

Select Language (Note: translation not 100% accurate)

What is the meaning of maSjID according to The Quran? Time will tell

In the following article, all occurrences of "masjid" in The Quran were analysed and information extracted, in order to gain a better understanding. The traditional understanding of this term is "mosque". Whilst this is the common understanding, a small minority of those who follow a Quran based islam have opted for different understandings.

In this work, sometimes significant points will be made, but also small observations which by themselves may not provide definitive insight, but taken together will hopefully provide a coherent view. Whilst reading this article, it is recommended to [open a new window](#) in order to lookup and study each verse cited and context. For further information, clickable links are given throughout the article.

For the purposes of accuracy/clarity, sometimes when translations are shown in this article: maSJD = singular, and all other forms are plural. Direct translations are shown in **blue** font.

Abbreviations:

AQ = al quran (the reading)

CAD = Classical Arabic Dictionaries

In [Part 1](#) of this comprehensive study on SuJuD it was shown that the most suitable meanings for SuJuD were "**to submit, honour or pay respect**", which may be better rendered as "to give acknowledgement/recognition (in a subservient/submissive manner)" as the core meaning. The literal meaning of "maSJD" is roughly "implemented SJD", but the form/manner in which this implementation takes is open to interpretation. By far, the most common interpretation is "place of SJD" e.g. Mosque, but some others include: act of SJD, institute of SJD, time of SJD. Perhaps the most well-known theoretical meanings of this Arabic word form would be place/time of SJD.

Review of maSJD occurrences

7:26 O children of Adam/mankind, we have provided you with clothing/*libasan*, it covers your body, and as an adornment/decoration. But the clothing* of [God-consciousness/taqwa](#) is best. That is from the signs of God, so that they may be mindful.

7:27 O Children of Adam/mankind, do not let the devil** tempt you as he expelled your parents from the garden/paradise; removing from them their clothing*** to show them their nakedness/shame. He and his tribe see you from where you do not see them. We have made the devils as allies for those who do not believe.

7:28 And when they commit indecent acts, they say: "We found our fathers doing such, and God ordered us to it." Say: "God does not order with indecency! Do you say about God what you do not know?"

7:29 Say: "My Lord has ordered with justice, and set-straight/aright(or establish) your faces/wills /purposes with**** every maSJD, and invoke Him (as) ones sincere to Him (in) the obligation/system; as He initiated you, so you will return."

7:30 A group He guided and a group deserved on them misguidance; indeed they have taken the devils as allies besides God; and they think they are those guided!

7:31 O Children of Adam/mankind, take***** (to yourselves) your beauty with**** every maSJD, and eat and drink and do not exceed; He does not like those who exceed.

7:32 Say: "Who has forbidden the beauty that God has brought forth for His servants and the good things of sustenance/provision?" Say: "They are meant for those who believe during this worldly life, and they will be exclusive for them on the Day of Resurrection." It is such that We explain the revelations for those who know.

* Arabic: "*libas*", note how this same word is used twice in this verse, literal and non-literal. This word

does not necessarily mean an actual cloth/dress, see 2:187, 16:112 for examples.

** Arabic: *shaytan*, is often used as a figurehead for opposition/rebellious force. The plural "devils" would be such opposing forces collectively, whether they be one's own thoughts or others.

*** this use and other verses referring to this incident imply it is NOT referring to a physical cloth, see 7:22, unless we assume they were clothed initially then experiencing/tasting the "tree" made them physically naked somehow. The previous mention of clothing, prior to this verse, was that of *taqwa*. Please note the story of adam is better understood as a parable, e.g. see [here](#) and [here](#) for a brief explanation. It is a preamble to this life, outlining the parameters of the "test", so to speak. That if you abide by God's law you are safe (i.e. worthy of paradise) and if you disobey, nothing can be hidden from Him, i.e. you are exposed before Him, accountability, how to repent/amend, God's mercy/guidance etc.

**** Arabic: *AAinda* (root: Ayn-Nun-Dal) = Preposition: here, with, by, at the point of, about, from, in the presence of. The word denotes the idea of nearness, whether it be actual in the sense of possession or ideational, it also denotes a sense of rank or dignity or opinion, time and place. See [Project Root List](#). "with" or "in the presence of" seems to fit best for occurrences of this preposition.

