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An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures

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(p. 376)

VI. The SAMARITANS, mentioned in the New Testament, are generally considered as a sect of the Jews.

This appellation is, in the New Testament, given to a race of people who sprang originally from an intermixture of the ten tribes with Gentile nations. When the inhabitants of Samaria and of the adjacent country were carried into captivity by Shalmaneser king of Assyria, he sent in their place colonies from Babylonia, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and Sepharvaim; with which the Israelites who remained in the land became intermingled, and were ultimately amalgamated into one people. (2 Kings xvii. 24.) An origin like this would, of course, render the nation odious to the Jews; and the Samaritans further augmented this cause of hatred by rejecting all the sacred books of the Jews, except the Pentateuch, which they had received from the Jewish priest who had been sent to them from Assyria to instruct them in the true religion. (2 Kings xvii. 27, 28.) On the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, when they began to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple, the Samaritans requested to be acknowledged as Jewish citizens, and to be permitted to assist in the work. (Ezra iv. 1—4.) In consequence of this refusal and the subsequent state of enmity, the Samaritans not only took occasion to calumniate the Jews before the Persian kings (Ezra iv. 5. Neh. iv. 1—7, 8.); but also, recurring to the directions of Moses (Deut. xxi. 11—13.), that on entering the promised land the Hebrews should offer sacrifices on Mount Gerizim, they erected a temple on that mountain, and instituted sacrifices according to the prescriptions of the Mosaic law.¹ From all these and other circumstances, the national hatred between the Samaritans and Jews increased to such a height, that the Jews denounced the most bitter anathemas against them (Ecclus. 1. 26.), and for many ages refused them every kind of intercourse. Hence the woman of Samaria was astonished that Jesus Christ, who was a Jew, should ask drink of her. (John iv. 9.) Hence also the Jews, when they would express the utmost aversion to Christ, said to him — *Thou art a SAMARITAN and hast a devil.*

¹ Josephus, Ant. Jud. lib. xi. c. 8. § 4.

(John viii. 38.) The temple on Mount Gerizim was destroyed by Hyrcanus, B. c. 129² : but the Samaritans, in the time of Jesus, esteemed that mountain sacred, and as the proper place of national worship. (John iv. 20, 21.) At that time, also, in common with the Jews, they expected the advent of a Messiah, (John iv. 25.) and many of them afterwards became the followers of Jesus Christ, and embraced the doctrines of his religion. (Acts viii. 1. ix. 31. xv. 3.)³

Towards the close of the Jewish polity, the Samaritans suffered much from the Romans; and though they received a little favourable treatment from one or two of the pagan emperors, yet they suffered considerably under some of the professing Christian emperors, particularly Valentinian and Justinian.⁴ At present, the Samaritans are very much reduced in point of numbers. Their principal residence is at Sichem or Schechem, now called *Napolose* or *Nations*. In 1823, there were between twenty and thirty houses, and about sixty males paid the capitation-tax to the Mohammedan government.⁵ They celebrated divine service every Saturday. Formerly they went four times a year, in solemn procession, to the old synagogue on Mount Gerizim : and on these occasions they ascended before sunrise, and read the law till noon; but of late years they have not been allowed to do this. The Samaritans have one school in Napolose, where their language is taught, The head of this sect is stated to reside at Paris.⁶ The Samaritans at Napolose are in possession of a very antient manuscript Pentateuch, which they assert to be nearly 3500 years old; but they reject the vowel points, as a rabbinical invention. In order to complete our notice of this sect, we have subjoined their confession of faith, sent in the sixteenth century by Eleazar their high priest to the illustrious critic Scaliger, (p. 378) who had applied to them for that purpose; together with a few additional particulars from the Baron de Sacy's Memoir on the Samaritans, and the Rev. W. Jowett's Christian Researches in Syria.⁷

1. The Samaritans observe the sabbath with all the exactness required in Exodus ; for not one of them goes out of the place where he is on the sabbath-day, except to the synagogue, where they read the law, and sing the praises of God. They do not lie that night with their wives, and neither kindle nor order fire to be kindled: whereas the Jews transgress the sabbath in all these points; for they go out of town, have fire made, lie with their wives, and even do not wash themselves after it. — 2. They hold the passover to be their first festival; they begin at sunset, by the sacrifice enjoined for that purpose in Exodus ; but they sacrifice *only* on Mount Gerizim, where they read the law, and offer prayers to God, after which the priest dismisses the whole congregation with a blessing. [Of late years, however, having been prohibited from ascending Mount Gerizim by their oppressors the Turks, they offer the paschal sacrifice within their city, which they

² Ibid. lib. xiii. c. 10. §§ 2, 3.

³ Robinson's Gr. Lex. *voce Tap.ap(i)Tijis*. Tappan's Lectures on Jewish Antiq. pp. 221 —227. Kuinbel, on John iv. 9. 25.

⁴ Basnage's History of the Jews, pp. 73—77. In pp. 63—96 he has given minute details respecting the history, tenets, and practices of this sect or people.

