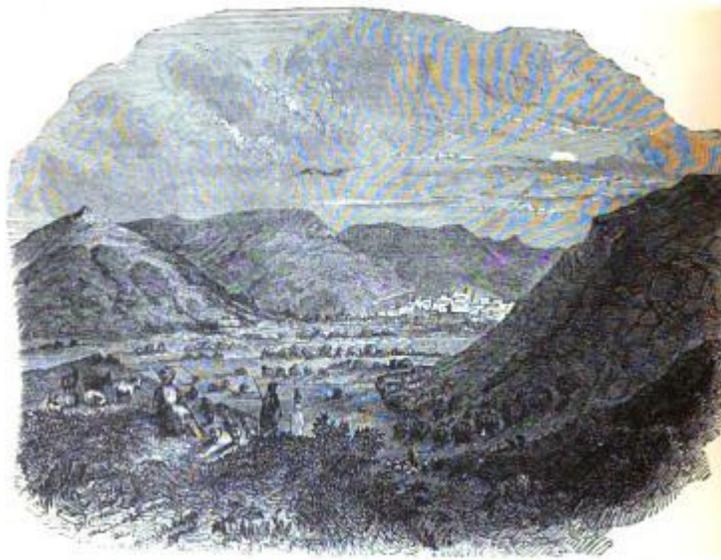


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The Land of Sacred Story
By **John Lemley**,
Editor of the Zion's Watchman
And author of Personal Recollections
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(p. 212)



THE GATHERING PLACE OF ISRAEL. MT. GERIZIM AND TEMPLE TO THE LEFT.
SHECHEM IN CENTRE. MT. EBAL TO THE RIGHT.

On Mount Gerizim stood the great Samaritan temple to which the woman as she talked at Jacob's well with the Saviour, pointed and said: "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain," to which the Lord revealed to the astonished woman the fact that the true worship of God depends not on the place but on the worshipper; that "neither in this mountain," (Gerizim) "nor yet at Jerusalem," shall men "worship the Father," but "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

(p. 213) A remnant of the ancient Samaritans still live in Shechem and at stated times come to this mountain to worship, on the summit of which are the ruins of an ancient temple, near which they point out a rock as the altar of their temple, which they built here about the same time that the Jews rebuilt the temple at Jerusalem after the Babylonish captivity. This is, perhaps, the only spot in all the world where the feast of the passover is to-day observed in its primitive way. But the Samaritans are fast passing away, and before many years have elapsed, the feast of the passover, as observed on Mount Guerizim, will have forever ceased.

It will be remembered that after the kingdom of Israel had been destroyed and the ten tribes carried into eastern captivity by the Assyrians, the country was gradually filled up with a

foreign population. "And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel." 2 Kings, 17:24. An Israelitish priest was also sent amongst them, who taught the Jewish religion, which they in part adopted. When the tribes of Judah returned from the Babylonish captivity and commenced the rebuilding of the temple, the Samaritans, with friendly intent, wished to join them in the work, but the exclusiveness of the Jewish character, intensified, no doubt by the captivity, repelled the proffered aid. They were, by the same jealous spirit, excluded from the participation in the worship of the Jews. The breach thus formed gradually widened, and war and bloodshed followed, so that in our Saviour's time the two nations held no intercourse whatever, hence the surprise of the woman of Samaria when the Lord asked her for water at Jacob's well.