***** verb form 5, [reflexive](#).

Muhammad Asad (see quranix.net) in his notes states: "*the word masjid, which usually signifies the time or place of prostration in prayer (sujud), evidently stands in this context-as well as in verse 31 below-for any act of worship.*" This is also alluded to in Ibn Kathir. In 7:29 Shakir and Yusuf Ali use "time of prayer", showing some flexibility in understandings.

The phrase "*aqim wajh*" (set-straight/aright or establish - your faces/wills/purposes or entire being/attention) in 7:29 also appears in 10:105, 30:30, 30:43 and [always](#) refers to *deen* (obligation/system, i.e. that which is due), which coincidentally is also mentioned in 7:29. This phrase is NEVER clearly used as a physical directional command. The implication from the context and the use of "*aqim*" imply that to "*aqim wajh*", is to set/make straight/right one's *wajh*, is a reference to intention/sincerity/purpose/approach, which just so happens to also be mentioned later as "ones sincere to Him".

In 7:31 it uses the word "*zeenat*/beauty", when it could have used the word for clothing (as some traditional commentators, e.g. Ibn Kathir, allege that these verses were revealed due to polytheists/idolators going to the Mosques naked/semi-naked, e.g. they used to perform circumambulation naked) but it didn't use this word (i.e. *libasan* as in 7:26) which would have been perfect if it meant that. This could imply *zeenat* is something inherent/intrinsic to the person as well as clothing, i.e. a wider meaning.

If it meant beautify in terms of clothes or oneself, then it seems a little odd to give such a command to males only thus would likely apply to both genders, which would mean women are allowed to attend the Mosques, if one understands it in this manner.

The context of these verses does seem to refer to a mix of people, hence the address "children of adam". Note the use of "they" in 7:26 and 7:28 and how "they" say: "...God/Allah ordered us to do it", i.e. "they" seemingly believe in a diety/God as well.

In these verses there seems to be a link to orders from God and undertaking them in the proper manner, as those sincere. This seems to be the theme of these verses, i.e. getting your mindset/intention right when you approach/undertake something. That mindset is of course *taqwa*.

72:17 ...And whoever turns away from the remembrance of his Lord, He will make him enter/*yaslukhu* a severe retribution.

72:18 And that the **maSaJiD** (are) to/for God, so do not call/*tadu* on anyone alongside God.

72:19 And when God's servant/*abdu* stood up calling on Him, they almost became upon him swarms.

72:20 Say: "I only call on my Lord, and I do not associate anyone with Him."

Implies calling/invoking God can be involved in *maSJD*, and the presence of a mix of people, due to him possibly being swarmed (which has a negative connotation).

17:5 So, when came the first promise, We sent against you servants of Ours, possessors of great might, so they breached the midst of the homes, and was a promise fulfilled.

17:6 Then We granted you victory over them, and We reinforced you with wealth and children, and We

made you more numerous.

17:7 If you do good, you do good for/to yourselves, and if you do bad, then it is for it (i.e. yourselves). So when came the last/next promise, to sadden/distress your faces/wills and enter **al maSJD** just as they entered/*dkhl* it the first time, and to destroy what they had overcome/conquered (with) destruction.

17:8 Perhaps your Lord will have mercy on you, and if you revert then so will We. And We made Hell a gathering place for the rejecters/concealers/ungrateful.

17:9 Indeed, this reading/quran guides to that which is more upright, and it gives glad tidings to the believers who do good work, that for them is a great reward.

This is the only occurrence of definite article and singular '*al maSJD*' implying something well known to the addressed audience. From the previous context, it states the first time their foes went through or breached the midst of their homes, and the second time it says '*al maSJD*' will be entered as they entered it the first time, but there is no explicit/clear mention of doing this previously. Any explanation may have to assume this or explain it somehow.

If the use of "*a*" is meant to refer to something well-known by the addressed audience then perhaps the only "*al masjid*" that we know of, referenced throughout AQ, is "*al masjid al haram*". If so, this would make it the likeliest option, if it could be explained to fit.

Since it describes these people as "our servants" in 17:5 it could imply they served as an instrument for executing a certain divine scheme in some way, e.g. carrying out His retribution. Not necessarily that they were believers as such ([see here](#)).