⁵ Jowett's Christian Researches in Syria, p. 195.

⁶ Visit of the Rev. James Connor, in 1819 and 1820, to Candia, Rhodes, Cyprus, and various Parts of Syria and Palestine, annexed to the Rev. W. Jowett's Christian Researches in the Mediterranean, p. 425.

⁷ Memoire sur l'Etat actuel des Samaritains, par M. Silvestre de Sacy. Paris, 1812. 8vo. Jowett's Christian Researches in Syria, pp. 196—198. See also Joan. Christoph. Friedrich, Discussionum de Christologia Samaritanorum Liber. Accedit Appendicula de Columba Dea Samaritanorum. Lipsia?, 1821. 8vo.

consider to be within the precincts of the sacred place.] — 3. They celebrate for seven days together the feast of the harvest, but they do not agree with the Jews concerning the day when it ought to begin; for these reckon the next day after the solemnity of the passover ; whereas the Samaritans reckon fifty days, beginning the next day after the sabbath which happens in the week of the unleavened bread, and the next day after the seventh sabbath following, the feast of the harvest begins. — 4. They observe the fast of expiation on the tenth of the seventh month : they employ the four and twenty hours of the day in prayers to God, and singing his praises, and fasting. All fast, except children at the breast, whereas the Jews except children under seven years of age. — 5. On the fifteenth of the same month, they celebrate the feast of tabernacles. — 6. They never defer circumcision beyond the eighth day, as it is commanded in Genesis, whereas the Jews defer it sometimes longer. — 7. They are obliged to wash themselves in the morning, when they have lain with their wives, or have been sullied in the night by some uncleanness; and all vessels, that may become unclean, become defiled when they touch them before they have washed. — 8. They take away the fat from sacrifices, and give the priests the shoulder, the jaws, and the belly. — 9. They never marry their nieces as the Jews do, and have but one wife, whereas the Jews may have many. — 10. They believe in God, in Moses, and in Mount Gerizim. Whereas, say they, the Jews put their trust in others, we do nothing but what is expressly commanded in the law by the Lord who made use of the ministry of Moses; but the Jews swerve from what the Lord hath commanded in the law, to observe what their fathers and doctors have invented.— 11. They receive the Torah or Pentateuch, and hold it as their only sacred book; they reverence (p. 379) the books of Joshua and Judges, but do not account them sacred in the same manner as the Torah, considering Joshua not to have been a prophet, but only the disciple of a prophet, that is, of Moses. — 12. They expect a prophet, whom they term Hathab; but, say they, there is a great mystery in regard to Hathab, who is yet to come. We shall be happy when he comes." When the Rev. Mr. Jowett, in November 1823, interrogated the officiating Samaritan priest concerning their expectation of a Messiah, the latter replied that they were all in expectation of him; — " that the Messiah would be a man, not the Son of God, — and that this" (Napolose) " was to be the place which he would make the metropolis of his kingdom : this was the place, of which the Lord had promised, he would place his name there." The report of the Samaritans worshipping a dove is groundless ; nor is it true that they deny the resurrection of the dead, or the existence of angels. They admit, however, that they recite hymns and prayers that Jehovah would pardon the dead, and the priest purifies them by prayer.

The Samaritans have a catalogue of the succession of their high priests from Aaron to the present time. They believe themselves to be of the posterity of Joseph by Ephraim, and that all their high priests descended from Phinehas; whereas the Jews have not one of that family. They boast that they have preserved the Hebrew characters which God made use of to promulgate his law; while the Jews have a way of writing from Ezra, which is cursed for ever. And, indeed, instead of looking upon Ezra as the restorer of the law, they curse him as an impostor, who has laid aside their old characters to use new ones in their room, and authorised several books that were written to support the posterity of David.

Several attempts have been made to convert these Samaritans; but they have been oppressed instead of being made Christians, and they are reduced to a small number rather by misery than by the multitude of those who have been converted. Nay, they seem

more stubbornly wedded to their sect than the Jews, though these adhere rigorously to the law of Moses. At least Nikon, who lived after the twelfth century, when setting down the formalities used at the reception of heretics, observes, that if a Jew had a mind to be converted, in order to avoid punishment or the payment of what he owed, he was to purify himself, and satisfy his creditors before he was admitted. But the Samaritans were not received before they had been instructed two years, and were required to fast ten or fifteen days before they professed the Christian religion, to attend at morning and evening prayers, and to learn some psalms; others were not used with so much rigour. The term of two years which was enjoined to the Samaritan proselytes, is an argument that they were suspected, and the reason why they were so was, that they had often deceived the Christians by their pretended conversion.⁸

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⁸ Lewis's *Origines Hebraeae*, vol. iii. pp. 57—59. In pp. 59—65. he has printed a letter, purporting to have been written by the Samaritans at Shechem in the seventeenth century, and sent by them to their brethren in England, by Dr. Huntington, some time chaplain to the Turkey Company at Aleppo, and afterwards Bishop of Raphoe, in Ireland.