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(The photo is the entire of page 44 and the article is shown on page 45.)

### READING THE PENTATEUCH AT NABLUS

In a beautiful valley between Mounts Gerizim and Ebal, about thirty miles north of Jerusalem, lies a handsomely built town of very ancient origin, which now bears the name of Nablus or Nabulus. The site is described as the most lovely spot in Central Palestine. It lies embosomed amidst groves of olives; and abundant fountains and streams, combined with the genial climate, make it a perpetual garden.

This charming spot has, however, a higher claim than that of natural beauty. Here, for upward of 4,000 years- from the time of ABRAHAM to the present day- the worship of God has been maintained, according to the traditions of the Hebrew patriarchs and the ceremonial established by MOSES. The modern town, which is large and well built, contains about 10,000 inhabitants, all of whom are Mohammedans, with the exception of a small community of Samaritans numbering 170 souls. It stands on the site of the Sichem or Shechem of the Old Testament, the Sychar of the New Testament, and the Neapolis of the Greeks and Romans, of which name the modern word Nablus is evidently a corruption. EUSEBIUS and St. JEROME say that the ancient Shechem was a suburb of Neapolis; St. JEROME also maintains that Sychar, in St. JOHN's Gospel (iv. 5), is a corruption of Sichem. Here, it is probable, ABRAM sojourned when, at God's command, before his name was changed to ABRAHAM, he left his country and kindred in quest of the land of promise, and journeying through Canaan, came to the place of Sichem, and there for the first time pitched his tent and built an altar in the land to be given to his seed. Here, four hundred years later, his descendants, after their long servitude in Egypt and wanderings in the wilderness, first assembled and established themselves on taking possession of the promised inheritance. Here, nearly two hundred years after ABRAM first camped, his grandson JACOB spread his tent and dug a well in the field he had bought of the children of HAMOR, SHECHEM's father. Near to it stands at the present time a little village called Salim, which it is not very difficult to identify with the "Shalem, a city of Shechem," where JACOB bought the parcel of ground, nor perhaps with the Salem of the high-priest MELCHISEDEK, who set bread and wine before ABRAM and blessed him. Shechem fell to EPHRAIM, and was a Levitical city and a city of refuge. Here was JOSEPH's tomb, and here also was the tabernacle in the time of JOSHUA, who set up a pillar near it shortly before his death. Here GIDEON defeated the Midianites, and REHOBAM was made king. By the side of JACOB's well Jesus sat, wearied with his journey, and conversed with the Samaritan woman, while his disciples went to Sychar to buy meat. The name Neapolis (new city) was given during the occupation of Syria by the Greeks, who probably extended the city to the eastward on account of the abundant supply of water in that direction. SIMON MAGNUS practiced his sorceries in Neapolis, and JUSTIN MARTYR was a native of the same city.

During the destruction wars waged by JUSTINIAN against the Samaritans in the first half of the sixth century the nation almost disappeared from history, and in modern times only one community of this people is known to exist -that at Nablus. According to their local traditions they are doomed to extinction. This small community has in its possession a copy of the five books of MOSES which claims to be the oldest book in existence. The Samaritans themselves maintain that it was written by ABISHUA, the great-grandson of AARON, fourth high-priest of the Jews, which would make its age about three thousand years. The opinions of scholars as to its age vary greatly. Most critics do not venture to carry its date beyond B.C. 116, when the temple to which it probably belonged was destroyed. The manuscript Pentateuch is written on a large parchment-like scroll, which is rolled upon two poles, protected by an embroidered cover, and deposited in a

richly ornamented cylindrical case of precious metals opening upon hinges. The ornament at the top of the case is said by the Samaritans to represent the standards of the tribes; the balls represent pomegranates. There are spots in the MS. from kisses of the Samaritans on the passages where the name of AARON occurs.

Our engraving on page 44 is taken from a very fine drawing by Mr. CARL HAAG, an eminent English water-color artist, who visited the synagogue of the Samaritans at Nablus during his



journey in Palestine; and being much impressed by the noble bearing, and handsome, intelligent, expressive, Semitic countenance of the high-priest, AMRAN, sought an introduction through Dr. GEORGE ROSEN, then accredited as PRUSSIAN Consul to Jerusalem, but at that time staying at Nablus. The result was that Mr. HAAG was not only permitted to take an easel into the synagogue for the purpose of sketching the place, but the high-priest stood in person, in his robes, and Pentateuch in hand to enable the artist to make a large finished study of him. The picture is consequently authentic, equally as regards the portraiture and accessories. The priest reads the MS. as represented, holding it high up before him; by turning the pole-handles he unrolls it off the left hand pole over to the right hand one- taking care not to touch the sacred scroll with bare hands. When he has finished reading the scroll is placed in its case and returned to the tabernacle. The embroidery upon the crimson curtain covering the wall behind the high-priest professes to represent the ancient temple which stood on Mount Gerizim. At the bottom of the

curtain appears to porch of the Temple, with two pillars, one on each side, called "Jachin and Boaz;" between which stand two golden candlesticks and a very large vessel in the middle. Higher up, amidst a profusion of ornaments, are trumpets, cymbals, and other ancient musical instruments. Above this, again, the embroidery shows the Court of the Priests, with a square plate in the centre representing the golden altar; on the right of which is a seven-branched; on the left, the vessel for burning frankincense; and beneath, the table whereon the showbread is set. Over all, at the top, is represented the Most Holy Place, in the centre of which stands the Ark of the Covenant, with a large vessel on the left, and AARON's rod that blossomed on the right.

**Photo: HIGH-PRIEST AT NABLUS READING THE PENTATEUCH.**