

The Middle East is home to many different people, cultures, and religions. Although this diversity is a great thing that makes the region a very culturally rich place, many problems, particularly religious ones, arise from these differences in beliefs. The problem that this paper will discuss is the temple mount in Jerusalem and how Judaism and Islam both view the significance of the temple mount and the subsequent tension that exists due to this contradiction.

Jewish History and claims to the temple mount (B.C.E.)

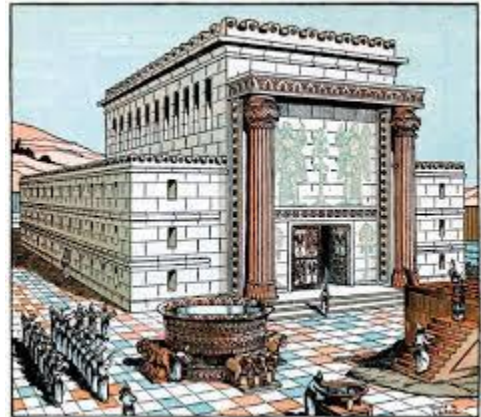
The temple mount is so called because that is the “mount” where the Jewish temple used to be. It was believed to be built on the same place where Abraham offered up Isaac. It was first built there by the Jewish king Solomon to serve as a reminder for his people to return to their god, and not the God’s of other nations. The temple replaced their existing “mobile temple”, the tabernacle.

The tabernacle was then stored in the temple mount where many believe it remains to this day. The temple

was the holiest place in all of Judaism and it is where animals were sacrificed, important relics were kept, and where people went to pay their tithing. This temple was built with the most precious of materials to show the highest respect towards the house of God. Unfortunately, the fame of the riches within the temple was well known and attracted enemies. The temple was first destroyed and looted by the Babylonians under king Nebuchadnezzar when they invaded. Seventy years later, the Babylonians allowed many Jews to return to rebuild their temple and later the city wall too. This second temple was destroyed during the roman occupation of Jerusalem and has not been rebuilt ever since.

Muslim History and claims to the temple mount (B.C.E.)

Muslims also believe in the biblical accounts and significance of the temple mount for many of the same reasons that Jews do. In addition to those accounts, this is where the prophet Muhammad was taken in a vision known as the night journey. In this legendary journey, Muhammad travels to “the farthest mosque”, Jerusalem, and there he worships with



Solomon's temple



The Night Journey

other prophets and ascends into heaven to visit God. Originally, Muhammad told his followers to pray towards Jerusalem and make their pilgrimage there, not Mecca. It was later changed to Mecca in order to distinguish Muslims from other monotheistic religions.

The Dome of the Rock mosque was built on the temple mount for religious and political reasons. The mosque was commissioned to be built by a major Islamic general, Chaliph Abd El-Malik at the end of

one of the crusades in which

Islam came off the victor. The Dome of the Rock mosque was built to enshrine Haram as-Sharif, the Noble Sanctuary, which is the rock that Muhammad ascended into heaven on. It is also where Muhammad's tomb is. The mosque was also built with the intent of re-orienting Muslim prayers and pilgrimage back to Jerusalem. This was because Chaliph Abd El-Malik became concerned that the people under his rule would be influenced by his political rivals as they journeyed to Mecca, where his rivals ruled.



The Dome of the Rock

Control of the temple mount (C.E.)



Control of the temple mount shifted with nearly every crusade.

Control of the temple mount, and all of Jerusalem shifted between Christianity and Islam many times since the Dome of the Rock was built, but the mosque was never destroyed. Many crusaders thought that the mosque was Solomon's temple, and they merely converted it into a church rather than destroy it. Thus, they left it intact for when Jerusalem was retaken again by the Muslims. The crusades ended with the Muslims in control of the temple mount. Islamic countries were in

control of the holy land from the last crusade until the Ottoman Empire fell after World War I. It then became occupied by Great Britain until they left after World War II.

