

The Furthest Mosque

The History of Al – Aqsa Mosque from Earliest Times to the Present day

Islamic Concern for Palestine

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Introduction

For more than thirteen hundred years Al - Aqsa has been venerated throughout the Muslim world as the third holiest site of Islam. It was to this that the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings upon him, made his Night Journey from the Masjid al - Haram in Makkah. It was from this site that he, peace and blessings be upon him, ascended on the Miraj, his journey through the heavens to his Lord.

سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي أَسْرَى بِعَبْدِهِ لَيْلًا مِّنَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ
إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَا الَّذِي بَارَكْنَا حَوْلَهُ لِنُرِيَهُ
مِنَ آيَاتِنَا إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ ﴿١﴾

'Glory be to him Who carried His Servant (Muhammad - peace be upon him) by night, From the Holy Mosque to the Furthest Mosque, The precincts of which We have blessed, That We might show him some of Our signs. He is the All - Hearing, the All – Seeing.'

(Qur'an, Surah Al-Isra', 17:1)

For thirteen hundred years Al - Aqsa has dominated the skyline and the life of the Holy City. For more than thirteen centuries it was a centre of pilgrimage for Muslims from all over the world. For the past twenty years, its very existence has been threatened. It is purpose of this publication, and the videotape available with it, to outline the history of events that has led to this situation and the Muslim perspective on, and beyond, it

Chapter One: The History of Palestine

Palestine; The land of the Prophets. Rich in history - the history of generations of believers who lived and worshipped, and fought and died there, praising their Lord and defending their faith.

Nearly 4,000 years ago the Prophet Abraham, peace be upon him, stopped in the land of Canaan. He was a true believer, one pure of faith. He surrendered his will to God alone, with no associates.

From his sons Ishmael and Isaac came two great nations of believers. The descendants of Abraham - two rivers from a single sea. But the nearest to Abraham were those who most closely followed his way.

Six centuries later the Prophet Moses, peace be upon him, revived his teachings and led his people, descendants of Isaac, out of Egypt. Their destination? Palestine, the Land of Canaan.

Two more centuries and the Prophet David, peace be upon him, united the scattered tribes of Israel. He took Jerusalem for his capital. It is said that he brought with him the ark of the covenant.

The Prophet Solomon, peace be upon him, inherited the Kingdom from David, and built fortifications, and a place of worship; a place of worship on a site revered since ancient times, a hill known as Moriah.

The Kingdom split into two in the struggle for power following Solomon's death; Israel to the North and tiny Judah, including Jerusalem to the South.

After two hundred years of bitter rivalry between these two kingdoms, Israel was conquered by the Syrians and Judah found itself the sole remaining remnant of the Israelite nation.

A temple cult developed in the house of worship built by Solomon. Elaborate rituals and a paid priesthood were put in place. Protagonists of a return to the pure teachings of Moses were beaten and exiled. Incidents of injustice and immorality within the general populace became rampant. The destruction of the Temple, and with it Jerusalem, was prophesied.

Nebuchadnezzar entered Jerusalem in 586 BC. The temple was sacked and set fire to, and razed to the ground. The Royal Palace and all the great houses were destroyed, the population carried off in chains to Babylon. and they lamented on their long march into exile:

"If we had just performed the will of God and devoutly sung His praises, we would not have into your hands been delivered"

Judah ceased to exist. Four hundred years of rule by the house of David had to come to an end.

In 536 BC, the Persians overthrew the Babylonians and encouraged exiles to return. Construction began on the Second Temple and was completed in twenty years.

After 200 years of relative peace the Greeks captured Jerusalem. Attempts at Hellenization, including the rededication of the Second temple of Zeus and the sacrifice of pigs on its altar sparked a revolt.

In 164 BC Hasmonean Jews captured Mount Moriah and re - consecrated the Temple. But after a hundred years of Jewish rule, the society they created lay in ruins, broken down by years of vicious infighting.

Jerusalem was overrun by Rome in 63 BC. Herod was appointed King of Judea. He slaughtered the last of the Hasmoneans and ordered a lavish restoration and extension of the Second Temple.

