

Muhammad's Alleged Night Journey in Sura 17

Glory to (Allah) Who did take His servant for a Journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the farthest Mosque, Whose precincts We did bless,- in order that We might show him some of Our Signs: for He Is the One Who heareth and seeth (all things).

So opens Surah 17, called the Night Journey, as translated by Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali. Many Muslims are aware of this alleged incident, also called the *mi'raj*, to varying degrees. Muslims have even put forth Sura 17:1 as a proof of the miraculous truthfulness of the Qur'an. They might not have considered that the problems and contradictions that arise are a disproof of the truthfulness of the Qur'an.

It is important to understand what your religion teaches, whether Christian, Jew, or Muslim. All of us should be able to happy to defend our religion with ease. As you consider the teaching of the night journey, you must examine the relevant facts and determine what you believe really happened.

If Mohammed supernaturally visited a mosque in Jerusalem in his time, was there really a Muslim mosque on the temple Mount in Jerusalem while Mohammed was still living? Was there even a Christian church or Jewish synagogue on the Temple Mount? Or, while Jerusalem was under Persian occupation, was the Temple Mount area being used as a garbage dump, as The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and the Muslim historian al-Tabari say?

Muslims' Claim that Jerusalem Was the City of the Farthest Mosque

Before we look at some unusual Muslim interpretations, let's briefly observe a standard Muslim interpretation. Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali in his introduction to Sura 17 states: "It [Sura 17] opens with the night journey of the Holy Prophet [Mohammed]: he was transported from the sacred mosque (of Makkah) to the Farthest Mosque (of Jerusalem) in a night and shown some of the Signs of Allah. The majority of Commentators take this Night Journey literally. The hadith literature gives details of this Journey and its study helps to elucidate its meaning. The holy Prophet was first transported to the seat of the earlier revelations in Jerusalem, and then taken through the seven heavens even to the Sublime Throne."

Yusuf 'Ali's footnote 2168. "The Farthest Mosque must refer to the site of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem on the hill of Moriah, at or near which stands the Dome of the Rock, called also the Mosque of Hadhrat 'Umar. This and the Mosque known as the Farthest Mosque (Masjid-ul-Aqsa) were completed by the Amir 'Abd-ul-Malik in A.H. 68. ... and completely razed to the ground by the Emperor Titus in A.D. 70."

Farooq-i-Azam Malik's translation of Sura 17:1. "Glory be to Him Who took His devotee (Muhammed) one night from Masjid-al-Haram (in Makkah) to Masjid-al-Aqsa (in

Jerusalem), whose vicinity We have blessed, so that We may show him some of Our signs; surely He is the One Who is the Hearer, the Observer.”

Many times in the English translations of the hadiths say “Jerusalem” when the Arabic is al-Aqsa, meaning “the farthest mosque”.

Let’s Ask Caliph ‘Umar

Let’s settle this once and for all by asking what ‘Umar did. ‘Umar, the companion of Mohammed and leader of all Muslims after caliph Abu Bakr died, knew that Jerusalem was meant in Sura 17, because in 638 A.D. ‘Umar read the beginning of Sura 17 right after he entered Jerusalem².

Apologies for belaboring the point, but the majority Muslim view is that Mohammed went to the farthest mosque in Jerusalem in Sura 17.

Timetable for the Mosque

The basic issue is that the night journey presents an anachronism. This is defined as: “The representation of someone as existing or something as happening in other than chronological, proper, or historical order.” As an example, if you were reading a factual historical account of a 13th century battle, and part of the story included jet airplanes, you would immediately recognize something is wrong! Such an anachronism would instantly label such a work as fraudulent.

Keeping this thought in mind, let’s look at the night journey specifically. Muhammad made his night journey sometime between 617 and 624 A.D.³ According to the Qur’an, Muhammad visited the farthest mosque (*al-Aqsa*) at this time. However, there was no mosque in Jerusalem that existed at that time.

The Dome of the Rock was built by Caliph Abd al Mâlik in the late 7th century, ‘Umar built the original al-Aqsa mosque soon after 637 A.D. (Abdel Malik rebuilt al-Aqsa though.) So where did Muhammad visit? Let’s examine this in more detail.

*Glorified by He who carried His servant [Muhammad] by
night from the masjid al-haram [Mecca] to the masjid al-Aqsa
[Jerusalem?]*

So just where is this masjid al-Aqsa? The more relevant questions is where was the masjid al-Aqsa in the year 624? This is the question that a Muslim must answer. Could it be Jerusalem? The evidence clearly indicates it cannot. This is because there was no mosque in Jerusalem at the time, neither is Jerusalem named in the Qur’an, nor is the night journey even named in the later mosques built in Jerusalem!

No Mosque in Jerusalem at the Time of the Night Journey

In the spring of 638, Caliph 'Umar came to Jerusalem at the request of Sophronius, the reigning patriarch. Specifically, 'Umar came because Sophronius was ready to surrender Jerusalem after a long siege. However, Sophronius would only surrender to Caliph 'Umar himself.⁴ Remember, this event occurred at least fourteen years after the night journey and six years after Muhammad's death.

