sup>1</sup>.

In the Islamic collective memory the Rock is also associated with an extremely significant event – the *Fida'* (Sacrifice/Ransom/Redemption) – although most exegetes claim that the son of Abraham intended as the Sacrifice was Ishmael and that the site of the Sacrifice is in Makkah. However, others believe that Abraham chose to sacrifice his son on the Noble Rock, but that by Divine Will he was replaced at the last moment by a fat ram – an event celebrated by Muslims at *Hajj* time as '*Eid al Adha*'<sup>2</sup> and described as "the Great Festival". On this occasion sheep are slaughtered to commemorate the occasion, referred to in the Qur'an in the *ayat*: "And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice" (*Al Saffat*, 107).

<sup>1</sup> Al Suyuti: *Ithaf al Akhissa*, see above, p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> Shihab al Din Abi Mahmoud bin Tamim al Maqdisi: *Muthir al Gharam*, see above, pp. 74-75.