

THE TEMPLE, THE KA'ABA, AND THE CHRIST

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NOTE: All Qur'an quotations from Abdullah Yussuf Ali,
New Revised Edition, Amana Corporation, 1989

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Life is but a journey. Some are heading for Rome, others see their Hajj to Mecca as their greatest goal, yet others dream of visiting the holy sites in Jerusalem while many people don't care about any of these places. They just want to succeed in life and find happiness their own way. But most people would certainly want to spend eternity in fellowship with their creator. How can we be sure to be pilgrims to heaven?

There are three great monotheistic religions in the world, namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Each of these not only recognises the existence of one sovereign God who rules the universe but has sources and roots common to the other two. All three admit that human history began when God created Adam and Eve, and they continue to agree on the immediate course of this history after the creation.

The initial temptation and fall of Adam and Eve, the great flood of the time of Noah, and the calling of prophets such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, are admitted by all three religions. Nevertheless the distinctions between these three religions are far more significant than their points of agreement. Each one of these three claims to possess the ultimate revelation of God and while Christianity and Islam acknowledge divine influence in the monotheistic religions which preceded them, they both make exclusive claims to have superseded the earlier faiths and to be in this age the final revelation of God to man. At the same time Judaism and Christianity have conceded nothing to the religions which have followed them, holding firmly to their claims to be God's only true religion in the world.

One of these religions is indeed the true religion of God. All three may trace their religious histories to the same sources but, by virtue of the sharp divergences between them, they cannot all be true religions in this age. If there is indeed only one God, there can only be one true religion - one faith that alone can give men access to the presence, knowledge and favour of God. It is unthinkable that he could be the author of three religions which differ so radically.

In this booklet we will examine the focal points of these three religions and compare them with one another to discover which religion really offers mankind access to God in this age. Judaism claims that Moses was its real founder but the focal point of the Jewish religion was not its prophet but the Holy of Holies - a shrine which contained a manifestation of the divine glory which was initially a portable edifice but which, from the time of Solomon, became a permanent structure and central feature in the Temple of the Jews. This Temple stood in Jerusalem until forty years after the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven and is known in Islam as *bait-ul-muqaddas* (the "holy house"). It is spoken of in the Qur'an as *al-masjid* ("the Temple") in Surah 17:8.

In Islam it is another structure which is the focal point of identification for the Muslim with God, namely the Ka'aba (known in Islam as *bait-ullah* the "house of Allah"). All Muslims face this house when they pray and are obliged to make a proper pilgrimage to it at least once in their lifetimes if they can afford it. Like Moses, Muhammad is only considered to be a prophet and while his name will appear over a photograph or poster of his tomb in Medina, it is always the name of Allah that appears over the Ka'aba. Hence the Ka'aba has become for the Muslim world its source of identification with God.

For the Christian Jesus Christ himself is the focal point of the Christian faith and the meeting-place of God with man. Therefore the Christian has no "house of God" on earth to perform the function of identification with God but looks to Jesus in heaven to perform this office. Accordingly he has become the *qiblah* of the Christian Church and all prayers to God are therefore offered in his name.

We shall proceed to compare these three to discover which one really offers men access to God in heaven.

THE TEMPLE OF JUDAISM

When the Jews were first delivered out of Egypt during the time of Moses, God chose to move and dwell among them in a special way. He ordered Moses to arrange the construction of a tabernacle in these words:

Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. According to all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and of all its furniture, so you shall make it. Exodus 25:8-9

In the very heart of the tabernacle there was a small ark with a wooden mercy-seat on top of it. This portion was the holiest part of the tabernacle and was to be separated from the rest of the tabernacle by a veil. God commanded Moses to construct it as such in these words:

The veil shall separate for you the holy place from the most holy. You shall put the mercy-seat upon the ark of the testimony in the most holy place. Exodus 28:33-34

God's transcendent holiness demanded that no access of any form should be allowed to man in the *Holy of Holies*. A visible cloud of glory by day and fire by night rested over the mercy-seat. On

only one occasion a year, on the Day of Atonement, the Jewish high priest was allowed into the Holy of Holies to offer the blood of a sacrifice for his own sins and the sins of his people. (Aaron, the brother of Moses, was the first high priest. He is named in the Qur'an *Harun*). It was only the blood of the sacrifice, a symbol of atonement, which allowed the high priest into the holiest portion. On all other occasions men were to stay outside the Holy of Holies because men are sinners and no sinner was allowed to stand before the presence of the Holy God of Israel. The veil before the holiest place was a frank and abiding reminder of the gulf and separation between God and his people. Nevertheless it pleased God to reveal his glory among his people in the centre of this shrine. God spoke of this holy place as follows:

There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory; I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar; Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate, to serve me as priests. And I will dwell among the people of Israel, and will be their God. Exodus 29:43-4

1. THE ORIGINAL TEMPLE OF SOLOMON

When the Israelites came to Canaan (later known as Israel and Palestine), this shrine remained with them and was at all times the holiest place for the nation. During the succeeding centuries it was housed in a tent at various places but the prophet David, during his reign as King of Israel, decided to ensure that a permanent structure would be built to house the ark and the mercy-seat. God prevented him from building such a shrine during his lifetime but promised that it would be built by his son Solomon:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name.
2Samuel 7:12-13

As soon as David died, Solomon became King of Israel. At the beginning of his reign he declared:

I purpose to build a house for the name of the Lord my God, as the Lord said to David my father, 'Your son, whom I will set upon your throne in your place, shall build the house for my name'. 1Kings 5:5

Solomon built a great Temple to house the ark and mercy-seat.