A period of great civil disorder followed with strife between pacifists and Zealots, and riots against the Roman authorities. In the midst of this chaos Jesus of Nazareth, peace be upon him, began his teaching mission. His attempts to call people back to the pure teachings of Abraham and Moses were judged subversive by the authorities. He was tried and sentenced to death; *"yet they did not slay him but a likeness that was shown to them."*

Years later Jewish Zealots captured the temple Mount and massacred roman troops in Herod's palace. After three years of revolt, Titus of Rome laid siege to Jerusalem. The fiercely defended Temple eventually fell, and with it the whole city. Seeking a complete and enduring victory, Titus ordered the total destruction of the Herodian Temple. It was the 70th year of the Christian Era.

A new city named Aelia was built by the Romans on the ruins of Jerusalem, and a temple dedicated to Jupiter raised up. In 324 Constantine of Byzantium marched on Aelia. He rebuilt the City walls and commissioned the church of the Holy Sepulchre, and opened the city for Christian pilgrimage.

After nearly 300 years of Christian rule Jerusalem was sacked again, this time by the Sassanid Persians. The Christians were massacred and their holy places destroyed. Fifteen years later Byzantine rule was restored and the Persians expelled.

Attempts were made to rebuild the city. But the die was cast: 600 miles to the south, Makkah had just surrendered to a far more dynamic and compassionate force. And it was spreading north, soon to overwhelm all of Byzantium, carrying with it the pure essence of the teaching of Abraham, the path revealed to Muhammad, peace and blessings upon him, the path of Islam.

In 638 Jerusalem's thousand years of recurrent persecution, intolerance and oppression, were bought to an abrupt halt: 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, the Second Khalif of Islam, entered Al - Quds.

Eager to be rid of their Byzantine overloads - and aware of their shared heritage with the Arabs, the descendants of Ishmael, as well as the Muslims' reputation for mercy and compassion in victory - the people of Jerusalem handed over the city after a brief siege.

They made only one condition: that the terms of their surrender be negotiated directly with the Khalif 'Umar in person.

'Umar entered Jerusalem on foot. There was no bloodshed. There were no massacres. Those who wanted to stay were guaranteed protection for their lives, their property, and places of worship.

It is related that 'Umar asked Sophronius, the city patriarch, to take him to the Sanctuary of David, as soon as he was through writing the terms of surrender. They were joined by four thousand of the companions of the Prophet.

When they reached the area of the Noble Sanctuary they found it covered in rubbish. 'Umar proceeded to the West of the sanctuary and unfurled his cloak. He filled it with debris. those with

him did likewise. They disposed of it and returned, again and again, until the whole area where Al - Aqsa Mosque now stands was cleared.

The entire area of the Haram ash - shariff, the Noble sanctuary, included more than 35 acres. The great rock, site of the Prophet's ascension to heaven on the Night Journey, peace and blessings be upon him, and direction of the first qibla, lay in the centre. The rock was uncovered and the ground purified. It was suggested that the Muslims pray to the North of the rock, to include it in the qibla when facing south toward Makkah, but 'Umar rejected this idea, and possible future confusion, by praying to the South of the Rock, at the southernmost wall of the Noble sanctuary.

A huge timber mosque which held three thousand worshippers was erected on this site, the site of the present Aqsa Mosque. Fifty years later, near the end of the 7th century, it was given to the Umayyad Khalif, 'Abdul Malik ibn Marwan, to construct one of the world's most beautiful and enduring shrines over the rock itself. Highlighting the skyline of Jerusalem, and the memories of all that visit, the dome of the rock is a tribute to the Muslims' love and respect for this site.

Thabit Al-Bunani reported on the authority of Anas that the Prophet said,

"I was brought al - Buraq, an animal white and long, larger than a donkey but smaller than a mule, whose stride was a distance equal to the range of its vision.

I mounted it and came to Jerusalem, and tied it to the ring used by the Prophets. After entering the Mosque, and praying two rakats in it, I came out and Gabriel brought me a vessel of wine and a vessel of milk. I chose the milk, and Gabriel said, 'you have chosen the true religion' We were then taken to heaven....."

Muslim transmitted it

After completion of the Dome of the Rock, construction began on the site of the original timber mosque at the south end of the Sanctuary. A vast congregational mosque, accommodating over 5,000 worshippers, rose up. It became known as Masjid Al - Aqsa, although, in reality the entire Haram ash-Sharif is considered Al - Aqsa Mosque, its entire precincts inviolable.

