

The Cities of Mizpah

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Preface: There are possibly six different cities or places which are given the name *Mizpah*.

1. The Hebrew:
 - a. First of all, we have the fairly rare masculine noun *mits^opeh* (מִצְפֵּה) [pronounced *mitz^o-PEH*], which means *watchtower, lookout point, outlook point*. This word is only found in Isa. 21:8 II Chron. 20:24 Strong's #4707 BDB #859. However, the corresponding verb, *tsâphâh* (צָפַח) [pronounced *tsaw-FAW*], is found many times in Scripture. It means *to look out, to view, to look about, to spy, to keep watch*. Strong's #6822 BDB #859. Therefore, the meaning of this word is well-established, and such a name would be reasonably given to several places of high altitude (or with a good natural lookout point) over a large amount of land.
 - b. The proper nouns built upon this are almost identical. The first is *mits^opeh* (מִצְפֵּה) [pronounced *mitz^o-PEH*], and this proper noun is found in Joshua 11:8 15:38 18:26 Judges 11:29 I Sam. 7:5–7 22:3 II Chron. 20:24 Jer. 40:6, 8, 12, 13 41:1.¹ It is transliterated *Mizpeh*. Strong's #4708 BDB #859.
 - c. The second proper noun is *mitspâh* (מִצְפָּה) [pronounced *mitz-PAW*], and it is found in Gen. 31:49 Joshua 11:3 Judges 10:17 11:11, 34 20:1, 3 21:1, 5, 8 I Sam. 7:6, 11, 12, 16 10:17 I Kings 15:22 II Kings 25:23, 25 II Chron. 16:6 Neh. 3:7, 15, 19 Jer. 40:10, 15 41:1, 3, 6, 10, 14, 16 Hos. 5:1.² It is transliterated *Mizpah*.
 - d. I would recommend strongly against making any hard and fast differentiation between the two proper nouns on the basis of one vowel point, seeing as how that vowel point would have been added hundreds of years after the original text was *penned*.
 - e. The definite article is used with *Mizpah* in Gen. 31:49 Judges 10:17 11:11, 34. I doubt that this means that these two references are of the same place.³
2. According to ZPEB, there are 6 possible *Mizpeh*'s, so we will approach it from that viewpoint to begin with the three which would be east of the Jordan:
 - a. When Jacob and Laban decided to split up (Jacob had worked for Laban for 14 years, married two of his daughters, and was essentially taken advantage of by Laban), they made a heap of stones and gave it several names, one of which was *Mizpeh*, because, as Jacob said, "[May Jehovah watch between you and me when we are absent from one another.](#)" (Gen. 31:49b). The idea was that Laban was a rotten sneak, and there was no telling what Laban might do or concoct while Jacob was not watching him; so the idea was that God would keep an eye on him. There is no indication that this became the name of a city here or that there was a city named that here.
 - b. Ramath-mizpeh (Joshua 13:26) and Mizpah of Gilead (Judges 11:29):

¹ This is according to *The Englishman's Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament*, George Wigram; Hendrickson Publishers, ©1997; First Printing; Appendix p. (34). My Hebrew Bible (which is Owen's) is not in agreement. However, recall that the vowel points (the only difference between the nouns) were added thousands of years later and that there are probably variant readings in the Masorite text.

² Again, according to *The Englishman's Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament*, George Wigram; Hendrickson Publishers, ©1997; First Printing; Appendix p. (34). I assume the association of particular passages with both spellings perhaps means that there are slightly divergent readings in these passages.

³ According to ISBE, most of the references carry the definite article, something which I did not check. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. III; p. 2068.

- i. In Joshua 13:26, we find Ramath-mizpeh, which is in northern Gilead.
- ii. In the book of Judges, the Ammonites (who are east of the Jordan) gathered for war against the Israelites in Gilead. The Israelites camped in Mizpah. ZPEB supposes that this Mizpah is north of the Jabbok River and my NASB map has it south of the Jabbok River (Gilead is on both sides of the Jabbok). However, if this is the same Mizpeh found in Joshua 13:26, then it would be north of the Jabbok.⁴
- iii. Mizpah was Jephthah's home town. Judges 10:17 11:11, 29–31
- c. W. Ewing (the author of the article in ISBE) identifies the previous Mizpah's as one and the same. He also says that this is the Mizpah which was first taken and then burned by Judas Maccabæus in I Macc. 5:35).⁵
- d. There is a third Mizpeh east of the Jordan in Moab. This is where David took his parents when being pursued by Saul (I Sam. 22:3). It is possible that this is another name for Kir of Moab (the capital of Moab). The site of Kir (which is modern Kerak) fits the etymology of *mizpeh*. It would not be unusual for the Israelites to know this city by one name and for the Moabites to know it by another.
- 3. Then we have the three Mizpah's which are west of the Jordan:
 - a. There is a Mizpah in northern Galilee mentioned in Joshua 11:3 (the land of Mizpeh) and in Joshua 11:8 (the valley of Mizpeh). This is partly where Joshua's northern campaign took place. It is not even clear if these are the same Mizpeh, and we certainly do not know any more about them than their very general location. J. A. Thompson places this Mizpeh at the foot of Mt. Hermon.⁶
 - b. There is a Mizpeh mentioned one time in the territory of Judah (Joshua 15:38). Context seems to place this near Lachish (v. 39), so it is assumed that it is *near the great fortress of Lachish*.⁷ Lachish, by the way is roughly even with the middle of the Dead Sea and one-third of the way from the Mediterranean Sea to the Dead Sea (which would place Mizpeh pretty close to the border of Israel and Philistia).
 - c. The most important *Mizpeh* of Scripture is the Mizpeh of Benjamin (Joshua 18:26), in Central Israel, roughly 10 miles north of Jerusalem.

