

Plenty of Room for Everyone: Why Are Jews Hindered From Praying on the Temple Mount?

Should Jews and other non-Muslims be allowed to pray on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem's Old City? Palestinians, Jordanians and many Muslims say a resounding "No!"

Israel's High Court guarantees freedom of access to the holy plateau, including freedom of worship. But the police prevent it out of fear of Palestinian riots. Still more Israelis are demanding those freedoms.

Muslims call it Haram al-Sharif—the noble sanctuary—in Arabic. They refer to the entire compound as Al-Aksa, which includes the mosque and the Dome of the Rock, as the third holiest site in Islam. Muslims claim they're the only ones allowed to pray there.

"Muslims, they have to pray, but others—Christians and Jews—they can visit, just visit, not to make prayer inside," a Muslim named Kaman told CBN News.

For Jews, the Temple Mount is the most sacred place on earth. Two Jewish temples stood here in Bible times. Jesus visited, preached and worshipped at the second temple before it was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. But Muslims say it never existed.

"Archaeology backs up the Bible, which says it's our holiest place, it's the center from the beginning of the Jewish people—many think from the beginning of the world. It's the center," Linda Olmert, deputy director of the Temple Mount Heritage Foundation, told CBN News.

For years, rabbis said it was forbidden for Jews even to set foot there, let alone pray on the Temple Mount because it was too holy. Now religious and non-religious Jews want to secure their rights to Judaism's most holy place.

"We want freedom for everybody to pray on the Temple Mount," Olmert said. "Isaiah says it will be a place for all nations."

For the first time in two years, Israel's government allowed two Knesset members to visit the Temple Mount. One of them was Yehuda Glick, who survived an assassination attempt because of his Temple Mount activism.

Left-wing Israelis protested his visit, fearing Arab violence.

"Those provocations that our members of Knesset are doing on the Temple Mount are not only dangerous, they are also violating what the Jewish tradition is about, which is sovereignty and inclusion," Hagit Ofra, with Peace Now, contended.

But Glick rejects the idea that he is provoking violence by going to a Jewish holy site.

"I call upon you to cooperate with us, all of those together who want peace in this place, and stop blaming others and stop calling to say [violent protests occur] because you go to [the] Temple Mount," Glick said. "The terror is because of the terrorists and it's because of all those inciting it, and we're not giving the terrorists any presence."

Since the 1967 Six-Day War, Jordan has kept religious control over the Temple Mount, Israel maintains security—and only Muslims can pray there.

Israeli officials keep a tight rein on Jewish visits to the contested site to prevent Muslim violence.

"We believe that by committing ourselves to the status quo, we help keep the peace and security in Jerusalem," said Brig. Gen. (res.) Yossi Kupperwasser, former director general of the Strategic Affairs Ministry.

But Olmert says it's all about civil rights.

"The only place I know, certainly in Israel where there is a real violation of civil rights as we have come to expect them in the Western world, in free democratic countries, is against Jews on the Temple Mount," she said.

Olmert says there's plenty of room for everyone.

"I believe that when the Messiah comes, He'll solve all the problems. Until then, I believe that there's a place for all nations on the Temple Mount." {eo}

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