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**Worship in Heaven And on Earth:**

Responsive, Congregational, Reverent, Musical, and Beautiful.

By the **Rev. J. G. Norton**

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(p. 337)

4.— *The Samaritan Passover on Gerizim.*

The elaborate *Sacrificial* Ritual of the Passover, as instituted by Moses, is fully described in the twelfth Chapter of Exodus. The design of the Holy Ghost in this institution seems to have been to fix unalterably those parts of the rite which foreshadowed the One Great Sacrifice for men. All the symbolical details of the rite were, therefore, fixed and settled by Divine authority. But beyond these details, the sacred narrative does not go. It gives no indication of the Devotional Ritual of prayers and praises, with which the piety of the Jewish Church should clothe the naked sacrificial skeleton of the rite. In a future Chapter, we shall learn that the Devotional Ritual with which the Passover was celebrated in the Temple was responsive and congregational. But here I would notice the presence of the same characteristics in the Open-Air celebration of the Paschal rite, which is still continued by the Samaritans upon mount Gerizim.

Gerizim appears to have been a sanctuary from very ancient times, and was, therefore, selected by the Samaritan colonists as their Holy Mount, the site of their Temple. It was with reference to Gerizim that the woman of Samaria said to our Lord, " Our (Samaritan) fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye (the Jews) say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Many were the legends and relics by which the Samaritans tried to establish the superior sanctity of Gerizim as compared with all other mountains.

Upon mount Gerizim, the small remaining remnant (p. 338) of the Samaritans still sacrifice their Paschal lambs year by year, with a ritual which many modern travellers have witnessed, and which is almost certainly, in its main features, a faithful representation of the ancient Paschal celebrations on this mount. With the *Sacrificial* part of this ritual we are not concerned in the present volume: but the still remaining traces of the *Devotional* Ritual show that the ancient Paschal sacrifices on mount Gerizim (which we know to have been borrowed from those of the Jews on mount Zion) were surrounded by a *responsive, congregational, reverent, musical, and beautiful* worship.

Down to the year 1854, *all the men* who were present at this solemnity on mount Gerizim *wore long white robes*. What must have been the joyous splendour and beauty of many a great Hebrew Service at which thousands of worshippers were so clad! The ancient Samaritan race and worship are now quickly passing away. Of late years, the

custom of wearing white robes at their Passover has dwindled down to the wearing of white by the Priest and by about 15 of the elder men, and 6 youths, who assist at the sacrifice.

The Priest begins the ceremony by standing on a rough stone on the top of the mount, and reciting, by heart, *in a loud chant*, various prayers and praises. *All present*, who are mostly provided with service-books, *join with the Priest* in chanting these prayers and praises. At a further stage in the ceremony, namely, when the sheep which are to be sacrificed appear among the worshippers, the entire history of the Exodus, from the beginning of the Plagues of Egypt, is rapidly and vehemently chanted by the whole assembly. At the various stages of the sacrificial rite, other chants and prayers are (p. 339) sung. The attitude of the Samaritans is that of all Orientals in prayer: standing, occasionally diversified by the stretching out of the hands, and by bowing down upon their knees, with their faces reverently wrapt in their clothes, and bent to the ground.

I may here mention that since the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, the Jews have ceased to offer up the Paschal lamb, which could only be sacrificed in the Temple. But there are still Paschal observances of great antiquity among the Jews, which contain traces of the *congregational* character of the worship by which this ancient rite was surrounded. In keeping the Passover at Jerusalem at the present day, a little boy, one of the youngest members of the family, asks the company present, "What mean ye by this service?"<sup>1</sup> Upon which *all the males* stand up and *recite very rapidly*, from Hebrew books which they have before them, the story of the deliverance from Egypt. All present are dressed in their best and gayest clothes, and the women have jewels and flowers in their hair.

### 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

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<sup>1</sup> Exod. 12. 26.