1953 - Why Did the Qiblah Shift from Bayt Al-Maqdis to Makkah?

the question

I would like to know why Muslims once prayed towards bait-ul-muqadis and why was this changed to the ka'bah.

Summary of answer

The reasons behind the Qiblah change:

-A test of faith for true believers (Al-Baqarah 2:143)
-Establishing the Muslim Ummah’s distinct status
-Aligning Muslims with the Qiblah of Prophet Ibrahim
-Demonstrating submission to Allah’s divine decree

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The Prophet’s Prayer towards Bayt Al-Maqdis in Madinah

When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) came from Makkah to Madinah, he used to face Bayt Al-Maqdis when he prayed, and that remained the case for sixteen or seventeen months, as is proven in Al-Bukhari and Muslim, in the Hadith of Al-Bara’ ibn `Azib (may Allah be pleased with him and his father), who said: The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) prayed towards Bayt Al-Maqdis for sixteen or seventeen months, and he was hoping that the Qiblah would be towards the House (i.e., the Ka`bah)

The Divine Command to Change the Qiblah

Then after that Allah commanded him to face the direction of the Ka`bah (the Sacred House), in the verse (interpretation of the meaning): so turn your face in the direction of Al-Masjid Al-Haram (at Makkah). And wheresoever you people are, turn your faces (in prayer) in that direction [Al-Baqarah 2:144].

The Divine Wisdom behind Allah’s Decrees

Before we answer the question about the wisdom behind this change, we must note the following points:

When we Muslims hear of a command from Allah, we must accept it and submit to it, even if the wisdom behind it is not clear to us, as Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): {It is not for a believer, man or woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decreed a matter, that they should have any option in their decision.} [Al-Ahzab 33:36]

Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, does not give any command without there being great wisdom behind it even if we do not understand it as He says (interpretation of the meaning): {That is the judgement of Allah. He judges between you. And Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise. [Al-Mumtahinah 60:10]

Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, does not abrogate any rule except to replace it with something better or similar to it, as He says (interpretation of the meaning): {Whatever Verse (revelation) do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring a better one or similar to it. Know you not that Allah is able to do all things?} [Al-Baqarah 2:106]

Why Was the Qiblah Changed?

Having understood this, we may note that the wisdom behind the changing of the Qiblah has several aspects, including:

- It is a test for the true believer, because the true believer, unlike others, accepts the commands of Allah. Allah has spoken of this in the Quran (interpretation of the meaning): {And We made the Qiblah which you used to face, only to test those who followed the Messenger from those who would turn on their heels. Indeed it was great (heavy) except for those whom Allah guided.} [Al-Baqarah 2:143]
- This Ummah is the best of nations, as Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): {You are the best of peoples ever raised up for mankind.} [Al Imran 3:110]

Confirming the verse about the Qiblah, Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): {Thus We have made of you (true Muslims) a Wasat (just) (and the best) nation.} [Al-Baqarah 2:143] Wasat conveys meanings of justice and of being chosen. So Allah has chosen for this Ummah goodness in all things and the best commands and rules, and thus He chose for them the Qiblah of Ibrahim, upon whom be peace.

The Impact of the Qiblah Change

Imam Ahmad (may Allah have mercy on him) reported in his Musnad (6/134-135) from `Aishah that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said about the People of the Book (Jews and Christians): They do not envy us for anything as much as they envy us for Yawm Al-Jumu`ah (Friday), to which Allah has guided us and from which they have gone astray, and for the Qiblah to which Allah has guided us and from which they have gone astray, and for our saying Amin behind the Imam.

(For more information on this subject, please refer to Badai` Al-Fawa`id by Ibn Al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) 4/157-174).

Review these answers for more explanation: (3000, 34751, 20903, 224401, 5419, 230200, 194527)

And Allah knows best.