Analysis of the language used in the prophecy about the 1st time is as if it has happened already, perhaps an obvious point, but prophecy about 2nd time is said as it will happen but in the future. Some traditional commentators explain the latter prophecy as if it also happened already in the past, which does not fit the grammar/words used. There is variance in views about what these prophecies refer to. These verses will be discussed further in part 3 of this work. As it stands the meaning of *maSJD* here cannot be determined with any certainty.

18:21 And like that We made known about them that they might know that God's promise is true and that the Hour there is no doubt in it. When they disputed amongst themselves about their issue, so said: "Build over/upon them a building". Their Lord knows best about them. Those who prevailed on their issue said: "Surely we will take* (to ourselves) over/upon them a **maSJD**."

*verb form 8, reflexive.

Interestingly, almost all translators seemingly neglect certain aspects of this verse:

Firstly, they imply a physical building was built (worse still, a Mosque) over them (i.e. their graves), as some sort of shrine in their memory, which is completely against the message of The Quran (i.e. no saint/human reverence). Some commentators do not distinguish whether this was a good or bad thing, i.e. do not clarify who "prevailed" in the dispute, the right view or wrong view. The flow and logic of the verse would imply those who prevailed were in the right, otherwise there would be little point ending on this note. It seems most commentators have this view also.

Secondly, it clearly states there is a dispute and some said "build a building over/upon them" yet it later says those who prevailed said "surely we will take (to ourselves) a *maSJD* over/upon them" clearly implying there must be a significant difference between each side's position. If traditionally understood, the only difference is one argues for a building, the other argues for a Mosque. What kind of building would have been built by the former side? It would most likely be a communal building, i.e. a Mosque-type building, thus trying to determine the difference in their arguments is difficult going by the traditional understanding. As a side note, Asad makes a reasonable interpretation of the term "over/upon them" as "in their memory", which seems plausible.

Thirdly, the former expression uses "build a building..." and the latter uses "take (to ourselves) a *maSJD*...", as if they were both about building why not use the same word? Not to mention "take to ourselves (a building)" doesn't quite make sense, as it implies a pre-existing thing. To check this, out of 128 occurrences of this specific verb form there are five occurrences that may refer to "taking for/to oneself a structure/building" and they are:

- 29: 41 (implies pre-existing thing)

- 9: 108 (unclear)
- 7: 74 - "take FROM (partitive) its plains palaces" (plains are pre-existing) or from context may refer to existing Thamud structures
- 26: 129 (implies pre-existing thing)
- 16: 68 (implies pre-existing thing)

Thus, the evidence is weighted in favour of a pre-existing thing. To use a reflexive verb such as this, to refer to building/creating something anew seems odd. To refute this, evidence to the contrary would have to be brought. Interestingly, this simple observation helped illuminate the parable of the spider: [click to read](#).

Lastly, since it implies the ones who prevailed had it right, we must ask ourselves what is the message of this verse? Well, clearly for the people in question God gave them a sign in this story. After this lesson, they disputed, some said "build a building over them" and in-between the other side's argument it says 'Their Lord knows best about them' (also mentioned in subsequent verses), implying their number or who they were is not the point, thus no need for a building, as their Lord knows best about them, and it is the outcome/lesson of the story or God's will prevailing that is important. Also, in 18: 22 it says "do not dispute about them except with an argument obvious/apparent", and since AQ does not clarify their number which seems to be the main dispute, the primary obvious/apparent argument is the lesson of their story, and this is what people should be reminded of and take to themselves.

May be interesting to read in conjunction with 2: 125, for a comparison of a similar phrasing "...take (to yourselves) from the status/position of Abraham a time/place of bonding/blessing/honour /commendation...".

Background reading for some traditional perspectives: www.sunniforum.net/showthread.php?t=304

2:113 And the Jews said: "The Nazarenes have no basis," and the Nazarenes said: "The Jews have no basis," while they are both reciting the decree/writ! Like that, those who do not know said a similar thing. So God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection in what they were differing in.

2:114 And who is more wicked/unjust than one who prevented God's **maSaJiD** to be remembered/mentioned His name in them and strived in their ruin/waste/uncultivation? Those! Not it was for them that they enter/dKhl them except as those fearing; they will have humiliation in this world and in the Hereafter a painful retribution.