God promised that his divine presence would continue to remain with the people of Israel in the Holy of Holies which now became a cubic structure in the centre of the Temple. This building was a magnificent edifice and was built with gold, hewn stones and cedars from as far afield as Lebanon. When it was completed Solomon ordered the chief priests to bring the ark of the covenant to the Temple and it was, at his command, placed in the most holy place in the centre of the building (1Kings 8:6). When the priests came out of this holy place in the middle of the Temple,

A cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.
1Kings 8:10-11

With great joy Solomon blessed God and praised him that his divine presence was to be manifested henceforth in the Temple he had built. He declared his joy in these words:

I have built the house for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. And there I have provided a place for the ark, in which is the covenant of the Lord which he made with our

fathers when he brought them out of the land of Egypt.

1Kings 8:20-21

Yet, conscious of the fact that however splendid his Temple was, it could not possibly reflect the glory of God or contain his eternal being, Solomon added this prayer:

But will God really dwell on the earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built! Yet give attention to your servant's prayer and his plea for mercy, O Lord my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day. May your eyes be open towards this temple night and day, this place of which you said, 'My name shall be there', so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays towards this place. Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray towards this place., Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.

1Kings 8:27-30

In time the Temple became not only the qiblah of the Jews but the centre of all their major festivals as well



In acknowledging God's omnipresence, Solomon nevertheless expressed honoured at this place and that every Israelite, no matter where he might be, should face toward the his desire that God should be Temple when he prayed. In time the Temple became not only the *qiblah* of the Jews but the centre of all their major festivals as well. Sacrifices had previously been offered only at the tabernacle and now could only be offered at the Temple. Accordingly Jews flocked to Jerusalem at the major feasts to offer the necessary sacrifices and draw near to God in communal worship. God's presence was manifested in the Temple and so it was proper for the Jews to face the building containing his presence whenever they prayed to him.

Solomon's Temple lasted about three hundred and fifty years and was finally destroyed when Jerusalem was sacked by the armies of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (the incident is referred to in the Qur'an in Surah 17:7). Judaism was no longer the religion it had been in Solomon's time. Israel had turned her back on the Lord and the people had opposed and rejected the prophets he had sent to them. As a result of this tragic national apostasy, God withdrew his presence from the Temple and gave it over to the hands of Israel's enemies.

2. THE TEMPLE AT THE TIME OF CHRIST

Even though Israel proved faithless, God remained faithful and sixty years later the Temple was rebuilt. It probably did not possess the grandeur of Solomon's Temple but was nevertheless built on the same lines. Once again the Holy of Holies – a cube-like structure – was constructed in the centre of the Temple. God continued to show his favours to the nation of Israel at this time and his presence remained in the Temple.

At this stage it will be useful to point out that God favoured no other nation as he favoured this one. From the time of Abraham, and especially from the time of Moses until the time of Jesus, the Jews alone were the recipients of his particular providential favours. Therefore the Temple rightly became the focal point of Judaism and no other nation on earth had a "house of God" for it was here, and here alone, that the divine glory was manifested. The Bible and the Qur'an have the following to say about God's favours to this nation:

To them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ.
Romans 9:4-5

And verily We gave the Children of Israel the Scripture and the Command and the Prophethood, and provided them with good things and favoured them above all peoples. Surah 45:16

Accordingly the Temple was the only true "house of God" in the world. The second Temple stood for nearly five hundred years. Gradually, however, Israel forsook the path of God and apostasy again infected the nation. On this occasion they did not turn to idols but abandoned spiritual worship and substituted it with numerous religious formalities which had the form of godliness but denied the spiritual power which these formalities were intended to represent. They had their sacrifices, ablutions, times of prayer, festival days, Temple worship and the like, but true godliness - holiness, love, truth, humility and honesty in the heart, had departed from them. Shortly afterwards Herod, the King of Judea, decided to rebuild the Temple. This new building took at least forty-six years to complete and rivaled Solomon's in material

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splendour, but that is as far as the comparison goes. No cloud of divine glory filled this Temple. Once again the Holy of Holies with its veil was erected and once again it stood as a testimony to the wide separation that existed between the Holy God of the universe and sinful men on earth. But whereas the religion of Moses had been like a rich, multi-coloured garment, being endowed with spiritual splendour, the garment had by now become worn out. It had lost its colour and Judaism had become a lifeless and colourless religion of petty religious rituals and formalities. The covenant God had made with Moses was practically obsolete and the Temple was ready to pass away. Significantly this Temple was not built by a faithful prophet of God but by a Gentile overlord who ruled over the Jewish race.

