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THE VIRTUES OF MASJID AL-AQSA AND ASH-SHĀM

The Virtues of al-Quds

Masjid al-Aqsa is one of the three greatest masjids in Islam. It ranks third after Masjid al-Ḥarām in Makkah and Masjid al-Nabawi in Madīnah. It is the only masjid mentioned in the Qur‘ān by name other than Masjid al-Ḥarām. It was the first Qiblah of the Muslims. Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ prayed for more of his life towards Masjid al-Aqsa than he did towards the Ka’bah when the Qiblah was changed after his migration to Madinah. The land of al-Aqsa, or al-Quds, is known as Jerusalem to the Christians and Jews. This land is considered sacred as well as blessed in their religions. It was the land of the Prophets of Allāh ﷻ. Add to that, all three religions believe it to be the site where the events leading to the End of the World will unfold.

Al-Quds is at the heart of the larger blessed land of ash-Shām, which refers to the lands that include modern-day Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Northeast Egypt, Southwest Turkey, parts of Northwest Saudi Arabia, and some nearby areas around them. Allāh immortalized the mention of Jerusalem and Masjid al-Aqsa till the Day of Judgment when He told us,

سُبْحَنَ الَّذِي أَسْرَى بِعَبْدِهِ لَيْلًا مِّنَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَا الَّذِي بَرَكْنَا
حَوْلَهُ لِنُرِيَهُ مِن ءَايَاتِنَا إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ ﴿١٧﴾

Glory be to the One who Took His Servant (Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ) by night from Masjid al-Ḥarām to Masjid al-Aqsa, whose surroundings We have Blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing. [Sūrah al-Isrā’, 17:1]

Al-Isrā’ wa-l-Mi‘rāj is one of the greatest signs and miracles that were given to Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ after the Qur‘ān. Al-Isrā’ refers to his Night Journey from Makkah to Jerusalem, and al-Mi‘rāj refers to his Ascension into the Heavens.

Linguistically, *quds* (Al-Quds being the definitive) refers to a sanctified or purified place. By purified, it could refer to the fact that oppressors or evil

people will never manage to take control of it. We see throughout history that the different waves of the Crusaders, the Mongols that shook the world, the mighty armies of Napoleon Bonaparte, and many others—all met their match in Palestine. This practice of rooting out injustice and oppression from Palestine will continue till it reaches its pinnacle with the return of Prophet ‘Īsā عليه السلام, the true Messiah, who will put an end to the Dajjāl or the Anti-Christ and establish a Kingdom of Justice upon Islam.

The Prophet ﷺ said, “Do not travel (specifically) to any masjid except three: Masjid al-Ḥarām, Masjid al-Aqsa, and this masjid of mine.” [Al-Bukhārī]

At the time of this ḥadīth, Masjid al-Aqsa was not under Muslim control. This was a form of prophecy and a positive mindset of the Prophet ﷺ that was shared with his companions.

There is a consensus (*ijmāʿ*) of the scholars that there is a special reward for praying in Masjid al-Aqsa. It was narrated that Abū Dharr رضي الله عنه said, “We were discussing when we were with the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ, which is better, the Masjid of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ or Bayt al-Maqdis (Jerusalem). The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, ‘One prayer in my masjid is better than four prayers offered there (in Bayt al-Maqdis), and what a good place of prayer it is. Soon there will come a time when, if a man has a piece of land the size of a horse’s rope from which he can see Bayt al-Maqdis, that will be better for him than the whole world.’ [Mustadrak al-Ḥākim]

Along with mentioning the reward of praying there, we see another prediction being made by our Prophet ﷺ. This ḥadīth also indicates that towards the end of time, it will be difficult for Muslims to pray in Masjid al-Aqsa.

‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr رضي الله عنه narrated that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, “Offering prayer in my masjid (in Madīnah) is better than one thousand prayers elsewhere, save for those offered in Masjid al-Ḥarām (in Makkah). And prayer offered in Masjid al-Ḥarām is better than prayer offered in my mosque by one hundred prayers.” [Aḥmad]

Jābir ibn ‘Abd Allāh رضي الله عنه narrated that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, “One prayer in my Masjid is better than one thousand prayers elsewhere, except the al-Masjid al-Ḥarām, and one prayer in al-Masjid al-Ḥarām is better than 100,000 prayers elsewhere.” [Ibn Mājah]

From these narrations, we can easily compute that the reward for one prayer in Masjid al-Ḥarām equals a hundred thousand prayers, and the reward for one prayer offered in Masjid al-Aqsa is equivalent to two hundred and fifty prayers.