The next five centuries of Muslim rule were characterized by peace, justice and prosperity. The Noble sanctuary became a great centre of learning; scholars came from all over the world to worship at Al - Aqsa and to study and teach within its precincts. Except for a brief period under the Fatimid Hakim which caused as much hardship for the Muslims as the Christians and Jews, the Islamic injunctions to respect the rights of the people of the Book were respected throughout this period.

"And We gave Moses the book, and made it a guidance for the children of Israel saying:

'Take not unto yourselves any guardian other than me' They were the seed of those We bore with Noah; surely he was a thankful servant.

And We decreed for the children of Israel in the book: You shall do corruption in the earth twice, and you shall become great tyrants. So when the time for the first of these came to pass, We sent against you servants of ours, men of great might, and they ravaged the country, and in it was a promise performed."

(Qur'an, Surah Al-Isra)

Chapter Two: People of the Book

In 1078 bands of Seljuq Turks took Jerusalem. They ruled for the next 20 years, during which time the rights of Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem were regularly trampled, together with almost everyone else's, in the paths of their fierce internal rivalries.

In 1096, the first Crusade was called by Pope Urban II, ostensibly to redress violations of pilgrims' rights. Hundreds of thousands of Christians were mobilized to defend their faith.

Sanctified by religion, spurred on by the promise of adventure and material gain, rag – tag army of knights, foot soldiers, women children and old men, marched across Europe to their destination and their goal, the Holy City of Jerusalem. Three years of marching and mayhem - - much of it against their pockets of Jews who crossed their path – and a remnant of the Crusaders, perhaps a tenth of those that had set out, reached gates of Jerusalem. It was morning of June 7th 1099.

Ironically, by the time they arrived the city was back in the hands of the Fatimids, and the rights of Christian pilgrims had been restored. After a five-week siege, the city's ramparts were stormed. The Crusaders went berserk. For two days, the 40'000 men, women and children of al – Quds were massacred in the streets, in the mosques, and in their homes. Muslim soldiers were slaughtered in Al – Aqsa mosque after being guaranteed amnesty there. The cities Jew's were burned alive in their main synagogue, where they had huddled together for refuge. Al – Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock were looted.

A golden cross was placed on top of the Dome of the Rock. It was renamed Templum Domini. Al – Aqsa mosque became Temple Solomonis. On their enthusiasm to link the glory of the Noble sanctuary with their own heritage, the new conquerors erased every trace possible of its Islamic origin. In the Dome of the Rock, Qur'anic inscriptions were plastered over. Steps were carved into the rock and an alter placed on top of it. Chips of the rock were sold for their weight in gold. Al-Aqsa mosque was subdivided into a royal palace for the Knights Templar. The vast vaulted subterranean area to the east of Al – Aqsa became a stable for 400 horses. All this had not passed by entirely unnoticed by the Muslims outside of Jerusalem. In 1146, Nuradeen Mahmud ibn Zangi, ruler of Aleppo, commissioned master craftsmen to build an extraordinary cedar mimbar. It was to be installed in Al – Aqsa on the day the crusaders were expelled from Al – Quds. It was Nuradeen who, through an auspicious joining of statesmanship, piety, humility and honour in his own character, reunited the Muslims of Syria into a force capable of rising Jihad against their enemies. But it was his lieutenant and successor, Salahudeen, who was to lead them into victory. Generous almost to a fault, shunning luxury and ostentation, Salahudeen was merciful with those he conquered but ruthless to anyone who maligned the Prophet and the path of God.

On the 2nd day of October, 1187, the 27th day of Rajab, the day Muslims celebrate the Prophet's night journey, peace and blessings upon him, Salahudeen entered Jerusalem after a 12-day siege. There was no bloodshed. There were no massacres. Those who wanted to leave were permitted to do so, with all their goods. Those who wanted to stay were guaranteed protection for their lives, property, and places of worship. The wisdom of the Khalif 'Umar was observed, the laws of Islam restored.

The cross on the Dome of the Rock was taken down. Al – Aqsa was purified and reinstated as a mosque. The magnificent mimbar commissioned by Nuradeen 40 years earlier was put into place. After 88 years of occupation, the Jumu'a prayer was held once again on the furthest mosque. The Crusaders dressed in black. They sought aid throughout Europe to recapture Jerusalem and soon returned to lay siege to the Muslim coastal stronghold of Acre. Richard the Lionheart joined them in the Spring of 1191. By July the city of acre surrendered into the crusaders' hands. Two thousand seven hundred Muslim soldiers and their families were

assembled and massacred outside the city walls. After a year of struggling to get a foothold from which to regain Jerusalem, Richard finally capitulated and returned to England. The rights of Christians to worship at their holy sites were guaranteed and Salahudeen's authority in all but the coastal areas of Palestine was confirmed.

