

THE TEMPLE MOUNT

Introduction

The ancient city of Jerusalem lies on the Temple Mount in the area known as the City of David. The area is approximately 37 acres. The first temple, Solomon's Temple, was built on the hill to the north of the City of David which is now known as the Temple Mount.

The mount is also the site of both ancient Jewish temples. The first, built by King Solomon, was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. The second was built in the sixth century BC and stood for nearly 600 years before it was destroyed and the Jewish people exiled in 70 AD by the Roman Empire. According to Jewish tradition, a third temple will be built on the site during the messianic age.



The Temple Mount Plaza



An Israeli checkpoint

Since Israeli forces regained control of the Old City of Jerusalem during the Six-Day War of 1967, Israel has extended its sovereignty over the site, though most of the world regards Israeli authority in all of eastern Jerusalem to be illegitimate. Day-to-day authority over the site rests with the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf. A waqf is a charitable trust recognized by Islamic law. Jordan, which had controlled eastern Jerusalem and the Islamic holy sites prior to 1967, continued to exercise a special guardianship over the mount. An arrangement later included in the 1994 Israel-Jordan peace treaty, states Israel *respects the present special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in Muslim Holy shrines in Jerusalem*. Overall security for the site, including entry to visitors and worshipers, rests with Israeli security forces.

Though there are multiple gates to access the site, non-Muslims must enter through the Mughrabi Gate, located near the Western Wall plaza. Israeli security controls the entry points. At moments of elevated tensions, Israel has occasionally closed the site to visitors, including Muslims.



Israeli soldiers on Temple Mount

The Dome of the Rock

The Dome of the Rock is a Muslim shrine not a mosque. It stands over the traditional site of Solomon's Temple. Also, it is believed to be the location of Araunah's threshing floor and Mt. Moriah. Inside the Dome of the Rock is embedded a large rock venerated as the spot where the Holy of Holies stood in Solomon's Temple.

This was the same area to which God commanded Abraham to go for the sacrifice of Isaac, Genesis 22:2, 2 He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

Also, this was the location of the threshing floor of Araunah, a Jebusite. It marked the place where the Lord stopped a pestilence after the death of 70,000 Israelites. The plague from the Lord had come upon Israel as a result of King David's prideful census, 2 Samuel 24:15-16, *So the LORD sent a pestilence on Israel from the morning until the appointed time. And there died of the people from Dan to Beersheba 70,000 men. 16 And when the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD relented from the calamity and said to the angel who was working destruction among the people, "It is enough; now stay your hand." And the angel of the LORD was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.*



The Dome of the Rock

At the instruction of the prophet Gad, the repentant David purchased the floor and built an altar to the Lord. Araunah offered oxen and everything needed for the altar as a gift, but David insisted on paying him, 2 Samuel 24:24, *But the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing."* So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. A parallel account in 1 Chronicles 21:15–26 uses the Hebrew form Ornan for the Jebusite's name.

Al-Aqsa Mosque



Entrance to Al-Aqsa Mosque

It is the third holiest site in Islam. According to Islamic tradition, it is the site of Muhammad's ascent to heaven in the seventh century. It has four minarets encircling the mosque. Three are on the western side and one on the northern side. The tallest is 121 feet high. It opened in 1035 A.D. It is the main congregational prayer hall and holds 5,000.

On the eastern side of the mosque is a flat plaza. Underneath this plaza is where the stairways from the Southern Steps ascend up to the Temple Mount. Muslim authorities will not allow any archaeological activity to take place here. They insist that no Jewish temple ever stood on the site. But, it is easy to notice some of the remains near the entrance which are from the temple that stood there in the time of Jesus.



Al-Aqsa Mosque Tunnel



Al-Aqsa Mosque site for purification.



One of four towers around Al-Aqsa Mosque



Some of the statuary from the Jewish temples

The Wailing Wall

The Western Wall, also known as the *Wailing Wall* or the *Kotel*, is the most sacred site in the world for Jewish people. For centuries, it was as close as Jews were permitted to come to the site of the ancient temple. Rabbinic belief is that *the divine Presence never departs from the Western Wall*. Jews lament the destruction of the Temple and pray for its restoration. It has long been a custom to push slips of paper with prayers on them into the wall's cracks.

It is next to the Temple Mount and is part of the retaining wall built by Herod the Great to expand the size of the temple platform on Mount Moriah. It is on the site of the first and second Temples of Jerusalem. The First Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587-586 BC and the Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD which was foretold by Jesus, Matthew 24:2,2 *But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."*



The Western (Wailing Wall)



Women at the Wailing Wall

The space is 160 feet long and 60 feet high. It has a public area for men and women. The actual Western Wall extends over 1,600 feet. The wall dates from the 2nd C BC with upper section added later. It continues below the current level for an additional 17 rows of stone.

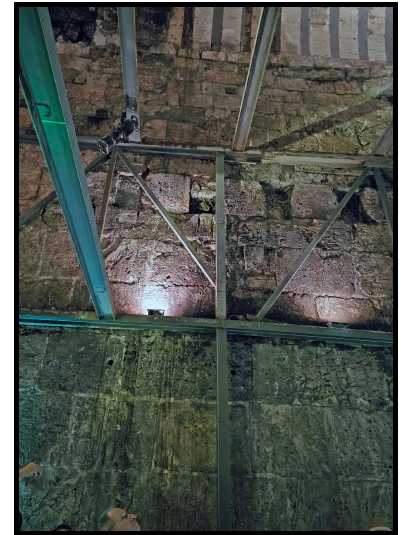
Because the wall now forms part of a larger wall that surrounds the Muslim Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque, Jews and Arabs have frequently disputed control of the wall and, often, right of access to it. That conflict has been particularly heated since the Israeli government took full control of the Old City in the wake of the Six-Day War of June 1967.

The Eastern Gate

This gate is located on the Eastern Wall of the Old City of Jerusalem and leads to the Temple Mount. It faces the Mount of Olives across the Kidron Valley. The Eastern Gate was destroyed by the Romans at the time of the destruction of the temple in 70 AD and was rebuilt in the sixteenth century A.D. The Herodian remains were accidentally uncovered below this gate, indicating that it was probably built over the one used when Jesus visited the temple. It was also called the Golden or Beautiful Gate, Acts 3:2, *And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple.*



Stairwell to thousands of years of history



Part of the Western Wall below street level



The Eastern Gate

It is the gate that gives the most direct access to the temple mount—if a person could pass through the arches of the Eastern Gate, he would be very close to where the Jewish temple used to stand. When Jesus entered Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives in Matthew 21, He used a gate in the same location as the current Eastern or Golden Gate.

The Bible predicts that Messiah will enter the temple through an eastern gate, Ezekiel 43:1-5, *Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing east. 2 And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory. 3 And the vision I saw was just like the vision that I had seen when he came to destroy the city, and just like the vision that I had seen by the Chebar canal. And I fell on my face. 4 As the glory of the LORD entered the temple by the gate facing east, 5 the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the temple.*

The gate was sealed shut in 1540 AD by the sultan of the Ottoman Empire and a cemetery was placed in front of it to prevent the Messiah from entering. The thinking was, if the closed gate would not stop Him, the cemetery would, because as a Jew, the Messiah would become ceremonially unclean if He touched anything connected with death; thus, Muslims thought He would not be able to enter the Temple Mount.

Of course, there will be a new millennial temple with 12 gates. Ezekiel speaks much of the entrance of Messiah. What we have now on the Temple Mount will be enlarged. It is interesting to note that there has and always will be an attempt by unbelievers to hinder the coming of Messiah even if the gate is changed.