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**Missionary Journeys through Bible Lands**  
Italy, Greece, Egypt, Palestine, Syria  
Asia Minor and Other Countries  
Including a Description of Religious and Social Conditions  
In Palestine and Syria, Personal Missionary Experiences, and a Discussion of Missionary  
Methods

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**NABULUS (SHECHEM)**

Nabulus is the only town aside from Jerusalem that ever became the capital of Palestine. It is a town of hoar antiquity, for it is mentioned in the days of the patriarchs—Abraham, Sketch Isaac, and Jacob all encamped here (Gen. 12:6, etc.). In the days of the conquest its central location, as well as other advantages, made it the chosen place for general gatherings of the tribes of Israel. Immediately after the destruction of (p. 205 Photo: Nabulus)



Nabulus

(p. 206) Jericho and Ai, Joshua "built an altar unto the Lord God of Israel on Mount Ebal," and wrote a copy of the law of Moses which he read unto the children of Israel, who gathered in this valley for that purpose, half of them standing "over against Mount Gerizim,

and half of them over against Mount Ebal" (Josh. 8:30-85). Joshua also held his last assembly of the people here, on which occasion they solemnly agreed to put away the gods of the heathen and to "serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:1-26).

Here we were in the place that figured so prominently in the early history of Israel. These very rocks echoed back the words of Israel's noble leader; and had we been here at that time, we could have heard his very language as his voice rang out over the narrow valley. Later, after the death of Solomon, a national assembly was held here to consider the matter of his succession, and the policy that should be followed. Rehoboam,

Solomon's son, had begun to reign, and the people of the northern tribes now offered him sovereignty upon condition that he would relieve them of the heavy taxes that had been imposed upon them by his father in his building operations. Rehoboam listened to the counsel of some young men, and answered the people roughly, whereupon these ten tribes revolted from his authority, chose Jeroboam for their king, and set up the independent kingdom of Israel, with Shechem for its capital. Afterward, Omri transferred the royal residence to the newly founded Samaria. The later history of Shechem is intertwined with the affairs of Samaria; but I will now refer to it briefly, on account of its bearing on the present religious life of Nabalus.

In 722 B. C. the Assyrians captured Samaria and carried away the inhabitants of this district, thus ending the national life of the northern kingdom. The ten tribes are thenceforth "lost" to history. Later the places of the deported Jews were filled by Eastern pagan colonists (2 Ki. 17: 24). "Thus the new Samaritans were Assyrians by birth or subjugation. . . . They were annoyed by beasts of prey, which had probably increased to a great extent before their entrance upon the land. On their explaining their miserable condition to the king of Assyria, he, believing that they had offended the god of the land, despatched one of the captive priests to teach them 'how they should know the Lord.'" The priest came accordingly, and henceforth the Samaritans had a mixed religion, the worship of idols being associated with the worship of the one true God. The kingdom of Judah, with Jerusalem for its capital, still remained. Later, however, came the (p. 207) Babylonish captivity, when the kingdom of Judah was subverted, and its people were carried away to Babylon, where they remained for seventy years.

After the return, when the work of rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem began, the Samaritans desired to unite with them, saying, "Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither"

(Ezra 4:2). But this proposed union was scorned by the Jews, who replied, "Ye have nothing to do with us to build a house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel" (Ezra 4:8). Angered by this refusal, the Samaritans threw every obstacle in their way, and by writing a special letter to the king of Persia, succeeded in hindering for a time the work of restoration at Jerusalem. Under the leadership of Sanballat, who was the moving spirit in the opposition (Neh. 2:10, 19), they built a temple of their own on Mount Gerizim and set up a rival worship. During the absence of Nehemiah in Persia, a son of Joiada, the high priest, probably Manasseh, married the daughter of Sanballat (Neh. 13:28), and rather than forsake her as the Mosaic law required, he (according to Josephus) went over to the Samaritans and became their high priest in the temple erected by his father-in-law.

From these circumstances arose that inveterate enmity between the two nations which afterwards became proverbial—"the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." The very name Samaritan became a term of reproach among the Jews; therefore some of them said to Christ, "Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil" (John 8:48). Hence as a matter of policy Jesus at first commanded his apostles not to enter into any city of the Samaritans to preach (Matt. 10:5). Jesus himself, however, ventured to preach to the Samaritan woman at the well-side; and when he saw that it produced a favorable impression on the inhabitants of the town, he turned aside from his journey and spent two days here, during

which time many believed on him (John 4:89, 40). Their temple was destroyed by John Hyrcanus in B. C. 129, but they continued to regard its site as sacred.