The next centuries witnessed the final expulsion of the Crusaders from Palestine and successful resistance to the advance of the Mongols under the energetic rule of the Mameluks. Awesome in battle, the Mameluks were no less vigorous in their building programs and public works. The four minarets on the North and West boundaries of the noble Sanctuary and the arched mawzeen surrounding the Dome of the Rock are from the Mameluk period, as are endowments for four madrassas on the grounds of the sanctuary and a trust fund for maintaining Al – Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock.

After a reign of nearly 300 years Mameluk power declined. By the early 16th Century Ottoman Turks displaced them, in the process establishing a vast empire which encompassed Constantinople, Damascus, Cairo, Makkah, Medina and Jerusalem.

On entering Jerusalem in 1517 the ottoman sultan Selim was entrusted with keys to Al –Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock. A delegation of Christian clerics presented him with a scroll containing the original covenant of 'Umar, guaranteeing them rights over the Church of the Holy places. Selim pressed them to his face and kissed them, confirming his intention to honour 'Umar's word.

Selim's son Suleiman al – Qanuni, known throughout Europe as Suleiman the Magnificent, consolidated his domain into the greatest world power of the 16th Century. drawing on his tremendous resources, he restored and renewed all of Jerusalem, building walls, gates, towers, and aqueducts.

His most remembered gift to Jerusalem, however, was the breathtakingly beautiful tile work commissioned for the exterior of the Dome of the Rock. With the incomparable skills of Persia's master ceramists, 40'000 tiles were fired and put into place, crowned by the inscription of Surah YaSeen at the top. This brilliant application of exquisite aesthetics to celebrate the message of God has made the Dome of the Rock a world landmark in sacred architecture.

This was the peak of the Ottoman empire. It soon began to deteriorate. Central authority broke down. Regionalism rose up. Corruption by petty officials became widespread. Military and political instructions and frontiers began to crumble. The western powers, restrained by Ottoman strength for so many years, were joyously anticipating its collapse and the inevitable division of spoils.

In 19th Century Jerusalem their dreams began to be realized. Consular offices representing the European powers were set up in the old city to begin exerting influence from abroad, while a new political movement was being cultivated that could exercise power from within Palestine: Secular Zionism.

Denying the prophetic message, while at the same time using it as the basis of their claims for a Jewish state in the Holy Land, crying anti - Semite at every protest of their despotic actions, even as they planned a ruthless displacement policy against the Semitic Arabs, the European Zionists created sufficient confusion to successfully deflect world criticism of their nationalistic goals in the Middle East. From this apparently irreconcilable platform, the political Zionists waged a successful campaign to gain international sympathy and support for their bizarre concept of a **secular**, and at the same time **Jewish**, state in Palestine.

Ottoman sovereignty was now seriously threatened and with it the believers' control of the sacred city of Al - Quds.

When British forces entered Jerusalem after its surrender by the Ottomans in 1917, it was only a question of time until Zionist plans began to be realized. The Balfour Declaration of the same year gave support for the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The British Mandate of 1920 helped to enforce it. But what was originally conceived of as a more passive and politically acceptable ally in the Middle east, turned out to be an unexpectedly impatient and violent one. Zionist inspired terrorism and economic blackmail combined to force the British out in 1948.

A hastily prepared UN recommendation for the creation of separate Arab and Jewish states with Palestine led immediately to an escalation of hostilities. Two Jewish terrorist groups, Airgun and the Stern gang, led a campaign of terror and psychological warfare calculated to drive the Arabs out, culminating in their joint undertaking at the Arab village of dayr Yasin, in which 250 men, women and children were brutally murdered, with threats to repeat performances broadcast throughout Palestine.

On May 14th, in 1948, David Centurion proclaimed the State of Israel. Lack of unity among the Arab states in the ensuing Arab/Israeli wars led to huge losses. By the time of the Cessation of hostilities in 1949, more than 700'000 Arabs were driven out of their homes.

Al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock had both sustained damage from the crossfire of mortars and bombs but remained, together with the old walled city, in the hands of the Arabs.

