

The most contested real estate on Earth?

Muslims call it the Noble Sanctuary. Jews and Christians call it the Temple Mount. Built atop Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, this 36-acre site is the place where seminal events in Islam, Judaism and Christianity are said to have taken place, and it has been a flash point of conflict for millennia. Many aspects of its meaning and history are still disputed by religious and political leaders, scholars, and even archaeologists. Several cycles of building and destruction have shaped what is on this hilltop today.

Dome of the Rock is a Muslim shrine to commemorate the prophet Muhammad's ascension into heaven accompanied by the angel Gabriel. It was built in the late 600s A.D. on top of the site of the Second Temple, restored by King Herod and destroyed by the Roman siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Dome of the Ascension was built by the governor of Jerusalem in 1200.

Gate of Darkness
Dome of al-Khalili
Iron Gate
Council Gate

Cotton Merchants Gate
Bab al-Silsila Minaret was built in 1329.

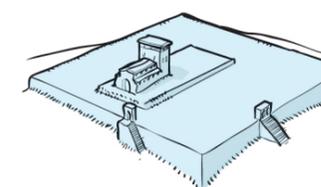
Western Wall
Jews consider the exposed portion to be the closest accessible site to the holiest core of previous temples, and they come from around the world to pray here. A separate section is reserved for Jewish women to pray.

Mughrabi Gate
is thought to have been created in the early 1200s and named after nearby residents who had come to Jerusalem from Morocco. The gate is open via a covered wooden bridge. It is the only access to the al-Aqsa Mosque compound for non-Muslims.

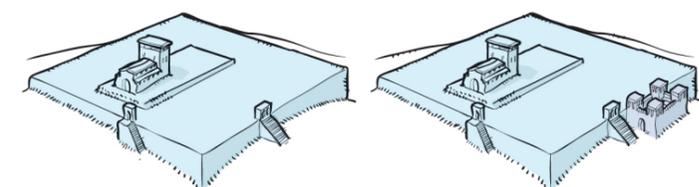


Five stages in the development of the Noble Sanctuary: A Muslim shrine supplants a Jewish temple

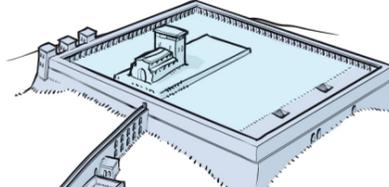
Before any temple or mosque was built on Mount Moriah, there was only an outcropping of bedrock. Among the significant associations attached to the rock by various traditions are that it originated in the Garden of Eden (or that dirt from it went to the Garden of Eden), that the prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven from it, that Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son on it, and that it is the source of all Earth's water. According to the Bible, King Solomon built the first temple there about 1000 B.C.



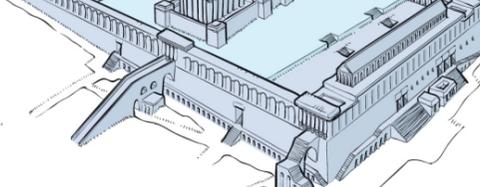
700 B.C.
Israel's King Hezekiah expanded the Temple Mount after his predecessor, Ahaz, plundered the temple. He built the walls and platform that form the courtyard. The first temple stood until Babylon's Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it in 586 B.C., and Jews built a second temple a generation later.



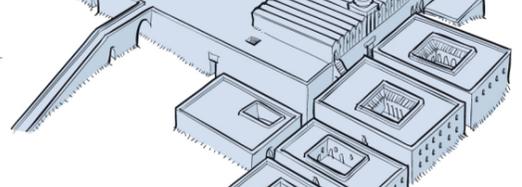
168 B.C.
After Seleucid King Antiochus IV Epiphanes ransacked the city, he built a fortress called Akra adjacent to the grounds and erected an altar to Zeus in the temple. Oppressive anti-Judaism laws sparked the Maccabean revolt that Hanukkah commemorates, and the fortress was demolished.



142 to 63 B.C.
Under the Hasmonean Dynasty, founded by the Maccabees, the temple was "purified" and restored and its platform extended to the south.



20 B.C.
King Herod ordered a major renovation and expansion of the Second Temple and greatly enlarged the square. All four New Testament gospels tell the story of Jesus chasing money changers out of this temple. It was destroyed in A.D. 70 during a Roman invasion commanded by Titus, son of Emperor Vespasian.



A.D. 691
During the Umayyad period, the Dome of the Rock was built over what was thought to be the innermost portion of the original temple, including the Holy of Holies, which only the high priest could enter. Al-Aqsa mosque was erected over part of Herod's addition, and several public buildings were later added.

