

# 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

Solomon's Dome

Gate of Atonement

Gate of Remission

Gates of the Tribes

Solomon's Throne

NORTH GARDENS

Golden Gate (blocked) is regarded as a holy site in Judaism (arrival of the Messiah), Christianity (entrance of Jesus on Palm Sunday) and Islam (site of future resurrection).

Summer Pulpit is where the imam stands to deliver sermons. It was built in the 1200s.

Al-Kas "the cup" Fountain is an ablution fountain for Muslim worshippers.

**Dome of Yusuf Agha** is thought to have been built by Saladin, the first sultan of Egypt and Syria, in the late 1100s after his armies recaptured Palestine from the Crusaders, who had conquered it 88 years earlier.

**Al-Aqsa mosque**, meaning "the farthest mosque," is also known as Bayt al-Muqaddas. Thought to have been originally constructed in A.D. 705 atop King Herod's temple extension. Much of the building as it stands dates to its rebuilding after an earthquake in 1033.

**Solomon's Stables** are under the southeastern courtyard of the Temple Mount. It is thought that the Crusaders, not Solomon, used this area as stables. The area was recently converted into a Muslim prayer hall for up to 7,000 worshippers.

The Single Gate (blocked)

The Triple Gate (blocked)

The Double Gate (blocked)

White Tower

Women's Mosque

Remains of Robinson's Arch

WESTERN WALL

Men

Women

Dome of Moses

JEWISH QUARTER

MUSLIM QUARTER

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.

There is a small but growing movement among Jewish activists who want time and space to pray on the Temple Mount, or, as it is called by Muslims, the Noble Sanctuary, home to the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa mosque.

Jews are allowed to enter the compound through the Mughrabi Gate, but non-Muslim prayer is forbidden. Now some Jews surreptitiously pray as they wander the grounds. Muslims warn that changing the delicate status quo could be an explosive issue.

**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.

**Ruined towers**  
The city walls were destroyed in an earthquake in 1033, and a new tower was built to protect the Double Gate entrance. After the city fell to the Crusaders, the Knights Templar expanded the tower and converted it into a massive defensible structure, blocking the Double Gate.

**Islamic Museum**  
Established by the Supreme Muslim Council in 1923, it is housed in a wing added by the Knights Templar during their tenure in the 1100s.

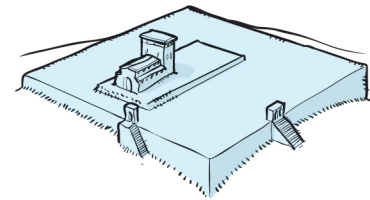
Photo reference source: Hanan Isachar Photography

Map of Jerusalem showing the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Old City, and the Green Line (1949 armistice accord). The map includes labels for Ramallah, Bethlehem, and the Jerusalem municipal boundary (disputed).

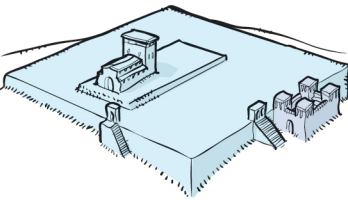
Map of the Noble Sanctuary/Temple Mount showing the Dome of the Rock, Al-Aqsa mosque, and surrounding quarters (Muslim Quarter, Jewish Quarter, Christian Quarter, Armenian Quarter). The map also shows the Mughrabi Gate and the Western Wall.

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

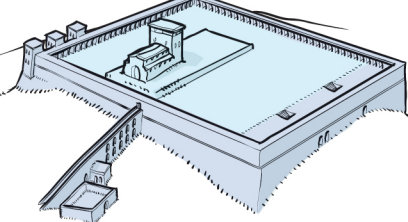
Before any temple or mosque was built on Mount Moriah, there was only an outcropping of bedrock. Among the significant associations attached to the rock by various traditions are that it originated in the Garden of Eden (or that dirt from it went to the Garden of Eden), that the prophet Muhammad ascended 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.



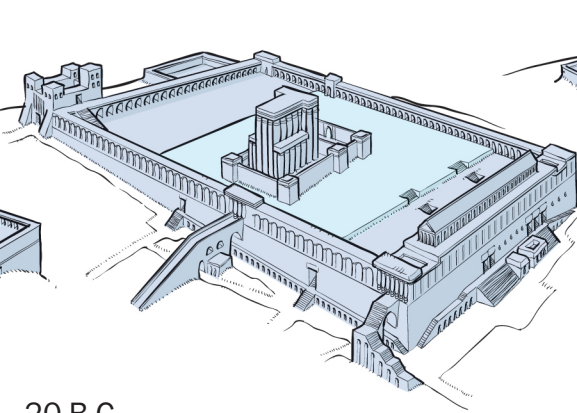
**700 B.C.**  
Israel's King Hezekiah expanded the Temple Mount after his predecessor, Ahaz, plundered the temple. He built the walls and platform that form the courtyard. The first temple stood until Babylon's Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it in 586 B.C., and Jews built a second temple a generation later.



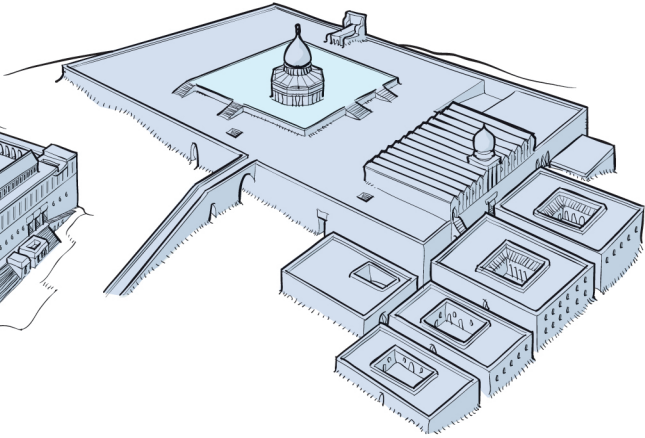
**168 B.C.**  
After Seleucid King Antiochus IV Epiphanes ransacked the city, he built a fortress called Akra adjacent to the grounds and erected an altar to Zeus in the temple. Oppressive anti-Judaism laws sparked the Maccabean revolt that Hanukkah commemorates, and the fortress was demolished.



**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.