About this time Jesus was born in Bethlehem which is near Jerusalem. He lived for thirty-three years and the Temple had much significance in his life and ministry as we shall see shortly. Forty years after his ascension to heaven, however the Temple of the Jews was destroyed by the armies of the Roman governor Titus. Not one stone was left standing upon another.

Although nineteen centuries have passed since then, the Temple has

never been rebuilt; and it never will be. It will never again be a symbol of God's presence among men on earth. Something greater has come (Matthew 12.6). By the mercy of God men have obtained a better form of access to the divine presence and this access is now available to all nations. Judaism lost its true nature and is no longer the religion of God on earth. Both Islam and Christianity claim to possess that which has superseded it. But these two religions are so different in character and emphasis that they cannot both be the possessors of the new covenant. Which one is in this age the final revelation of God to men? Let us begin by examining the equivalent of the Temple in Islam, namely the Ka'aba in Mecca, to see whether Islam offers that final, complete form of access to God which replaced the Temple of Judaism.



Holy of Holies in
Herod's temple

THE KA'ABA OF ISLAM

Anyone who has studied comparative religion cannot fail to be struck by the similarities between the Temple of Judaism and the Ka'aba of Islam. The photographs in this booklet show very clearly the resemblances between them. Just as the Temple had a large courtyard which was surrounded by porticoes, so the *Haram* in Mecca has the same features. And in each case we find a cubic structure in the centre (the very word "*Ka'aba*" means cube) which in both religions appears as the holiest place on earth. Furthermore, just as Jews came from all over the world to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem, so Muslims come on pilgrimage to Mecca to pray and worship in the Great Mosque in the centre of the city.

Likewise, as Jews turned towards Jerusalem when they prayed to unite in worship of the one true God (1Kings 8:30), so all Muslims face the Ka'aba in Mecca when they pray in accordance with the teaching of the Qur'an (Surah 2:150). The function and design of the Ka'aba in Mecca is so remarkably similar to the Temple in Jerusalem that one cannot help but conclude that this is not a coincidental phenomenon. Clearly there is a link between them. Furthermore the forms of prayer and the fact of pilgrimage in Islam today are practically a perpetuation of the Jewish forms in pro-Christian times (though the actual rituals of the pilgrimage resemble the pro-Islamic rites of the pagan Meccans rather than the forms of worship at the Temple in Jerusalem).

1. ITS RELEVANCE TO SOLOMON'S TEMPLE

The issue which we have to consider here is whether the Ka'aba has in fact become, by God's appointment, the replacement of the Temple in this age. The obvious similarities between them can lead one initially to conclude that such a substitution has indeed taken place, and to speculate whether God has, perhaps, taken the true form of worship from the sons of Israel and delivered it to the sons of

Ishmael. Certainly the resemblances between the two appear, at first sight, to give some support to this contention.

Nevertheless, when the issue is considered in detail, and when all the facts are carefully compared with one another, the only possible conclusion that can be arrived at is that the Ka'aba, on the contrary, is definitely not that which God has provided as a better means of access to his

presence than the Temple of the Jews which stood in Jerusalem.

Firstly, the Qur'an does not claim that the Ka'aba, at the time of the destruction of the Temple, became the centre of true worship. It claims in fact that the Ka'aba was built before the Temple by Abraham and his son Ishmael as a house of worship for God (Surah 2:125-127). The Qur'an, in fact, alleges that from the time of Abraham the Ka'aba became, by God's command, the holiest place of worship on earth:

We made the house (at Mecca) a resort for mankind and a sanctuary, (saying): Take as your place of worship the place where Abraham stood (to pray). Surah 2:125

Nowhere in the Qur'an is it suggested that the Ka'aba replaced the Temple as the true house of worship. While the Qur'an acknowledges that the Temple was in fact the house of worship for the Jews while God favoured them above all nations (Surah 17:7), it nevertheless claims that the Ka'aba was built before it

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as the first sanctuary for mankind (Surah 3:96). Therefore it cannot be claimed that at the time of the destruction of the Temple God instituted the Ka'aba as the true place of worship on earth. Such a sequence of preference is precluded by the Qur'an's claim that the Ka'aba was in fact built before the Temple. In fact we saw in the last chapter that the Temple, during its history, was the *only* "house of God" on earth and this fact seriously undermines the Qur'an's claim that the Ka'aba was built by Abraham long before the first Temple was ever built by his descendant Solomon.

