Welcome to Nebi Samuel Park
Mount Samuel, Mount of Joy

I daresay there is nowhere in Palestine...or in the entire world, a sight like Nebi Samwil. Not because of its height... but because of its situation. And thus it seems like a center overlooking the best-known places on earth, like nowhere else...” (from a description by the pilgrim Norman McCleod, 1884)

At 885 meters above sea level, Nebi Samuel Park controlled the ancient road (and controls the modern one as well) from Gath Zev to Jerusalem.

“Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpah” (1 Sam. 7:6).
The site is identified as the biblical Mizpah, in light of remains found from the time of the First Temple and the Second Temple, and also the site mentioned in Nehemiah 3:15... “the ruler of the district of Mizpah” and later, the Maccabees “And they assembled together, and came to Mizpah over against Jerusalem: for in Mizpah was a place of prayer heretofore in Israel” (Macc. I: 3, 46).

And Samuel died; and all Israel gathered themselves together, and lamented him, and buried him in his house at Ramah (1 Sam. 25:1).

According to tradition, Nebi Samuel Park is also identified with Rama, Samuel’s burial place. The anniversary of Samuel’s death is marked on the 25th of Iyar, the day of his death.”

This is the place where Gedaliah son of Ahikam was made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam governor in the land, and had committed unto him men, and women, and children, and of the poorest of the land, of them that were not carried away captive to Babylon; then they came to Gedaliah to Mizpah,... then they came to Gedaliah to Mizpah... (Jer. 40:7–8).

Now when all the captains of the forces that were in the fields, even they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had recovered from Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, whom he had recovered from Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, they built the fortress, which controls the road from the

Touring the site
The tour begins at the explanatory sign at the southeast entrance.

The remains seen here are of a residential quarter and main street under which ran a rainwater drainage channel. This is part of a large, densely inhabited settlement from Second Temple times whose dwellings, which had two stories and perhaps more, were built on terraces.

This settlement was established in the second century BCE (the Hellenistic, Second Temple period), apparently by the Seleucid king Antiochus III or Antiochus IV, and continued in existence until the time of the Hasmonean (Hellenistic) kingdom.

The settlement was abandoned during the reign of King Alexander Janneaus, perhaps because it was no longer needed to defend Jerusalem after Alexander expanded his realm.

Remains of a settlement from the Persian period were also found, apparently an administrative center for the province of Judah. Scholars have come to this conclusion based on jar handles stamped with the word yahad, found at the site.

In this area remnants were found of a settlement, from the First Temple period, beginning in the eighth century CE (the time of the kingdom of Judah).

The site is mentioned in the Bible in the context of the Babylonian exile, which began at this time.

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The tour continues westward, where remains can be seen of the wall of the Crusader fortress. When the Crusaders approached Jerusalem in 1099, they saw the city from this place, one of the highest points in the Jerusalem mountains, and therefore they called it Mount of Joy. In the 12th century they built the fortress, which controls the road from the lowlands to Jerusalem.

Continuing along the route, you will see a quarry that also serves as a moat. The builders of the fortress and the church used the local stone, and the quarry was planned as part of the fortress’ defenses. The quarrying was done along a long channel, which is 70 cm wide and 3 m deep.
The opening you see further along the path is a side entrance to the fortress. The main entrance is below it on the west. The ancient road from the lowlands to Jerusalem came from the northwest and the main entrance to the fortress was indirect: People approached it up a ramp raised on large vaults, which can be seen here, and turned left to the entrance.

Below this point, on the descent toward the orchard, is Hannah’s Spring, where according to tradition, Hannah immersed after giving birth to Samuel.

And it came to pass, when the time was come about, the Hannah conceived, and bore a son; and she called his name Samuel: ‘because I have asked him of the Lord’ (1 Sam. 1:20).

Next to the fortress an inn was built for pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. The quarry was turned into an encampment with stables, cisterns and shelters – mainly tents – on its eastern side.

The ground in the encampment area was leveled northward allowing rainwater to drain into channels cut at the western and eastern corners. The water in the eastern canal collected in a pool constructed outside the quarry and the water in the western channel flowed outside to agricultural terraces.

In 1187 (the Ayyubid/Crusader period) the fortress and the wall were destroyed by Saladin and his army to prevent a Crusader return to the site.

Remains can be seen in the encampment area of two pottery ovens from a later period – the Mamluk (Late Muslim) period.

At that time this was a manufacturing area for clay vessels; other firing ovens were uncovered throughout the site. The vaults, which once supported the ramp that ascended to the fortress, were divided into workshops and living quarters.

During the Ottoman period, settlement here was renewed and its synagogue remained in use until 1730. In that year, the mufti of Jerusalem, Sheikh Mohammed al-Halili, expropriated the tomb of Samuel from the Jews, closed its entrance and built a mosque over it. A small Muslim settlement was established at the site.

During World War I, the British, on their way to conquer Jerusalem, fought the Turks here, and on November 21, 1917, the British took Nebi Samuel Park and the mosque was destroyed.

The communication trench that you can see along the path is a remnant of the War of Independence, when the Palmach launched a failed attack on the site in the hope of lifting the threat on Jerusalem. The trench was also used during the Six-Day War, when, on June 6, 1967, Israel captured the place.

Opening hours of the prayer site
Sunday–Wednesday: around the clock, except from 2 A.M. to 4 A.M.
Thursday–Friday: From Thursday 4 A.M. to Friday before the Sabbath begins.
On Rosh Hodesh (the first day of the Hebrew month), the site remains open from 4 A.M. to 2 A.M. the following morning.

Opening hours of the archaeological site: The site is open year-round from 8 A.M. to 4 P.M. (summer time 5 P.M.) On Friday and holiday eves the site closes one hour earlier. Last entrance to the site is one hour before closing.

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