34751 - Is al-Masjid al-Aqsa considered to be a sanctuary?

the question

Is al-Masjid al-Aqsa considered to be a sanctuary (Haram) like the sanctuaries of Makkah and Madeenah?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

Al-Masjid al-Aqsa is superior to other mosques. The best of all mosques is al-Masjid al-Haraam (The Sacred Mosque in Makkah), then al-Masjid al-Nabawi (the Prophet's Mosque in Madeenah), then al-Masjid al-Aqsa.

These three mosques are the three for which it is prescribed to travel for the purpose of worship. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Do not travel (specifically) to any mosque except three: al-Masjid al-Haraam, Masjid al-Aqsa, and this mosque of mine."

Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 1996.

One prayer in al-Masjid al-Aqsa is equivalent to two hundred and fifty prayers offered elsewhere.

It was narrated that Abu Dharr (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: We were discussing when we were with the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), which is better, the Mosque of the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) or Bayt al-Maqdis (Jerusalem). The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "One prayer in my mosque is better than four prayers offered there (in Bayt al-Maqdis), and what a good place of prayer it is. Soon there will come a time when, if a man has a piece of land the size of a horse's rope from which he can see Bayt al-Maqdis, that will be better for him than the whole world." Narrated by al-Haakim, 4/509; he classed it as saheeh and al-Dhahabi and al-Albaani

agreed with him, as it says in al-Silsilah al-Saheehah, at the end of the discussion on hadeeth no. 2902.

One prayer offered in the Prophet's Mosque is equivalent to one thousand prayers (offered elsewhere), so one prayer offered in al-Masjid al-Aqsa is equivalent to two hundred and fifty prayers.

With regard to the well-known hadeeth that says that one prayer offered there is equivalent to five hundred prayers, this hadeeth is da'eef (weak). See Tamaam al-Minnah by Shaykh al-Albaani (may Allaah have mercy on him), p. 292.

Secondly:

A Haram or sanctuary comes under special rulings which were prescribed by Allaah.

For example: it is haraam to fight therein; it is haraam to hunt the animals and birds that live there; it is haraam to cut down the plants that grow there naturally by the will of Allaah and have not been planted by anyone.

Allaah blessed the people of Makkah by making Makkah a sanctuary and safe place for them, in which both people and animals are safe. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Have We not established for them a secure sanctuary (Makkah), to which are brought fruits of all kinds, a provision from Ourselves, but most of them know not"

[al-Qasas 28:57]

"Have they not seen that We have made (Makkah) a secure sanctuary, while men are being snatched away from all around them?"

[al-'Ankaboot 29:67]

"whosoever enters it, he attains security"

[Aal ‘Imraan 3:97]

Muslim (1362) narrated that Jaabir said: The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Ibraaheem made Makkah a sanctuary, and I have made Madeenah a sanctuary… its branches are not to be cut and its animals are not to be hunted.”

The word that is translated as “branches” here refers to every kind of tree that has thorns. If it is haraam to cut down the trees that have thorns then it is more appropriate that those that do not have thorns should not be cut down.

And Muslim (1374) narrated that Abu Sa’eed al-Khudri said: The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “O Allaah, Ibraaheem made Makkah sacred and made it a sanctuary, and I have made Madeenah a sanctuary… no blood is to be shed therein, no weapon for fighting is to be carried, and no tree is to be struck to make its leaves fall, except to provide food for animals…”

Al-Nawawi said:

This shows that it is permissible to take the leaves of plants to provide food for animals. What is meant here is that taking the leaves is haraam except for this purpose.

Al-Quds (Jerusalem) is not a sanctuary in this sense, according to the consensus of the Muslims. People use this word (Haram or sanctuary) in a very broad sense, to such an extent that they call al-Quds a sanctuary, and the Mosque of Ibraaheem al-Khaleel in Palestine a sanctuary, and even universities are called sanctuaries. There are no sanctuaries on earth apart from those in Makkah and Madeenah, and a valley in al-Taa’if called Wujj concerning which the scholars differed as to whether it was a sanctuary or not.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah said in Majmoo’ al-Fataawa, 27/14-15:

Bayt al-Maqdis is not a place that can be called a sanctuary (haram), nor is the Tomb of al-Khaleel or any other place on earth, except for three:

The first is a sanctuary according to the consensus of the Muslims. This is the sanctuary of Makkah, which Allaah has honoured.

The second is a sanctuary according to the majority of scholars. This is the sanctuary of the Prophet (i.e., in Madeenah). This is a sanctuary according to the majority of scholars such as Maalik, al-Shaafa'i and Ahmad. There are many saheeh hadeeth concerning this narrated from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him).

The third is Wujj, which is a valley in al-Taa'if. There is a hadeeth concerning this that was narrated by Ahmad in al-Musnad, not in the books of Saheeh. This is a sanctuary according to al-Shaafa'i because he believed the hadeeth to be saheeh, but it is not a sanctuary according to the majority of scholars. Ahmad classed as da'eef (weak) the hadeeth that was narrated concerning this and did not accept it.

Places other than these are not sanctuaries according to any of the Muslim scholars. The sanctuary is that in which Allaah has forbidden hunting and cutting its plants, and Allaah has not forbidden hunting and cutting plants in any places except these three.

And Allaah knows best.