The site of the mosque in Jerusalem is where the Jewish Temple stood. At that time it was a rubbish heap. 'Umar told the people to follow his example in clearing the rubbish away. *al-Tabari* vol.12 p.195-196

Now one Muslim claimed he thought there was a mosque in Jerusalem during the lifetime of Mohammed. When asked further, he thought the al-Aqsa mosque (not the Dome of the Rock) was a mosque from before the time of Jesus that was just sitting there all shuttered up. This is not a theory though, this was just wishful thinking since

- a) There is no historical evidence to back this up
- b) There is Muslim historical evidence that contradicts this, and
- c) This would not solve the Muslim's problem anyway, since the Roman Emperor Titus completely destroyed Jerusalem anyway in 70 A.D.

The al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem was built 40 years after the mosque in Mecca according to *Ibn-i-Majah* vol.1:753 p.414

When 'Umar was escorted into the city, he asked to be taken to the Temple Mount (where the Dome of the Rock would later be built). He was disgusted at the state of disrepair of the area. When it came time to pray, he refused to pray in any of the Christian monuments, but rather prayed on the steps of the Cardo Maximus, a nearby street.⁵ Why did 'Umar not pray in the mosque? The answer is because there was no mosque there yet!

The Hadiths and the Night Journey

“...Allah’s Apostle actually saw with his own eyes the vision ... on the night of his Night Journey to Jerusalem (and then to the heavens). The cursed tree which is mentioned in the Qur’an is the tree of Az-Zaqqun.” *Bukhari* vol.8 book 78 no.610 p.398

Narrated Jabir bin ‘Abdullah that he heard Allah’s Apostle saying, “When the people of Quraish did not believe me (i.e. the story of my Night Journey), I stood up in Al-Hijr and Allah displayed Jerusalem in front of me, and I began describing it to them while I was looking at it.” *Bukhari* vol.5 book 58 no.226 p.142

In other words, the people of Mecca did not believe Mohammed, so Mohammed described Jerusalem to them. It does not say it was verified that Mohammed was correct, or that the Meccans believed Mohammed after that. In fact, the battles between the Meccans and Muslims were all after that.

Now quoting a hadith, with no independent verification, does not mean much if this “proof” to the Meccans left the Meccans unconvinced.

During the Night Journey: When I [Mohammed] left him (i.e. Moses) he wept. Someone asked him, ‘What makes you weep?’ Moses said, ‘I weep because after me there has been sent (as Prophet) a young man whose followers will enter Paradise in greater numbers than my followers.’ *Bukhari* vol.5 book 58 no.227 p.146

Mention of Bait al-Maqdis in the Night Journey. *Sunan Nasa’i* vol.1 no.453 p.329

“Umm Salamah said that she heard the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) say : If anyone puts on ihram for Hajj or ‘Umrah from the Aqsa mosque to the sacred mosque, his former and latter sins will be forgiven, or he will be guaranteed Paradise. The narrator ‘Abd Allah doubted which of these words he said....” *Abu Dawud* vol.2 no.1737 p.457

The al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem was built 40 years after the mosque in Mecca. *Ibn-i-Majah* vol.1 no.753 p.414

So we see that not only is the placement of Muhammad’s night journey in Jerusalem a mistake, but we also see the accompanying hadiths show that Muslims accepted this night journey as a fact. Following are some theories about the night journey, and Christian responses.

Sura 17 Theories and Responses

Theory 1: A Mosque occupied the Temple Mount?

A mosque in Jerusalem before Mohammed was at that site. Perhaps it was just sitting at the site in Jerusalem boarded up from ancient times just sitting in Jerusalem up until Mohammed's time.

A pamphlet in Indonesian also says it was at the Temple Mount. The pamphlet, entitled ISRA & MI'RAJ NABI MUHAMMAD SAW by Al.Khoiroot (Kakarta) published on data 20 Rab. Akhir 1427 H / 19 Mei 2006 says that just as God can do miracles (such as Moses walking through the sea), Muslims as faithful people must believe this event really happened and quotes Sura 17:1. On page 2 it claims Mohammed correctly gave the shape of the "Masjidil Al Aqsho". This is the al-aqsa mosque, not Jerusalem or something else. Yet on page 3 it says the al-aqsa mosque [of later times] did not exist yet; it was just a garden with the mosque of Daud and Sulaiman (David and Solomon.)

Response 1: We know this not true because the al-Aqsa site is on the Temple Mount, and we know the history of the Temple Mount well. A garbage dump is not a garden, and there was no structure of mosque/temple/other place of worship standing at the garbage dump.

1a) - The Roman Emperor Titus razed the Jewish Temple on the temple mount in 70 A.D. David and Solomon did not return to earth to build a mosque in the ruins of another building, in the middle of a garbage dump, in 70 A.D., after Christ. Even Yusuf 'Ali acknowledges that Titus completely razed the building on the Temple Mount to the ground in 70 A.D.

