

Temple Mount Controversy Explodes Ahead of Biblical High Holidays

A growing push to change who can access the Temple Mount on Shabbat is gaining momentum in Jerusalem, and the timing could hardly be more significant.

With Rosh Hashanah, Sukkot and Simchat Torah all colliding with Shabbat in the coming Hebrew year, Jewish visitors could find themselves unable to enter Judaism's holiest site during some of the most significant appointed times on the biblical calendar.

According to Israel365 News, Assaf Fried, head of the Committee for Opening the Temple Mount on Shabbat, is challenging the Israeli government to reverse the longstanding policy that prevents Jews, Christians and other non-Muslim visitors from accessing the Mount on Saturdays.

"There is no operational reason, no security reason," Fried told Israel365 News.

The restriction was not always in place.

Fried told the outlet that Jews accessed the Temple Mount on Shabbat following Israel's capture of Jerusalem's Old City in the 1967 Six-Day War. He even recalled personally ascending the Mount in 1991.

Everything changed following the eruption of the Second Intifada in 2000. Jewish access to the site was completely suspended for nearly three years. When the Mount eventually reopened to Jewish visitors in 2003, Saturday access never returned.

"And a status quo formed," Fried said.

More than two decades later, Fried's organization says over 1,350 Shabbats have passed without that policy being reversed. The group calculates that Jewish visitors currently have access to the Mount for only 32.5 of the 168 hours in an average week, Israel365 News reported.



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But the upcoming biblical calendar is adding renewed urgency to the campaign.

Rosh Hashanah, the first day of Sukkot, and Simchat Torah will each fall on Shabbat. All three carry profound connections to the biblical Temple.

Sukkot holds an especially striking connection. The Jewish tradition holds that 70 sacrifices were offered during the feast on behalf of the 70 nations. The celebration was not merely about Israel—it depicted a blessing extending to the nations of the world.

Then there is Simchat Torah.

The coming observance corresponds on the Hebrew calendar with the anniversary of the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas massacre. Hamas itself called its attack "Al-Aqsa Flood," invoking the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound located on the Temple Mount.

For Fried, keeping Jewish visitors away on that anniversary sends precisely the wrong message.

"That means that on the day after Simchat Torah, which falls in October, on our calendar we are surrendering to Palestinian violence," he told Israel365 News.

The controversy does not stop with Jewish visitors. Christians and other tourists are also prevented from entering the Temple

Mount on Shabbat, something Fried believes has become increasingly consequential as Christian interest in the biblical site grows.

Now the campaign is headed into the public square.

A rally scheduled for Aug. 27 in Jerusalem is expected to draw rabbis, yeshiva leaders, Knesset members and government officials as supporters call for Shabbat access to be restored, according to Israel365 News.

As the biblical feasts draw near, this debate is about far more than opening and closing hours. It touches one of the most prophetically significant pieces of land on earth—and raises a powerful question about what happens when ancient biblical significance collides with the modern realities surrounding the Temple Mount.

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