Najd

Najd: A Depopulated Palestinian Village in the Gaza District

Najd was a Palestinian village in the Gaza District, situated on a relatively elevated and level area of the southern coastal plain approximately 14 kilometres northeast of Gaza, at an average elevation of about 50 metres above sea level. Its population reached 620 in the 1944/1945 statistics. Its inhabitants were expelled on 13 May 1948 during the Zionist military advance in the area in the final days of the British Mandate, and the village was subsequently destroyed during the Nakba and the occupation of Palestine in 1948.

Item	Information
Subdistrict	Gaza
Distance from district center	14 km northeast of Gaza
Average Elevation	50 m above sea level
Population in 1931	422
Number of Houses in 1931	82
Population in 1944/1945	620
Estimated Population in 1948	About 719 – a later demographic estimate, not an official census
Total Land Area in 1945	13,576 dunams
Attack and Depopulation	The inhabitants of Najd were expelled on 13 May 1948, just before the establishment of the state of Israel. The available sources do not name the force that expelled them, but state, citing Benny Morris as quoted by Khalidi, that the Palmach's Negev Brigade expelled the inhabitants of nearby Simsim at the same time.
Final Israeli Control	13 May 1948, the date of the expulsion of the inhabitants; the available sources give no separate date for the entry of Zionist forces into the village.
Military Unit	The Palmach's Negev Brigade – uncertain attribution: the available sources do not name the unit that expelled Najd's inhabitants, but state that this brigade expelled the inhabitants of nearby Simsim at the same time (according to Benny Morris as cited by Khalidi)
Cause of Depopulation	Expulsion of the inhabitants by Zionist forces
Settlements Documented on Village Lands	Sderot, founded in 1951 to the south of the village site; and Or ha-Ner, founded in 1957 near the site, to the northeast – both on village lands

Location

Najd stood approximately 14 kilometres northeast of Gaza on a relatively elevated

and level area of the southern coastal plain, at an average elevation of about 50 metres above sea level.

Secondary roads connected the village with several points along the al-Majdal–Gaza highway and with nearby Palestinian villages.

Najd's lands bordered those of Simsim, Huj, Burayr, Dimra, and Bayt Hanun. Simsim was one of the nearest villages, approximately 2 kilometres to the northeast.

Najd Through History

The Arabic name “Najd” means elevated or high ground, reflecting the village's position above the surrounding agricultural land.

In 1596, Najd was a village in the nahiya of Gaza in the Gaza district, with an estimated population of approximately 215.

The villagers paid taxes on wheat, barley, fruit, goats, beehives, vineyards, and other forms of agricultural production.

In the late nineteenth century, Najd was described as a small village containing a well and a pond.

As its population increased during the British Mandate, the village expanded northwestward.

Architecture and Public Facilities

The inhabitants of Najd were Muslims, and the village houses occupied the elevated ground around its small built-up centre.

The built-up area covered approximately 26 dunams in the 1944/1945 statistics.

Najd did not have its own school. Village children attended the school in nearby

Simsim, approximately 2 kilometres to the northeast.

Local Palestinian documentation also mentions a shrine known as Maqam al-Shaykh Hammad, although this detail derives primarily from local village accounts.

Population

The 1922 census recorded 305 inhabitants in Najd.

By the 1931 census, the population had increased to 422 people living in 82 houses.

According to the 1944/1945 statistics, the village population reached 620.

The estimate of approximately 719 inhabitants in 1948 is a later demographic estimate rather than an official British Mandate census figure.

Palestine Remembered estimates the number of refugees and their descendants at 4,417 in 1998.

Population of Najd

Year	Population	Note
1596	About 215	Historical estimate based on Ottoman records
1922	305	Official census
1931	422	Official census
1944/1945	620	Government of Palestine statistics
1948	About 719	Later estimate
1998	4,417	Estimate of refugees and their descendants

Number of Houses

The 1931 census recorded 82 houses in Najd.

The figure of approximately 139 houses for 1948 is a later estimate rather than an

official census count.

Land of Najd

According to the 1944/1945 statistics, Najd had a total land area of 13,576 dunams.

Arab ownership amounted to 12,669 dunams, Jewish ownership to 495 dunams, while 412 dunams were classified as public land.

The official statistics reviewed do not provide sufficient support for describing exactly 264 dunams as roads and wadis, and this article therefore retains the official public-land classification.

Total	**13,576**
Ownership Category	**Area in Dunams**
Arab ownership	12,669
Jewish ownership	495
Public land	412

Agriculture and Economic Life

The inhabitants of Najd depended primarily on agriculture and animal husbandry. Grain fields and fruit orchards surrounded the village on nearly all sides.

Fruit trees were concentrated on the northern and northeastern sides, where irrigation water was available from wells, and were also planted in the beds of wadis crossing the village lands.

