

3748 - A brief history of al-Masjid al-Haraam in Makkah

the question

A patron at our library has asked for the architecture and history of the Great Mosque in Mecca known as Masjid Al Haram.

Detailed answer

Al-Masjid al-Haraam (the Sacred Mosque) is situated in Makkah, a city in the Arabian Peninsula 330 meters above sea-level. The history of the mosque goes back to its founding at the time of Ibraaheem (Abraham) and his son Ismaa'eel (Ishmael), peace be upon them both. Makkah is the place where the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was born and where the Revelation began, and from which the light of Islam spread. Al-Masjid al-Haraam is located here. This is the first mosque that was built for people on earth, as Allaah says in the Qur'aan (interpretation of the meaning):

“Verily, the first House (of worship) appointed for mankind was that at Bakkah (Makkah), full of blessing, and a guidance for al-‘aalameen (mankind and jinns).” [Aal ‘Imraan 3:96].

It was reported in Saheeh Muslim that Abu Dharr said: “I asked the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) about the first mosque to be built for people on earth. He said, ‘Al-Masjid al-Haraam.’ I asked, ‘Then which?’ He said, ‘Al-Masjid al-Aqsa [The Furthest Mosque, in Jerusalem].’ I asked, ‘How long between them?’ He said, ‘Forty years.’”

The Ka'bah – which is the direction of prayer for all Muslims throughout the world – is situated roughly in the middle of al-Masjid al-Haraam. It is a 15-meter high stone structure more or less in the shape of a cube. It was built by Ibraaheem (peace be upon him) on the command of Allaah. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And (remember) when We showed Ibraaheem the site of the (Sacred) House (the Ka'bah at Makkah) (saying): ‘Associate not anything (in worship) with Me, and sanctify My House for those who circumambulate it, and those who bow and make prostration.’ [al-Hajj 22:26]

The word “bawwa'naa” [translated here as “We showed”] means “He guided him and gave him permission to build it.”

(Tafseer
Ibn Katheer).

Allaah also says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And (remember) when Ibraaheem and (his son) Ismaa'eel were raising the foundations of the House (the Ka'bah at Makkah)...”
[al-Baqarah 2:127]

Wahb ibn Munbih said: “... It was built by Ibraaheem, then [rebuilt] by the Amalekites, then by Jurham, then by Qusayy ibn Kilaab. Its rebuilding by Quraysh is well known... They began to rebuild it with the stones of the valley, which Quraysh carried on their shoulders, and they built it up, 20 cubits high... Between the rebuilding of the Ka'bah and the beginning of the Revelation there were five years, and between the rebuilding and the Hijrah there were fifteen years. ‘Abd al-Razzaaq reported from Mu'ammarr from ‘Abd-Allaah ibn ‘Uthmaan from Abu'l-Tufayl, and from Mu'ammarr from al-Zuhri: ‘They were building it and

when they reached al-Rukn, Quraysh argued about which tribe should lift it up. Then they said, "Let us ask the first person who comes from this direction to judge between us." They agreed on that, then the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) came to them, and he was a young man wearing a spotted sash. They asked him to judge between them, and he told them to place al-Rukn on a piece of cloth, then he told the chief of every tribe to hold the edge of the cloth, then he climbed up and they lifted al-Rukn up to him, and he himself (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) put it into its place."

(Taareekh Makkah by al-Azraqi, 1/161-164)

Muslim (2374) reported that 'Aa'ishah said:

"I asked the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) about al-Jadr [the wall] and whether it was part of the House [the Ka'bah]. He said, 'Yes.' I asked, 'So why is it not incorporated into the House?' He said, 'Your people ran out of money.' I asked, 'What about the door? Why is it high up?' He said, 'Your people did that so they could let in whomever they wanted and keep out whomever they wanted. If it were not for the fact that your people are still new [in Islam] and too close to their Jaahiliyyah, and I am afraid that they would resent it, I would think of incorporating al-Jadr into the House and bringing the door down to ground level.'"

Before Islam (in the year in which the Prophet

(peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was born), the Ka'bah was subjected to an attack by the Ethiopian Abrahah, who had built al-Qulays, a church to which he wanted the Arabs to make their pilgrimage. He set out with his army, with whom was the elephant, and when they reached Makkah, Allaah sent flocks of birds against them; each bird was carrying three stones like

chickpeas or lentils, one in its beak and two in its claws. Every man who was struck by a stone was killed, so the army was destroyed, by the command of Allaah.

