

An Examination of the Jurisprudential Verses About Temples of the People of the Book

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(Received: November 5, 2020 ; Revised: December 18, 2020 ; Accepted: February 3, 2021)
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Abstract

Although Islam does not deem all rulings related to mosques as applicable to temples, it regards the temples of the People of the Book in most cases similar to the Islamic mosques, and so, rules Muslims' prayer saying in the temples of the People of the Book as permissible. The Qurʾān's recommendation to venerate the divine waymarks – including the temples of the People of the Book – also involves the shrines of the prophets and Imāms (a), as suggested by Islamic narrations and the unity of basis. The use of the temples of the People of the Book to augment oaths in cases such as mutual cursing and also the consideration of the temporary marriage of a Muslim man with a Christian woman whose previous divorce is made in the court rather than church as invalid show that Islam respects the beliefs of the People of the Book about their temples. An examination of the Qurʾānic verses indicates that the word *masjid* has a general and specific meaning. Its general meaning (as prayer site) involves the temples of the People of the Book, while its specific meaning (as mosque) has the same meaning that is common and famous among Muslims.

Keywords: Veneration, Destruction, Mosque, Temple.

Introduction

Any religion – either right or wrong – has a temple and prayer site, and the Islamic Sharīʿa has expressed conditions and rulings about this identified and conventional fact similar to other conventional facts (Sabziwārī, 1993, vol. 19: 157).

Moreover, in some Qurʾānic verses, the Islamic jurisprudence talks about the temples of the People of the Book in various ways to the extent that it is said that the Jew or Christian woman whose husband is a Muslim man has the right to go to a synagogue or a temple similar to a Muslim woman who has the right to go to the mosque (Shīrāzī Ḥusaynī, 2005: 51).

The Qurʾānic verses that talk about the temples of People of the Book can be called “the verses of the revealed prescripts about the temples of the People of the Book.” The Qurʾānic commentaries and jurisprudential sources have talked about these verses, but there is no independent study on “the verses of the revealed prescripts about the temples of the People of the Book.” Therefore, in this study, we adopted an analytical-descriptive method to answer the following questions.

- Has the Qurʾān talked about the temples of other revealed religions?
- Does the Qurʾān consider the temples of the People of the Book similar to Islamic mosques?

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- From the viewpoint of the Qur'ān, is it permissible to damage or destroy the temples of the People of the Book?
- Is it permissible to say prayers in the temples of the People of the Book?

The literal and terminological meanings of *ma'bad* (temple)

The word “ma'ābid” is the plural form of “ma'bad” and means prayer site and also saying prayers (Wāsiṭī Zubaydī, 1993, vol. 5: 91), while its terminological meaning regards places where God is worshipped, such as mosque, synagogue, church, etc.

The People of the Book is a term in the Qur'ān that refers to those who believe in one of the three religions of Judaism, Christianity, or Zoroastrianism (Qur'ān 22:17). In the light of the verse “and those unto whom We gave the Scripture aforetime” (Qur'ān 29:47), there is no doubt in the fact that Jews and Christians are among the People of the Book. However, the consideration of Zoroastrianism as part of the People of the Book is disputed. Some jurists have taken Zoroastrians as part of the People of the Book (Karakī, 1993, vol. 12: 390; Majlisī, 1990, 76; Narāqī, 2001, vol. 2: 335), but some Twelver Shī'a jurists such as Shaykh Bahā'ī (Bahā'ī 'Āmilī, 1990: 46) and Sunnī jurists such as Shāfi'ī rely on the Prophetic narration “Treat them with the conventions of the People of the Book” (Ṣadūq, 1993, vol. 2: 53) and do not regard them as among the People of the Book, but rather call them “pseudo People of the Book” (Karakī, 1993, vol. 12: 391). In this article, we adopt the viewpoint of those who take Zoroastrians as part of the People of the Book.

The temples of the People of the Book in the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān repeatedly talks about temples including the temples of the People of the Book. The related themes are given and discussed in the following lines.