The first stage of their nationalistic plans realized, the Israelis cast a covetous eye on Gaza and the West Bank. But the real prize, East Jerusalem, and its jewel, the Noble sanctuary, laid tantalizingly just out of reach. The Israelites commenced on their plans for the capture of Al - Quds.

In 1967 they got their opportunity. Through the din of the capricious chants of Arab nationalism Israel carefully plotted its attack. On June 7th the Israelis took Al - Quds.

Israeli tanks and soldiers entered the Noble sanctuary. The Maghribi quarter was levelled. Two mosques and 135 homes were bulldozed, leaving six hundred and fifty Muslims homeless. The West Bank and Gaza were occupied, demographically impossible situations, which would drive the Jews to desperation and despicable acts of oppression in years to come. Jerusalem was annexed.

Only the Haram ash-Sharif was returned to the Muslims and their willingness to defend it at any cost.

"Then We gave you once again your turn to prevail over them. And We gave you wealth and children, and We made you more in soldiery, saying, 'If you do good, it is to your own souls and you do good to, and if you do evil it is to them also'

So when the promise of the second came to pass, We roused against you others of Our servants to ravage you, and to enter the Temple, even as they entered it the first time, and to lay waste to all that which they conquered with an utter wasting. Perhaps the lord will have mercy on you but if you return, we shall return - and We have appointed Hell a prison for the unbelievers."

(Qur'an, Surah Al-Isra)

Chapter Three: The Furthest Mosque

With the capture of east Jerusalem all of the elements seemed to be in place for the realization of the Jewish national dream, the rebuilding of the Second Temple, for which virtually every practicing Jew had been praying, "that in our days may the Temple be rebuilt", for the past 1900 years.

Only according to the Halachah, the Jewish code of law and doctrine, the most critical requirement for rebuilding the Temple, the coming of the Messiah, had yet to be fulfilled. But the requirements of Judaic Law had never deterred the Secular Zionists before. Especially when it involved prohibiting something they desired, like a a fantastic symbol of Jewish nationalism right in the middle of Jerusalem, to replace the glaring reminder of the Muslims still in their midst. A Second Temple would do very well indeed, just as it had before its destruction, as an object of worship for the Jews.

A model of the temple already existed, built on the grounds of the Holy Land Hotel in West Jerusalem before the Six Days' War. The only obstructions to the realization of the Zionists architectural dreams:

- international recognition of the Muslim right to, and ownership of the Haram ash-Sharif,
- the existence of Al - Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock,
- and the vigilance of 600 million Muslims who call this site the third holiest in Islam.

Seeking to establish the principle of the Noble Sanctuary as a place of Jewish worship, extremist groups began performing Jewish prayer services in the area of the Sanctuary, despite the prohibition by the chief Rabbinate of Jews of even setting foot in it for fear of violating its sanctity according to Judaic law.

Fearing retribution from the Muslim World the Israeli attorney General banned such acts in the Spring of 1969. Four months later the entire south wing of the Al - Aqsa Mosque was destroyed by fire. Fire fighters from Jerusalem and the West Bank answered the alarm, but not soon enough to prevent damage that would take more than twenty years of concerted effort to repair.

When the fire was finally extinguished, the Qbla wall, mihrab and dome were destroyed and with them the mimbar commissioned by Nuradeen over 700 years earlier; the mimbar installed by Salahudeen when the Crusaders were driven out in the twelfth century.

An Australian visitor at a coastal kibbutz was arrested that night for setting blaze. Reaction from the Muslim countries was strong and swift. A protest strike and demonstration was called in Jerusalem. Others followed throughout the Muslim world

An emergency meeting of the UN Security Council was called, and Israel's control of Jerusalem put into question. The Israel's position about rebuilding the Temple on public record:

"according to the Halachah, the Temple will be rebuilt when the Messiah appears. It is therefore inconceivable that we ourselves should make any plans for rebuilding the Temple"

Despite his disarmingly rational courtroom demeanor, and evidence that he may have worked with others, an Israeli court ruled that the Australian could not be held responsible for his actions due to mental imbalance. After treatment in Israel he returned to Australia.

Two decades later, work on the restoration of the damage caused by this fire continues. Supported by Muslims throughout the world, and winning international awards for excellence, the restoration has nonetheless disrupted worship in al - Aqsa since 1969, with no immediate end in sight.

Attempts to establish Jewish prayer services within the Sanctuary continued. In 1976 Israeli central Courts passed a law permitting them. Two weeks of demonstrations by Muslim Law students and the subsequent resignation of members of the municipal courts in the West Bank resulted in their repeal. Other attempts to establish these services were renewed two years later.