Yusuf 'Ali's footnote 2168 says, "The Farthest Mosque must refer to the site of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem on the hill of Moriah, at or near which stands the Dome of the Rock, called also the Mosque of Hadhrat 'Umar. This and the Mosque known as the Farthest Mosque (Masjid-ul-Aqsa) were completed by the Amir 'Abd-ul-Malik in A.H. 68 [687/688 A.D.]. ... and completely razed to the ground by the Emperor Titus in A.D. 70."

1b) Moreover, in 132 A.D. "After the Bar Kochba revolt in 132 A.D., "Following the defeat of the Jews, Jerusalem was devastated more thoroughly than by Titus. The site was ploughed over and anew city, Aelia Capitolina, so-called in honor of (Aelius) Hadrianus, was built over the ruins. ... Temples were dedicated to Bacchus, Venus and Serapis and over the former sanctuary a shrine of Jupiter Capitolinus was reared." *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1956) vol.13 p.8.

1c) Caliph 'Umar built the first al-Aqsa mosque 637/638 A.D.. 'Umar told the people to follow his example in clearing the rubbish away before building the mosque in *al-Tabari* vol.12 p.195-196

Theory 2. Church or Synagogue on the Temple Mount?

Church or Synagogue in Jerusalem was at that site. Muhammad Asad, in his commentary, *The Message of the Qur'an*, (<http://bismikaallahuma.org/Quran/Commentary/israa.htm>) says Mohammed physically going to Solomon's Temple was the view of the majority of the prophet's companions, though he also mentions a minority view.

Response 2: We know this is not true because there was a garbage dump there, and 'Umar did not destroy any churches or Jewish places of worship.

2a) - There was a garbage dump at this site from before Mohammed's time up until 'Umar saw it in 638 A.D.. (Nobody suggests the Mohammed confused a mosque with a garbage dump.)

2b) - When 'Umar entered Jerusalem, he promised to not tear down any Christian monuments.⁶

When 'Umar took control of Jerusalem, he promised not to destroy any churches or crosses in Jerusalem. *al-Tabari* vol.12 p.191. So there was no church on the site of the mosque.

2c) - 'Umar built a wooden mosque call al-Aqsa 637/638 A.D.

Conclusion: How could 'Umar build a mosque at al-Aqsa, not tearing down and Christian or Jewish places of worship

The site of the mosque in Jerusalem is where the Jewish Temple stood. At that time it was a rubbish heap. 'Umar told the people to follow his example in clearing the rubbish away. *al-Tabari* vol.12 p.195-196
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'Umar read the beginning of Sura 17 right after he entered Jerusalem.

'Umar said they are not to venerate the [Dome of the] Rock, but they were commanded to venerate the Ka'bah in *al-Tabari* vol.12 p.195

Theory 3. Different Place in Jerusalem?

A different place in Jerusalem was where Mohammed went. Mohammed went to Jerusalem, but a different spot than the Temple Mount. (This is a possibility, but I have not actually heard a Muslim put forth this theory, yet.)

Response 3: Sura 17 did not say just Jerusalem, but instead al-Aqsa. Almost all Muslims, from the caliph 'Umar on, accept that this is on the Temple Mount.

To quote Qur'an translator Yusuf 'Ali in footnote 2168. "The Farthest Mosque must refer to the site of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem on the hill of Moriah, at or near which

stands the Dome of the Rock, called also the Mosque of Hadhrat ‘Umar. This and the Mosque known as the Farthest Mosque (Masjid-ul-Aqsa) ...”

Theory 4: Different City?

A different city, not Jerusalem, was the location of the mosque prior to Mohammed. The city of Jerusalem not named in Sura 17:1, only the farthest mosque. Here is what a Muslim said about this.

Let’s now look at the actual language of the Qur’an. The original name of Jerusalem in Islam was Bayt Al-Maqdis, “House of the Temple”, so why doesn’t the Qur’an use this term? Alternatively, Jerusalem was referred to at the time as “Ilya”⁷, or “Aelia”. Again, why doesn’t the Qur’an explicitly use this term either? Why the mystique by using the term masjid al-Aqsa? Perhaps the answer is because the farthest place of worship at that time was a small village eight miles from Mecca named Al-Jiranaḥ.⁸ There is no evidence to suggest Jerusalem as the most remote mosque, whereas there is evidence to suggest Al-Jiranaḥ. Most notable, this evidence is the anachronistic nature of citing Jerusalem, whereas there was a mosque in Al-Jiranaḥ at the time of the night journey.

It would seem logical that when Abd al Mâlik build the Dome of the Rock, he would have included 17:1 as one of the inscribed verses. Instead, the inscribed verses all focus on refutation of Jesus as the divine incarnation of God. It would seem only logical that the opening of the Night Journey Surah would appear someplace in the Dome of the Rock. This of course would assume the lore of the night journey already placed Abraham’s rock in Jerusalem as the spot from which Muhammad ascended. Yet for some reason a relevant verse from the Qur’an did not appear anywhere within the Dome of the Rock. Again, we are forced to ask why. This last fact in and of itself does not offer definitive proof, but it is yet another corroborating piece of evidence that points away from Jerusalem.