Secondly, we find that when Muhammad first prayed in Medina his *qiblah* was Jerusalem and not Mecca. He faced the site of the Temple rather than the Ka'aba. (In addition to the *mihrab* facing Mecca there is also a *mihrab* in one of the mosques in Medina to this day giving Jerusalem as the *qiblah* in commemoration of this fact). Indeed the Qur'an itself alleges that Muhammad's decision to face Jerusalem was a result of God's express command to this effect:

We appointed the qiblah which ye formerly observed. Surah 2:143

It was only as a result of the opposition in Medina from the Jews that Muhammad changed his *qiblah* to Mecca. What is most

significant about this incident is that the Prophet of Islam himself, nearly six hundred years after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, chose this place as his initial *qiblah* - and that, according to the Qur'an, at God's command.

Furthermore he faced a place where no shrine stood. A bare piece of ground which had supported the Temple centuries earlier was, according to the Qur'an, preferred by God to the Ka'aba in Mecca. This incident also seriously undermines the Qur'an's suggestion that the Ka'aba was built by Abraham - for if it was, why did God command Muhammad to face Jerusalem? It also most certainly shows that the Ka'aba did not replace the Temple. Even though the Temple site had been derelict for centuries, the very Prophet of Islam was commanded to prefer this place to the Ka'aba in Mecca. If the Ka'aba had replaced the Temple, assuredly no such command would have been given. The simple answer would have been to face it right from the beginning as the *qiblah*. It cannot be suggested that God chose Jerusalem in preference to Mecca simply because the Ka'aba was, at that particular time, a shrine of idol-worship. For the command to change the *qiblah* to Mecca in the Qur'an predates by many years the conquest of Mecca. During all those years when Muhammad

faced Mecca, the Ka'aba remained a shrine of idol-worship.

Thirdly, secular history in no way supports the Qur'an's claim that the Ka'aba was ever a place of monotheistic, non-idolatrous worship. The first mention of the Ka'aba is found in the writings of *Diodorus Siculus* who, about 60 BC, described it as a "temple greatly revered by the Arabs". Accordingly the Ka'aba dates back at least to before the time of Christ. But this fact only helps to support the final conclusion we shall draw in this chapter. It certainly does not in any way suggest that the Ka'aba existed before the Jewish Temple. On the contrary, before the time of Muhammad, the Ka'aba was only known as the principal shrine of pagan idolatry of the Arab world in and around Mecca.

We do have clear evidence, however, that the Ka'aba is not of monotheistic origin. We refer to the black stone built into its east corner known as *al-hajarul-aswad*. Before Muhammad's time the Arabs worshiped stones and the black stone was one of these objects of worship. Not only was the kissing of this stone incorporated into Islam, but the whole form of the *Hajj* Pilgrimage today is fundamentally that of the Arabs before Islam. Muhammad only changed the meaning of the formalities - he made no attempt

to change the forms and rites of the pilgrimage themselves.

Some have suggested that stone-worship among the Arabs arose out of veneration of the black stone, but this is highly improbable. Any form of veneration of a dead stone – especially to the extent of bowing down and kissing the stone – can only be identified with pagan idolatry rather than pure monotheistic worship. Even Umar was reluctant to imitate the pagan Arabs by kissing the stone and only did so because he saw Muhammad do it. But in our view Muhammad likewise was only perpetuating one of the forms of Meccan idolatry and we cannot possibly see how veneration of a form of idol-worship can be reconciled with the worship of the one true God.

Secular history knows of only one form of pre-Islamic veneration of the Ka'aba and that is the idolatry of the pagan Arabs. There is no corroborative evidence whatsoever for the Qur'an's claim that the Ka'aba was initially a house of monotheistic worship. Instead there certainly is evidence as far back as history can trace the origins and worship of the Ka'aba that it was thoroughly pagan and idolatrous in content and emphasis. Certainly in the six hundred-odd years between the destruction of the Temple and the

final conquest of Mecca the Ka'aba was purely a shrine of thriving pagan idolatry. Therefore the Ka'aba cannot have become the form and place of true worship in God's providence when the Temple of the Jews was destroyed.

Fourthly, and most importantly, far from becoming a house of greater spiritual worship than the Temple, the Ka'aba in fact, and all the forms of worship around it, are positively of lesser import and effect than those of the Temple. Within the Holy of Holies the living, abiding presence of God was visibly manifested, but no such claim has ever been made for the Ka'aba. It is only a symbol of worship and has never been a place where God's definite presence has been literally revealed. A supernatural cloud overshadowed the Holy of Holies when it was first built as a sign of God's living presence in the Temple, but the Ka'aba can make no such claim for itself. Accordingly its importance in Islam is decidedly less than the Temple was in Judaism. While the Ka'aba is called the "House of Allah" (*bait-ullah*), the divine presence has never filled it as it did the Temple. Pilgrims are in fact allowed into the Ka'aba when the doors of the shrine are opened to them.