It was about four o'clock in the evening when we reached our hotel in Nabulus (Shechem), so we left our luggage there and proceeded at once to view the place. Although it is a prosperous town of 27,000 inhabitants, we were not greatly interested in it. Our chief interest lay in the Sect of the Samaritans, who are the lineal descendants of the aforementioned people, and who to this day perpetuate on (p. 208) Mount Gerizim the worship of their fathers. Three times each year— at the feast of unleavened bread, the feast of weeks, and the feast of tabernacles—they make a pilgrimage to the top of the sacred mountain. They celebrate all of the Mosaic festivals. At the feast of the passover seven white lambs are sacrificed. Dean Stanley says that "probably in no other locality has the same worship been sustained with so little change or interruption for so great a series of years as in this mountain. In their humble synagogue at the foot of the mountain, the



Samaritan Passover Encampment on Mount Gerizim

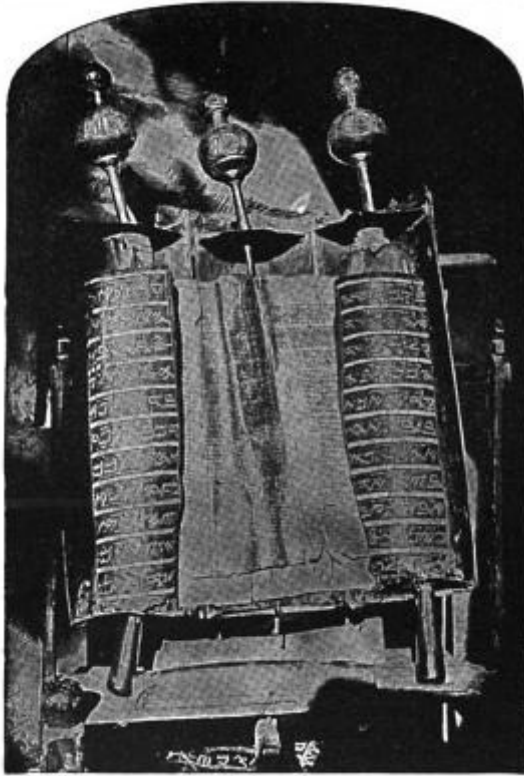
Samaritans still worship—the oldest and the smallest sect in the world, distinguished by their noble physiognomy and stately appearance from all other branches of the race of Israel. In their prostrations at the elevation of their revered copy of the Pentateuch they throw themselves on their faces in the direction, not of priest or law, or any object within the building, but obliquely towards the summit of Mount Gerizim.

And up the side of the mountain and on its long ridge is to be traced the pathway by which they ascend to the sacred spots where they alone, of all the Jewish race, yearly celebrate the paschal sacrifice."

Securing a guide, we proceeded at once to the southwest part of (p. 209 Summit)



(p. 210) the town to visit their synagogue. Our way across the town led through crooked and winding streets,



The Samaritan Pentateuch

many of which were covered, forming long, dark tunnels through which we groped our way. Arriving at the door of the synagogue, which is a small white-washed chamber, we were informed that the entire company was absent, being at this time encamped for seven days on the mountaintop during the annual feast of the Passover.

I felt keenly disappointed in failing to meet any of them, so turned to our guide and asked him if he could not take us at once to the top of the mountain where they were. He replied that the time was not sufficient, but said that he could on the morrow. I then stated that we must leave the city early in the morning, therefore he must take us now. He at last yielded to our requirement, and we started on our rapid climb, for it was absolutely necessary that we make the return before dark. It is supposed, to take about one and one-fourth hours to make the ascent, as-

the mountain is 2,848 feet high and the path long and winding, but we arrived at the top in about forty minutes, a little tired, it is true. As this was the time of their greatest festival, we considered it a special privilege to be here at this time. About the first thing we observed was a number of tents—not so many as we had expected to see, for this small remnant of the ancient nation has now diminished to about 170 persons, of whom about two-thirds are men. They never marry outside of their sect, and when a married man dies, his nearest relative, other than his brother, is bound to marry the widow. Bigamy is permitted if the first wife be childless. They are strict monotheists. The only Scripture- they have is the Pentateuch, of which they possess the oldest copy in existence.

