

Miracle Has Just Happened on Jerusalem's Temple Mount!

Wait, what? Jews and Christians can pray on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Why is that news?

At the conclusion of the 1967 Six Day War, Israel negotiated a cease fire with the Arab countries that had gone to war against it. A cease fire, not peace. Israelis believed that after the crushing defeat of the Arab armies and loss of vast territory, the Arabs would finally realize that they could not win militarily, and that Israel was a reality to live with, not fight against. Many believed that all that was needed was to negotiate to return the land and the Arabs would make peace. Simple.

While Israel was fully in control of all of Jerusalem, including the Old City which had previously been under Jordanian occupation (and never recognized internationally), Israel allowed Jordan to retain administrative control of the Temple Mount, with the Hashemite Kingdom serving as trustees of the mosques there. Part of that arrangement prevented non-Muslims, specifically Jews and Christians, from praying on the Temple Mount. This arrangement is referred to as the "status quo" and has governed the access to the Temple Mount in general, and specifically the inability of Jews and Christians to pray there.

This perverse situation existed for decades; Israeli security would prohibit Jews and Christians from bringing Bibles, and other religious text and symbols to the Temple Mount, with access to Jews specifically, and Christians in general, severely restricted. People were detained for appearing to pray, silently moving their lips. Any outward sign of audible prayer was prohibited. It's unknown how many people transversed the site on which both Temples stood, praying

silently, that one day public prayer will be allowed.

It seems that God answered those prayers.

Recently, Jerusalem Magistrate's Court Judge Bilha Yahalom revoked a restraining order to a Jewish man, Rabbi Aryeh Lipo, who was "caught" praying on the Temple Mount during the previous Yom Kippur. The judge ruled that it is permissible for Jews to pray quietly in the holiest Jewish site. Presumably this applies to Christians as well, if not in the text of the judge's order, at least in its precedent.

In recent years, an increasing number of Jews have taken to ascending to the Temple Mount, with a growing number openly praying at Judaism's most hold site, or at least not hiding that they were doing so. A group that promotes Jews visiting the Temple Mount reported that a record number of Jews actually prayed on the Temple Mount this summer: 4,239 Jews during the Biblical month of Av, an increase of nearly double that during the same season the previous year.

In her ruling the judge wrote, "The appellant is on the Temple Mount on a daily basis and is familiar with the accepted procedures at the place, and indeed admits that he prayed there. In this sense, it is clear why the respondent (Israel Police) is apprehensive and why it ordered the removal. On the other hand, it is precisely his daily arrival at the Temple Mount that indicates that this is a matter of principle and substance for him. The video I reviewed shows that the appellant was standing in a corner with a friend or two next to him, there's no crowd around him, his prayer was silent, a whisper," the Judge added.

"The respondent does not dispute that the appellant, like many others, prays on a daily basis on the Temple Mount, and this activity in itself does not violate police instructions," Judge Yahalom concluded.

The judge's ruling acknowledges a precedent which has been

taking place on the Temple Mount on a growing basis. Contrary to the "status quo" which was reached with the Jordanians in 1967 prohibiting Jewish prayer, Jews have been praying quietly in small groups in a way that's known, and not disruptive.

The response of Israel's diverse government has been broad. Many nationalist and religious parties and Knesset members are celebrating. On the other side, Israeli Arab Minister for Regional Cooperation, Issawi Frej, announced at the beginning of the government's cabinet meeting that he objects to Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount. The paradox is that while Frej is left-wing politically he is not known as a particularly religious Moslem. Despite his more secular leaning, he still objects to Jews praying at their holiest site, "I support the prayer of every person everywhere, but the Temple Mount has a status quo and should be respected. Period."

Judge Yahalom observed is that there is no actual law against Jewish (and Christian) prayer on the Temple Mount, but a five-decade history of orders that have created a precedent but are also seen as contradictory, if not discriminatory, based on a status quo from over half a century ago.

There's reason for concern that Islamic and Arab nationalist extremists will respond with violence. Indeed, "protecting Jerusalem" from Jews has been the battle cry of Arabs and Islamists for generations. This goes back to 1929 when allegations of Jews storming the Temple Mount was the "excuse" for Arabs to massacre dozens of Jews in Hebron. Another member of Israel's governing coalition, the Islamic Ra'am party announced in July: "Al-Aqsa Mosque (synonymous to Muslims for the entire Temple Mount) is an exclusive right of Muslims and no one else has any right to it."

In addition to violence, within Israel and from outside, there could be political consequences with the Ra'am party walking out of the government if, for instance, a new law is not passed that overrides the judge's ruling. It's hard to imagine

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and other right-wing members of government agreeing to this, as all members of the coalition straddle very narrow lines to find areas to agree upon and keep the government together. A parallel controversy might happen in the Palestinian Authority with more ardent Islamic terrorist elements using this opportunity to incite violence, and delegitimize PA President Abbas and his Fatah party.

It's not impossible that thousands of Arab rioters could storm the Temple Mount, which would lead to a lockdown, widespread violence, and closing the holy site to prayer for everyone. In this case, it's likely that the ruling will be appealed to Israel's Supreme Court, with Israel Police pointing to the rioters as a reason to ban Jews from praying there, again. But now, with a legal precedent that would have its own political implications.

Prayers are needed for the continued right of Jews and Christians to pray on the Temple Mount. {eoa}

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