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INTRODUCTION

Poetry and lyrics have been passionately composed and great works of literature authored. Pilgrimages have crossed continents and migrations have been undertaken. Dua, endowments, donations and toil are offered freely. Millions contemplate and discuss its significance. Not to mention the numerous people who have sacrificed their lives. What is it about Masjid Al-Aqsa, this hallowed sanctuary, that inspires such profound devotion and sacrifice from countless individuals throughout the generations?

This book takes readers on a spiritual journey through the ahadith, unveiling the hidden treasures of Masjid Al-Aqsa that transcend architectural beauty and functionality. It examines the qualities that enrich spiritual experience and presents Masjid Al-Aqsa as a symbol connecting the earthly with the divine. It also fosters continuity, linking sacred traditions of the past to modern life and inspiring spiritual renewal. The text encourages contemplation and transformative reflection, uncovering symbolic meanings that deepen our understanding of Masjid Al-Aqsa. It demonstrates that Masjid Al-Aqsa is not merely a physical space but a dynamic source of spiritual nourishment, unity, a symbol of Muslimness and empowerment for Muslim identity. Ultimately, understanding Masjid Al-Aqsa's significance, transforms daily experience into meaningful engagement with the divine.

The Quran refers to Baytul Maqdis¹ in more than eighty places, calling it *Holy* and the *Blessed* land. In one instance, Allah ﷻ remarks on Baytul Maqdis's people as 'of exceeding strength'. Having described its people, Allah ﷻ states that the Mountains of Baytul Maqdis and even the birds joined Dawud ﷺ in praising Him. Allah ﷻ continues and talks about the violent (unruly) wind around Baytul Maqdis that 'was made to flow (tamely)' for Sulayman ﷺ. Even the ants of Baytul Maqdis get a mention. The Quran also reminds us of how Allah ﷻ favoured Mariam with the provision of food and was given the glad tidings of the miraculous birth of Isa ﷺ within Al-Aqsa. In this blessed place, when Zakariya ﷺ made dua for a child, the response was instantaneous. An angel was dispatched to inform Zakariya ﷺ that 'Allah gives you glad tidings of providing you with a son'.

To help etch the consciousness of Al-Aqsa, Allah ﷻ takes an oath² on Baytul Maqdis. He ﷻ talks about the (first) Qibla and continues to emphasise its importance after the change of the Qibla,³ saying only 'the Fools among the people will say: What has turned them from the Qibla to which they used?' Allah ﷻ even symbolically evokes the region of Baytul Maqdis in surah Quraysh (106). Some Mufassarin comment that when Allah ﷻ determines to end the world, the trumpet will be blown from the region of Baytul Maqdis, referred to in the Quran as 'a place quite near'.⁴ Allah ﷻ consolidated the centrality of Al-Aqsa by choosing it to be the station in the Night Journey of the noble Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. This is the only place on Earth where all of Allah's Messengers

1 Baytul Maqdis (the land that is made sacred) refers to the Greater Palestine, while al-Quds (the sacred) indicates the city of Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa (the most sacred) specifically indicate the blessed Masjid Al-Aqsa.

2 Quran, surah at-Tin 95:1-3

3 Quran, surah Baqarah 2:142-150

4 Quran, surah Qaf 50:41

Chapter One

THE HERITAGE

عَنْ أَبِي ذَرٍّ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: قُلْتُ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ أَيُّ مَسْجِدٍ
وُضِعَ فِي الْأَرْضِ أَوَّلُ؟ قَالَ: الْمَسْجِدُ الْحَرَامُ. قَالَ: قُلْتُ: ثُمَّ أَيٌّ؟
قَالَ: الْمَسْجِدُ الْأَقْصَى. قُلْتُ: كَمْ كَانَ بَيْنَهُمَا؟ قَالَ: أَرْبَعُونَ سَنَةً
ثُمَّ أَيُّنَا أَدْرَكْتِكَ الصَّلَاةُ بَعْدَ فَصْلِهِ فَإِنَّ الْفَضْلَ فِيهِ. (البخاري)

Abu Dharr رضي الله عنه reported that he asked the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, “O Prophet of Allah, which Masjid was built first on Earth?” The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم replied, “The Sacred Masjid of Makkah.” Abu Dharr again asked, “Which was next?” The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said, “Masjid Al-Aqsa.” “How long was the period between them?” Abu Dharr asked. The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said, “Forty years. Apart from these, offer your salaah anywhere when it is time to pray, although excellence is in praying in these Masajid.” (Bukhari)

Masjid Al-Aqsa, built forty years after the Kaba in Makkah, is distinguished by its spiritual significance rather than its physical and architectural wonders. It stands as a living monument that preserves heritage, supports both individual and collective memory, strengthens faith and fosters communal belonging. Imam Qurtubi (1214-1273), a Maliki scholar from Cordoba and a specialist in hadith and Quranic exegesis, authored the twenty-volume *Al-Jami Ahkam Al-Quran*, states, “There are different opinions regarding the construction of Masjid Al-Aqsa. Some assert that Adam عليه السلام