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The Status and Significance of Bayt al-Maqdis in Islam

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ABSTRACT *In this commentary, the status and significance of Bayt al-Maqdis in Islam is discussed from a religious perspective. The importance of Bayt al-Maqdis is emphasized in the Qur'an and in the traditions (hadith) of Prophet Muhammad. The paper explains the significance of Bayt al-Maqdis by addressing the close bonds, unalienable rights, and firm ties that link Muslims to Bayt al-Maqdis and the land of Palestine. The author claims that there are four significant bonds through which Muslims link to Bayt al-Maqdis, namely bonds of creed, bonds of worship, bonds of civilization and culture, and historical bonds.*

Keywords: Palestine, al-Quds, Bayt al-Maqdis, Islam, Muslims

Introduction

When the blessed al-Aqsa Mosque is mentioned, it also denotes the city of al-Quds or Bayt al-Maqdis, in particular, and Palestine, in general. Any references to any of these three rubrics necessarily include the other two rubrics, as there is a concomitance of faith, worship, and history among them. There is absolutely no room for separating these names. In the Qur'an, Allah (SWT) says: "Limitless in His glory is He who transported His servant by night from al-Haram Mosque [the Inviolable House of Worship at Makkah] to the Remote House of Worship [al-Aqsa Mosque at Bayt al-Maqdis] –the environs of which We had blessed– so that We might show him some of Our symbols: for, verily, He alone is all-hearing, all-seeing."¹ *Surah al-Isra* is the only one, in the Qur'an, that begins with the glorification, *Subhan*, so as to indicate that Allah (SWT), intends to alert us that an extraordinary matter had taken place, that is the miracle of the Night Journey to Bayt al-Maqdis (*al-Isra*) and the subsequent Ascension to Heaven (*al-Mi'raj*).

Miracles are part of the Islamic faith. In addition, the blessing mentioned in the above verse includes and is bestowed on the land of Palestine from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River, including the city of al-Quds. The blessing of al-Aqsa Mosque is doubled and realized in the first place. There is an opinion by some scholars of *tafsir* (exegesis of al-Qur'an) that the blessed land includes

not only the Levant countries but also all homelands of Islam and any country whose people embraces Islam, is covered by this blessing. In order to explain the place of Bayt al-Maqdis in Islam, it is necessary to address to the close bonds, unalienable rights, and firm ties that link Muslims to Bayt al-Maqdis and the land of Palestine. These bonds will be briefly discussed below.

Bonds of Creed

The bonds of creed are represented in several aspects. The first aspect is the "Night Journey (*al-Isra*)" and the subsequent Ascension to Heaven (*al-Mi'raj*). Our impeccable Prophet (PBUH) was transported by night from al-Haram Mosque (the inviolable house of worship at Makkah) to al-Aqsa Mosque, the remote house of worship at Bayt al-Maqdis (al-Quds) in Palestine. Then he ascended to Heaven all the way to the lotus-tree of the farthest limit or ultimate boundary, as indicated in *Surah al-Najm*.

Thus, al-Quds was the hub of this divine miracle (*al-Isra* and *al-Mi'raj*) so as to demonstrate the importance of al-Quds and Palestine and to appreciate its profile, status, and significance. Since the incidents of *al-Isra* and *al-Mi'raj* are miracles that are part of the Islamic creed, all Muslims are attached to this city by religious belief. Therefore, the presence of the people of Palestine in this land is based on an eternal divine will and is subject to neither negotiation nor concession.

The second religious significance of al-Quds is related to Angel Israfil and the Rock of Bayt al-Maqdis. Allah (SWT) says: “And be on the alert for the day when the caller calls from a close quarter, the day when they hear the Cry in all truth. That is the day of rising [from the dead].”² The “close quarter” here is the honorable Rock of Bayt al-Maqdis where Israfil (PBUH) will call humanity for gathering; that is, the day of rising from the dead for the ‘Day of Judgment.’ Believing in the ‘Day of Judgment’ is another part and parcel of Islamic creed.

The third aspect is that the Bayt al-Maqdis will be the land of resurrection and gathering as people will be resurrected from the dead and gathered for their final reckoning in the Day of Judgment. On the authority of the companion, Maymuna bint Sa’d (may Allah be pleased with her) said: “O Prophet of Allah, tell us about Bayt al-Maqdis.” So he said, “The land of resurrection and gathering. Visit it and pray in it since praying one prayer in it is like a thousand prayers in other masjids. [Maymuna] said: What if I couldn’t bear reaching it? He said: then present it with oil so as to light up its lamps, so whoever does that is like someone who has visited it.”³ And since the Day of Resurrection is part of the Islamic faith, the connection of all Muslims to this place is a bond of creed.

