

SACRED CITIES; MECCA, MEDINA, & JERUSALEM (PART 2 OF 2)

Rating:

Description: The second lesson covering the sacred cities Medina and Jerusalem and why they hold a special place in the hearts of Muslims.

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Published on: 15 Jun 2015

Last modified on: 15 Jun 2015

Objective

- To understand the importance of the second and third most sacred cities, Medina and Jerusalem.

Arabic Terms

- Masjid* - the Arabic term for mosque.
- Sahabah* - the plural form of "Sahabi," which translates to Companions. A *sahabi*, as the word is commonly used today, is someone who saw Prophet Muhammad, believed in him and died as a Muslim.
- Qiblah* - The direction one faces during the formal prayers.
- Kabah* - The cube-shaped structure located in the city of Mecca. It serves as a focal point towards which all Muslims face when praying.

Medina (*continued*)

The second most sacred city in Islam is Medina. It is in the western region of Saudi Arabia in the area known as the Hejaz. Medina is the Arabic word for city and it is known as "the city" meaning it is the city of Prophet Muhammad. It is also sometimes known as Medina Munawwarah meaning the city of enlightenment. Originally called Yathrib, Medina is the city to which Prophet Muhammad and the fledgling Muslim community migrated when life became too difficult in Mecca.



The original Prophet's Mosque was an open-air building with a raised platform for sermons. It was a square enclosure of approximately 30 by 35 meters and was built from palm trunks with mud walls. It could be accessed through three doors and its basic

plan has since been adopted in the building of many other mosques throughout the world.

The *Masjid* also contained a shaded area to the south and a prayer area facing north towards Jerusalem. When the *qiblah* was changed to Mecca, the *Masjid* was re-oriented to face Mecca. This space also served as a community centre, court, and school. In only seven years the *Masjid* space was doubled to accommodate the ever increasing number of Muslims.

It is here in the *Masjid* that the tomb of Prophet Muhammad is located. Because prophets are generally buried where they die, Prophet Muhammad was buried in the home of his wife Aisha. This was originally attached to the *Masjid* but in the intervening centuries the *Masjid* has expanded to such a degree that even the cemetery known as Al-Baqi, once on the outside of the city, now marks the outer precincts of the *Masjid*.

The graves of some of Prophet Muhammad's family members and many *sahabah* and early generations of scholars can be found here.

One of the most significant and important reasons why Muslims all over the world long to visit this city filled with light and learning is the fact that it has many blessings.

"The person who offers 40 prayers consecutively in my *Masjid*, without missing a prayer in between, will secure immunity from the fire of Hell and other torments and also from hypocrisy." [\[1\]](#)

Prophet Muhammad said, "I was ordered to migrate to a town which will swallow (conquer) other towns and is called Yathrib and that is Medina, and it turns out (bad) persons as a furnace removes the impurities of iron." And he also said, "There are angels guarding the entrances (or roads) of Medina, neither plague nor *the Dajjal* (Antichrist) will be able to enter it." [\[2\]](#)

Medina and its surrounds are filled with the places and sights that are infused with Islamic history. The site of the Battle of Badr is approximately 20 miles south west of Medina, and four miles north is the site of the Battle of Uhud. Also within a short distance is the place where the Battle of the Ditch was fought. Masjid Al-Quba the first mosque built in Islam and whose foundation stone was laid by Prophet Muhammad himself can be found here in Medina, so too is Masjid Al-Qiblatain, the mosque built on the site where the revelation to change the *qiblah* direction came. Before this revelation the first Muslims prayed facing towards Jerusalem.

Jerusalem

The city of Jerusalem is the third most sacred site in Islam. According to Islamic history, Prophet Jacob, built a *masjid* on the Al-Aqsa site approximately 40 years after his grandfather Prophet Abraham built the *Kabah* in Mecca. It was later rebuilt or expanded by King Solomon, a man considered by Islam to also be a Prophet.

Glorified be He Who took His slave on a journey by night from Masjid Al-Haraam to Masjid Al-Aqsa, the neighbourhood whereof We have blessed, in order that We might show him of Our signs. Verily, He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer. (Quran 17:1)

Muslims are much attached to Jerusalem because God refers to it in the Quran as “the neighbourhood whereof we have blessed”. A compound called Masjid Al-Aqsa lies within the city of Jerusalem. The name Al-Aqsa translates to the farthest *masjid*. However there are multiple mosques and centres of learning on the 144,000 square metre site including the most identifiable building in Jerusalem, the Dome of the Rock.

The golden shining dome stands out on the Jerusalem skyline and can be recognized by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In an event known as the Night Journey and Ascension, Prophet Muhammad ascended to the lowest heaven from a rock that is now found inside this most famous symbol. On the same journey Prophet Muhammad led the previous prophets in prayer and that site is on the other side of Al-Aqsa. More about the Night Journey and Ascension can be found here.

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When the direction of prayer was changed from Jerusalem to Mecca the significance of Jerusalem was in no way diminished; the change merely represented one more step in the establishment of the message of Islam. Jerusalem’s immense worth in the eyes of Muslims continued then, as it does now.

One prayer in Masjid Al-Aqsa is worth 250 prayers elsewhere, excluding the Prophet’s Masjid in Medina where one prayer is the equivalent of 1,000 prayers and the Sacred Masjid in Mecca where one prayer contains the reward of 100,000 prayers.^[3]

Footnotes:

[1] *Imam Ahmad*

[2] *Saheeh Bukhari*

[3] *Saheeh Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*

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