The consideration of temples as divine waymarks

The verse “... he who venerates the waymarks of Allāh, surely it is from the piety of the hearts” (Qur'ān 22:32) recommends the veneration of the divine waymarks. On the other hand, some Muslim jurists rely on the verse “And who is more unjust than he who forbids that in places for the worship of Allāh, Allāh's name should be celebrated?-whose zeal is (in fact) to ruin them? It was not fitting that such should themselves enter them except in fear. For them there is nothing but disgrace in this world, and in the world to come, an exceeding torment” (Qur'ān 2:114) to assert that the divine waymarks are not limited to the Islamic ones. They point out that rejecting the invitation of prophets is necessarily illicit from the intellectual viewpoint, and the destruction of the temples of all religions is incorrect because they are places in which God is celebrated. The reason is that the word “masājid” in this verse is not the terminological meaning of this term (i.e., Islamic mosque), but rather, it regards the general meaning as the worshipping place, which involves the temples of other religions as well (Balāghī Najafī, 1999, vol. 1: 118; Miyānjī Malikī, 1980: 200).

Confirming the foregoing claim on the inclusion of all temples - involving the temples of the People of the Book – in the meaning of the above-mentioned verse, Miyānjī (a Twelver Shī'a jurist) says,

The verse is a general one and involves every temple, mosque, shrine, religious mansion, synagogue, monastery, and church in which God is celebrated day and night. It is not limited to masjid as a term common among Muslim jurists [i.e., mosque]. The fight against monotheists and the rejection of the invitation of prophets

is an evident, intellectually illicit act rather than a devotional one. Therefore, those who try to reject the waymarks and signs of the Unity of God (no matter what nation and religion they belong to), especially if they try to reject the Islamic and Shī‘a waymarks and signs of the Unity of God and prevent people from worshipping God are among the most oppressive people” (Miyānjī Malikī, 1980: 200).

The reason for the consideration of preventing people from going to the places where God is worshipped – including the temples of the People of the Book – as an oppressive act is that oppression means not applying something in its right and appropriate place, and since temples and worshipping sites are for worshipping and remembering God, preventing people from worshipping God is a kind of oppression as it prevents something from happening in its right place. On the other hand, such an act is rejecting God and the rejection of God is accompanied by disbelief (Kāḏimī, n.d., vol. 1: 185).

One of the evidences that confirms the inclusion of the temples of the People of the Book by the Qur’ān 2:114 is that on the one hand, the verses before this verse talk about the People of the Book and on the other hand, based on one of the causes of revelation mentioned for this verse, the verse is revealed after the Romans destroyed Masjid al-Aqṣā and contaminated it (Baḥrānī, 1994, vol. 2: 48). Since the cause of revelation is not particularized, this cause of revelation and its related interpretation does not disagree with other possibilities such as prevention from Masjid al-Ḥarām and other worshipping sites. As a result, Bayḏāwī says, “The verse is generally about everyone who destroys a worshipping site or tries to close a place that is prepared for saying prayers, although it is [in the first place] revealed about Rome that fought against Bayt al-Muqaddas and killed its inhabitants” (Bayḏāwī, 1997, vol. 1: 102).

Based on the foregoing points, some Muslim scholars say, “The foregoing verse indicates that the destructions – of the worshipping sites that belong to the protected non-Muslims or disbelievers who have a peace treaty with Muslims – mentioned in this verse are not permissible” (Jaṣṣāṣ, 1985, vol. 5: 83). Moreover, this verse indicates that God is against corrupting and destroying the worshipping sites, because the signs of divine religion and its monuments should be preserved and should stay away from damage.

Some contemporary jurists have deemed impermissible the destruction of the temples of the protected non-Muslims (that are controlled by them) unless under the conditions that are true for the destruction of an Islamic mosque (Bahjat, 2007, vol. 2: 222).

Some jurists such as Shahīd Thānī have cast doubt against considering the Zoroastrian fire sites as temple and the possibility of using them in mutual cursing and oaths augmentation (Shahīd Thānī, 1993, vol. 10: 237). Nonetheless, we might rely on the verse “... he who venerates the waymarks of Allāh, surely it is from the piety of the hearts.” (Qur’ān “32) to conclude the sacredness of such places because they are places at which God is celebrated (Muṣṭafawī, 1982, vol. 6: 281). On the other hand, some jurists have taken such worshipping sites as venerable like mosques (Bahjat, 2007, vol. 2: 99).