So in conclusion, we see the following. There was no mosque in Jerusalem until at least six years after Muhammad’s death. The Qur’an does not actually say that Muhammad went to Jerusalem, when this could have been made clear if true. The Islamic monuments in Jerusalem do not even reference the night journey. What are we to believe?

Response 4: If this were true, then I guess someone should tell the al-Aqsa martyr’s brigade and other Islamic terrorist groups to forget about Jerusalem. After all these centuries, the farthest mosque, and the night journey were not there after all! Would the Muslim author of this view volunteer to tell them?

Looking at the details of this theory, there are five points to consider.

- a) While the Qur’an does not say Bait-ul-Maqdis, the hadiths do say so.
- b) It was not Abd al Malik who first built the mosque there but ‘Umar in 637/638 A.D.
- c) ‘Umar said it was Jerusalem, quoting Sura 17:1 when he entered Jerusalem

- d) Mohammed himself said it was Jerusalem in the Bukhari hadith.
- e) Mainstream Muslim opinion says that it is Jerusalem
- f) There are three sacred Muslim cities, not four.

4a) The hadiths DO in fact use the term Bait-ul-Maqdis (Jerusalem) in describing the Night Journey in *Bukhari* vol.5 book 58 no.228 p.148-149.

4b) It was not Abd al Malik who built the original mosque in Jerusalem, but caliph ‘Umar before him. While Abd al Malik build the Dome of the Rock in 687/688 A.D., ‘Umar built the al-Aqsa mosque after he took control of Jerusalem in 638 A.D.. See *al-Tabari* vol.12 p.195-196

4c) ‘Umar, close companion of Mohammed and the second caliph in Islam after Mohammed’s death, would be in the best position to know. ‘Umar recited Sura 17:1 when he came to Jerusalem just prior to building the mosque.

4d) Mohammed himself said it was Jerusalem. “Narrated Jabir bin ‘Abdullah that he heard Allah’s Apostle saying, “When the people of Quraish did not believe me (i.e. the story of my Night Journey), I stood up in Al-Hijr and Allah displayed Jerusalem in front of me, and I began describing it to them while I was looking at it.” *Bukhari* vol.5 book 58 no.226 p.142. So the Meccans did not believe Mohammed, and Mohammed claimed that Allah did a second miracle and showed Jerusalem in front of him, so that Mohammed could describe it. While the Meccans, who later fought Mohammed were apparently unconvinced, Mohammed was trying to prove it really was Jerusalem.

“Narrated Ibn ‘Abbas: Regarding the Statement of Allah ... The sights which Allah’s Apostle was shown on the Night Journey when he was taken to Bait-ul-Maqdis (i.e. Jerusalem) were actual sights, (not dreams). And the Cursed Tree (mentioned) in the Qur’an is the tree of Zaqqum (itself).” *Bukhari* vol.5 book 58 no.228 p.148-149

4e) For a more modern Muslim voice, Qur’an translator Yusuf ‘Ali in his footnote 2168. “The Farthest Mosque must refer to the site of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem on the hill of Moriah, at or near which stands the Dome of the Rock, called also the Mosque of Hadhrat ‘Umar. This and the Mosque known as the Farthest Mosque (Masjid-ul-Aqsa) were completed by the Amir ‘Abd-ul-Malik in A.H. 68 [A.D. 687/688]. ... and completely razed to the ground by the Emperor Titus in A.D. 70.”

Sura 17 is called both “The Night Journey” and “Sons of Israel” (see Yusuf ‘Ali’s footnote 722 and *al-Tabari* vol.12 p.194) Why would Muslims call it “Sons of Israel” if it had nothing to do with Israel?

4f) A Muslim can only take a journey to visit three mosques: Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem. *Abu Dawud* vol.2 no.2028 p.540. If Muslims through the ages were all mistaken about al-Aqsa being in Jerusalem, then where is this fourth sacred Muslim city, which all Muslims, both then and now, are unaware of?

Theory 5: The Whole World is a Mosque?

Sura 13:15 and 16:49 says that all the beings in the heavens and earth prostrate to Allah, so many Muslims interpret these to mean that the entire earth is Allah's mosque. So wherever Mohammed went, in one sense he was always in a mosque.

Response 5: This would make the "night journey" in the Qur'an meaningless and misleading

- 1) If Mohammed never left the mosque (of the earth), then Mohammed did not travel anywhere.
- 2) If Mohammed traveled from the sacred mosque [in Medina] to the farthest mosque, then Mohammed in fact did leave the area of a mosque and had to go to a different location for another mosque.
- 3) If the whole earth is the farthest mosque, the 'Umar, all of Mohammed's early companions, and Muslims today have been wrongly guided; because they learned that the farthest mosque was in Jerusalem.

