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The Land of Promise:  
Notes of a Spring-Journey  
From Beersheba to Sidon  
By Horatius Bonar, D.D.  
London: James Nisbet & Co., Berners Street  
1858

(p. 364)...

As we descended the height we came upon the village of *Howarah*. The valley or ravine is very rugged and stony, without a tree, though at the bottom there is good soil, on which crops are growing. A woman is cutting down the thorns at one part of the hill for fuel, reminding us of the thorns ready for the fire, so often given us as a figure of the unfruitful soul. We saw several villages to the left, that is westward, *Ain Abus*; more to the left, or south-west, *Kuza*; the right *Beitah*. About half-past three we passed *Howarta*, a village to the left; a little farther, on the same side, on one of the slopes of Gerizim, *Kefer Kullin*, and on the opposite side *Anupta*, circled with its olives. We now began to wind round *Gerizim*, or *Jebel et-Tur* as it is called; and as we did so, Mount *Ebal* came in front of us. The sun was now getting low and Gerizim was intercepting his radiance, though he had perhaps an hour yet of his descent to make. We were impatient to reach Jacob's Well, and afraid lest the shadows should overtake us. So we pushed on, and in a short time were wandering amid the ruins and wild-flowers that (p. 365) BIB YAKUB. surround its mouth. The broken pillars, crumbling walls, shattered stones, we did not take much interest in. Though above a thousand years old, they were to us merely the memorials of the superstition, which, throughout this land, has sought to materialize everything, and to substitute for the spiritual, the sentimental or the sensuous. The flowers were various and beautiful, reminding us of One who so often used them in his holy lessons. They spoke to us more of Him than did the ruins which lie scattered on all sides.

A large arch or vault, on a level with the ground, covers the mouth of the well, and forms a small, square chamber above it. Into this we scrambled down, in order to see into the well, which, like many eastern wells, seems to narrow at the top, making the aperture much smaller than the main-shaft. We were sadly disappointed at finding no mouth at all, nothing but broken stones covering the whole surface of this chamber, in the centre of which the mouth of the well should have been. A dozen of the natives were hanging about the ruins, some holding our ponies, the rest doing nothing; so we called them and asked to be shewn the aperture. We were told, that recently some heavy rains had loosened part of the arch, and brought down a mass of debris upon the hole. We asked if it could not be removed. They shook their heads. We tried to remove it ourselves, but in vain; nor was our attempt quite a safe one, for had the stones thus jammed together and filling up the space given way, we might have seen (p. 366) MOUTH OF WELL. more of Jacob's well than we had any desire to do.<sup>1</sup> It was sufficient to know from good authority that the well was about ten feet in

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<sup>1</sup> The Jerusalem Itinerary (A.D. 333)"though referring to the scene at the well (John iv.) can hardly be said to speak of the actual well, but only of " Sechar" where it was. After mentioning *Neapolis* (Nablus), and *Mons*

diameter,<sup>2</sup> seventy-five feet deep, and that sometimes there was water in it, and sometimes again almost none. The chamber over the mouth, in which we now were, may possibly have been what has been suggested, "a resting-place for the weary traveller;"<sup>3</sup> but it is as likely to have been part of the substructures of the church,—a cell where the altar stood as an early writer affirms.<sup>4</sup>

Finding that we could make nothing of the interior of the well, we came up out of this chamber and took our seat upon the ledge, as once the Lord had done, (p. 367) SCENE AT THE WELL. more weary than we, for he had *walked* since morning, and it was hot noon when he reached this spot. We were not much fatigued, and even though we had been, the evening air was enough to revive us. The afternoon had been altogether one of the most thoroughly delicious that we had ever enjoyed; the mild sunshine, the soft breeze, and the slight haze that took off the heat, while it did not dim the blue, all combining to make the scenes we have traversed doubly beautiful. In no light could we have seen them all to greater perfection. The scene, the sky, and the hour, well suited each other. So we felt, as we sat down with our Bibles to read together the fourth chapter of the gospel of John. The ledge on which we were sitting was not the same as existed in ancient times, though there must have been a raised ledge or low wall, like that of Beersheba, on which the Lord sat; but the well was the same; the hills were the same; the vale was the same; the road leading westward to the city was the same, and the way northward to Galilee, which the Lord was about to take, was the same; only the time of day was different, for the mountain shadows were lengthening, and Gerizim was intercepting the rays of the sun, that then beat with its full noon-force upon His head. One may conceive how the words sounded then, "IF THOU KNEWEST THE GIFT OF GOD, AND WHO IT IS THAT SAITH TO THEE, GIVE ME TO DRINK; THOU Wouldest HAVE ASKED OF HIM, AND HE WOULD HAVE GIVEN THEE LIVING WATER," (John iv. 10). (p. 368) EBAL.