Some jurists have said about the narration “God has set the earth as my worshipping site” (Majlisī, 1990, vol. 80: 277) that it means all worshipping sites of the earth; accordingly, one can say prayers at any point on the earth provided that it is not usurped or ritually impure (Quṭb Rāwandī, 1985, vol. 1: 98). Moreover, they have stipulated that using the building materials and instruments of the worshipping sites to develop one’s own property is illicit (Ḥillī, 1990, vol. 1: 358). On the other hand, they have pointed out that using all or part of churches or synagogues in one’s own property or as part of a road is illicit based on the foregoing verse, because it means destroying a prayer site and changing the usage of a religious endowment (Karakī, 1993, vol. 2: 154). Maḥmūd Shahābī says, “One of the seven points derived from this verse is the prohibition of the destruction of worshipping sites in any form that is considered by the common belief as destruction, including the destruction of the

wall, the removal of furniture, its dissolution, or the establishment of businesses in it that prevent and disagree with worshipping” (Shahābī, 1996, vol. 2: 25).

Some jurists including Mīrzā Shīrāzī and Muḥammad Kāzīm Ṭabāṭabā’ī have said that although the temples of the People of the Book are not the same as the mosque, it is the most precautionary to avoid ritually polluting them (Najafī, 1994: 61). In other words, based on this view, the obligatory precaution ruling is that it is impermissible to ritually pollute the temples of disbelievers such as those of the Christians and Jews (Sabziwārī, n.d.: 72 & 648). Even if we rule for the non-obligation of purifying the foregoing temples due to the rejection of hardship principle, this does not mean that the ritual pollution of the temples of the People of the Book is permissible (Āmulī, 1986, vol. 3: 51-52), because ritually polluting the foregoing temples disagrees with the necessity of venerating God’s waymarks (Qur’ān 22:32), which are deemed by some Muslim jurists (Miyānjī Malikī, 1980: 200) to include the temples of the People of the Book.

In addition to the verse “And who is more unjust than he who forbids that in places for the worship of Allāh, Allāh’s name should be celebrated?” other Qur’ānic verses also call the temple of the People of the Book as masjid, e.g., “Exalted is He who carried His worshiper (Prophet Muhammad) to travel in the night from the Sacred Mosque to the Furthest Mosque which We have blessed around it so that We might show him some of Our signs. He is the Hearer, the Seer” (Qur’ān 17:1). Some exegetes have relied on the linguistic context to take “Masjid al-Aqṣā” to mean Bayt al-Muqaddas (in Jerusalem), and have said that since it is far from Masjid al-Ḥarām (Sacred Mosque), God has called it the Furthest Mosque (Ṭūsī, n.d., vol. 6: 446). As we know, at the time the Qur’ān was revealed, Masjid al-Aqṣā was a temple of the People of the Book.

Another verse in which the masjid is taken to mean temple is “Behold, they dispute among themselves as to their affair. (Some) said, ‘Construct a building over them’: Their Lord knows best about them: those who prevailed over their affair said, ‘Let us surely build a place of worship over them.’” (Qur’ān 18:21). In this verse, masjid is used as a place of worshipping (Qurashī, 1992, vol. 3: 231). The assertion by ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī indicates the use of the word “masjid” to mean “temple” where he says,

It seems that the people of the city built a worshipping place on top of that cave, but alas, now there remains no remnant of that worshipping place over the cave and there is not observable even a ruin, not of a mosque, not a synagogue, nor any such building. The closest religious building that is seen in that area is a church that is nearly three kilometers away from the cave, and no indication can be found to relate to the cave. (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1996, vol. 13: 297)

In addition, Dakhīl ‘Alī b. Muḥammad ‘Alī says, “Masjid means a temple and a place for worshipping and prostrating to God. Some have said [that it means in this verse] a worshipping place in which the Companions of the Cave could say prayers when they wake up” (*Al-Wajīz fī tafsīr*: 389). Ṣādiqī Tihirānī says, “Due to their high status, the Companions of the Cave were entitled to have a mosque or temple built in their place” (Ṣādiqī Tihirānī, 1998: 299).