Note the use of "those!" in 2: 114, implying those previously mentioned are doing this. Are the previous incidences examples of ruining and preventing God's maSaJiD to be mentioned His name in them? If so, the *salat* mentioned in 2: 110 may be of relevance to the context, as it could be argued the regular/timed *salat* is an example of a *maSJD*, i.e. a time of SJD/acknowledgement. (Background: [salat article](#))

Note the use of "enter" implying whatever maSJD is it can be entered, but this is not necessarily an entering of a building, e.g. see how the word *dKhl* is used in 5: 61, 72: 17, 2: 208, 7: 151, 17: 80, 27: 19, 49: 14, 110: 2.

The phrase "not it was for them that they enter them except as those fearing" is a little unusual. For a comparison, this perhaps should be read in conjunction with 48: 27, in which an example of entering "*al masjid al haram*" not fearing is given. Possibly implying they (believers) may have feared previously when entering. If we imagine one group is in a minority and they attempt to disrupt something the majority are trying to uphold then it would be natural to "fear" doing so - of what may happen, e.g. the consequences, e.g. humiliation, or worse. See 41: 26, 7: 204, 17: 46, 15: 91, 23: 67, 43: 31, 25: 32 - for ways in which people cause problems or prevent others from the message.

The traditional understanding is related to attempting to destroy Mosques, however, there is no clear evidence of this taking place in AQ as far as I'm aware.

2:187 Lawful for you nights (of) the abstinence is sexual approach* to your women, they are a garment for you and you are a garment for them. God knows that you used to betray/deceive yourselves so He turned towards you and He forgave you; so now approach** them and seek what God has decreed/written for you. And eat and drink until becomes distinct the white thread from the black thread, of dawn. Then you shall complete the abstinence until the night, and do not approach** them

while you are devoting/cleaving in the **maSaJiD**. These are God's boundaries, so do not transgress them. It is thus that God makes His revelations clear to the people that they may be righteous/God-conscious.

*Arabic: RaFaTh (root: Ra-Fa-Tha)

**Arabic: BaShiR (root: Ba-Shin-Ra)

IF one takes *masajid*=mosques then if women were not allowed in them, it would make this statement illogical, thus clearly implying women could be present in the mosques. It also implies men and women are unlikely to be segregated, as they could approach one another, i.e. interact.

Who in their right mind would approach their wife in a sexual manner in a public Mosque? Was this such a temptation or common practice that AQ had to tell them not to do it? According to history/tradition mosques in those early days were very basic or simply courtyards thus unlikely to have multiple rooms so it seems even more odd to suggest such a thing taking place in a Mosque. This traditional understanding verges on the nonsensical.

IF *masajids*=mosques, why even mention mosques, when there is much greater chance of sexual temptation in the homes during abstinence? The traditional commentators attempt an explanation for this, e.g. Jalalayn/Ibn Kathir say this is referring to '*itikaf*' (spiritual retreat in the mosque) when believers would leave the mosque for sex then return, when they are meant to reside at the mosque for a certain number of days. This is a complete insertion of course, and hardly "clear" as it implies at the end of the verse, and the obvious error as it says "...WHILE YOU are devoting/cleaving IN the *masajid*" not when one leaves them. So, it would seem they interpret it as "...while you are staying in the *masajid* (for *itikaf*)...".

If it did mean '*itikaf*' then this is not explained elsewhere in AQ, e.g. how many days, what does it involve, why, is it obligatory, examples of anyone actually doing it etc. If we are relying upon AQ only for our understanding of this verse, then '*itikaf*' must be rejected outright. The consequence of this however, is that it renders the understanding of *masajid*=mosques illogical, or at least very unusual.