Then mounting our horses, and giving a last look to the spot, we went down the slope; for the well is on a slight elevation, a prolongation of the base of Gerizim. Glancing at Joseph's tomb as we passed, we went up the valley,<sup>5</sup> with Gerizim on our left, and Ebal on our right.

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*Agazaren*, and *Sechim*, the old traveller adds, "inde (i. e. from *Sechim*) passus mille, locus est cui nomen Sechar, unde descendit mulier Samaritana ad eundem locum ubi Jacob puteuni fodit," &c. And then he adds, in reference to Sechar, "ubi sunt arbores plantani quos plantavit Jacob, et balneus qui de eo puteo lavatur." Jerome speaks of Paula's entering a church built on the side of *Garizim*, "circa puteum Jacob" (Epitaph. Pauls). The ruins of this church are often referred to by the pilgrims and writers of succeeding ages. "Historia dell Antica e Moderna Palestina, dal Vincenzo Bendini" (1641), Part ii. p. 39. "El dev-oto peregrino y viage de Tierra Santa, per Antonio del Castillo," (1666) "esta toda arruinada," p. 301. See "Narrative of Mission of Inquiry," &c. p. 212. Dr Wilson's *Lands of the Bible*, vol. ii. 54. Dr Robinson's *Bibl. Res.* vol. ii. 284; vol.iii. 132.

<sup>2</sup> This is greater than the western well of Beersheba, which was nearly six feet, but less than the eastern, which was twelve. These were, however, not nearly so deep as this of Jacob.

<sup>3</sup> Narrative of Mission, etc., p. 212.

<sup>4</sup> Bonifacius, cited by Quaresmius, in Dr Robinson, vol. ii. p. 284.

<sup>5</sup> The Moslem Wely over Joseph's tomb, takes away the interest attaching to such a place, if it be really the patriarch's place of sepulture. It may be so, and perhaps marks the site of the ancient *Shechem*, for that town must have been nearer the well than the modern Nablus. Jacob would not have dug a well two miles from his place of abode. Eastern towns like Hebron, have frequently changed their places, even while retaining the locality, creeping up and down a hill or valley, as convenience or safety suited. Sychar may not have been so far up the valley as Nablus, but nearer the well. Neapolis and Sychar may have corresponded to each other as did Kainopolis (Bezetha) and Jerusalem. The Jerusalem Itinerary makes Neapolis, Sechim, and Sichar, different places. Van de Velde mentions *Askar* at the foot of Ebal, which he takes to be the birth-place of Judas. It must be *Sychar*.

On Ebal we observed numerous rock-cut tombs; and all along that side of the mountain wall, we were struck with the ruggedness of the grey basaltic rocks, that give such solemn grandeur to the mountain of the cures. The grey was slightly interspersed with green, and there were olives here and there; but the aspect of the rock was wild and bleak; not so terrible as the red glare of Sinai; but giving that peculiar aspect of melancholy dreariness, which the grey colour of the rock seems always to impart, as in the Coolin hills of Skye, whose jagged peaks and bold grouping remind one of Sinai, while their grey sides and top recall Ebal and its fellows. Joshua's altar on the hill is gone (Josh. viii. SO); his great stone which he set up under the oak is rolled (p. 369) NABLUS. away (Josh. xxiv. 26); the Amen of Israel's thousands does not echo from rock to rock; but this is the valley where the multitude gathered, and somewhere on this road must have stood the stone with its shadowing oak.<sup>6</sup>

We soon come in sight of Nablus, and hear the mirth of young voices. Fifty or sixty children are playing on the slope at the eastern gate of the city. They shout and laugh as we pass, not appearing over civil. We do not enter the town, but turn slightly to the left, and keeping along the outside of its walls, we reach its west end, where, upon some olive-crowned hillocks, we find our tents. It was still good twilight, so that we could enjoy the scene before the darkness shut it out.