If you do not merely claim to believe this, but sincerely believe that the farthest mosque was not in Jerusalem, then congratulations! You have just solved the problem of peace in the Mideast. Kindly go to the Mideast and explain to all the militant Muslims there that what they have been taught for centuries is wrong, and the farthest mosque is not Jerusalem after all. They do not need to have any more respect for Jerusalem than for Damascus or Athens as the farthest mosque.

Theory 6: The Mosque in Jerusalem was a Site, not a Building, Where People Used to Pray to God?

A mosque is any site on earth where Muslims performed prayer, and Muslims consider Abraham, David, Jesus, etc. as Muslims. So even though it was used as a garbage dump at the time, Mohammed went to the site where the Jewish Temple used to be.

Response 6: *Bukhari* vol.5 book 58 no.226 p.142 proves this wrong. It says,

Narrated Jabir bin 'Abdullah that he heard Allah's Apostle saying, "When the people of Quraish did not believe me (i.e. the story of my Night Journey), I stood up in Al-Hijr and Allah displayed Jerusalem in front of me, and I began describing it to them while I was looking at it."

By the way, perhaps some Meccan traders had traveled to Jerusalem. It nowhere records that any pagan Meccans were convinced by Mohammed.

Unless one believes Mohammed tried to impress the Meccans by describing a garbage dump, this means that Mohammed was describing a different or non-existent place.

Now a Muslim pointed out to me that since Mohammed's supernatural journey was at night, he would not have seen all of the garbage. However, Mohammed would have smelled a city-wide garbage dump, and Mohammed would have seen that no building was there. If someone goes to a garbage dump, and they do not smell anything, they do not see anything, and they do not step in anything, then I question whether they really went in or to that garbage dump at all.

Looking for an escape hatch.

Trying to explain away the contradiction of the *mi'raj* (night journey), the following explanations are more desperate. In fairness, it should be mentioned that these three explanations are not acceptable to a number of Muslims.

Theory 7. It was only a vision, Mohammed Did not Go Anywhere

The *mi'raj* was just a vision. Either Mohammed thought he went somewhere but was mistaken. Alternately Mohammed really knew he did not really go anywhere, but he led his followers to believe otherwise.

N.J. Dawood footnote 2 on Sura 17 says, "Of Jerusalem. ... Some Muslim commentators give a literal interpretation of this passage, others regard it as a vision."

The vast majority of Muslims insist the *mi'raj* (night journey) was a physical event, but some Muslims will argue that Muhammad really did not travel to these places, but only had a vision that he went to these places. If that is true, that means the night journey didn't really occur.

Response 7: Imagine a Christian today said he visited the church Medina? How would you know this was wrong? Even though you did not follow the Christian around, you would know this was false, because there is no church in Medina. If the Christian said a mosque is a church, you would say this was not true information. If the Christian said this was just symbolic, it would be false if people said this was an actual miracle. Likewise, if a Muslim claimed to visit a mosque, where none exists, it would be the same.

A Muslim saying this about Mohammed has two consequences. First, the Qur'an specifically says he was "carried" or "taken" depending upon the translation. This miracle is offered by some Muslims as proof of the Qur'an. If Mohammed only went to Jerusalem "in his dreams", and this proof of the Qur'an is only in his imagination, then other things that were presented as external events (such as Gabriel's revelations) could be products of his imagination too.

Early Muslims were led to believe it was real. *Muwatta' Malik* 51.4.10 relates that on the Night Journey an evil Jinn was seeking Mohammed with a torch of fire. Jibril [Gabriel] taught him the special words to say to put out the evil genie's torch.

The Sunni Muslim Sharia says it was real. "Narrated Ibn 'Abbas: Regarding the Statement of Allah ... The sights which Allah's Apostle was shown on the Night Journey when he was taken to Bait-ul-Maqdis (i.e. Jerusalem) were actual sights, (not dreams). And the Cursed Tree (mentioned) in the Qur'an is the tree of Zaqqum (itself)." *Bukhari* vol.5 book 58 no.228 p.148-149

However, if a Muslim argues that *Bukhari* (the highest authority in the Sharia after the Qur'an) was wrong here, that Muhammad really did not travel to these places, but only had a vision that he went to these places, then the night journey did not occur. Sura 17:1 has led millions of Muslims to believe a false thing, i.e. a lie, about Mohammed and Allah.

Theory 8. Mohammed Time-Travelled?

Time-travel is the explanation for this anachronism

Response 8: If this innovative interpretation were true, if Muhammad really could time travel, it opens a wide variety of unanswerable questions. What era of time was he taken to? Why wasn't he taken to the Day of Judgment? Why wasn't he taken to meet other prophets while they were alive? If you truly hold this time travel theory, you should be interested in pursue the logical questions such a theory expose.

Not only that, Sura 17:1 presents the *mi'raj* (night journey) as factual evidence within time. If the *mi'raj* was a time travel event, Allah misled not only early Muslims, but almost every Muslim throughout the ages in thinking this was a factual event.