Allaah has mentioned this incident in His Book, where He says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the Owners of the Elephant? Did He not make their plot go astray?

And sent against them birds, in flocks,

Striking them with stones of Sijjeel,

And made them like an empty field of slaks (in which the corn has been eaten up by cattle).” [al-Feel 105:1-5]

(See al-Seerah al-Nabawiyah by Ibn Hishaam, 1/44-58).

There was no fence or wall around the Ka’bah until

it became necessary. Yaaqoot al-Hamawi said in Mu’jam al-Buldaan (5/146):

“The first one to build a wall around the Ka’bah was ‘Umar ibn al-Khattaab (may Allaah be pleased with him); there was no wall around it during the time of the Prophet

(peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) or Abu Bakr. [The wall was built]

because people were building their houses too close to the Ka’bah and making the

space around it too small for people. ‘Umar said: ‘The Ka’bah is the House

of Allaah, and a house needs a courtyard. You have encroached on its space, it has not

encroached on yours.’ So he bought those houses, demolished them and added that space

to the space around the Ka’bah. He also destroyed the houses of people in the

vicinity of the Ka’bah who had refused to sell, and kept the money aside for them

until they came and took it later on. He built a wall around the mosque, lower than the

height of a man, and lamps were placed on it. When ‘Uthmaan was khaleefah, he bought

more houses that were more expensive... It was said that 'Uthmaan was the first one to build porticos around it ... When Ibn al-Zubayr was in power, he improved its appearance, although he did not increase its size, by adding marble pillars, extra doors and other improvements. When 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwaan was khaleefah, he added to the wall of the mosque, and brought columns from Egypt by sea to Jeddah, which were carried from Jeddah to Makkah on wheels. Al-Hajjaaj ibn Yoosuf commanded that the Ka'bah should be covered in drapes (al-kiswah) and when al-Waleed ibn 'Abd al-Malik was khaleefah, he added to the adornment of the kiswah and spent money on improvements to the drainage spout and roof... When al-Mansoor and his son al-Mahdi were khaleefahs, they added more adornments to the mosque and improved its appearance."

There are also other religious monuments in the Mosque, such as Maqaam Ibraaheem (the Station of Ibraaheem), which is the rock on which Ibraaheem (peace be upon him) stood whilst he was building the Ka'bah. There is also the Well of Zamzam, which is a spring of water brought forth by Allaah for Haajar and her child Ismaa'eel (peace be upon him) when he got thirsty. We should not forget either the Black Stone and al-Rukn al-Yamaani, which are two of the precious stones of Paradise. Al-Tirmidhi and Ahmad reported that 'Abd-Allaah ibn 'Amr said: "I heard the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) saying that the Rukn and the Maqaam are two of the precious stones of Paradise, whose light has been extinguished by Allaah. If He had not extinguished their light, it would illuminate everything between the East and the West."

(Sunan al-Tirmidhi, 804).

Near the Mosque are the two hills of al-Safa and al-Marwah. One of the unique features of the Mosque is that it is the only mosque in the

world to which people come on pilgrimage (Hajj). Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Verily! Al-Safa and al-Marwah are of the Symbols of Allaah. So it is not a sin on him who performs Hajj or ‘Umrah (pilgrimage) of the House to perform the going (tawaaf) between them. And whoever does good voluntarily, then verily, Allaah is All-Recognizer, All-Knower.” [al-Baqarah 2:158]

Another of its unique features is that Allaah has made it safe, and one prayer in it is equal to a hundred thousand prayers elsewhere. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And (remember) when We made the House a place of resort for mankind and a place of safety. And take you (people) the Maqaam (place) of Ibraaheem as a place of prayer, and We commanded Ibraaheem and Ismaa’eel that they should purify My House for those who are circumambulating it, or staying (I’tikaaf), or bowing or prostrating themselves.” [al-Baqarah 2:125]

“In it are manifest signs (for example); the maqaam (place) of Ibraaheem; whoever enters it, he attains security. And Hajj to the House is a duty that mankind owes to Allaah, those who can afford the expenses (for one’s conveyance, provision and residence); and whoever disbelieves [i.e., denies Hajj, then he is a disbeliever of Allaah], then Allaah stands not in need of any of the ‘aalameen (mankind and jinns).” [Aal ‘Imraan 3:97]

(See Akhbaar Makkah by al-Azraqi and Akhbaar Makkah by al-Faakihi).

And Allaah is the Source of Strength and the Guide to the Straight Path.