

“And We Said After that to the Children of Israel, ‘Settle the Land’”

Is there a Qur’anic Mandate for Eretz Yisroel? (Part 1)



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Introduction to Classical Study of the Qur’an

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Outline

- This session will purely be a text study of materials relating to the status of Jerusalem (Aelia Capitolina) and the Holy Land in the view of commentators on the Qur'an – please review the primary Qur'anic texts in *Islamic Texts on Israel*
- The aim is to facilitate your own exploration of these questions through study of the texts themselves and the commentaries, and determine upon which matters Islamic exegetical tradition in the classical period has articulated a view, and upon which matters it has remained silent
- It also aims to allow you to compare and contrast texts from the classical period with the plethora of modern commentaries and popular materials around this highly politicised and mythologised issue. For an example of the latter, see the bestseller, *Jerusalem and the Qur'an* by Imran Hosein
- *Text Study:* Qur'anic texts on Jerusalem and the Night Journey

Definitions

- *al-masjid al-'aḡsa* – the furthest mosque (place of prostration); what and where is this? *Surat al-Isra'* (Qur'an 17):1
- *bayt al-maḡdis* (root: שִׁדְּוּ), *al-ḡuds* – Arabic terms for Jerusalem; these terms are not found in the Qur'an but are extensive in hadith literature; also *'Iliya* from *Aelia Capitolina*
- *'ula al-ḡiblatayn, thani al-masjidayn, thalith al-haramayn* “First of the two qiblas, second of the two mosques, third of (ie. after) the two sanctuaries (ie. Makkah and Medina)”
- *al-ard al-muḡaddasa* (root: אֶרֶץ) – Arabic term for the Holy Land; the term Canaan is not found in the primary Qur'anic text
- *al-isra'* – “the Night Journey” from the Arabic verb *אשרה'*, “to make one depart by night” referring to the Prophet's journey by night to Jerusalem
- *al-miraj* – the ascent into heaven and encounter with Moses

The First Qibla

سَيَقُولُ السُّفَهَاءُ مِنَ النَّاسِ مَا وَلَاهُمْ عَن قِبَلَتِهِمُ الَّتِي كَانُوا عَلَيْهَا قُلْ لِلَّهِ الْمَشْرِقُ وَالْمَغْرِبُ يَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ
وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الْقِبْلَةَ الَّتِي كُنْتَ عَلَيْهَا إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَن
يَتَّبِعُ الرَّسُولَ مِمَّن يَنْقَلِبُ عَلَى عَقْبَيْهِ وَإِن كَانَتْ لَكَبِيرَةً إِلَّا عَلَى الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُضَيِّعَ إِيمَانَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِالنَّاسِ لَرُؤُوفٌ
رَّحِيمٌ
قَدْ نَرَى تَقَلُّبَ وَجْهِكَ فِي السَّمَاءِ فَلتُوَلِّبْنَاك قِبْلَةً تَرْضَاهَا فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنْتُمْ فَوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُ وَإِنَّ
الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ لَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّهِمْ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِعَافٍ لِّمَن يَعْمَلُونَ
وَلَئِن أَتَيْتَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ بِكُلِّ آيَةٍ مَّا تَبِعُوا قِبْلَتَكَ وَمَا أَنْتَ بِتَابِعٍ قِبْلَتِهِمْ وَمَا بَعْضُهُمْ بِتَابِعٍ قِبْلَةَ بَعْضٍ وَلَئِن ائْتَبَعْتَ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ مِّن
بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِنَّكَ إِذًا لَمِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

The fools among the people will say: "What has turned them from the Qibla to which they were used?" Say: To God belong both east and West: He guides whom He will to a Way that is straight. Thus, have We made of you an Umma justly balanced, that you might be witnesses over the nations, and the Apostle a witness over yourselves; and We appointed the Qibla to which you were used, only to test those who followed the Apostle from those who would turn on their heels (From the Faith). Indeed it was (A change) momentous, except to those guided by God. And never would God Make your faith of no effect. For God is to all people Most surely full of kindness, Most Merciful. We see the turning of your face (for guidance) to the heavens: now Shall We turn you to a Qibla that shall please you. Turn then your face in the direction of the sacred Mosque: Wherever you are, turn your faces in that direction. The people of the Book know well that that is the truth from their Lord. Nor is God unmindful of what they do. Even if you were to bring to the people of the Book all the Signs (together), they would not follow your Qibla; nor are you going to follow their Qibla; nor indeed will they follow each other's Qibla. If you after the knowledge has reached you, were to follow their (vain) desires, then you were indeed (clearly) in the wrong. *The Heifer (Qur'an 2):142-5*

Points in Relation to the First *Qibla*

- al-Tabari (d. 923) and other classical commentators state the institution of Jerusalem as *qibla* (root: קבל) was dated to the time immediately preceding the Hijra from Makkah to Yathrib
- Modern Orientalist scholar Uri Rubin contends that the very first *qibla* before Jerusalem was the Ka'aba and this has been suppressed by later Islamic tradition, which latter suggests in some instances a practice of the Prophet praying toward Jerusalem from the very outset of his ministry in Makkah
- or based on some traditions which claim a supernatural power of the Prophet to know in advance the changes in *qibla* at various times in his prophetic activity
- Is there significance in the remoteness of Jerusalem enhancing its sacral character as a direction for worship? See 1 Kings 8:33-34