However, this would be consistent with Muslim theology in a strange way. Muslims believe it was not really Jesus who died on the cross; Allah only made another look like Jesus. Yet Allah could not see fit to tell any writers of the Bible, or any early Christians about belief in "the great Muslim switcheroo". Again, we must ask why this is so. Why would Allah employ a tactic such as time travel for Muhammad and not explain it, yet not reveal the impersonation of Jesus to Christians! If Allah did use time travel without telling anyone, and then gave the appearance in Sura 17 that He did not, then Sura 8:30 is certainly true: "Allah is the greatest of deceivers/schemers".

Theory 9. An Unauthorized Change to the Qur'an?

An unauthorized addition to the Qur'an explains everything. Mohammed was not mistaken, and Mohammed did not lie; this was not a part of the Qur'an Mohammed revealed, but was added by a later forger.

Response 9: Most Sunni Muslims would not make this argument, but some Shi'ites, Sufis, of others are more free to say that 'Uthman and other Sunnis changed the Qur'an. But if this alleged miracle was really just a change, then what else in the Qur'an was changed? We could compare different early versions of the Qur'an, but caliph 'Uthman burned almost all of them, which would hide the tracks of many changes. We do have lists of suras and parts of Suras that did survive and are different, but nothing shows as different on Sura 17.

Theory 10. The Actual Site of the *mi'raj* Does Not Matter???

While some Muslims Sura 17:1 as a proof of the historical reliability of the Qur'an, others say that the location of Sura 17:1, which would provide the proof, does not matter.

Response 10: This is the last bastion of hope for the Muslim who wants to maintain confidence in the Qur'an. Whether Muhammad took a night journey, and whether that night journey was to Jerusalem matters a lot if one is checking the historical truthfulness of the Qur'an! Muslim teachers are stating Muhammad went to Jerusalem, and they are offering it is proof of the authenticity of the Qur'an. If you realize Muhammad did not go to Jerusalem because there was no mosque there at that time, and there is no other rational explanation besides "it doesn't matter", then it is your duty as a Muslim to stop your leaders from espousing such blasphemous teachings.

Again, if it does not matter to a Muslim, that Muslim should tell other Muslims to stop presenting this miracle as proof of the miraculous truthfulness of the Qur'an.

The Other Night Journey

While this night journey was witnessed by no one else, to a mosque where mosques did not exist, and reported to a Quraeshi people who were not convinced. But what about the other night journey to Jerusalem?

Right before his arrest and passion, Jesus traveled with his disciples to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. Jesus knew He would be betrayed by Judas and arrested, so Jesus could simply have retreated to another place. Nobody would have But Jesus deliberately chose to endure the things He did for the victory over death and Satan through His death on the cross and resurrection.

Crunch Time

So what do you believe? Do you believe in the Qur'an that teaches Muhammad went to a mosque that did not exist yet? These problems do not just go away by waving your hands. The only logical explanation that can be the truth is that the Qur'an does contain contradictions.

My wish is that every Muslim will consider these questions carefully, and thoughtfully consider following the God of truth.

Peace to you.

Footnotes

1. Sura 17 is called “The Night Journey” in Arberry, Dawood, Rodwell, Yusuf ‘Ali in English. It is also called “The Children of Israel / Israelites” in Yusuf ‘Ali in Arabic, Pickthall, Malik, Shakir, Sher Ali. It is called both according to *al-Tabari* vol.12 p.194 footnote 722.
2. ‘Umar read Sura 17 on entering Jerusalem according to *al-Tabari* vol.12 p.194
3. Here is when Sura 17 was revealed according to various sources. These sources are all in agreement, except that Yusuf ‘Ali gives extra details.
Sher Ali - before Hijra [Hegira)
Malik - at Makkah
M.M. Pickthall - Revealed at Mecca
Yusuf ‘Ali introduction to Sura 17 - “usually dated to the 27th night of the month of Rajab (though other dates, e.g., 17th of Rabi’ I, are also given) in the year before the Hijra. This fixes the date of the opening verse of the Sura, though portions of the Sura may have been a little earlier.”
4. (Thomas A. Idinopolus, “Jerusalem Blessed, Jerusalem Cursed,” (1991), p. 213-214)
5. (Karen Armstrong, “Jerusalem,” (1996), p. 229)
6. ‘Umar promised not to destroy any crosses or churches in *al-Tabari* vol.12, p.191
7. *ilya* was a name for Jerusalem according to *Bukhari* vol.1:6 p.12.
8. Oleg Grabar, “The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem,” *Ars Orientalis*, vol. 3 (1959), p. 37.

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4. Pickthall, Mohammed Marmaduke. *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*. Dar al-Islamiyya (Kuwait) (no date given)
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Appendix I - Sura 17:1 in different Translations

This sura has two names: “The Night Journey” also “The Children of Israel / Israelites”¹.