According to the 1944/1945 statistics, cereal cultivation covered 12,344 dunams: 11,916 Arab-owned dunams, 427 Jewish-owned dunams, and 1 dunam of public land.

Irrigated and plantation land covered 511 Arab-owned dunams, while 10 Arab-

owned dunams were devoted to citrus and bananas.

Uncultivable land covered 685 dunams: 206 Arab-owned dunams, 68 Jewish-owned dunams, and 411 dunams of public land.

The Arab built-up area covered 26 dunams.

Total	12,669	495	412	13,576
Type of Use	**Arab**	**Jewish**	**Public**	**Total**
Citrus and bananas	10	0	0	10
Irrigated and plantation land	511	0	0	511
Cereals	11,916	427	1	12,344
Built-up area	26	0	0	26
Uncultivable land	206	68	411	685

Khirbat Najd

Khirbat Najd was located south of the village.

The site contained rough stone foundations of ancient buildings, as well as caves or vaulted remains and cisterns.

These remains indicate earlier human activity in the area, although the principal sources reviewed do not provide precise dates for all of the archaeological features.

The Expulsion of Najd's Inhabitants

The inhabitants of Najd were expelled on **13 May 1948**, one day before the end of the British Mandate and the declaration of the State of Israel.

The depopulation occurred amid Zionist military advances in the Gaza and northern Negev area during the first half of May, as the Palmach's Negev Brigade

pushed northward and eastward while the Giv'ati Brigade expanded southward.

PalQuest and Walid Khalidi, transmitting an account by Israeli historian Benny Morris, state that the inhabitants of neighbouring Simsim were expelled at the same time by the Negev Brigade.

The detailed Najd account, however, does not explicitly identify the unit that directly entered Najd itself. This article therefore does not conclusively assign the village's capture to a particular brigade or battalion.

The account derived from Benny Morris is cited here only as transmitted through Walid Khalidi and PalQuest and not through direct reliance on the Israeli source.

Was Najd Occupied During Operation Barak?

Palestine Remembered's summary table classifies Najd among the villages occupied during Operation Barak and identifies the Negev Brigade as the attacking force.

Operation Barak took place from 9 to 13 May 1948 and involved forces from the Giv'ati and Negev Brigades.

However, PalQuest's detailed Operation Barak entry does not include Najd in its list of affected villages, even though Najd's documented depopulation date of 13 May falls within the operation's timeframe.

The detailed village account also confirms the expulsion on 13 May but does not explicitly name Operation Barak.

The most cautious formulation is therefore that Najd's depopulation occurred **within the military and chronological context of Operation Barak and the simultaneous advances of the Negev and Giv'ati Brigades**, while a definitive attribution of Najd's capture specifically to Operation Barak or directly to the Negev Brigade requires more precise documentation.

Occupation and Depopulation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
Depopulation of the village	13 May 1948	The inhabitants of Najd were expelled just before the establishment of the state of Israel. Benny Morris, as cited by Khalidi, writes that the Palmach's Negev Brigade expelled the inhabitants of nearby Simsim at the same time, as part of a number of small pushes northwards and eastwards in coordination with the Giv'ati Brigade's southward expansion in the first half of May.
Settlement on village lands	1951	The settlement of Sderot was founded on village lands, to the south of the village site.
Settlement on village lands	1957	The settlement of Or ha-Ner was founded on village lands, near the village site to the northeast.

Israeli Settlements on Najd's Lands

Sderot

Sderot was established in **1951** south of the Najd village site on village lands.

Or ha-Ner

Or ha-Ner was established in **1957** on Najd's lands, close to and northeast of the former village site.

Israeli Settlements on Najd's Lands

Name	Year Established	Relationship to the Village
Sderot	1951	Established south of the Najd village site on village lands
Or ha-Ner	1957	Established on Najd's lands close to the site to the northeast

Najd After the Nakba

According to the field documentation relied upon by Walid Khalidi, the village site was fenced.

Old trees, cactus plants, Christ's-thorn bushes, and sycamore trees grew across the site, which also contained crumbled walls of buildings whose original functions were difficult to identify.

An irrigation canal also remained, while the surrounding village lands were cultivated.

Khalidi's field description suggested that the presence of old trees and the condition of the site might indicate that it had at some point been treated as a protected natural area, although this should not be interpreted as confirmation of its current administrative status without a contemporary source.

This description reflects the condition of the site during the field documentation relied upon by Walid Khalidi and should not necessarily be interpreted as a comprehensive survey updated to 2026.

Sources

- PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Najd.
- PalQuest: Najd.
- PalQuest: Operation Barak.
- Palestine Remembered: Najd, Gaza District.
- Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains*: Najd, as reproduced by Palestine Remembered.
- Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains*, entry on Najd.
- Government of Palestine, censuses of 1922 and 1931.
- Government of Palestine, Department of Statistics, *Village Statistics, 1945*.