Another verse of the noble Qur’ān in which the word “masjid” might be taken to mean temple is the Qur’ān 72:18, “And the places of worship [masājid] are for Allāh (alone): So invoke not any one along with Allāh,” as there are three possibilities in the concept of the word “masājid,”

1. Places in which people prostrate to God. The most perfect instance of suchlike places is the Sacred Mosque. Other instance concerns other mosques, and the most widespread instance regards all places in which the humans say prayers.

2. The seven members of the human body that touch the ground when one prostrates; a narration from Imām Jawād (a) confirms this interpretation (Ḥurr ‘Āmilī, 1989, vol. 28: 252).
3. Prostration should always be done to God. This interpretation is against the appearance of the verse, and there is no indication to prove it (Makārim Shīrāzī, 2000, vol. 19: 95-96).

The best of these three interpretations is the first one, which suggests the use of the word “masjid” to mean worshipping place (which in turn includes the temples of the People of the Book).

Although the foregoing discussion suggested that the word “masjid” could be used to mean temple, the Qur’ān sometimes uses this word against the worshipping sites of the People of the Book. In suchlike cases, the word “masjid” simply means Muslims’ mosque, e.g., “Did not Allāh check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of Allāh is commemorated in abundant measure” (Qur’ān 22:40), because the clause “in which the name of Allāh is commemorated in abundant measure” in the verse is a description that belongs to the Muslims’ mosques. The reason is that compared to other worshipping places, there are more people gatherings in mosques. That is to say, the daily prayers are performed everyday several times in Muslims’ mosques, but the gates of the worshipping sites of other religions are opened only in certain days such as Saturdays or merely in some days of the year (Makārim Shīrāzī, 2000, vol. 10: 358).

Verses that call temples in general as “God’s houses”

In some verses of the Qur’ān, worshipping sites are called God’s houses no matter if those sites belong to Muslims or non-Muslims/the People of the Book, such as the verse “(Lit is such a Light) in houses, which Allāh hath permitted to be raised to honor; for the celebration, in them, of His name: In them is He glorified in the mornings and in the evenings, (again and again)” (Qur’ān 24:36).

There are different viewpoints about the meaning of “(Lit is such a Light) in houses, which Allāh hath permitted to be raised to honor,” as follows.

1. Mosques: this stance is taken by Ibn ‘Abbās and some others.
2. Bayt al-Muqaddas: This opinion is expressed by Ḥasan Baṣrī.
3. Other sites in which God is worshipped: This viewpoint is expressed by ‘Ikrama (Ibn ‘Arabī, n.d., vol. 3: 1389).

The assembling of these three viewpoints results in the inclusion of the temples of the People of the Book, because the qualities that are mentioned for the “houses” in this and the following verse confirm the third viewpoint. The qualities are as follows,

4. In them is He glorified in the mornings and in the evenings, (again and again) (Qur’ān 24:36)
5. By men whom neither traffic nor merchandise can divert from the Remembrance of Allāh, nor from regular Prayer, nor from the practice of regular Charity (Qur’ān 24:37)
6. Their (only) fear is for the Day when hearts and eyes will be transformed (in a world wholly new) (ibid)

These three viewpoints show that these houses are the same sites that are established following the order of God, are the sites for remembering God, and the Islamic facts and divine decrees disseminate from them; in addition to the mosques, the houses of God’s prophets and saints, especially those of the Prophet (s) and ‘Alī (a), are included in the third meaning (Makārim Shīrāzī, 1994, vol. 3: 299).

Interpreting the phrase “in houses,” some theologians have suggested a fourth viewpoint that regards “bayt” (house) as the heart. They assert that in the prophetic narration “Angels do not enter a house in which there is a dog” (Fayḍ Kāshānī, 1986, vol. 7: 458), the word “bayt” means house and the word “kalb” (dog) means greed (Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1992: 65). That is, the angels do not enter a greedy heart.