Another explanation put forth for this verse is that sexual approach to your women is permitted in the nights of the abstinence but not when one is staying in the mosques, e.g. The Sacred Mosque (in Mecca). Not for "itikaf" per se but simply a spiritual/devotional retreat there, e.g. travellers to The Sacred Mosque (in Mecca) may have come from afar and thus set up tents there, and this verse is referring to them (a verse cited to support this notion of "residency/staying" is 22:25). Not that I necessarily agree with this explanation, but it is at least more plausible than the Traditional explanation, which advocates a specific practice of "itikaf" rather than an undefined one. It is debatable whether the word "akif" means "reside/stay" according to Quran usage, but in any case people staying-over in the mosque seems odd/impractical if one takes "tawaf" as "circumambulation" for example, and the "hadiy" (gifts/offerings) are also to be taken to such a venue. It could make "circumambulation" rather awkward, and if many residents/gifts/animals, perhaps impossible.

22:39 It is permitted for those who have been persecuted to fight. And God is able to give them victory.

22:40 Those who were expelled from their homes without right, except that they said: "Our Lord is God!" And if it were not for God checking/defending the people, some by others, surely would have been overturned/demolished monasteries and churches/synagogues and synagogues/blessings/bonds/petitions and **maSaJiD** in which the name of God is mentioned/remembered much. And surely God will help those who help Him. Indeed God is Powerful, Noble.

22:41 Those who if We empower them in the land, they uphold/establish the salat/bond, and give forth betterment, and enjoin the right and forbid from the wrong. And to God is the conclusion of matters.

According to CAD "*salawatun*" (the plural of '*salat*') can mean "synagogues", hence translators opting for this. Interestingly, it should be noted that if "*salawatun*" were translated as "prayers", as it is elsewhere in AQ by most translators, it would not fit as "prayers" are not destroyable. Coincidence? The word "*biya'un*" can also mean "synagogues" hence putting it twice above.

The implication of 22:40 is that God does not want these things to be ruined. Somewhat unusually, it singles out '*maSaJiD*' saying "in which the name of God is mentioned/remembered much", implying the others listed do not have this or some *maSaJiD* do not have this. A more detailed study into the possible CAD meanings of "*sawami*" and "*biya'un*" may need to be done.

24: 36 may be interesting to note as it uses "buyoot/houses" not "masajid". IF masjid=mosque, it seems that could have been more appropriate to use.

9:17 It was not for the polytheists that they develop/cultivate/enliven* God's **maSaJiD** (while) witnessing over their own rejection/concealment. For these, their works have fallen, and in the Fire they will abide.

9:18 Only will develop/cultivate/enliven* God's **maSaJiD** is one who believed in God and the Last Day, and upheld/established the bond/salat, and brought forth betterment/zakat, and does not fear except God. Then *perhaps* these that will be of the guided ones.

*Arabic: ya'muru, root: Ayn-Miim-Ra, other occurrences of this form lessen the possibility of "maintain" as a meaning, e.g. see 30:9. Please note the difference between "maintain" and "develop".

These verses likely refer to the mix of polytheists, i.e. those who did and did not break the treaty, see chapter 9. In 9:18 note the use of imperfect and perfect verbs, implying in future only those who did X, Y, Z will be able to develop/enliven God's *maSaJiD*.

Note the important and very interesting use of the word "asa/perhaps" in 9:18 which clearly shows even if you believe and do the aforementioned things you may not be of the guided ones. This notion ties in with verses such as 7:28 in which those who believe in a diety/Allah are doing things not authorised by Him, in other words, one can believe in God but still be on a Quranic journey, purifying their beliefs/practices as they go.

9:107 And those who take* (to themselves) a **maSJD** (for) harming and concealment/rejection and division between the believers and preparing/observing** for whoever battled/warred God and His messenger from before. And they will swear "not we wish except the good", and God bears witness that indeed they are liars.

9:108 Do not observe/maintain/stand in it ever. A **maSJD** founded on God-consciousness from the first day/period is more worthy/truer that you maintain/stand/observe in it; in it (are) men who love to purify themselves. And God loves those who purify.

9:109 Is one who founded his building/structure (*bunyan*) on protection/forethought/consciousness from/of God and His approval better, or one who founded his building on the edge of a cliff about to crumble, so it crumbled with him into the fire of Hell? And God does not guide the wrongdoing people.

9:110 Their building/structure (*bunyan*) which they built will not cease to be a doubt in their hearts except/until that cut to pieces their hearts. God is Knowledgeable, Wise.

*verb form 8, reflexive.