Bonds of Worship

Firstly, the city of al-Quds was the first *qibla* of the Muslims. Accord-

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ing to the most likely accounts,⁴ Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and early Muslims directed their faces towards Bayt al-Maqdis, as their first, in their prayers for sixteen months in Madinah according to the most likely accounts starting from the divine enshrinement of the five daily prayers during *al-Mi’raj*, which was commenced from Bayt al-Maqdis, until the divine revelation of the verse changed the *qibla* to the Masjid al-Haram:

We have seen thee [O Prophet] often turn thy face towards heaven [for guidance]: and now We shall indeed make thee turn in prayer in a direction which will fulfill thy desire. Turn, then, thy face towards al-Haram Mosque; and wherever you all may be, turn your faces towards it [in prayer]. And, verily, those who have been vouchsafed revelation aforetime know well that this [command-

Palestine has also a historical significance for Arabs. Throughout the history, there have been continuous Arab migrations from the Arabian Peninsula to the Levant

ment] comes in truth from their Sustainer; and Allah is not unaware of what they do.⁵

Secondly, according to the tradition (*hadith*) related to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the reward of prayers in al-Aqsa Mosque is equivalent to five hundred times of the reward in other *masjids*⁶ There are several versions of this *hadith* strengthening and corroborating each other.

It must be noted that when we mention al-Aqsa Mosque, we mean by that all the area of al-Aqsa Mosque which amounts to 144 *dunums* (i.e., 144,000 square meters). That is, we do not mean by al-Aqsa Mosque only the covered southern construction. The mosque is composed of all its facilities including the Dome of the Honorable Rock, the Marwani Chapel, the old Aqsa, the terraces, the corridors, the arcades, the wells, the endowed water reservoirs and fountains, the patios, the external walls, and the main gates.

Thirdly, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) prompts Muslims to visit the

blessed al-Aqsa Mosque with the intent of worship and his traditions tie it up with al-Haram Mosque in Makkah and al-Nabawi Mosque in Madinah. He said: "Travelling is prompted only to three mosques: al-Haram Mosque, my Mosque (al-Nabawi) which is this, and al-Aqsa Mosque." In another version of this *hadith*, he said: "...al-Aqsa Mosque and my Mosque which is this."⁷

Fourthly, our honorable Messenger (PBUH) linked al-Aqsa Mosque to the rituals of pilgrimage to Makkah (i.e., *hajj* and *umra*): "Whoever commences pilgrimage from al-Aqsa Mosque, all his past sins will be forgiven."⁸ Commencing the state of pilgrimage starts with *ihram*, wearing *ihram* cloths from al-Aqsa Mosque, and the pilgrim raising their voice with *takbir* and *talbiya* as a declaration of intent of pilgrimage and beginning the trip to Makkah from Bayt al-Maqdis.

Fifthly, the residents of the city of al-Quds are eligible for the reward of frontier guardians in the cause of Allah, as they are in a continuous worship according to the prophetic tradition:

A group of my Ummah remains prevalently committed to the truth: defeating their enemy, not harmed by those who disagree with them, nor those who let them down, nor the adversity that befalls them, until Allah's will and support comes to them while they are in that situation. They said: O Messenger of Allah, where are they? He said: In Bayt



Sheikh Ikrima Sa'eed Sabri, the President of the Islamic Center in al-Quds, entering the al-Aqsa Mosque despite Israeli ban, January 2020.

MOSTAFA ALKHAROUF / AA Photo

al-Maqdis and the vicinity of Bayt al-Maqdis.⁹

Bonds of Civilization and Culture

In addition to al-Aqsa Mosque, which, covers, as mentioned above, an area of 144,000 square meters, there are several hundred buildings, facilities, endowments, monuments, and cultural institutions that date back to various eras of Islamic history, i.e. the Caliphate of Umar Ibn al-Khattab, the Umayyads, the Abbasids, the Ayyubis, the Mamluks, and the Ottomans. These monuments and institutions are all located around al-Aqsa Mosque and also in the old town of al-Quds, all of which represent the Islamic civilizational heritage of the city. Among the dozens of mosques in the old town of al-Quds, some date back to the caliphate of Umar Ibn

al-Khattab. Hundreds of Qur'an and *hadith* schools, institutes, *khanqahs*, *tabkhanehs*, and hospices, which were constructed and endowed around al-Aqsa Mosque and in the old town of al-Quds since the era of Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, still exist. These all serve to confirm Muslims' cultural, educational and civilizational bonds to Bayt al-Maqdis and Palestine.¹⁰