Points in Relation to *Quran* 17:1

- This is the only verse with explicit reference to the “remote temple” and the *isra’* – nocturnal departure
- Angelika Neuwirth has suggested on the basis of poesy and the form and rhyme of the clausula that the verse is out of place; though this is not an opinion shared by most scholars
- Islamic tradition records in al-Tabari via Ibn Ishaq (d. 767 biographer of the Prophet) a plain sense tradition from Umm Hani’, a cousin of the Prophet
- The elaborated traditions in relation to this event are actually two – 1) *al-isra’* firstly, a horizontal journey to Jerusalem, and 2) *al-miraj* secondly, a vertical ascent to heaven and encounter with the prophets of past ages
- Islamic tradition confounds these two ancient oral accounts into a single seamless sequence of events

Umm Hani' Tradition in al-Tabari

“The nocturnal departure of the Messenger of God took place as follows: He was staying at my house, where he spent the night. When he had performed the final evening prayer he went to sleep and so did we. In the early morning, God’s Messenger woke us for the morning prayer and when we had concluded it together he said to me, ‘Umm Hani’, I have been praying here together with you the evening prayer, as you remember. But then I was in *Bayt al-Maqdis* and prayed there. And now I have been praying with you the morning prayer in this place.” [al-Tabari *Jami* 15:3](#)

Traditions of the *Isra'* and *Miraj*

Hasan al-Basri (d. 642-728) transmission: “I was told that al-Hasan said the Prophet said: ‘While I was sleeping in the *Hijr*, Gabriel came and stirred me with his foot. I sat up but saw nothing and lay down again. He came a second time and stirred me with his foot. I sat up, but saw nothing and lay down again. He came to me a third time and stirred me with his foot. I sat up and he took hold of my arm and I stood beside him and he brought me out to the door of the mosque and there was a white animal, half mule, half donkey, with wings on its sides with which it propelled its feet, putting down each forefoot at the limit of its sight and he mounted me on it. Then he went out with me keeping close to me.” *Ibn Hisham al-Sira al-Nabawiyya* 1:398

Traditions of the *Isra'* and *Miraj*

“The Apostle and Gabriel went their way until they arrived at the Temple at Jerusalem. There they found Abraham, Moses, and Jesus among a company of the prophets. The Apostle acted as their imam in prayer. Then he was brought two vessels, one containing wine and the other milk. The Apostle took the milk and drank it, leaving the wine. Gabriel said: ‘You have been rightly guided to the way of nature and so will your people be, Muhammad. Wine is forbidden you.’ Then the Apostle returned to Makkah, and in the morning he told Quraysh what had happened. Most of them said, ‘By God, this is a plain absurdity! A caravan takes a month to go to Syria, and a month to return, and can Muhammad do the journey in one night?’ Many Muslims gave up their faith.’ *Ibn Hisham al-Sira al-Nabawiyya* I:398

Traditions of the *Isra'* and *Miraj*

Ibn Ishaq reporting on the authority of Abu Sa'id al-Khudri has the ascent to heaven follow directly from the journey to Jerusalem, attributing to 'Abd Allah b. Mas'ud:

“They reached the seventh heaven and his Lord. There the duty of fifty prayers a day was laid upon him. The Apostle said: ‘On my return I passed by Moses and what a fine friend of yours he was! He asked me how many prayers had been laid upon me and when I told him fifty he said, ‘Prayer is a weighty matter and your people are weak, so go back to your Lord and ask him to reduce the number for you and your community.’ I did so and He took off ten. Again I passed by Moses and he said the same again; and so it went on until only five prayers for the whole day and night were left. Moses again gave me the same advice. I replied that I had been back to my Lord and asked him to reduce the number until I was ashamed and I would not do it again. Anyone of you who performs them in faith and trust will have the reward of fifty prayers.” *Ibn Hisham al-Sira al-Nabawiyya* 1:407

Mythologising Exegesis

- J Horowitz in 1919 undertook the first major Western exegetical analysis of Quran 17:1, in conjunction with Schrieke, offering the interpretation that this account was not of a translation to Jerusalem but an ascent to the “furthest mosque” in heaven
- For Horowitz the ecstatic experience attributed to the Prophet and the *dramatis personae* in the mythologising account is associated with an initiation rite of inclusion into the ranks of the prophetic assembly firmly establishing Muhammad’s credentials
- Other Western scholars have cast doubt on Horowitz’s methodology, but his view is still influential

Summary

- Examination of some key linguistic terms used around Islamic discourse on Jerusalem and the Prophet's Night Journey and Ascent
- There are controversies in relation to the history of Jerusalem as an important *qibla* of prayer in the formative period of Islam
- There are controversies around the oral tradition which clothes the very limited reference in Qur'an 17:1 with an extensive body of elaborate narrative – including the question of whether Jerusalem is actually the referent
- Is there evidence of a plain sense Umm Hani' tradition becoming steadily more mythologised over time? If so, how does this affect approaches to exegesis of the Qur'anic text?
- What is the relationship – if any – between the account of the Prophetic Journey to Jerusalem and Heavenly Ascent, and any claim that Muslims might now make for Jerusalem being territory that should be under Islamic jurisdiction? Does or should these religious issues of claims to sacred territory inform negotiation in the Israel-Palestine conflict?