One of the evidences that justifies the extensiveness of the verse and its inclusion of the temples of the People of the Book is that some jurists have relied on this verse and the principle of the unity of basis – which here is the veneration of God’s waymarks – to rule for the inclusion of Ḥusayniyyas in the meaning of the verse (Kalāntar, 1990, vol. 10: 11). On the other hand, as noted above, the veneration of the temples of the People of the Book is also recommended (Miyānjī Malikī, 1980: 200).

In the light of the foregoing interpretation, based on narrations, saying prayers in churches and synagogues is acceptable, as Imām Ṣādiq (a) – in response to a question – deemed saying prayers permissible in these temples even when the People of the Book are saying prayers in them and told the inquirer, “Haven’t you read the verse ‘Say: “Everyone acts according to his own disposition: But your Lord knows best who it is that is best guided on the Way”’? [Qur’ān 17:84] Say your prayers while you face Qibla and do not pay attention to them” (Kulaynī, 1987, vol. 3: 388; Ṣadūq, 1993, vol. 1: 244). There is no difference in the accuracy of the obligatory and ritually recommended prayers said in these temples, although saying prayers in the mosque is more virtuous (Ḥurr ‘Āmilī, 1989, vol. 5: 139).

The majority of early Shī‘a jurists have deemed Muslims’ prayer saying in the temples of the People of the Book to be ritually disapproved (Gīlānī, 1989, vol. 1: 394); however, according to the stance taken by the majority of Shī‘a scholars, saying prayers in these temples is not ritually disapproved (Najafī, 1984, vol. 8: 375). Some jurists have attributed the ritual disapproval of saying prayers in synagogue to the existence of images in them rather than its synagogue-ness (Ḥillī, 1992, vol. 4: 328).

Some jurists deem it ritually recommended to spray some water in the temples of the People of the Book if one doubts the purity of these places, although even in such doubted cases they are essentially ruled as pure (Ṭabāṭabā’ī Yazdī, 1989, vol. 1: 73). In case one does not doubt the purity of those temples, spraying water in them is not a ritually recommended act (‘Arāqī, 2002: 408). This viewpoint is supported by some related narrations. It seems that the ritually recommended order to spray water might be due to one of the following reasons,

1. The spiritual impurity of these places: in this case, the ritual recommendation will be true even if one ascertains the sensory purity.
2. The impurity of the synagogue due to its synagogue-ness (essential)
3. Doubt in the accidental impurity of these places.

The possibility that the absolute majority of scholars might have accepted is the last one (Ṣadr, 1988, vol. 4: 66-67).

In response to the question “What is the ruling for saying prayers in the temples of the People of the Book?” Āyatullāh Makārim Shīrāzī says, “It has no problem” (Makārim Shīrāzī, 2000, vol. 3: 25). Likewise, Āyatullāh Fayyāḍ says, “Saying prayers in churches and synagogues is permissible without spraying water and even without asking for permission from the people in them, as is so in the Muslims’ mosques” (Fayyāḍ Kābulī, n.d., vol. 3: 135).

It is mentioned in some narrations that the verse “(Lit is such a Light) in houses, which Allāh hath permitted to be raised to honor; for the celebration, in them, of His name: In them is He glorified in the mornings and in the evenings, (again and again)” (Qur’ān 24:36) refers to the prophets’ houses. The house of Imām ‘Alī (a) is also one of these houses (Bahrānī, 1995, vol. 4: 73).

The specific references to the temples in the Qur'ān

The temples of the People of the Book are referred in the Qur'ān specifically with names such as “*ṣawāmi‘*,” “*biya‘*,” and “*ṣalawāt*.” These are detailed in the following lines.

1. *Ṣawāmi‘* is the plural form of *ṣawmi‘a* (monastery).
2. *Biya‘* is the plural form of *bī‘a* (church).

Based on one viewpoint, both of these are Christian worshipping sites, because *ṣawmi‘a* is used for Christian nuns and *bī‘a* is used for the Christians residing in cities, as Ṭabrisī says, “*Biya‘* are the Christian temples in cities and *Ṣawāmi‘* are their temples in the mountains and plains” (Ṭabrisī, 1994, vol. 7: 139).

3. *Ṣalawāt* (Judaist synagogues) (ibid).