Nevertheless we have admitted that the form of worship around the

Ka'aba is linked to that of the Temple. But far from this being proof of the divine origin of the Ka'aba, the only reasonable conclusion that can be drawn is that the Ka'aba is in fact derived from the Jewish Temple. It has never compared with the splendour of the Temple but is remarkably similar to it in design and size. The form is repeated but not the splendour – this argues strongly for imitation. It is extremely likely that Arab proselytes to Judaism (there were many) spoke intensely favourably of the Temple when it existed and that the sons of Ishmael in Arabia felt it would be appropriate to construct a similar shrine to that ordained by God for the sons of Israel. This suggestion is strongly supported by the evidence that the Ka'aba existed before the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD.

Similar shrines existed all over Arabia at the time of Muhammad. One still stands at the al-Kabir mosque in Yemen. It is strikingly similar to the Ka'aba in Mecca.

In considering the chronology of God's dealings with mankind, one can only conclude that the worship which centres around the Ka'aba is

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at best merely an imitation of that which focused on the Temple. But although this worship resembles some of the forms of Jewish worship (for example, facing the shrine in prayer), it has far more similarities with the pagan rituals of the Quraish prior to Islam. In any event what it does not have is a manifestation of the divine glory confirming the presence of God himself as the Temple had. Therefore, far from being a replacement or substitution, it in fact lacks the very thing that gave the Temple its marvelous significance. The divine presence - a living reality - is not there. Accordingly we must reject the suggestion that the Ka'aba, and with it Islam, provides the fulfilment of that which the Temple foreshadowed. Instead of providing a superior and better form of access to God, it in fact provides no access to him at all and is inferior to the structure which stood in Jerusalem. The former shrine had at least a manifestation of God's presence among the people, even though they could not obtain access to him within the Holy of Holies, but the Ka'aba has never enjoyed a revelation of the actual presence of God within its walls.

It was at the time of Jesus Christ that the divine presence left the Temple in Jerusalem. Judaism lost its exclusive identification with

God but the whole of mankind – Israel included - gained a better form of access to God. Let us now proceed to examine the life of Jesus, particularly those events and sayings of his which affected the Temple, to discover precisely how and where the whole human race has, in this age, gained this far greater access to the presence of God himself.



It is the Qiblah
of the Islamic religion

THE CHRIST OF GOD

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea in the days of Herod the King. At the time of his birth the new Temple was being built in Jerusalem. Although it was being constructed under the auspices of a foreign ruler, it nevertheless conformed to the pattern of the original Temple and was

accordingly a proper representation of the House of God in Israel. No prophet of God could disassociate himself and his ministry from the Temple of God and therefore we must expect to find some connection between Jesus and the Temple during his life on earth.

1. JESUS AND THE TEMPLE

Shortly after Jesus was born he was brought to the Temple by his mother Mary and her husband Joseph to be dedicated in accordance with the law of the Lord (Luke 2:22). Every year thereafter his family visited the Temple in Jerusalem to observe the annual Passover festival (Luke 2:41). Nothing unusual happened at these feasts until Jesus was twelve years old. On this occasion he stayed behind in Jerusalem when the feast was ended. It was

customary for all the children to mix freely in the company of those who went up to the feast and it was only after a day's journey that Joseph and Mary discovered he was missing. They returned to Jerusalem and after three days they found him in discussion with the Jewish teachers and scribes in the Temple. Those men marveled at his knowledge of the law of God for it was not to be expected that a young boy would have such an intimate knowledge of the law.

His mother, however, was distraught after searching for him for three days and she said to him:

"Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously." Luke 2:48

Joseph, however, was not really the father of Jesus and his mother Mary knew only too well that she had conceived her son while she was still a virgin. Accordingly Jesus met this ill-considered reproof of his action with those words:

"How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"
Luke 2:49

He expressed his wonder that Joseph and Mary had not sought for him right from the start in the Temple of God for it was, in his own words, "my Father's house". Mary should have remembered what the angel said to her when she first conceived him, namely:

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High ... therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. Luke 1:32,35

Two things, however, must be noticed in this incident. *Firstly*, Jesus identified himself with the Temple at a very young age and identified it as the "House of God".

Secondly, he described it as "my Father's house" – something he was to do again twenty years later (John 2:16). By this we must of necessity conclude that God was, in a very real and eternal sense, the true Father of Jesus Christ.

The next connection that Jesus had with the Temple was during the forty days that he fasted in the wilderness of Judea after he was baptised. At the end of this period Satan tempted him no less than three times to turn away from the path God had chosen for him. One of those three temptations related directly to the Temple in Jerusalem:

Then the devil took him to the holy city, and put him on the pinnacle of the Temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone'." Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God'." Matthew 4:5-7

Jesus identified himself with the Temple at a very young age and identified it as the "House



Satan knew who Jesus was. Having heard Jesus describe the Temple as "my Father's house" and having also heard God describe him as "my beloved Son" at his recent baptism (Matthew 3:17), he now tempted him to prove to all the Jews gathered at the Temple that God was indeed his Father. Satan tried to persuade him to stand on the Holy of Holies and jump down in the sight of all Israel; for surely, if God was his Father, he would send his angels to save him lest he injured himself in the fall. If this were to happen, surely all the Jews would fall at his feet and acknowledge, in the very precincts of the Temple of God, that he was indeed the Son of God.