Arthur J. Arberry “Glory be to Him, who carried His servant by night from the Holy Mosque to the Further Mosque the precincts of which We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. He is the All-hearing, the All-seeing.”

N.J. Dawood “GLORY BE to Him who made His servant go by night from the Sacred Temple to the father Temple whose surroundings We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. He alone hears all and observes all.”

The English Translation of the Al-Qur’an by **Muhammad Farooq-i-Azam Malik** (1997) The Institute of Islamic Knowledge. “Glory be to Him Who took His devotee (Muhammed) one night from Masjid-al-Haram (in Makkah) to Masjid-al-Aqsa (in Jerusalem), whose vicinity We have blessed, so that We may show him some of Our signs; surely He is the One Who is the Hearer, the Observer.”

M.M. Pickthall “Glorified be He Who carried His servant by night from the Inviolable Place of Worship to the Far Distant Place of Worship the neighbourhood whereof We have blessed , that We might show him of Our tokens! Lo! He, only He, is the Hearer, the Seer.”

J.M. Rodwell “GLORY be to Him who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Temple of Mecca to the Temple that is more remote, whose precinct We have blessed, that We might shew him of Our signs! For He is the Hearer, the Seer.”

M.H. Shakir “Glory be to Him who made His servant to go on a night from the Sacred Mosque to the remote mosque of which We have blessed the precincts, so that We may show to him some of Our Signs; surely He is the Hearing, the Seeing.”

Maulawi Sher Ali “In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful. Glory be to Him Who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Distant Mosque, the environs of which We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our Signs. Surely, He alone is the Hearing, the Seeing.” - Note: translators often put words in italics to tell the reader the word was added to clarify the meaning but was not in the original language. Apparently Maulawi Sher Ali is trying to be precise.

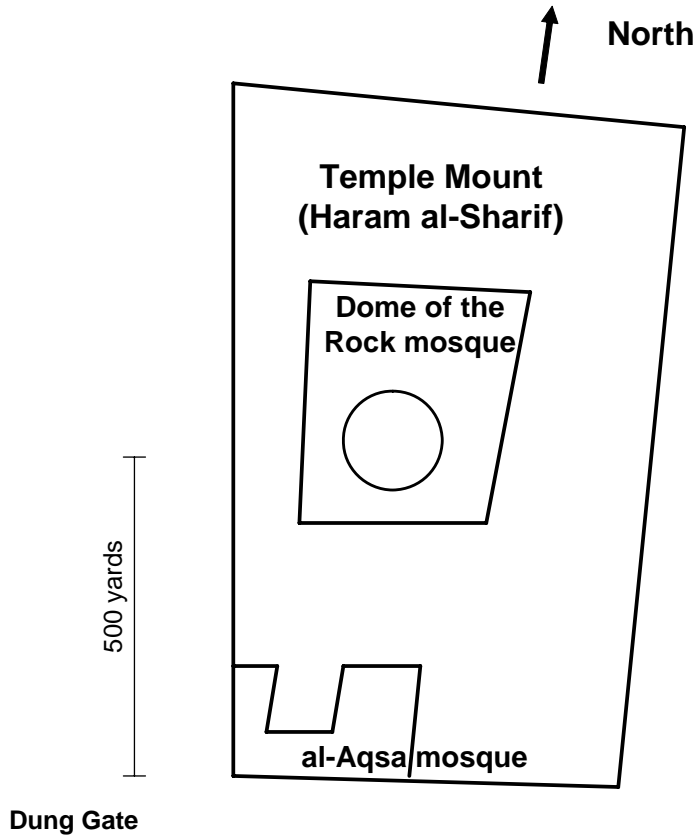
Abdullah Yusuf ‘Ali “Glory to (Allah) Who did take His servant for a Journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the farthest Mosque, Whose precincts We did bless,- in order that We might show him some of Our Signs: for He Is the One Who heareth and seeth (all things).”

Appendix II - Where Exactly was the “Farthest Mosque” in Sura 17:1?

There are three views.

1. Caliph ‘Umar built the **al-Aqsa mosque** in Jerusalem at the alleged site.
2. However, the **Dome of the Rock mosque** is where many Muslims think Mohammed went to heaven. “The mosque is octagonal in shape, having 8 sides. Each side has a door and 7 windows, with rock crystal carving. The dome is made of gold. Right in the middle, the mosque hosts the honored rock on which the Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) stood on, before he was raised to heaven.”
(<http://www.islamicarchitecture.org/ia/archi/domeoftherock.html>, May 23, 2004)
3. **The entire Temple Mount** (34 acres) was the general location.
According to <http://www.islamicarchitecture.org/ia/archi/alaqsamosque.html> (May 23, 2004) “The building became known as Masjid al-AQSA, Al-AQSA Mosque, although in reality the whole area of the Noble Sanctuary is considered Al-AQSA Mosque, the entire precincts inviolable according to Islamic law.”

Where are these places? The map below shows where they are.