Late in the evening, after we had gone to rest, Mr Wright and Mr Beddome arrived, weary and hungry. Of their journey we have already given an account.

*Nablus, Wednesday, March 12.*—At the untimely hour of three this morning we were awakened by the arrival of our dragoman and Mr Graham. They had not left Jerusalem till yesterday at four, and had pushed on in the darkness, over the rocky road, reaching Nablus in eleven hours. Haji Ismael's horse had fallen more than once, though without injury to man (p. 370) THE VALE OF NABLUS. or beast; but Mr Graham's energetic and sure-footed grey mare had never stumbled.

At a quarter past six, I set out for a stroll. I wished to have climbed Gerizim, which lay close behind our tents, and is not much above eight hundred feet in height; but the morning was so breezy, that I had to content myself with walking a little way up beyond the olives and prickly pears which fringe its base. Passing the Turkish burying-ground, I went first along the western slope, and then returning, went more directly up the hill a little way. The view of the long narrow town, from the height, is excellent. Wedged in between Ebal and Gerizim,<sup>7</sup> it has made the best use it could of the space allotted to it, and thrown round itself a green fringe of every varied shrub and tree, olive, fig, mulberry, pomegranate, and even palm. Well-watered, though without a river, it has spread over its suburban fields a richness of vegetation, not equalled, perhaps, in the land,—at least, in southern Palestine. Unrained upon during summer, it has still its fountains, which scatter life through all its groves, and keep its verdure unwithering. How quietly it rests down there, with its domes and minarets, the rising sun shooting over its whole length, and the sharp breeze throwing up into the radiance the varied foliage of its groves! Yonder, too, rises Ebal, frowning above it, (p. 371) bare and precipitous, with an olive or a prickly pear here and there; the rock-cut tombs along

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<sup>6</sup> No one seems to have measured the height of either Gerizim or Ebal. Buckingham speaks of their not exceeding seven or eight hundred feet above the valley. But their height above the sea-level must be greater. They are nearly equal in height; but Olin seems to think Gerizim the higher of the two. Maundrel gives the preference to Gerizim for "pleasantness," though he does not think that either has much to boast of.

<sup>7</sup> On which of these mountains, were "the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made," (2 Kings xvii. 29)? Probably both, and on many other hills.

its lower slope, adding to the desolation which is associated with its name. Lying fully exposed to the sun of noon, it has, perhaps, a more parched and sterile aspect than its more shaded rival.

The two mountains look very near each other, though one is deceived as to distance here. Yet it did not seem an unlikely thing that parties should answer each other from these heights. I asked specially as to this of Mr. Rogers, the excellent Consul of Khaifa, who is at present here on business. He mentioned that it is quite a common thing for the villagers to call to each other from the opposite hills, and that the voice is heard quite distinctly. Having already, in the desert, found how far sound is carried, I did not think the distance, between Ebal and Gerizim, at all greater than between some of those places where we had already tried our voices; and I thought I could have undertaken to make my wishes known to any shepherd or fellah on yon rock, had there been one there at the time, or could I have addressed him in 'his native tongue.<sup>8</sup>

(p. 372) THE SAMARITAN KENISEH.