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The Mizpah of Benjamin	
Scripture	Information
Joshua 18:26	Located in Benjamin.
Judges 19:1–21:25	When the Levite's concubine was abused, Mizpah was a gathering point for the Israelites. Therefore, it was a central location and a meeting place even then (see Judges 20:1 I Sam. 7:5 10:17).
I Sam. 7:2–7	This particular Mizpah appeared to become the new political and/or spiritual center of Israel when Samuel summoned the house of Israel to Mizpah. Prior to this, Samuel had told Israel to remove the idols and to serve Jehovah-God alone.
I Sam. 7:10–14	The Philistines took this gathering of Israel as an offensive action and advanced against Israel. However, God provided Israel with some <i>supernatural</i> help, and He confused the Philistines with horrendous thunder. Israel was able to deploy from Mizpah and push the Philistines all the way below Bethcar.

⁴ Obviously, there *could* be two Mizpeh's here.

⁵ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. 2068; p. 833. In I Macc. 5:35, the city is listed as Maapha or Alema.

⁶ *The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p.833.

⁷ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 4, p. 255.

The Mizpah of Benjamin

I Sam. 7:16	Samuel developed a route that he followed each year, going from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah. He acted as a judge over Israel in these three places.
I Sam. 10:17–25	Samuel will gather all of the people of Israel into Mizpah and Israel will ask for Saul to be set as king over them. Again, the gathering here indicates that Mizpah is a political center in Israel.
I Kings 15:22 II Chron. 16:6	Mizpeh had to be in the neighborhood of Ramah and Gibeon, as King Asa used the timber and stones of Ramah (they were the materials used in the fort of Baasha) to fortify Gibeon and Mizpah against any offensive launched by Baasha.
II Kings 25:22–25 Jer. 40:1–41:10	During the time of the deportation, Jeremiah stays in Mizpah with Gedeliah (Gedeliah is a temporary ruler over Judah). This appears to be the Mizpah of Benjamin, although it could be the one in Judah.
Neh. 3:7	Repairs are made on Mizpah when Israelites return to Judah after the deportation. Now, personally, I tend to associate Jerusalem with Judah, although it is originally in Benjamin (Jerusalem is on the Judah-Benjamin border). However, the Mizpah closest to Jerusalem (which is mentioned in this reference and in the reference directly above) is in Benjamin. That Mizpah is much closer to Jerusalem than the Mizpah of Judah. To give a Texan analogy, El Paso, Texas is much closer to Phoenix, Arizona than it is to Houston, Texas.
Neh. 3:15, 19	Some citizens of Mizpeh were responsible for many of the repairs under Nehemiah.
I Macc. 3:46	Mizpeh was used as city for an important assembly under Judas Maccabæus. Mizpeh, in this portion of the Apocrypha, is also called a former place of prayer for Israel.

Possible Modern Location: Nebi Samwil (4 miles northwest of Jerusalem; altitude 2935 ft. and 500 feet above the surrounding area) or Tell en-Nasbeh, which is on top of an isolated hill 8 miles north of Jerusalem. Nebi Samwil is a tall mountain peak which looks down over the Valley of Aijalon, *which is the best route between the Mediterranean coast and the Jordan Valley*. This is the route that Joshua followed when he conquered southern Palestine. Tell en-Nasbeh apparently lacked natural defensive military features, so that the ancient city here *had some of the heaviest walls of any Palestinian fortress because it was so vulnerable to attack*.⁸ Tell en-Nasbeh was excavated by F. W. Badé and he reports that there was a long line of occupation from the *Early Bronze Age to the Maccabe period, with evidence of strong fortification in Asa's time*.⁹ There were stamped jar handles found here with the letters MSH and MSP, the latter of which could refer to *Mizpah*.

The author in ZPEB (M. Abel) preferred the Nebi Samwil location, as it is closer to Jerusalem and it overlooks Gibeon in the Valley of Aijalon, which is in keeping with the Gedeliah story in Jeremiah. In case you are interested, there is more detail under Mizpah in volume 4 of *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Modern locations for some of the other Mizpah's are found in *The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; p. 833 and in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Vol. III; p. 2068.

- d. ISBE suggests that the use of *mizpeh* as a masculine noun in II Chron. 20:24 is a mistake and that this is another city known as *Mizpeh* in Judah. Its location near Tekoa (II Chron. 20:20) precludes this from being identical to the other Mizpeh in Judah¹⁰ (neither of my other two main sources suggested this).

⁸ Quoted and paraphrased from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 4, p. 255.

⁹ *The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p.833.

¹⁰ Tekoa is 10 miles south of Jerusalem and Lachish is bordering Philistia on the west. Even given that there is a city known as Mizpeh in the vicinity of both locations, they are too far apart for this to be the same city.

4. It is reasonable to conclude that most of the Biblical references to Mizpah refer to the Mizpah of Benjamin (which territory later became a part of Judah).

Bibliography

1. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*; Hendrickson Publishers; ©1996; pp. 859.
2. *The Englishman's Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament*, George Wigram; Hendrickson Publishers, ©1997; First Printing, Appendix p. (34).
3. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. III; pp. 2068–2069.
4. *New American Standard Bible, Study Edition*; A. J. Holman Company, ©1975 by The Lockman Foundation.
5. *The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; pp. 832–833.
6. *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 4, pp. 254–257.

It is clear, when examining the sources of many the articles above that they have examined more ancient and better sources. However, there are so many hours in a day, so that, in order for me to do what I need to do, I need to stand upon the shoulders of hundreds of great Christian men who have preceded me.

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