Passing this amphitheatre, just described, the mountains again closed in upon the valley, forming two walls extending for three or four miles westward. At the entrance of this narrow valley, with Gerizim and Ebal to the east as outposts, lies Nablous, or ancient Shechem. The situation is one of (p. 214) great beauty, stretching along this fertile valley, with gardens on either side extending to the base of the mountains. Another striking feature of the place is, it lies at the "summit" of the valley. The city being exactly on the height of the water-shed, the streams divide within the city, part running east to the Jordan, and part west to the Mediterranean. These streams, cool and sparkling, render the environs beautifully green and fertile. The almond, fig, olive and pomegranate trees flourishing abundantly adding very much to the natural beauty of the place, and the people, in their bright holiday dresses of many colors, principally red, walking or sitting under the foliage of trees, presented a picture peculiarly oriental and fascinating to the admiring eye. Nablous (the Neapolis of the Romans) claims to be the second city in Palestine, having a population of 13,000. But we doubt the claim, as Joppa contains a population of 16,000, and Acre, under the shadows of Carmel, seeks honors with Beyrout. But it is a very ancient place, and seems to share historic honors in this respect with Damascus, dating back to Abraham's time, for he "passed through the land unto the place of Sichem." Gen., 12: 6. Here he tarried for a season and received the promise of the land for his seed, and here he built an altar, and here he afterwards met Melchisedek and blest him. Jacob also remained for a time near this town; Simeon and Levi here slaughtered the entire male population to avenge the dishonor of their sister Dinah. It was made, after the conquest, of the land, a city of refuge, and became the great gathering-place of all Israel during the life-time of Joshua. It was the capital of the kingdom set up by Abimelech hi the time of the Judges, and afterwards destroyed by him. It was on top of the mountain over against the city where Jotham stood at the time he spake his memorable parable of the trees going "forth to anoint a king over them." Judges, 9: 7-15. Here "all Israel were come" to make Rehoboam king, and here (after the rebellion, Jeroboam having been called out of Egypt, whither he had fled during the reign of Solomon), was proclaimed king. It was (p. 215) at this time that he rebuilt Shechem and also set up the idol worship at Bethel. In the distribution of the country, it fell to the lot of Ephraim. At the present there can be seen the ruins of the " church of the Passion," built in 1167, and the ruins of the church of the "Knights of St. John." On one of the back streets is the synagogue of the Samaritans. It is a small building with whitewashed walls and matted floor. This is the modern "temple," where services are regularly held, and where officiates the high-priest who is "in the succession," being a descendant of the tribe of Levi. They observe all the Mosaic festivals. They also exhibit, with great pride and veneration, the ancient Samaritan Codex of the Pentateuch, which they regard as a priceless treasure. This book is their *fetish*, and though of undoubted antiquity, their claim that it is over 3,000 years old and was written by Abishma, a great

grandson of Aaron, is of course mythical. They reject all of the Bible except the Pentateuch, and repeat their prayers in the Samaritan dialect, although Arabic is now the colloquial language of the sect.

The history of the race does not afford a more extraordinary spectacle than this fragment of people preserving their identity through all the storms and persecutions of 2,000 years, clinging with a death-like tenacity to their ancient beliefs and customs, and living where their forefathers lived twenty centuries ago. Their history is strangely pathetic, well worthy of thought and study.

Justin Martyr was a native of this ancient city, and was the great apologist of Christianity in that early age. After the unwearied efforts of attempting to bring the learned pagans of western Asia to a knowledge of Christ, he suffered martyrdom A. D.- 167.

The present population, until quite recently, had the unenviable reputation of being exceedingly quarrelsome and turbulent, and discourteous to strangers. Formerly, Christians passing through the place were greeted with the cry of *Nozrani* (Nazarene) and were pelted with stones. We passed through their streets, and stopped at one of their khans (p. 216) (hotels) and took dinner, undisturbed. The streets are narrow and thronged with donkeys and camels and their noisy drivers. Upon the whole, our stay here was quite pleasant.

Leaving Shechem, we passed down a delightful valley over a good road amid running streams of water and luxuriant fields of grain. Here for the first time we noticed women and girls gathering tares out of the wheat-fields. The worthless weed looked very much like a good grain stalk, but if left to grow, will absorb all the moisture from the atmosphere and kill out the grain. How the picture of our Lord's parable of the tares, which an enemy sowed in the field while men slept, was brought to mind. Only the Lord, in His infinite love, suffers the tares to grow until the harvest, while these *fellaheens* pluck them up from among the growing grain.

We are now on the southern borders of Samaria. The country is most charmingly beautiful. Mountains are bold and grand with rich, fruitful valleys between, presenting picturesque scenery. These fertile valleys, if they were only properly cultivated, would yield immense crops. There are also fine olive yards—the finest we have yet seen. The olive trees as seen in the distance look very much like our apple tree, but upon a nearer approach they are quaint, gnarled, old trees which twist themselves into a thousand fantastic shapes. The wood of the olive tree is said to have no grain, hence it is brittle as glass, yet, strange as it may seem, it attains a great age, some of the trees being a thousand years old. A good tree will average five bushels of olives per annum. There are a vast number of olive yards throughout the land, and olive oil is one of the most important products of the country. These yards are not owned by one man, but a number of parties will have an interest in them, one man only owning two or three trees. Probably as many as five hundred persons have an interest in the grove through which we are riding, which is about a mile in extent. Useful as this tree is, it is taxed. Every tree pays a certain tax, and, in addition, one.....

Comments on this section from the Editor of theSamaritanUpdate.com

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