In September of 1979, fifteen extremist Jews blocked the way to one of the Sanctuary's gates on the day of the Friday congregational prayer, pointing a gun at one of the Muslim security guards.

In May of 1981 the adhan was prohibited from the minaret overlooking the West Wall because of Jewish celebrations. The following month the Hakam of the Wailing Wall petitioned the Minister of Religious affairs in Jerusalem for permission to pray in Al - Aqsa. Harassment and acts of sabotage escalated in 1981. In August an Israeli helicopter hovered at low altitude over Masjid Al - Aqsa preventing worshippers inside from hearing the khutba. That same month a tunnel dug by workers from the Ministry of Religious affairs was uncovered in the sanctuary leading to the Western Wall. The government immediately ordered the tunnel sealed because of the political sensitivity of the issue.

Despite warnings by Israeli archeologists against digging beneath the Sanctuary, and UN resolutions against them, excavations continued, leading to dangerous cracks to buildings adjoining the Western Wall. Engineers and archeologists were prohibited by Israeli authorities from revealing anything about their digs beneath Al - Aqsa.

In September Arab students entering one of these tunnels to seal it off were injured in an encounter with a group of Israelis. A general strike was called by the Supreme Muslim Council to protest the excavations. Muslims were prevented by Israeli Security Forces from entering Jerusalem the following Friday for fear of large demonstrations.

The following spring armed Israeli religious students clashed with Muslim security guards. This time the Minister of Defence was petitioned for permission to perform Jewish services at Al - Aqsa. Excavations beneath Al - Aqsa continued with Israeli archeologists claiming the discovery of Jewish ruins under the Mosque. In April of 1982 a parcel with a fake bomb and threats signed by Jewish extremists was discovered at one of the gates leading to the Sanctuary. Two days later Muslims mobilized a large demonstration in Al - Aqsa to protest attacks on Holy places.

The following day an ex - Israeli army regular opened fire with his military assault rifle, killing two Muslims and filling the interior and exterior of the Dome of the Rock with bullet holes. The West Bank and Gaza rioted in protest. Less than a month later shots were fired into the Sanctuary by a sniper on the rooftop on the Madrassa Amriyya, and a group of Israelis tried to enter the Sanctuary with leaflets inciting Jews to take over the Mosque. In nearby Khalil, armed members of Kiyat Arba entered the Ibrahim Mosque and performed prayer with the support of the Military.

In June the Awqaf received a letter from Europe warning that this fund was trying to buy up Waqf property to the Sanctuary.

In March Muslim security guards discovered explosives in the entrance to the Sanctuary on the day of the Friday prayer, four armed Israelis were discovered attempting to enter the sanctuary through Solomon's Stables, and arms and plans for rebuilding the temple were found in the house of an extremist group leader.

The same month a group of Jewish fanatics armed with Uzi's and M - 16's and carrying a cache of explosives were caught attempting to enter the Sanctuary. Radio Israel reported that they were prepared for a prolonged siege. Six months later they were acquitted in Israeli courts.

In January of 1984 a group of Jewish terrorists carrying ladders and explosives were stopped in the sanctuary by Muslim security guards in the middle of the night. Four days later time bombs were discovered by explosive experts.

By the Spring of '84 armed Israeli guards were patrolling the Sanctuary twenty - four hours a day, their presence and behavior inimical to the sanctity of the Mosque. The Supreme Muslim Council petitioned the Israeli Prime Minister repeatedly to withdraw the soldiers but to no effect. With no response forthcoming from the Israelis, the Supreme Muslim Council petitioned the UN in May of 1984 to pressure Israel to withdraw its troops from Al- Aqsa.

Despite continued demands for their withdrawal, Israeli soldiers continue to patrol the Sanctuary on the pretense of protecting it from attack. In reality it is the Muslim - run Aqsa Security force - underpaid, understaffed, and unarmed - whose vigilance has provided the only protection for the Noble Sanctuary in virtually all the acts of terrorism against it.

The UN Security council has passed more than 20 resolutions condemning Israel's annexation of Old Jerusalem and its military occupation of the West Bank. Repeated violations of human rights led directly to the Intifada, the Palestinian Uprising, in the winter of 1987. Recognizing the Intifada's roots in the revival of Islam, the Israelis increased their attacks on places of worship throughout Palestine. On June 15th, 1988 Israeli troops stormed Al - Aqsa Mosque, firing tear gas into groups of worshippers. A month later the discovery of new excavations adjacent to the Sanctuary led to more civil disorder.