Returning from my walk, I joined the party, and we all proceeded to the Samaritan synagogue. On our way we called on Mr. Zeller, the missionary from the Church Missionary Society, who went along with us and introduced us. The synagogue seems to be in connection with the house of the priest, or high priest, as I suppose he is called. We were soon conducted to the *Keniseh* or synagogue, passing first through a small court: At the door of the synagogue the priest stopped us, and asked us to take off our shoes. We complied, and entered a very homely and rather gloomy chamber, in part laid with matting. To the left there was a curtain, meant perhaps for the veil before the Holy of Holies. This was withdrawn, and we stood at the entrance of this recess till the priest brought out the roll. It certainly looked very venerable, though the tradition as to its being the work of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, (1 Chron. vi. 3, 4), or nearly three thousand five hundred years old, is of course a mere Samaritan fable, meant to lengthen out the pedigree of a late-sprung sect, and to give some weight to its pretensions, by substituting antiquity of origin for evidence of authenticity. We helped him to unroll the ancient scroll, for he permitted us to touch it as well as to see it. The two sticks or rollers round which it was wrapt were ornamented at both ends, though a little shabby and out of condition. The old Karaite book of the law, which we had seen at Jerusalem, was a book paged and bound like our own, shewing that the Jews do not (p. 373) SAMARITAN MEGILLAH. confine themselves to one form; but this was a regular *volume*, "a volumen," a thing rolled and unrolled, a *Megillah*, such as that which Jeremiah took, and Baruch wrote in, and Jehudi fetched, and Jehoiakim cut with his penknife and burned, in the fire of his winter-house, (Jer. xxxvi. 2, 4, 27). The old man was most obliging, unrolling it considerably to let us see it fully. We then rose up to go (for all this took place upon our knees, as the roll was on the carpet), and the priest had put away the roll and drawn the curtain, when we remembered that we had not examined specially the Ten Commandments, with which the Samaritans are said not to have dealt more honestly, than the Romanists at home. We returned, accordingly, and asked to see the volume again. Thinking that we wanted to see something more, the priest brought forth another ancient roll, though evidently

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<sup>8</sup> If Jotham's voice were at all like that of his people to this day, clear *and* shrill, he would find it easy enough to stand on the top of Gerizim, and call down to the inhabitants of the city beneath, "Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you," (Judges ix. 7). Jotham's allusion, in his parable, to the olive, the fig-tree, and the vine, suits well a spot like this, where all these trees must have been under his eye. As to the "bramble," (ver. 14; I know not what it was, unless the prickly pear, which abounds here.

more modern than the other. As this is an exact transcript of the other, we were quite satisfied with it, and asked him to unroll it at the place which contains the Commandments. I looked for the *tenth*, and in its place I read, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God on Mount Gerizim." Ingenious devices of men, bent on bringing the word of God into conformity with their own systems and laws! The Latin needs to erase a commandment from the divine statute-book, but in order to achieve this without being caught in the act of felony, he splits the tenth into two, while he blots out the second, that the number may still stand *ten* in his breviary. The Samaritan needs to *add* a com- (p. 374) SAMARITAN SACRIFICES. mandment, and that he may do so without making eleven, he joins the first and second! He forms a Bible to suit himself, leaving out or inserting as much as may be convenient;—true representative of the " foolish people that dwell in Shechem," whom the son of Sirach refused to count a nation.<sup>9</sup>

We now quitted the synagogue, put on our shoes, and gave the priest a few piastres for his trouble. He took them gladly and wished us peace. What is this old man's hope, and the hope of the hundred and fifty Samaritans that worship here? He has Moses, but not the prophets. He has Moses, but he has not Him of whom Moses and the prophets testify! These Samaritans, it seems, offer sacrifice! But what is the meaning of sacrifice to men with a double veil upon their hearts? It is not to them life for life,—the life of the substitute for the life of the sinner ;—and if not this, what is it? But is the Samaritan worse than the Jew? Perhaps he has not become so impenetrable, because he does not daily confront himself with so much truth; but then he contemns more of Scripture, and wraps himself up in the five folds of the Pentateuch, treating psalms and prophets as a fable. The Samaritan sacrifices because he has access to Gerizim, where his fathers worshipped (John iv. 20); would the Jew sacrifice, if he had access to Moriah? Certainly he would; for the Christian argument that cuts him most sharply is, that he is " without a sacrifice;" yet he dare not offer sacrifice any where in the (p. 375) MOUNTAINS OF GILEAD. world save on the old hill of Oman, and on that he cannot set his foot. The restoration of Palestine to the Jews, in an unconverted state, would be like the touch of a magician's rod, suddenly evoking an amount of slumbering Judaism, for which the world is not prepared.

