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(p. 336)

**Samaritans and Their Annual Sacrifice.**

The Samaritans are dying out, and it is probable that before many years the annual Passover sacrifice will cease to be held. This rite is now of the greatest historical interest, being the last representative of the ancient Jewish sacrifices. Rev. W. E. Geil, in *The Christian Herald*, gives an account of this unique ceremony, which is held on Mount Gerizim, the sacred mountain of the Samaritans, and the same place on which they worshiped in the time of Christ. Says Mr. Geil:

"Seven days before the feast of the Passover the Samaritans leave their homes, climb the mountain, and encamp in a hollow near the top of Gerizem, Three times a year they make their pilgrimage to the holy mountain, but only at the Passover is there a sacrifice offered.

"About an hour before sunset on the last day of the encampment, 111, which is the full number of the male Samaritans, gather at the place of the slaying of seven white lambs. (Most of the women remain in the tents.) Then Jacob Aaron, the high priest, dressed in long, flowing white priestly robes, steps upon a large stone and stands there barefooted, leading the congregation in chanting prayers or praises. During prayer the men stretch out their hands, bow, kneel, and touch the ground with their forehead, much after the fashion of the Moslems. Seven white lambs having been driven into the circle by seven barefooted young men dressed in white, the history of the Exodus is recited in concert, faster and faster as the moment of sunset approaches. When the 'orb of day' has touched the western sky-line, the seven young men suddenly unsheath their bright knives, lift them on high, they flash in the light of the setting sun for a moment and then across the throats of the innocent lambs. The slayers then dip their fingers in the blood and touch each Samaritan on the forehead and on the nose. Sometimes only the youngest are thus blood-stained. I noticed two holes dug at the place of sacrifice, one some distance from the other and twice as deep. I was told on the spot how a fire is kindled in the deep hole, a kettle swung in and water boiled. The hot water is carried and thrown on the slain animals and the fleece removed. Afterward a spit, fashioned out of what is supposed to be pomegranate, is thrust through lengthwise of each lamb; a shorter spit is either driven through the breast or else is fastened to the long piece where the throat is cut. The forefeet are stretched out and fastened to it, thus making a veritable cross and crucifixion. They are then taken to the more shallow hole, and fire having been made in it are put in and the hole covered over; here they remain until the flesh is well roasted. I must not omit mentioning that the right foreshoulders and entrails are flung aside and burned. The congregation employ themselves most of the time by chanting. By and by the lambs are

taken out and held aloft, then one can behold the seven crosses. They are carried to the place of sacrifice, where the people, having been supplied with bitter herbs and unleavened bread, hastily tear the flesh off and eat it. It is intended that all should wear white robes, have ropes tied around their waists, shoes on their feet, and stones in their hands, thus fulfilling the Scripture requirements to the very letter. (Meat is carried to the women in the tents.) After having eaten, the men search diligently for any morsels that may have fallen aside, and burn all that remains and then, according to Deut. xvi. 7, which says: 'Thou shalt turn in the morning, and go unto thy tents,' they depart to their homes.

"A guard of fifty Turkish soldiers is frequently necessary to protect the Samaritans, at the time of the sacrifice, from the excitable and fanatical Mohammedan residents of Shechem."

Of another Samaritan curiosity, the celebrated manuscript of the Pentateuch, Mr. Geil writes as follows:

"In Nablus is the famous Samaritan Pentateuch, which they claim was written by Aaron's great-grandson. It is not that old, but there seems to be good reason to believe that it is a trifle over 2,000 years of age. It is kept in a costly case of silver (p. 337) which is wrapped about with a cover of fine Venetian cloth. Some portions look older than others, due no doubt to the priests kissing Aaron's name."

Of the decreasing numbers of the once powerful sect, the priest said to Mr. Geil:

"There are 201 now. Of that number 111 are males and 90 are females. Our young men find it difficult to obtain wives. All except the priests may marry Jewish ladies, if they can get them." This last was said with a merry twinkle in the eye.

"Do you have any converts?"

"His answer was simply the following question: 'Who would join the poor and hated?'"—*The Literary Digest*.

This being the season for the Passover, astronomically and scientifically, we print the above to show that the custom of celebrating, even though the ceremony by these ignorant oriental fanatics is most revolting, is still in vogue in some parts of the world. Some copy after this ancient practice, but all fail in grasping the meaning of the ancient symbolical celebration.—[ED.]

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

This reference is not located in *A Bibliography of the Samaritans, Third Edition, Revised, Expanded, and Annotated*, by Alan David Crown and Reinhard Pummer, ATLA Bibliography, No. 51, The Scarecrow Press, Inc. Lanham, Maryland, Toronto, Oxford. 2005