Jesus resisted the temptation and refused to yield to Satan's suggestion. This incident tells us much about the condition of the Temple at the time of Jesus. There must have been something radically wrong with the worship around it for the devil to incite Jesus to obtain by spectacular means the honour and obeisance of the Jews who were gathered there in worship.

If the people had been drawn to the Temple through a deep spiritual desire to worship God in spirit and in truth and to have fellowship with one another in the knowledge of God, the last thing Satan would have wanted was the discovery by the Jews that Jesus

was indeed the Messiah they had long awaited. On the contrary we must presume, from the fact that Satan did everything in his power to persuade Jesus to reveal himself publicly as the Messiah in the Temple precincts, that the religion of Judaism had largely become false and that their worship at the Temple no longer focused spiritually on God but in fact had become contrary to the purpose of God which was to draw all men in true worship to himself. Quite obviously the Jews had turned away from him even though they outwardly still conformed to the prescribed pattern of the Temple worship.

That this was indeed the case is clear from an event that took place on the very next occasion that the Passover feast took place in Jerusalem. Jesus went up to the feast and immediately reacted to the rituals and practices taking place in the Temple:

In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons and the money-changers at their business. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all, with the sheep and the oxen, out of the temple; and he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; you shall not

make my Father's house a house of trade". John 2:14-16

Far from approving of the worship at the Temple, he displayed his utter opposition to what was taking place. God's house was meant to be a house of worship but they had made it a market for secular trading. The chief priests had transformed the Temple into a place of mercantile objectives. They sought only to obtain wealth at the expense of the many pilgrims who came regularly to Jerusalem to worship and observe the feasts.

Jesus cleansed the Temple as a sign that the true worship of God in future was to be revealed in his ministry. We can see now why he resisted Satan's temptation. When he finally came to the Temple, far from seeking to draw the honour and praises of the Jews to himself, he in fact opposed them to their faces and, by his actions, showed that he disapproved entirely of what was passing for the worship of God in its precincts.

Once again he described the Temple as "my Father's house".

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While he revered it as such, he displayed an open abhorrence of the affairs of the Temple which were supposedly being conducted in the name of God. A few years later, when he repeated this action, he accused the Jews of making the Temple "a den of robbers" (Matthew 21:13).

As was to be expected the Jews took strong exception to this action. On the first occasion they asked him what sign he had to show them that he acted on authority from God in entering the Temple and behaving as if he were the Lord of it. Jesus answered then:

"Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up."
John 2:19

The Jews marveled at this statement. They declared that it had taken forty-six years to build the Temple and were amazed at his suggestion that he could rebuild it within three days. But Jesus had not spoken of the Temple building. One of his disciples, who records this incident, tells us:

He spoke of the temple of his body.
John 2:21

Yet, by describing it as "this temple" immediately after he had driven the money-changers out of the Temple building, it is no wonder that the Jews took his

statement to refer to the building itself. This identification of his body with the Temple building was not coincidental, however, but was deliberately implied in his reply to the Jews. Henceforth the true Temple of God was no longer to be the building in Jerusalem but the person of Christ himself. From this moment onwards Jesus drew a clear distinction between himself and the Temple, and many incidents in his life show that Jesus himself had become the new focus of true worship and had replaced the Temple as the meeting-place of God with men.

When Jesus left Judea to return to Galilee he passed by Jacob's well in Samaria which was not far from a town called Sychar (in what is known as the "West Bank" of the Jordan river today). In this province lived a people who had a mixed ancestry, part of which was Jewish. They held that as the prophet Jacob had worshipped on Mount Gerizim, and not at the site of the Temple in Jerusalem, so they should do likewise. When a Samaritan woman asked Jesus which of the two was indeed the true place of worship, he replied:

Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But

the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. John 4:21-24

Be plainly told her that the hour had *now* come when the Temple in Jerusalem would *no* longer be the focus of worship. In his answer he clearly implied that no place on earth would fulfil this function. Now that *Jesus* had come, the situation was to be changed. *His* advent at *this* time heralded the new age when worship was to be directed not towards a place on earth (for example, Gerizim, Jerusalem or Mecca) but spiritually towards God in heaven.