The verse “Did not Allāh check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of Allāh is commemorated in abundant measure” (Qur'ān 22:40) specifically refers to the temples of the People of the Book. In other words, it refers to the four monotheistic religions – even Zoroastrianism – because these religions have essentially been monotheistic.

Since monotheism has been the top common point among divine prophets and has a special importance, if monotheism and the worshipping centers of the followers of revealed religions are attacked by disbelievers, Muslims – according to the foregoing verse – have to expand their responsibility scope and defend monotheism and the worshipping sites of monotheistic religions.

Based on the foregoing verse, if God does not prevent the attacks of some humans to others, all worshipping sites will be destroyed, including the Judaist synagogues, Sūfī centers, and Islamic mosques. In other words, attacks to the worshipping sites and other places prevent everyone from worshipping God freely. Therefore, one of the benefits and reasons of the holy struggle is the preservation of worshipping sites. As Master Muṭahharī says,

It seems as if here the addressees are priests who deem religion and holy struggle as opposite and ask that if it is religion, what the holy struggle means here. The Qur'ān says [to priests] that if holy struggles did not exist to repel the corruptions, your temple also did not exist. The Christian prayer site, the Judaist prayer site, the Zoroastrian prayer site, the Islamic prayer site, and all prayer sites in general owe their existence to holy struggles and defenses. Otherwise, always the evil and corrupt people who exist in the society – those who are not bound to any conscience or faith – start acting, and [some expect that] we [just] say religion is against these acts [but do not take any practical measures]! This is the same concept in the saying, “They have unleashed the dog and have kept the stone frozen”; they say that keep the stones frozen and unleash the dog [so that stones cannot be taken and used to repel the dogs] (Muṭahharī, 2005, vol. 25: 275).

Based on the foregoing discussion, some Muslims scientists have said, “The foregoing verse indicates that it is impermissible to destroy the foregoing places that belong to the protected non-Muslims or the ones who have a peace treaty with Muslims” (Jaṣṣāṣ, 1985, vol. 5: 83). Moreover, the foregoing verse shows that God loathes the corruption and destruction of the prayer sites, because the waymarks of His religion and its monuments should be preserved and stay away from damage.

Some believe the foregoing verse (Qur'ān 22:40) is related to the past time and expresses the need to defend the prayer sites of the time of Prophet Moses (a), Prophet Jesus (a), and Prophet Muḥammad (s), but does not include Muslims' defense of the temples of the People of the Book in the present time (Ṭabrisī, 1994, vol. 7: 139). However, the correct viewpoint is that the verse is not limited to the necessity of defending the temples of the People of the Book in the past, because the generality of the verse and its addressing of the present-day Muslims refer to the necessity of defending the temples of the People of the Book in the

present-day. Pertinent to this discussion is the assertion of ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī. After expressing that the verse is to legislate the holy struggle and fighting, the clause “Did not Allāh check one set of people by means of another” is general fighting, and repelling through fighting is the last step taken in this regard, he says, “The reason for the order of fighting is to protect the religious community from enemies that try with all their strength to put off the light of God; if there was not holy struggle and fighting, the religious prayer sites and divine waymarks would be destroyed and worshipping and rituals would be exterminated” (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1996, vol. 14: 386).

The order to defend the People of the Book and their temples is general and includes the present-day temples, too. Rashīd Riḍā says in this regard,

The second intention for the legislation of war in Islam is supporting all divine religions when they are attacked, and the noble verse “Did not Allāh check one set of people by means of another” implies this. If God did not allow for such a defense, all prayer sites in which God is worshipped – such as the Christian monasteries, Judaist synagogues, and Islamic mosques would be exterminated due to the oppression of idolaters and deniers of the temples. It is a general religious principle that stipulates freedom of religions and implies Muslims’ support of the prayer sites of religions” (Rashīd Riḍā, 1993, vol. 11: 280).