** is a verbal noun, indicating the act of doing as well as the noun itself, thus the meaning can also include "as a preparation/observation"

The verse discusses those concealing themselves under the guise of being good-doers so they can harm/divide believers, spy and help enemies etc. Some related evidence of this understanding, see 58:16, 63:2, 16:92, 16:94.

The word "*bunyan*" does not necessarily mean a physical building here, see 16:26 in which it is commonly taken as a metaphor. It seems to be about the works of an individual, as not everyone can build a mosque. No physical structure will crumble with the disbeliever in the fire of Hell but it is the structure of polytheism/rejection/wrongdoing/etc that will ultimately crumble with him in the fire of Hell. In other words, this usage could be a metaphor, similar to 16:26.

M. Asad notes: "*In verses 109-110, the reference to "the building which they have built" is, obviously, widened beyond the preceding allusion to houses of worship, and allegorically circumscribes here all the "works" and the behaviour of men.*"

There is possibly an issue if we take 9:108 to mean "do not stand in it (i.e. Mosque) ever", because how are believers meant to differentiate Mosques and actually do this, if in 9:107 it implies believers could be duped by such people? Traditionalists explain the context as referring to a rival Mosque being built. Does this mean such a Mosque could NEVER be stood in by a believer? The point being that by using "ever" seems very absolute. If it is not delimited in some way, it could seem impractical/unusual. We could reason that once such a Mosque was not used for this, e.g. run by believers, then believers could stand/observe in it. For example, if "maSJD" meant "time of SJD" then by definition, it would be

delimited.

It may be interesting to note that in 18:21 a *maSJD* seems sufficiently distinct from a *bunyan*, yet in 9:107-110 IF they (*maSJD* and *bunyan*) are taken as the same thing/reference, as is traditionally understood, they seem interchangeable here. Thus, one might expect one side in 18:21 to clarify what kind of building is being proposed by the other side, as they may well have meant a mosque, but this is not addressed.

Summary and Discussion

Taking the above review of occurrences into account, a summarised reference list of the information extracted about maSJD will be shown below:

- set-straight/aright your face/will/purpose with(or 'in the presence of') every **maSJD** and invoke Him
- take (to yourselves) your beauty with(in the presence of) every **maSJD**
- the **maSaJiD** (are) to/for God, so do not call on anyone alongside God
- sadden/distress your faces/wills and enter **AL maSJD** just as they entered it the first time, and to destroy what they had overcome (with) destruction.
- who prevailed on their issue said: "Surely we will take (to ourselves) over/upon them a **maSJD**."
- who is more wicked/unjust than one who prevented God's **maSaJiD** to be remembered/mentioned His name in them and strived in their ruin/waste/uncultivation? Those! Not it is for them that they enter them except (as) those fearing
- do not approach them while you are devoting/cleaving in the **maSaJiD**. These are God's boundaries, so do not transgress them.
- if it were not for God checking/defending the people, some by others, surely would have been overturned/demolished..... **maSaJiD** in which the name of God is mentioned/remembered much
- not for the polytheists that they develop/enliven God's **maSaJiD** (while) witnessing over their own rejection/concealment.
- Only will develop/enliven God's **maSaJiD** is one who believes in God and the Last Day, and upholds the bond/salat, and brings forth betterment, and does not fear except God.
- those who take (to themselves) a **maSJD** (for) harming and concealment/rejection and division between the believers and preparing/observing for whoever battled/warred God and His messenger from before
- Do not observe/maintain/stand in it ever. A **maSJD** founded on God-consciousness from the first day/period is more worthy/truer that you maintain/stand/observe in it; in it (are) men who love to purify themselves

The above list can be used by readers to run their understanding of maSJD through to see how it fits. Some understandings, as discussed on free-minds.org/forum:

Place of SJD (i.e. mosque) and [institution of SJD/obedience](#) fare most poorly in 18:21 and 2:187, especially so in the latter verse. [Act of SJD/compliance](#) and time of SJD/acknowledgement seem to fare ok, however since it is uncommon to read these verses with these meanings it may seem odd for some readers. 17:7 will be quite subjective until the meaning of the context is understood properly.

In Part 3 the terms "*al masjid al haram*" and "*al masjid al aqsa*" will be reviewed in detail, whereupon a more decisive and coherent understanding will hopefully emerge, God Willing.