

## **Fact Sheet: Jewish Worship at the Temple Mount**

**Format:** "Issues" page on the website

Since 1967 when the Israeli government gave official control of the Temple Mount (*Haram al-Sharif*) to the Jordanian Islamic trust known as the Waqf, a Status Quo agreement has been maintained to ensure overall peace and safety on the mount. The Status Quo, which has long been the agreement governing control and access to certain religious sites in the Holy Land, has allowed Jews access to the Temple Mount and prayer privileges at the nearby Western Wall, and has allowed Muslims access to pray at the Temple Mount. Israel continues to [affirm its commitment](#) to maintaining the Status Quo and understands it to be in service of its Declaration of Independence's policy to protect the freedom of religion and worship for all faiths. The U.S. Department of State recently [urged Israeli and Palestinian officials](#) to preserve the status quo on the Temple Mount and highlighted its role in deescalating tension and violence. In recent years, violations of the Status Quo have created barriers to Christian worship in Jerusalem and [threatened the future of a Palestinian Christian presence](#) in the city.

The Temple Mount is widely understood to be the location of both ancient temples in the Jewish tradition--the first built by King Solomon and the second built in the 6th century BCE. Both ancient temples were destroyed by foreign leaders and accompanied Jewish exile from Israel. Although the Temple Mount is considered one of the most significant holy sites for Jews, Jewish tradition understands entry into the Holy of Holies (where God resides) as forbidden. Religious Jews today thus typically refrain from entering the Temple Mount to avoid walking on sacred ground. The territory that Israel gained during the 1967 War allowed Jews access to some of their holiest sites that were previously restricted including Rachel's Tomb, Hebron, and the Western Wall, which is generally considered the closest to the Temple Mount that Jews are permitted to pray. However, some Jews believe it is their religious and legal right to pray atop the Temple Mount and advocate for Israeli courts to permit it.

The Temple Mount is known to Muslims as Haram-al Sharif, or the Noble Sanctuary, and is considered the third holiest site in Sunni Islam. Islamic tradition understands it as the place where Mohammed ascended to heaven in the seventh century, which is commemorated with the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock. The Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque were built by the Umayyid Caliphs in 692 CE, and the mount as a whole has been under the management of the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf since the Crusades. The Haram al-Sharif brings a large number of Muslim pilgrims to Jerusalem each year, and serves as the closest and only opportunity for many Palestinian Muslims to visit a sacred site given the travel restrictions that Palestinians systematically face.

Over the past decade, [violations of the Status Quo](#) have increased, which have the tendency to protect Jewish worshippers while limiting access for Muslim worshippers. These violations have resulted in a rise in Jewish prayer permitted, a heavier military presence, greater restrictions against Muslim worshippers, and increased violence at and surrounding the site. Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) [affirms](#) that religious freedom and access to holy sites is of paramount importance for Christians, Muslims, and Jews in the Holy Land. However, we cannot view religious freedom in the Holy Land without acknowledging the ways in which the religious rights and freedoms of Palestinians are systematically denied. In order to promote a shared Jerusalem that remains sacred and peaceful for Jews, Christians, and Muslims, CMEP advocates for a strengthening of the Status Quo on the Temple Mount and believes that any changes must be agreed upon by all relevant parties. Without mutual agreement and mediation, such changes will likely exacerbate rising tensions rather than secure authentic religious freedom for all.

### **Facts at a Glance**

- [Over 40,000 Jewish visitors](#) go to the Temple Mount each year
- From 2016-2017, there was a [60% increase in Jewish visitors to the Temple Mount](#)
- Violations of the Status Quo can be linked to [an increase in violence](#) in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza
- Palestinians [encounter increasing obstacles](#) by the Israeli government that inhibit them from accessing the Temple Mount and other holy sites such as: road closures, permit restrictions, and entry restrictions (especially for young men)

- Since the 1967 occupation of East Jerusalem, activities surrounding the Temple Mount have been [crucial in sustaining a Palestinian presence in the Old City](#)

## **International Peace Treaties and Resolutions**

### [1994 Treaty of Peace Agreement Article 9\(2\): Places of Historical and Religious Significance and Interfaith Relations](#)

In 1994, the status quo was reaffirmed under Article 9(2) of the Treaty of Peace Agreement between Jordan and Israel.

### [United Nations Security Council Resolution 271](#)

This resolution reaffirmed the protection of Al-Aqsa Mosque and “recognizes that any act of destruction or profanation of the Holy Places, religious buildings and sites in Jerusalem or any encouragement of, or connivance at, any such act may seriously endanger international peace and security.”

## **Articles**

### [Israeli Court is Rubber Stamping Temple Mount Zealots](#), Haaretz, 2021

Aviv Tatarsky details the Israeli police’s growing violations of its status quo policy over the last two years, which has resulted in a public normalization of Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount that has significantly influenced recent court rulings on such violations.

### [After Raid on Aqsa Mosque, Rockets From Gaza and Israeli Airstrikes](#), New York Times, 2021

The rise in violence throughout Gaza and the West Bank after the Israeli military raided Al-Aqsa Mosque and attacked Muslim worshippers and protestors on the Temple Mount demonstrates the link between an Israeli military presence on the Temple Mount and increased violence.

### [On Yom Kippur. Jerusalem’s most sacred piece of property must be a place of peace](#), NBC News, 2021

Rabbi Avi Shafran explains the consensus view among Israel’s chief rabbis and Orthodox Jewish believers that religious law forbids Jews from ascending the Temple Mount, a sacred ground that is understood to be forbidden until the Holy Temple is rebuilt.

### [The Astonishing Israeli Concession of 1967](#), The Atlantic, 2017

The historic Israeli concession of the Temple Mount in 1967 was based on the understanding that changing the demographic character of the Temple Mount would be an “affront to the Muslim world” and would spark significant violent conflict.

### [A Dark Easter for Palestinian Christians](#), Washington Post, 2012

Richard Stearns explains the travel restrictions placed on Palestinian Christians that prohibit them from celebrating religious holidays at their holy sites.

### [Haram al-Sharif and the Status Quo](#), Christians for Social Action, 2018

CMEP’s Molly Lorden discusses how violations of the Status Quo instill fear and deter Muslims from worshipping at Haram al-Sharif.

## **Reports**

### [Continued Threats against Al-Aqsa Mosque Compound and Attacks against Palestinian Worshipers, Al-Haq, 2019](#)

Al-Haq recalls the historic reaffirmations of the status quo and documents significant Israeli breaches of that policy.

### [Increasing Cooperation between the Temple Movements and the Israeli Police](#), Ir Amim, 2017

Findings from a year of observing the increased protections given to Temple Movements activists from the Israeli Police.

### [Restrictions on movement in Bab al-Majles in Jerusalem’s Old City place neighborhood in chokehold.](#)

B’Tselem, 2016

An analysis of the increasing restrictions in the Old City that deny Muslim worshippers access to the Temple Mount.

[UNESCO Executive Board 200 EX/SR.1-8: Occupied Palestine](#), 2016

The Executive Board “strongly condemns the escalating Israeli aggressions and illegal measures against the Awqaf Department and its personnel, and against the freedom of worship and Muslims’ access to their Holy Site Al-Aqşa Mosque/AI-Ḥaram Al-Sharif, and requests Israel, the occupying Power, to respect the historic status quo and to immediately stop these measures.”