Some have taken the word *bī’a* (whose plural form is *biya’*) as the Christians’ temples (Farāhīdī, 1990, vol. 2: 265; Fayḍ Kāshānī, 1986, vol. 12: 59; Ibn Manẓūr, 1993, vol. 8: 26; Karakī, 1993, vol. 2: 154; Ṣāhib b. ‘Ubbād, 1993, vol. 2: 178). On the other hand, one author has relied on Al-Munjid to interpretation *bī’a* as referring to the Christian and Judaist temples (Wujḍānī, 2005, vol. 2: 156). Some have talked about a third viewpoint, which states that the word *bī’a* regards the small temples of both religions, as mosque is so for Muslims (Gīlānī, 1989, vol. 1: 398). In addition, Ṭabrisī says, “*Biy’a* are Christian churches in cities and *ṣawāmi’* are their temples in the mountains and plains” (Ṭabrisī, 1994, vol. 7: 139).

There has been disagreement among scholars about the implication of the word *kanīsa* (whose plural form is *Kanā’is*). Some have taken it to mean Judaist synagogue, some others have deemed it as the Christians’ prayer site, and still others have considered it to generally mean the prayer site of the disbelievers (Wāsiṭī Zubaydī, 1993, vol. 8: 450). In addition, some other scholars have said that *kanīsa* includes the large Judaist and Christian temples and is like a principal mosque for Muslims (Gīlānī, 1989, vol. 1: 398).

Considering the foregoing verse, it seems that these two words are used only for the Judaist and Christian mosques and the viewpoint that takes them as referring to the disbelievers’ temples in general is incorrect, because in the Shī’a jurisprudence, the rulings about the Judaist and Christian temples are not different.

Based on the interpretation of Ibn ‘Abbās and Ibn Jinī, the word “*ṣalawāt*” in this verse refers to the Judaist synagogues (Wāsiṭī Zubaydī, 1993, vol. 19: 608), because it has been taken from the word “*ṣalūtā*” in Hebrew language, which means prayer site; however, Arabs have used it figuratively to mean prayer due to the attribution of the meaning of the place name to the mood (Ḥasanī, 1991: 33).

The People of the Book have conditioned some issues to be done only at their temples. For example, according to the Christian viewpoint, the marriage and divorce of the Christians must be done at the church. Because of this condition, some Muslims jurists have deemed impermissible the temporary marriage of a Muslim man with a divorced Christian woman whose divorce has been done at the court rather than the church (Bahjat, 2007, vol. 7: 236).

One of the uses of the temples of the People of the Book is that they can be used to augment the oaths made by the People of the Book (Hāshimī, 2005, vol. 2: 549).

The mutual cursing with the People of the Book should also be done at a place believed by them as magnificent, such as the church, synagogue, and fire site (Ṭūsī, 2009, vol. 5: 198).

One of the terms related to the temples of the People of the Book that is specifically mentioned in the Qur'ān is “maḥārīb” (the plural form of miḥrāb). This word is used only once in the verse “They worked for him as he desired, (making) arches, images ...” (Qur'ān 34:13). This verse indicates that the jinni made beautiful arches and temples as well as various utensils such as very large trays and pots for Prophet Solomon (a) (Makārim Shīrāzī, 1994, vol. 13: 476).

Some specialists of “the verses of the revealed prescripts” have relied on this verse to assert that the images that were used in the temples before the advent of Islam were permissible, but those images have become forbidden after the advent of Islam due to some narrations (Jaṣṣāṣ, 1985, vol. 5: 246). However, this viewpoint is not congruent with narrations from Imāms (a) who have taken the word “images” here to mean the images of trees (Barqī, 1993, vol. 2: 458). In the latter set of narrations, the word “images” in the verse is considered as the images of trees and similar images (that are permissible) rather than the images of men and women (or flesh and blood ones, indeed).

Some Muslim jurists have relied on the foregoing verse to rule that saying prayers while wearing clothes with animal images on them is ritually disapproved (Baḥrānī Āl Safūr, 1985, vol. 7: 149).

One of the narrations that prohibit making images is a narration transmitted by Ibn ‘Abbās from the Prophet (s) that says, “The residence place of anyone who makes an image is the Hell. In return for any image he makes, an animal is set for him to torture him in the Hell. If he has to make the image, he might make the images of trees and inanimate beings” (Barqī, 1993, vol. 2: 618).

Despite the permissibility of making images of trees and inanimate beings on prayer sites, this does not imply that saying prayers in such a place is not ritually disapproved.