On another occasion, when Jesus was reproved by the Jewish leaders for allowing his disciples to pluck heads of grain in his presence on the Sabbath, he replied:

"Have you not read in the law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here." Matthew 12:5-6

If God allowed the priests to perform functions on the Sabbath which appeared to profane the day, and were not censured by

God even when this was done right in his presence in the *Temple*, so likewise the disciples were free from blame before *God* when they plucked these heads of grain on the Sabbath in the presence of *Jesus* and were not reproved by *him*. Clearly *Jesus* was portraying himself as the replacement of the Temple and as the centre of the abiding presence of God among men. Something *greater* than the Temple was now here in the person of *Jesus* and we shall shortly see why this was indeed the case and how it came to pass.

A climax was reached when *Jesus* took his three closest disciples up a high mountain and was transfigured before them. His garments became white as light and his face shone like the sun. A bright cloud overshadowed him and a voice from heaven said:

"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him". *Matthew 17:5*

Centuries earlier this bright cloud of glory had settled in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle (Surah 2:57) and then in the same chamber in the Temple as a sign of God's real presence in the shrine. Now it settled above the person of *Jesus* as a manifestation of God's presence in him and as a proof of the fact that from henceforth God's presence and favour were only to be found in *Jesus*. All prayers and worship were from

this time forth to be offered in his name and he had therefore become the "qiblah" rather than the Temple.

As he stood in the Temple for the last time at the end of his ministry, *Jesus* was deeply moved in spirit and foresaw the demise of this great building as the place where God was to be identified with his people on earth. *Jesus* declared to the multitude:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'."
Matthew 23:37-39

Immediately afterwards, as he withdrew from the Temple for the last time, he said to his disciples of the buildings in the Temple:

"Truly I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another." *Matthew 24:2*

With these words *Jesus* pronounced God's judgment on the Temple. It was forsaken and desolate. For centuries the Jews had opposed the prophets God had sent to them and had

practised a false worship around the Temple. Forty years later the Temple was duly destroyed by the

Roman armies under Titus and so it no longer represented the presence of God among men.

2. THE ONE MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MEN

Jesus had become instead, in his own person, the centre of true religion on earth. The Temple had merely foreshadowed and anticipated his coming but he, ultimately, is the identification and focus of worship between God and men. The purpose of praying towards the Temple and of pilgrimages to its feasts within its precincts was a way by which God through Christ had sought to draw the worship of the Jews towards himself. But even when Jesus himself stood among them in human form they opposed and rejected him. Their religion centered on the Temple but not on him. In distinguishing between Christ and the Temple, and by preferring the latter to him, the Jews lost the knowledge of God for it is in Jesus alone that the divine presence is ultimately revealed to men and through him alone that men can obtain access to God. Therefore he told them that their Temple was forsaken and that they would not in any way rediscover the path of access to God until they found it in *him* and admitted that *he* was indeed their Messiah.

But how is this access obtained through Jesus to God? We must return to his saying, "Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up" to find the answer to this vital question. Two days after Jesus pronounced God's judgment on the Temple he was arrested and put on trial before the Jewish leaders. Of all his sayings this one remained foremost in their minds. Two witnesses came forward and said:

*This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the Temple of God and to build it in three days'.
Matthew 26:61*

But Jesus had said nothing of destroying the Temple himself. What he did say was that when they destroyed it he would raise it in three days – and by this he meant his own body as we have already seen. When they sentenced him to death and obtained permission to crucify him the following day, the sign Jesus

Their religion centered on the Temple but not on him

had promised them was about to be fulfilled before their very own eyes. By having him crucified they were themselves destroying the temple of his body. Nevertheless, even as he hung on the cross others said:

"You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." Matthew 27:40

Jesus, however, intended to fulfil this prophecy in a far greater way than by coming down from the cross. He hung on the cross for reasons unknown to these scorners. Without realising it, by their efforts to have him put to death they were helping to fulfil his prediction. As he died on the cross a remarkable thing happened:

"The curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom." Matthew 27:51

The veil in the Temple which had for centuries signified that a sharp separation existed between God and mankind was torn from the top as an earthquake shook Jerusalem, signifying that God, from above, had torn down the barrier between men and himself through the death of his Son Jesus Christ on the cross. Jesus had died on the cross not because he could not save himself but to save others from their sins. Three days later

God raised him from the dead to fulfil the prophecy and sign he had given to the Jews. He had overcome death and had conquered the power of sin. He had bridged the separation between God and men and forty days later he ascended to the very presence of his Father in heaven above.