Returning from the synagogue, through the narrow and not over cleanly streets of the city, we soon breakfasted, and were ready to move off for Samaria. While standing for a few minutes to look around us once more upon the city and its guardian hills, we turned the eye eastward to get a glimpse of the mountains on the other side of Jordan, the mountains of Gilead. They were barely visible; but one likes to take in all the features of a scene, the distant as well as the near. From these hills the Ishmaelites came "with their camels bearing spicery, and balm, and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt" (Gen. xxxvii. 25); for it was to Israel's hills that Mizraim was indebted for the spices, with which she embalmed her dead. These hills were not only the dwellings of Israel's physicians; but the " mountains of prey," the strongholds of the warrior, "for because Machir was a man of war, therefore he had Gilead and Bashan" (Josh. xvii. 1); out of these hills came forth Elijah the Tishbite (true representative of the ancient warriors of Manasseh and Gad), down to this very spot where we now are, for through this gorge he must have passed to Samaria on his first visit to Ahab (1 Kings xvii. 1). From his own mountains he had from childhood gazed upon Gerizim and Ebal, and as he comes (p. 376) FRUITFULNESS. down to Israel, having in his hands both the blessing and the curse, he passes between these hills, which so truly represented the

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<sup>9</sup> Ecclesiasticus li. 26.

errand on which he had come. From these hills (at least from the southern parts of them) had Moses pointed out to Israel the spot where the blessing or curse would be pronounced; "are they (Gerizim and Ebal) not on the other side Jordan *by the way were the sun goeth down*" (Deut. xi. 30), for Israel had seen many a sun set behind their summits.

We now proceeded on our way, having for a little the company of Mr. Rogers, to whom we were indebted for much information. Striking down into the valley, we soon crossed its hollow of perhaps three hundred yards, and ascended the opposite or Ebal side, moving in a north-westerly direction. We saw olives and figs on all sides, the former in their usual ever-green, the latter putting forth their young green figs. Ploughs were at work in all the fields, and the sound of the ploughmen's voices was pleasant. The verdure was as yet but scanty, for spring was little more than begun, but we saw enough to tell us how rich the valley is, and could guess with what a luxury of flower and fruit, the summer is hastening to cover it. It was a goodly specimen of Ephraim's fruitful heritage. Nor was there any lack of villages, both far off and near. In front there was *Zeita*; to our left, on the height, *Beit-Uzin*; and then a quarter of an hour farther, *Beit-Eba* on a hill to the left. Just here we saw a sort of aqueduct, across the valley, another of the many evidences of cultivation (p. 377) DISTANT VIEW OF SEBUSTIEH. around. At present it serves only as a mill-lead, but its twelve pointed arches were originally meant for something more than this. Even in our own country we do not build such costly water-courses for common mills; and though Dr Robinson speaks slightly of it, in past ages, it may have done higher service, though whether an "ancient bridge," as Richardson calls it, or a regular aqueduct to some of the villages or towns which covered the sides of this valley, one cannot say.

We now turned to the right and entered a beautiful green valley, stretching beneath us to the left. We passed through fields of green corn, which had already reached a height of eight or nine inches, so that in little more than a month they would be whitening for harvest. Scattered thickly over the hill-sides were the anemonies, large and tall; fields of beautiful blue lupin; the drop-hyacinth, with a profusion of other flowers, red, blue, and yellow, which my scanty botanical knowledge hinders me from attempting to name. Down in the valley to our left we saw the village of *Deir-Sheraf*, too far off to be visited.....

### **Comments on this section from the Editor of theSamaritanUpdate.com**

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The date of the author meeting the Samaritan High Priest was *Wednesday, March 12, 1856*. The Samaritan High Priest was Amran b. Shalma (1855-1874), but Shalma b. Tabia was alive during this time and it could possibly be him.

**Horatius Bonar** (1808 – 1889) was a Scottish churchman and poet.  
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