On entering this village of tabernacles, we were met by a small crowd of boys and girls, then some men, one of whom (the son of the high priest) conducted us to the tent of the high priest, where we were offered some refreshments in accordance with the established Oriental custom. They then proceeded to impart to us information concerning their people, and then our host on this occasion secured a key, unlocked a case, and brought out the ancient copy of their Pentateuch. I was informed in advance that at the synagogue an inferior codex was usually palmed off on travelers, while the genuine one was kept in a costly case covered with green Venetian cloth. I have since learned that the genuine one is not used by them except once each year, on the occasion of the feast of the Passover. So when he exhibited this codex, I saw (p. 211) at once that it was really the ancient one. It is written on yellow parchment. "The case is of silver, as large as a stove-pipe, cut

length wise into three sections, and with two sets of hinges at the back, so that it will open and show a column of text, or close and protect (p. 212) all from the light. At the

top are three large knobs, the middle one a dummy and the two end ones rolls by which the parchment is rolled forward or back. The case itself is about eighteen inches high; but the knobs above and the legs below make the entire height about thirty inches. The five books of Moses, which are all the Bible that the Samaritans receive, are written on the hairside of skins of lambs offered in sacrifice. The entire roll is probably sixty or more feet in length." I understand that it has been many years since it has been unrolled, for owing to its extreme age it is very brittle and they do not wish to injure it. So I suppose no one now living knows the exact length of it, although Condor was told that it contains twenty-four skins.

The Samaritans claim that it was written by a grandson of Aaron, and when I asked its age, they replied, confidently, that it is 3,576 years old. According to our chronology this would antedate Aaron himself. While no dependence can be placed in these claims, the manuscript has been conceded by many scholars to be as old as the Christian era, in which case it is the oldest manuscript of the Bible in the world. The three oldest Greek manuscripts of the New Testament—the Alexandrian, in the British Museum; the Vatican, at Rome; and the Sinaitic, at Petrograd—do not antedate the fourth century. Our oldest Hebrew manuscript of the Old Testament does not date back further than the tenth century; while this Samaritan manuscript of the Pentateuch in Hebrew may be 1,000 years older. These facts made it extremely interesting to us. In some particulars it deviates from all other texts, but it is not regarded by scholars as possessing supreme importance, though valuable for reference and examination in critical study. From this oldest codex, the Samaritans have derived all their other manuscripts of the Pentateuch. The one usually exhibited is doubtless very old.

Desiring to obtain accurate information concerning the religious ideas of this interesting people, I purchased from them a small work entitled, "The Messianic Hope of the Samaritans," written by their present leader, "Jacob, Son of Aaron, High Priest of the Samaritans." As the name implies, this work treats of a Messiah yet to come, and their hope is based particularly on Deut. 18:15—"The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him shall ye hearken"; also verses 18 and 19. When asked whether their Messiah was expected to be in any sense divine, the high priest (p. 213) replied: "The Messiah will not be in any sense the Son of God. He will be a prophet like Moses and like his brethren." In regard to the mission of this Messiah he said: "The Messiah will be a prophet as I have told you . . . he is to be a King, and rule the earth from Shechem, the ancient city of power, and from his holy mountain, Gerizim. He will call all the world to acknowledge him, and they will do so." Concerning the continuation of the Passover, he said: "The Passover will continue after the Messiah comes. It is a perpetual feast. It has no reference whatever to the Messiah." He was asked concerning the Scripture in Gen. 49:10: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." To this he replied: "While there is some difference of opinion about Gen. 49: 10, which tells at what time the scepter shall depart from Judah, there is light to be found in the form of the name Shiloh. The Jews make it two words, but in the Samaritan Torah it is but one word, and that is the name Solomon. The characteristics which Jacob attribute to Shiloh belong very well to the character of Solomon. For he it was who set up idolatry in Jerusalem that he might please his heathen wives; and further built there the temple for the pretended ark. . . . Then it was that the

scepter departed from Judah, and under his son Rehoboam, though he came back to the true capital, Shechem, to be anointed king, the true Israel revolted, and set up the kingdom in Shechem where it belonged, and the scepter departed from Judah."

While we were viewing these things within the tent, religious services, led by the high priest, were in progress on the outside; so we went out to witness the scene. We passed around to the place where the sacrifices are offered, but we were too late in the day to witness the sacrifice itself. Here mats were spread out on the ground. The worshipers were men arrayed in long white garments, standing in a semi-circle; while the high priest, clad in long, sacerdotal robes, stood out in front with his back turned towards them. They were repeating prayers, and at intervals would prostrate themselves on the ground. These prayers are recited in the ancient Samaritan tongue, though the people speak the colloquial language of the country Arabic. While viewing this scene, I recalled, with fresh meaning, the words of the Samaritan woman to Christ at the well-side, "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain"; and now after the lapse of nearly nineteen centuries we were witnessing their lineal descendants continuing the same devotions. (p. 214)

But as it was nearly dark, we now made our way as rapidly as possible down the steep, stony slopes of the mountain. Here a splendid view of the city is obtained, but we did not have time to halt very long. It is needless to say that we were very tired by the time we reached the bottom, and were glad for a place of rest when we arrived safely at our hotel.

### **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

They left Jerusalem April 22, 1913 toward Gerizim.