Historical Bonds

As proven by stone figures (slabs), the Arab Jebusites were the oldest recorded peoples that inhabited Palestine since 7500 B.C. (i.e., the Stone Age). Historical record does not show any people older than the Arab Jebusites and the Canaanites in these lands. Jebusites are also the first to establish the city of al-Quds and that its first name was Jebus, pronounced as



The last Friday prayer of Ramadan at the al-Aqsa Mosque, Jerusalem, May 2019. ISSAM RIMAWI / AA Photo

“yebus”, after their name. Among the names of this city is also Uru-Salim which is a Canaanite nomenclature that means the city of peace.

Palestine has also a historical significance for Arabs. Throughout the history, there have been continuous Arab migrations from the Arabian Peninsula to the Levant. The absence of a natural barrier, such as mountains, seas or rivers, separating Arabia from the Levant, in general, and the land of Palestine, in particular, facilitated these migrations. It is well known that migrations from the Ara-

bian Peninsula to the Levant were greater than those in the reverse direction, because Arabs were in dire need of water and pasture, which were more abundant in the Levant than in the Arabian Peninsula.¹¹ The Qur’an indicates that the Arab people were present in Palestine before the divine commission of Musa (PBUH), also known as Moses, that is, before the subsequent emergence of the Jewish religion and/or tradition. In *Surah al-Maidah*, Qur’an mentions that Prophet Musa said: “O my people! Enter the holy land which Allah has promised you; but do not turn back

[on your faith], for then you will be lost!”¹²

In the above verse, Musa (PBUH) addresses the children of Israel to enter the holy land of Palestine, which Allah has commanded them to enter, and warns them against rebellion and not responding to Allah’s commandment so that they do not lose their faith. The children of Israel replied: “O Musa! Behold, ferocious people dwell in that land, and we will surely not enter it unless they depart there from; but if they depart there from, then, behold, we will enter it.”¹³ That is, the people of Palestine were powerful and mighty and the children of Israel had no power to confront them until the former departed. This is an indication that the Children of Israel wanted a land without people. And when two righteous men asked the children of Israel to enter the land of Palestine, their answer was again refusal and abstinence, so Allah said: “O Musa! Behold, never shall we enter that [land] so long as those others are in it. Go forth, then, thou and thy Sustainer [Lord], and fight, both of you! We, behold, shall remain here!”¹⁴ The children of Israel insisted on disobedience and not entering the holy land; they used the word “never” in their answer, which denotes perpetuation.

As a result of this disobedience and intransigence, Musa (PBUH) turned to his Lord with the following words as mentioned in Qur’an: “O my Sustainer! Of none am I master but of myself and my brother [Aaron]: draw Thou, then, a dividing-line between us and these iniquitous folk!”¹⁵ Then

The holy land was forbidden to the children of Israel, as punishment for their rebellion to the commandments of Allah, and then they would be lost in the desert for forty years

came the divine answer and will as provided in the glorious Qur’an: “Then, verily, this [land] shall be forbidden to them for forty years, while they wander on earth, bewildered, to and from; and sorrow thou not over these iniquitous folk.”¹⁶ This means that the holy land was forbidden to the children of Israel, as punishment for their rebellion to the commandments of Allah, and then they would be lost in the desert for forty years. After this divine will, Musa (PBUH) stayed with his lost people in the desert for forty years, and despite the lapse of this period, they did not enter Palestine, but went to the Moab Mountains (al-Karak Mountains and Madaba in present-day Jordan) through Valley of ‘Araba. According to the Old Testament, Musa (PBUH) stood on a high hill in Moab Mountains and sighted the city of al-Quds in agony bemoaning that he was denied entry to Palestine, despite the lapse of the wandering time.

The Old Testament confirms that: “And the Lord said unto him, this is the land which I swore unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, say-

According to both the Old Testament and the Qur'an, the issue of the land of promise in Palestine, which Zionists have been reiterating for about a century as a justification for occupying Palestine, establishing Israel and ethnically cleansing the Palestinian people, had already been terminated during Musa's (PBUH) era

ing, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither.”¹⁷ This is further corroborated by what Musa, allegedly, said when the angel of death came to him: “O My Lord, deaden me in the holy land which is a stone's throw away.”¹⁸ From this tradition, it is understood that Musa (PBUH) did not enter the holy land, but rather died at a close location, that is, the Moab Mountains. Therefore, according to both the Old Testament and the Qur'an, the issue of the land of promise in Palestine, which Zionists have been reiterating for about a century as a justification for occupying Palestine, establishing Israel and ethnically cleansing the Palestinian people, had already been terminated during Musa's (PBUH) era. The glorious Qur'an gives details how the Israelites were denied entry to the holy land due to their rebellion

against Allah (SWT) and disobedience of His commandments.

