



Courtesy of Nablus Municipality

# Nablus City

## History and Civilization

The city of Nablus, located in the northern West Bank, lies amidst a long valley between the Gerizim (south) and Ebal (north) mountains. The Nablus valley extends to the Jordan River in the east and from Wadi al-Tuffah to the Alexander River in the west.

A very ancient city, Nablus was founded by Canaanite tribes in 2500 BC and named Shechem. It was built over a hill named Tel Balata, located at the eastern entrance of Nablus near Balata village. Since the thirteenth century BC, Nablus was subject to a series of invasions by various foreign nations until the city was conquered by the Romans in 63 BC. Later, in 67–69 BC, Emperor Vespasian rebuilt a new city to the west and called it Neapolis – a Latin word that means “new city,” thereafter named Nablus. The Persians invaded Nablus in 615 AD, then the Romans were defeated by Arab Muslims in 636 AD. The population therefore became a mixture of a Muslim majority and a Christian and Samaritan minority.

General view of the city of Nablus.



Qaryoun Square in the old city.



Al-Nasr Mosque and Manara Clock Tower.



The Church of Jacob's Well.



Khan al-Wakala.

During that period, Nablus referred to Damascus, the Umayyad Caliphate capital, and then to Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate. Later, in 968 AD, Nablus was ruled by Fatimids, Sunni Seljuk Turks, and Ayyubids until 1197 AD, when the Mamluks ruled the city. Following the Mamluk regime, the city was ruled by the Ottomans in 1516, incorporated into Greater Syria, and governed by a number of Ottoman Turk rulers in the seventeenth century. At the same time, Nablus witnessed a wide movement of construction and restoration measures for its historic buildings, and Nablus Municipality was established in 1869.

Nablus came under the British Mandate on September 1, 1918. Following the 1948 *Nakba*, the West Bank, including Nablus, was under Jordanian rule until the 1967 War, when all Palestinian cities were subject to Israeli occupation. The eruption of the first Intifada in 1987, followed by the signing of the Oslo Accords led to the inception of the Palestinian National Authority. When the Israeli government breached the terms of the Oslo Accords, the second Intifada out broke in 2000, when the Israeli army swept through the city, causing political turbulence with its security siege that was imposed for more than eight years.

### The old city...the vivid heart of Nablus

The old city of Nablus is known for its magic, charm, and architectural characteristics, and is regarded as an open museum that contains a number of archeological and historic landmarks. The Islamic and Mamluk patterns and ornaments are demonstrated in a number of buildings and old mosques, such as the northern gate of the Great Salahi Mosque, Alsatoon Mosque, and other historical buildings and houses. The Turkish baths (hammams), part of which were constructed during the Ottoman Era (1516–1918), are among the most important features of the architectural heritage of the old city. These Turkish baths include



Turkish bath located in the old city.  
Photo from Palestine Image Bank.

Al-Shifa and Sumara, which continue to operate even today. Moreover, palaces and castles enrich the features of the city's history, noting most importantly the Touqan, Abdel Hadi, and Al-Agha Nimer palaces. Roads and alleyways are crowded with small-scale industries such as traditional sweets (*halawa*, *zalabya*, sesame paste, and *kanafeh*), blacksmithing, and carpentry.

The old city counts approximately 20,000 inhabitants distributed among six major quarters and alleyways: Habaleh, Aqabeh, Qisariyyeh, Qaryoun, Yasmineh, and Al-Gharb. Nablus natives who live outside the old city are apparently keen to keep its dynamic and vibrant spirit through intensive roaming and shopping there, especially during the month of Ramadan.



Nabulsi soap. Photo from Palestine Image Bank.



Nabulsi *knafeh*.

The prosperous old city is considered a significant residential and commercial center and an important destination for local, national, and international visitors. Despite periods of turbulence and political instability, the old city represents the unique cultural heritage of Nablus.

### Services

Nablus Municipality delivers a wide range of services to the local inhabitants, including **provision of drinkable water**, which covers the city, 4 refugee camps, and 18 villages. The water-network length is 500 km, and average daily production of water is 32,000 m<sup>3</sup>. Average consumption

is 67.7 liters/individual per day. **Wastewater services** are provided through a wastewater network that is 230 km in length, covering 96 percent of the total population. **Solid-waste management services** cover the city and 4 refugee camps, with a daily total of 220–250 tons. **Building of public utilities** includes commercial centers, parking lots, public schools, public parks, and recreation facilities. **Preserving cultural heritage** includes restoration measures for historic buildings, palaces, mosques, arches, and squares located in the old city. **Social and cultural services** are offered through five cultural centers as part of Nablus Municipality. **Other**

**services** include zoning and building regulations, fire-brigade services, meat-slaughtering, and a central vegetable market.

Touristic sites include the old city, including Manara Square, hammams, khans, soap factories, and palaces; Khan Wakala; Jacob's Well; and Sama Nablus Resort. Among the archeological sites are Canaanite Shechem, East and West Roman Cemetery, the Roman Hippodrome, the Roman Amphitheater, and Sebastia Village. Religious sites include the Great Mosque, the mosques of Al-Satoon, Al-Hanbali, and Al-Khader, and St. Jacob's Church.

### Some general statistics

- The total population of Nablus Governorate including the four refugee camps and surrounding localities is 392,407.
- The total area of Nablus District is 605 km<sup>2</sup>, whereas the land area of Nablus city is 29 km<sup>2</sup>.
- There are 258 schools – private, public, and UNRWA-run in Nablus Governorate.
- There are seven hospitals – three private, two public, and two charity/private.
- Regarding tourism facilities, there are seven hotels, 389 restaurants and coffee shops, and ten tourism offices.
- There are seven archeological sites, 11 historic mosques, 8 Islamic shrines, 4 churches, 25 historic palaces, 8 Turkish baths, 23 soap factories, 5 souks and Khans, and 7 public places.

Ongoing Nablus Municipality projects include West Water Treatment Plant, East Water Treatment Plant, Water Loss Reduction, Reuse of Treated Water for Irrigation of 3,000 dunums, Building Six Public Schools, the Restoration of the Old City, Land Registration Project, Water Life Vein (extending water pipeline from Al-Badan to Al-Masaken), Rehabilitation of Jamal Abdul Nasser Public Park, Rehabilitation of the Public Library, Pavement and Rehabilitation of local streets, Nablus Boulevard Project, E-Municipality project, and Rehabilitation of City Main Entrances, West Emergency Unit.

Future projects include Completion of Ring Road Street, Beautification of the city, City Street and Public Space Lighting, Restoration of Toukan Palace, New Central Vegetable Market in the East Part of the city, Professions and Crafts Zone in the Eastern Part of the City, Cultural Palace, Renewable Energy Project, Development of Public Parks of Nablus, and Establishing a Soccer Field in the Eastern Part of the City.

All images are courtesy of Nablus Municipality.

Water Life Vein Project.



Water treatment plant.

