

Sacred Sites in the Vicinity of Nablus

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Nablus, also known as the Uncrowned Queen of Palestine, is situated 60 km north of Jerusalem, between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. As one of Palestine's largest cities, Nablus has much to offer. We would like to invite you to explore some of the sites linked to events of exceptionally high importance for both believers and historians.



The Great Mosque of Nablus

The Great Mosque (*Jama'a al-Kbir*) is the oldest and the most historically fascinating mosque of Nablus. Its beautiful and massive gate, decorated with marble portico and columns, can be seen in the midst of the old quarter's busy *souq* (vegetable market). However, just behind the mosque's threshold, thanks to its thick stone walls, the bustle of the street is hardly heard, and a person becomes immersed in the quiet and peaceful atmosphere of prayer.

The place has a long history. On its spot originally stood a Roman basilica built in the third century. The edifice was later destroyed in order to be replaced by a Byzantine church. Its image can be seen in the famous sixth-century mosaic, the Madaba Map. In the following centuries, the cathedral was transformed into a mosque, only to become a magnificent Christian place of prayer once again in the times of Crusaders. Finally, in the twelfth century, it was again changed into a mosque by the Ayyubids.

Jacob's Well

Jacob's Well (Bir Ya'qub), traditionally located in the eastern part of the city of Nablus, is the 35-meter-deep well that, according to the Biblical accounts, stands in the land that Jacob bought from Hamor for a "hundred pieces of silver" (Genesis 33:19). It is also believed that here Jesus asked a Samaritan woman to draw water for him to drink (John 4:13–14).



The well has been a site of pilgrimage since that time. The first church built on the site dates back to the end of the fourth century. The well inside the church formed the centerpiece of the crypt beneath the high altar. This original church was destroyed during the Samaritan revolt in 529. In the twelfth century, the Crusaders constructed a new church on the Byzantine foundations. Today, the existing church, which lies six meters below the present ground level, is owned by the Greek Orthodox Church.

Sacred Mount Gerizim

Mount Gerizim (*or Jebel at-Tor*) is one of the two mountains in the immediate vicinity of Nablus and marks the southern side of the valley in which Nablus is situated (the northern side is formed by Mount Ebal). The high mountain is sacred to the Samaritans, who regard it as having been the location chosen by God for a Holy Temple, a claim that, in Samaritan belief, supersedes that of the Temple of Jerusalem.



On the mountain's summit is located a holy rock that the Samaritans believe was the place where Abraham was ready to sacrifice his son Isaac. There also can be seen the ancient ruins of a Samaritan city dating to the Persian and Hellenistic periods that include a temple precinct. In the second century BC, the settlement was destroyed by the Hasmoneans. One can also see the Byzantine remains of an outstanding octagonal monastery built over the ruins of the Samaritan city.

Until now, the mount continues to be the spiritual center for the Samaritan people. Originally, their village below and west of Gerizim's peak was only temporarily occupied for the 40 days of the feast of the Passover. Nowadays, the site where Samaritans annually celebrate the paschal sacrifice is a permanent installation that can accommodate a broad audience of thousands of spectators. Currently, the village consists of modern buildings, among them one that houses the Samaritan Museum, which displays various interesting cultural, religious, and social artefacts.

Nabi Yahya Mosque (Sebastiya)



The Nabi Yahya Mosque (Mosque of the Prophet John) is the main, centrally located, mosque in the picturesque village of Sebastiya. The edifice has massive buttressed walls and decoratively carved columns. It stands on the site regarded since Byzantine times as the place where John the Baptist's body was buried, supposedly by his followers. A church was constructed on the spot of the reputed tomb during the Byzantine era.

In 1160, it was replaced by an impressive Crusader cathedral, whose shape is distinguishable within the present form of the edifice. It is said that it was transformed into a mosque by Saladin in 1187, although some sources state that it was converted by the Mamluks in 1261. At that time, it was dedicated to Nabi Yahya, whose name refers to John the Baptist in Arabic. The site was restored and mostly rebuilt during the nineteenth century while Palestine was ruled by the Ottomans.

Within the mosque's courtyard, a stairway located in a small domed shrine leads underground, where six burial niches can be found, among which are believed to be the tombs of Elisha, Obadiah, and John the Baptist. Local tradition also notes that Sebastiya marks the spot where John the Baptist was beheaded. Many also claim that it contained the site of his prison.

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