The above discussion has outlined the most prominent bonds that link Muslims and Arabs to Palestine, in general, and Bayt al-Maqdis, in particular. With this brief overview, I hope that Muslims become aware of their religious, legal, and historical rights in Palestine and Bayt al-Maqdis and disseminate this knowledge. Verily, Allah (SWT) honored, sanctified, blessed Palestine, and raised its status and significance. ■

Endnotes

1. Qur'an, 17: 1. This verse implies a short reference to the Prophet's mystic experience of the “Night Journey (*al-Isra*)” to Bayt al-Maqdis and the subsequent “Ascension (*al-Mi'raj*)” to heaven.
2. Qur'an, 50: 4.
3. This tradition is related by Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Abu Dawud, Ibn Maja, and al-Bayhaqi as sound tradition (*Musnad Ahmad*, Vol. 6, p. 463; Ibn Maja, *hadith* No. 1407). The Prophet's clause was: “present it with oil to light up its lamps”, which signifies constructing, maintaining the place and donating for that purpose.
4. See, *Tafsir al-Maraghi*, 2nd Edition, pp. 9-10; M. al-Khudari, *Nur al-Yaqin fi Sirat Sayyid al-Mursalin*, p. 105. This account is related by al-Bukhari, Muslim, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Abu Dawud, Ibn Maja, al-Tirmidhi, and al-Nasai on the authority of the great companion al-Bara' ibn 'Azib, may Allah be pleased with him.
5. Qur'an, 2: 144.
6. “The reward of prayers in al-Haram Mosque is a hundred thousand times of the reward of prayers in other mosques and it is one thousand times in my Mosque and five hundred times in the Bayt al-Maqdis Mosque (al-Aqsa Mosque).” Related by Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Ibn Khuzayma, al-Tabarani, and al-Bazzar as a valid tradition on behalf of the companion, Abu al-Darda, may Allah be pleased with him.
7. Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim on behalf of the great companion Abu Said al-Khudari, may

Allah be pleased with him. Also related by Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Abu Dawud, al-Tirmidhi, al-Nasai, and Ibn Maja on behalf of the companion Abu Hurayra, may Allah be pleased with him. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, no. 1189; *Musnad Ahmad*, Vol. 3, p. 34; *Sunan Abu Dawud*, no. 2033; *Sunan al-Nasai*, Vol. 2, p. 73; and *Sunan Ibn Maja*, no. 1410.

8. Related by Abu Dawud in his *Sunan* on behalf of Um Salama, the mother of the believers (the Prophet's spouse), may Allah be pleased with her. This tradition is also related by Ibn Maja in his *Sunan* with different wording (version).

9. Related by Ahmad ibn Hanbal and al-Tabarani in *al-Awsat* as a sound *hadith* and its narrators are all trustworthy. It is narrated on behalf of the Prophet's companion Abu Umama al-Bahili, may Allah be pleased with him.

10. 'Arif al-'Arif, *al-Mufassal fi Tarikh al-Quds*, Vol. 1, pp. 491, 504; Ikrim Sabri, *Wajib al-Muslimin nahwa takhliṣ al-Quds al-Sharif*, pp. 3, 4.

11. Mujir al-Din al-Hanbali, *al-Uns al-Jalil fi Tarikh al-Quds wal-Khalil*, Vol. 1, p. 8; 'Arif al-'Arif, *al-Mufassal fi Tarikh al-Quds*, pp. 1-4; 'Arif al-'Arif, *Qubba al-Sakhra al-Musharafa wal-Masjid al-Aqsa al-Mubarak*, p. 18; Muhammad Hussain 'Ali, 'Abd al-Rahim Mir'ib, *Tarikh al-'Arab wal-Muslimin*, pp. 7-8; Hamad Yusuf, *Bayt al-Maqdis min al-'Ahd al-Rashidi wa Hatta Nihaya al-Dawla al-Ayyubiyya*; Ikrim Sabri, *Dalil al-Masjid al-Aqsa al-Mubarak*, pp. 7-8.

12. Qur'an, 5: 21.

13. Qur'an, 5: 22.

14. Qur'an, 5: 24.

15. Qur'an, 5: 25.

16. Qur'an, 5: 26.

17. Old Testament, Deuteronomy, 34: 4.

18. This tradition is related by al-Bukhari, Muslim, and al-Nasai.

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