The word “maḥārīb” (as the plural form of miḥrāb (arch)) means either the worshipping site or the fighting place; the latter meaning is derived from the name of special places made on the top of castles for defense (Qarā’atī, 2005, vol. 9: 429). The word “maḥārīb” has also been used to mean mosques; in this case, mosques are called so because they are the place one fights against the Devil and evil-prompting self (Mudarrisī, 1999, vol. 10: 343).

The meaning of the word “miḥrāb” might come from the point that the human should be ḥarīb (salīb) in miḥrāb; i.e., he should remove any mental engagement with mundane affairs and any mental distractions from himself. Some have said that the miḥrāb of a house entrance should be on top of the house; then, when mosques were considered as prayer sites, the top of the mosques was called miḥrāb. Some others have asserted that miḥrāb has been originally exclusive to the mosques, and the top part of houses was called miḥrāb following the mosques. Still others have suggested that the word “maḥārīb” in the foregoing verse is something called “madhbaḥ” by the People of the Book, which is located at the front part of the temple and has a door that can be reached by a stairway; the people who are in the temple cannot see the people who are in miḥrāb (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1996, vol. 3: 174).

Muslims’ last will made for the temples of the People of the Book

Considering the verse “The alms are only for the poor and the needy, and those who collect them, and those whose hearts are to be reconciled, and to free the captives and the debtors, and for the cause of Allāh, and (for) the wayfarer; a duty imposed by Allāh. Allāh is Knower, Wise” (Qur'ān 9:60), some Muslim jurists have deemed it permissible for Muslims to make their will for the temples of the People of the Book in order to reconcile the hearts. ‘Allāma Ḥillī says in this regard,

If a Muslim designates a property in his will to be given to synagogues, churches, the Torah and the Bible, or an oppressor (in order to help the oppressor), his/her will is not effective and it is not permissible to enforce it. [However,] it is permissible for a Muslim to make his will for the temples of the People of the Book in order to reconcile their hearts (Ḥillī, 1999, vol. 3: 35).

Some jurists have conditioned the impermissibility of making the will for the temples of the People of the Book to the point that a Muslim takes the responsibility of enforcing it (Ḥillī, 1990, vol. 2: 507). This assertion shows that the will made by the People of the Book for their own temples (if a member of the People of the Book is responsible for its enforcement) is permissible.

Conclusion

The stance of Islam toward the temples of the People of the Book indicates that although it distinguishes the mosque and the temple with regard to some rules and does not consider some rules that are applicable to mosques as applicable to the temples, it looks to temples in many cases in a way similar to the mosques.

The viewpoint of Islam about defending temples – that is pointed out in some verses – and its recommendation for the veneration of religious waymarks such as the temples of the People of the Book reveal that from the viewpoint of Islam, the temples have a great importance because they are places in which God is worshipped. As a result, it is regarded acceptable for Muslims to say prayers in the temples of the People of the Book.

The word “maṣjid” is used as both a general and a specific term. In its general meaning, maṣjid mean a worshipping site and includes the temples of the People of the Book, but in its specific meaning, it only includes the common meaning among Muslims (i.e., mosque) and does not include the temples of the People of the Book. In the verses in which the names of the temples of the People of the Book – such as ṣawāmi‘, biya‘, and ṣalawāt – have been mentioned next to the word maṣjid, the latter is used in its specific meaning.

Although there are similarities between the temples of the People of the Book and the mosques of Muslims in some rules such as the necessity of their veneration, since God is worshipped in the mosques several times a day by many worshippers while the doors of the temples of the People of the Book are opened to the worshippers in few days in a year, mosques are more important.

The recommendations of Islam about Muslims’ mosques and the temples of the People of the Book are derived from the necessity of venerating God’s waymarks. This is not limited to Muslims’ mosques and the temples of the People of the Book, but rather, due to the unity of basis and some narrations, it also includes the shrines of the prophets and Imāms (a).

The use of the temples of the People of the Book to augment oaths in some cases such as mutual cursing and the consideration of the divorce of the People of the Book done in a court rather than a church as invalid indicates that Islam respects the belief of the People of the Book about their temples.

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