During the World War II, many Jews were employed in Britain's army where they were trained how to fight. At the end of World War II, in direct response to the horrors of the holocaust and threats by Palestinians to eradicate all of Judaism, the United Nations gave the Jews land in their homeland. As many Jews started migrating back to their homeland (Israel) as part of the Zionist movement, they started moving in next to their mostly Muslim neighbors and were banding together to form their own country without the consent of the Muslims already living there. They even, under David Ben-Gurion, started an underground army using weapons and training they got from the British during the war. This caused a lot of friction and tension to develop in the area and after the British left, war ensued between Israel and Palestine. Israel had the upper hand because of how much preparation they had so they eventually won the war and Israel was born.



David Ben-Gurion

Who owns the temple mount?

The problem is that the major holy site in Jerusalem is claimed by both Islam and Judaism and neither is willing to share. Since its establishment, Israel has been cautious but accepting of other religions, but that belief is being questioned by many in their faith because of how much they want their temple there. Their holiest site in which they would like to build their temple is occupied by one of the most holy sites in Islam, the dome of the Rock. Thus, their beliefs are contradicting another. Many Jews and Muslims are willing to negotiate a compromise, but neither group is constant, there are radicals on both sides. The radical Jews are unwilling to build their temple anywhere else and have even threatened to destroy any such attempt. And while many Muslims are willing to share the temple mount, others are trying to eliminate any Jewish tie to the area.



Leaders of the mosque have authorized excavations on the temple mount to make room for more worshippers

Since the Dome of the Rock is such a sacred site in Islam, it is natural that there would be many pilgrims and tourists that go there. Unfortunately, there simply isn't room for as many people as would like to be there. Because of this, the leaders of the mosque have been excavating under and around the mosque to make room for more worshippers.

The problem with this is that many Jews view this as an Islamic attempt to defile the area, remove any Jewish relics (many Jews believe that the tabernacle is buried there), and make a mockery of Judaism.

Evaluating the problem

To evaluate this problem, I will use the following three criteria. One: Who does this problem affect and how? Two: to what extent does this problem affect the stability of the region and the world? Three: how does this problem affect us in the United States?

One: who does this problem affect and how? The more people that the problem affects, the bigger the problem is. How these people are being affected is an important factor. Are they affected monetarily, or is the issue threatening their lives, home, or families? This problem has the potential to affect everyone in the world to some extent. It most directly affects all of the countries in the Middle East, beginning with Israel. This affects the citizens of Jerusalem because of the demonstrations and protests that often have to be broken up by police. This affects all countries



Many demonstrations and riots have had to be broken up by police already

where Jews live because the police that are breaking up these demonstrations are Israel which, to many, seems like they are arresting their own people and putting down their own cause for a temple. As of now, this issue does not threaten individual liberties, personal property, or the safety of those involved. So although this problem affects many people, it doesn't affect them

very much, so according to the first criteria, this is not yet an unmanageable problem though it does have the potential to be.



This problem could potentially spread throughout the whole world

Two: to what extent does this problem affect the stability of the region and the world? Are the consequences associated with this issue isolated to Jerusalem? Does it have the potential to grow? This region has a history full of one religious war after another, so issues that arise from religious differences have lasting effects and far reaching consequences. What starts as a simple protest can potentially spread throughout the entire Middle East, then encompass the whole globe. From the second criteria, this issue has the potential to become a very large problem.

Three: how does this problem affect us in the United States? Is it affecting us now, or is it only a potential problem for the future? As of now, this issue does not affect the everyday lives of the United States. However, U.S. foreign policy is deeply mired in Middle Eastern politics because of our role in helping Israel become an independent country. If this issue grows and ever turns into an armed conflict over the temple mount, the U.S. will have to choose a side because of our relationship with Israel which would make us an integral part of any wars in this area. Obviously, if the U.S. became involved in a war in the Middle East, it would greatly affect the everyday lives of its citizens.

Conclusion

A solution to this problem is essential to the whole world. There is a Jewish movement to establish a temple on the mount at any cost. There have already been demonstrations, protests, and even clashes with police. One organization has declared that they will do whatever they can to obtain their temple this very year, 2013. A solution needs to be reached before these clashes and demonstrations escalate into another full scale war.

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