Note that while Muslims themselves do not precisely agree on the site, al-Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock are only 400 or so yards of each other. There was no mosque

Appendix III - A Brief History of Buildings in Jerusalem

- 576 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar destroys Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple.
- 168 B.C. Antiochus Epiphanes destroyed the Temple. He built a citadel for his troops, called the Akra, which is probably at the northeast corner of where the al-Aqsa mosque now stands.
- Simon Maccabeus destroyed the Akra, lowered the hill on which the Akra stood, and build another citadel there.
- 37 B.C. Herod the Great became king of Judea. He rebuilt the temple.
- 70 A.D. Titus destroyed Jerusalem.
- 132 A.D. "After the Bar Kochba revolt in 132 A.D, "Following the defeat of the Jews, Jerusalem was devastated more thoroughly than by Titus. The site was ploughed over and anew city, Aelia Capitolina, so-called in honor of (Aelius) Hadrianus, was built over the ruins. ... Temples were dedicated to Bacchus, Venus and Serapis and over the former sanctuary a shrine of Jupiter Capitolinus was reared." *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1956) vol.13 p.8. *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1972) vol.12 p.1009a says that the Temple area was left desolate.
- 136 A.D. Emperor Constantine ordered two churches built: the church of the Holy Sepulchre where they thought Jesus was buried for three days, and the Basilica of the Cross where they thought Jesus was crucified.
- 326-336 A.D. the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Basilica of the Cross were built over what was believed to be Jesus' tomb and at the site of Calvary. THIS WAS NOT THE SITE OF THE TEMPLE THOUGH.
- 460 A.D. Empress Eudocia had more churches built, including one above the Siloam pool and another over that they thought was the tomb of Stephen north of the Damascus gate.
- 6th century Justinian's Basilica was built over what was thought to be the tomb of David.
- 614 A.D. Chosroes II of Persia captured Jerusalem, killed 60,000 Christians and enslaving 36,000. He damaged many buildings and destroyed many churches, including the church of the Holy Sepulchre. *al-Tabari* vol.5 p.318 also records this.
- 614 A.D. *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1972) vol.9 p.1009F says the octagonal rotunda of the Holy Sepulchre still stood despite the Persian sack. HOWEVER, THIS WAS AT THE SITE OF THE TOMB, NOT THE JEWISH TEMPLE. "The Temple Mount (called the Qadra or 'Square') had still the shape given to it by Herod's enclosure wall. The ruins of the Antonia Fortress were still visible in its northwestern corner, but the area of the Temple, on which stood the ruins of the Temple of Jupiter built by Hadrian, served till Muslim times as the garbage dump of the city. The only exception to this desolation was the Church of St. James or the Corner Church overlooking the southeastern corner of the Temple esplanade." (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1972) vol.12 p.1009F.
- 617 to 624 A.D. Sometime during this period Mohammed revealed Sura 17:1.
- 629 A.D. Heraclius defeated Chosroes and re-entered Jerusalem.
- 637/638 A.D. Jerusalem surrendered to 'Umar, who promised not to tear down any crosses or churches**
- 637/638 A.D. 'Umar built a wooden mosque called al-Aqsa.**
- 687/688 Caliph Abdul Malik rebuilt al-Aqsa and built the Dome of the Rock**

1517 Selim I (the Grim) of Turkey conquered Jerusalem from the Egyptians, and the present layout of the city's walls is due to him.
See the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1956) vol.13 p.8 for more info.

Appendix IV – Does Sura 17:60 Also Refer to the Same Night Vision?

Sura 17:60 says: "...We granted the Vision Which We showed thee, But as a trial for men, As also the Cursed Tree (Mentioned) in the Qur-an: We put fear (and warning) Into them, but it only Increases their inordinate transgression!" (A. Yusuf 'Ali's translation)

Yusuf 'Ali's footnote 2249 says, "Some Commentators take this as referring to the Mi'rah (17:1) and others to other visions. Such visions are miracles, and become a stumbling block to unbelievers. They are an encouragement to men of faith. Thus they are 'a trial for men'."

However, *Bukhari* vol.8 book 77 no.610 p.398 says, "...Narrated Ibn 'Abbas regarding the Verse: (And We granted the vision (Ascension to the heavens 'Miraj') which We showed you (O Muhammad as an actual eye witness) but as a trial for mankind.' (17:60): Allah's Apostle actually saw with his own eyes the vision (all the things which were shown to him) on the night of his Night Journey to Jerusalem (and then to the heavens). The cursed tree which is mentioned in the Qur'an is the tree of Az-Zaqqum." Note that the parts in parenthesis are not in the Arabic but added by the Muslim translator. The parts in the parenthesis do not significantly change anything though: Bukhari records that Ibn 'Abbas said this was actually Jerusalem.

That he heard Allah's Apostle saying, "When the people of Quraish did not believe me (i.e. the story of my Night Journey), I stood up in Al-Hijr and Allah displayed Jerusalem in front of me, and I began describing it to them while I was looking at it." *Bukhari* vol.3 book 58 ch.40 no.226 p.142

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