Ten days later the Holy Spirit descended from heaven in visible form, not into the Temple, hut into the very hearts of the disciples who had gathered in Jerusalem to wait for this event. Something greater than the Temple was indeed here. By faith in Jesus his disciples gained direct access to God by the fact that the Holy Spirit came, not into a forbidden part of the Temple, hut right into their very own hearts. Until Jesus comes again men will only be saved and obtain access to God through faith in him. It is God's plan to unite all things in him - things in heaven and things on earth (Ephesians 1:10). This indeed was that which motivated Jesus to endure the cross for by this means he ensured that the last prayer he offered for his disciples would be answered:

"I do not pray for those only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be in us, so that the world may

*believe that thou hast sent me.”
John 17:20-21*

Instead of facing the Temple and making pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Jesus desired, by his abiding presence in heaven, to draw men through himself directly to God in true spiritual worship. The Christian has no Temple or Ka'aba, no holy place on earth. Instead he has in heaven one who has gone before him right into the presence of God; and a holy city in the heavens ready to be revealed at the last time. The Christian has within himself, through the Holy Spirit which is given to him, direct access to God in heaven. Christ is in him and he is in Christ. By this profound mystery, he is actually represented in Christ who beholds and shares the glory of his Father without measure - and who has promised that that glory will be ours as well when he returns to earth at the end of time (John 17:24).

The torn veil was an everlasting sign that the death and resurrection of Jesus had broken down the barrier between God and men. Although the Temple

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had been a sign of God's presence in Israel, its stone walls and veil were really a reminder of God's absence from man. Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies once a year and then only with the blood of a sacrifice as a symbol of atonement. That symbol was fulfilled through the death of Jesus on the cross. Through him all true Christians have access beyond the veil to God himself.

For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Hebrews 9:24

When the Temple was destroyed it was a permanent proof of the fact that the barrier between God and man was forever broken down. The Jew could travel all the way to Jerusalem on pilgrimage but he could only touch the stones of the building. He could not obtain direct access to God. But in Jesus, no matter where he may be, the Christian has this access right into the presence of God's temple in heaven.

For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. Ephesians 2:18

Therefore the Christian faith indeed possesses that which replaced the Temple. This shrine was laid low at the time of Jesus to allow for a far better form of

access to God. We look not to a house of stone made with hands but to a living person like ourselves who is seated on our behalf at the right hand of the very presence of God in heaven. Jesus, in heaven, is indeed our "qiblah". All we do or pray is done in his name.

This shows that the Ka'aba is not relevant to God's dealings with man in this age. The Ka'aba, in its resemblances to the Temple, is only a symbol of the barrier that once existed between God and man – and also a symbol, perhaps, of the gulf that still exists between God and those that have not experienced renewal and access to him through faith in Jesus. Like the Jews before them, the Muslims can only touch stones; but in Jesus Christ we have access, through the Spirit he has given us, directly to God our Father in heaven. No cloud of glory filled or settled on the Ka'aba when Muhammad had all its idols destroyed after the conquest of Mecca.

The glory of God had settled on the Temple when Solomon dedicated it



The Jew could travel all the way to Jerusalem on pilgrimage but he could only touch the stones of the building



to God and later upon Jesus himself when he was transfigured but no such thing happened when Muhammad consecrated the Ka'aba for the worship of Islam. The glory of God, instead, will forever be vested in Jesus Christ and will be manifested again when Jesus returns at the end of time. This glory is also available to all who turn to God through faith in *him*. When he is revealed in all his glory, then the righteous too will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Matthew 13.43). For this reason Jesus declared in the Temple itself on the great day of the Feast of Tabernacles:

If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink. John 7:37

We look, not to buildings made with stone on earth, but to the best of qiblahs, a living Saviour who has given us direct access to God, Jesus Christ himself. In the words of Peter, one of the closest disciples of Jesus, we appeal to all Muslims:

Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious. 1Peter 2:4-5

In him, Jesus our Lord, salvation, forgiveness of sins, the knowledge of God, the assured hope of glory and the indescribable anticipation of eternal life are vested. He alone is the "living" stone, in him alone

will men ever find access to the living God of heaven.

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Acts 4:12

Will you not forsake vain things which cannot profit or save by turning away from rites and ceremonies which concentrate on stones and other lifeless objects and turn instead to the living way which brings eternal life? Will you not turn to him, to Jesus Christ, and so become a partaker of the glory that is to be revealed? Will you not submit your whole life to

him and follow him as your Lord and Saviour? He is alive in heaven and is ready to receive you now. Will you not commit yourself to him and receive the living Spirit of God which he is willing to pour into your heart?

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Now it is your turn:

1. What are your thoughts about the author's conviction 'If there is only one God there can only be one true religion'?
2. Why is the Ka'abah of such great significance to Muslims?
3. What made Solomon's Temple so famous that people came from afar to be there?
4. What purpose did the Ka'abah and the black stone have to the Arabs before Muhammad's time?
5. What was so unique about the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem?
6. Who had built the Temple that Jesus visited many times during his life on earth?
7. Why was Jesus surprised that his parents did not first look for him in the Temple when they missed him (when he was twelve years old)?
8. What reasons do we have that the religion of Judaism had largely become false during the time of Jesus?
9. What did Jesus mean when he claimed that he would rebuild the temple within three days?
10. Why has a Christian no need of the Temple or the Ka'abah, or of any other holy place on earth?

Send in your answers to us and receive a **free copy** of another booklet of your choice from our **CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM SERIES**.



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