Less than one year later soldiers were forced from the precincts of the Noble Sanctuary by the more than 20'000 Muslims who gathered in Al - Aqsa for the first Friday prayer in Ramadan. Roadblocks were set up around Jerusalem the following week and Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza were barred from the Mosque.

In the meantime, the aspiration to rebuild a Jewish Temple on the site of the Dome of the Rock has become more and more open, despite the Judaic injunctions against it. In July of 1984 it was reported in the ***International Herald Tribune*** that the

"yearning to remove the mosques and build a Jewish temple there has begun to spread from a few religious fanatics into more established rightist political groups."

A recent article on rebuilding the Temple appearing in one of Israel's major color supplements, **The Nation**, explores such obtuse questions as the location of toilets, parking spaces, and gift shops - and whether or not to air-condition while pondering the more serious implications of the multi - billion dollar projected annual income generated by their anticipated monopoly on the Jewish pilgrim trade.

A visit to the Institute of the Temple overlooking the Wailing Wall, and the sanctuary itself, reveals just how busy some have been in making preparations for what they feel may be a forthcoming event. A scale model of the Second temple is on display, together with diagrams of various other aspects of the Temple based on descriptions of their original counterparts recorded in the Misha, and a miniature version of the Arc of the Covenant, thought to be buried somewhere under Al - Aqsa. Major expenditures in time and money have already been made to reproduce what are thought to be exact replicas of the myriad utensils necessary for the performance of the complex Jewish rituals to take place within the Temple.

A recent debate in Jerusalem between Muslim, Jews and Christians televised in Britain included the serious suggestion by an Israeli participant that the Dome of the Rock could be relocated, as the Temples of Ramses the Second were in Aswan Dam project, to make way for the new Jewish temple. If the Israeli's enthusiasm for moving Arabs out of their houses is anything to go by, not to mention their history of blowing them up, then the Muslims had better keep an eye on Al - Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock.

Harassment and acts of terrorism against Muslims living adjacent to the Sanctuary, while officially not condoned, are part of an ongoing policy to drive them from this area. The eventual bulldozing and replacement of their houses with Jewish condominium fortress complexes can only be a harbinger of things to come.

The Israelis seem busy preparing for a war while creating the desperation, injustice and despair necessary to provoke one. Where can it possibly lead?

To the West Bank and Gaza. To the Intifada and a people who have had enough of the insatiable greed and thoughtlessness of an unconscionable occupation. And to Al - Aqsa, to the furthest mosque - not to the idol that the Temple became where prophets were slaughtered and pure religion of Abraham was abandoned - but to the site from where the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, made his journey through the heavens to the Lord.

Regarding his ascent the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, related in the last section of the hadith reported by Thabit al bunani, on the authority of Anas:

".....I found Abraham leaning his back against the frequented house which is entered daily by seventy thousand angels who do not return to it.

I was then taken up to the lote - tree of the furthest boundary whose leaves are like elephant ears and whose fruits are like earthen vessels. When what God commands over shadows it, it changes, and none of God's creatures can describe it because of its beauty. God revealed to me what He revealed and made obligatory fifty prayers every day and night.

I then came down to Moses who asked what my Lord had made obligatory for my people. When I told him he had prescribed fifty prayers every day and night he said,

'Go back to your Lord and ask Him to lighten them, for your people are not capable of that. I have tested Bani Israel and have experience.'

I went back to my lord and said "O my Lord, make things lighter for my people", so he relieved me of five. when I returned to Moses and told him he had relieved me of five he said,

"your people are not capable of that, so go back to your Lord and ask Him to make things still lighter." I then kept going back and forth between my Lord and Moses till he said,

"Muhammad, there are five prayers every day and night. Each will count as ten making fifty times of prayer. He who intends to do a good action recorded for him. If he does do it, it will be recorded for him ten times. He who intends to do a wrong action but does not do it, will have nothing recorded against him. If he does do it, only one wrong action will be recorded against him. I then came down. When I came to Moses and told him he said, "Go back to your Lord and ask Him to make things lighter." God's messenger said that he replied "I have gone back to my Lord until I am ashamed before him "

Muslim transmitted it.