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**Journal of My visit to the Israelite Samaritans And to Mount Gerizim, Samaria By:
Tsafon Etzion, Dallas, Texas**

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(Photos: **Tsafon Etzion**
[On the left] with **Mr.
Geoffrey Ben Nathan**
from London in Joseph
Tomb in Nablus and
(below) with
**Archimendrit
Stephanus** in Jacob's
Well for his journal of his
first visit to the Israelite
Samaritans and Mount
Gerizim)

Warmest greetings to
the Israelite Samaritans
from Dallas, Texas,
USA. Just this past

Shavuot I had the great pleasure of meeting many of you. I am sorry I didn't get the chance to meet all of you but you probably saw me sitting in the back of the synagogue. I am happy to share about my first trip to the Holy Land. Unlike the vast majority of tourists who travel to Israel, I did not visit Bethlehem, nor the sea of Galilee. I did not float in the salty Dead Sea. I did not get baptized in the Jordan River. I did not even go to Jerusalem like 2.4 million other tourists this last year. I did not have a need to visit those sites. My heart's desire was to go to Mount Gerizim, where the ancient Israelites were commanded to go first and proclaimed the Blessing. I also believe that the Name of The Almighty and the Commandments were written into the plastered rock on Gerizim (The Mountain of Blessing) and not on Ebal. I believe that Mount Gerizim is where we are to seek Him out and go to like it says in Deuteronomy. 12:5. Monday, the week prior to Shavuot, I was picked up at the airport by my good friend Benny Tsedaka and brought to his home in Holon. I had a brief tour of the neighborhood and then that afternoon we loaded up a van and headed into the West Bank, and up to the top of Mount Gerizim where I spent the rest of the week. There on the top of the mountain, in your community of Kiryat Luza, I met many of the Samaritan Israelites. I know many of you wondered what that goyim [Gentile] was doing in the back of your synagogue. Many of you asked me why I was there, where I was from, what I thought of the Samaritans and eventually, several people asked if it was true that I wanted to join the Samaritans. Allow me to give a brief history of who I am in introduction and to help answer those questions. I was born in the U.S.A. I was born into a very religious evangelical Christian family. My ancestors came to the United States from Norway and Sweden three generations before I was born.

I can only trace my heritage back a handful of generations which is not uncommon for Americans. I am 40 years of age. I have a wife and six children. Up until the year 2007 I was an active, passionate, Christian. I worked in a worldwide ministry of Christianity for 10 years. I have an Associates degree in Bible studies and a Bachelor of Science degree from a Christian university. Everything I pursued in life was Christian but I am the kind

of person who wants to understand why we do things a certain way and believe what we believe. In my desire to search for God and for what He wanted from me, I knew the closest thing to the pure truth would be looking back at the origins of the Bible. I began to study the Jewish origins of the Christian faith. While studying the Pentateuch (Torah)



I began to wonder what it meant to truly fear God. I began to pray for God to teach my heart what it meant to fear Him. I began to question the religion I so passionately participated in. I began to ask why Christians don't keep the feasts, why Christians don't keep the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week, and where in Torah did it prescribe that a righteous man had to die for the wickedness of others. Obviously, it didn't. I came to the conclusion that what God wanted was for His people to obey Him, to obey His Torah. So I and my wife and kids removed the New Testament from our collection of "sacred" books and began to keep Shabbats and the cleanness laws to the best of our understanding. At that point I was only following the Tanak (Old Testament). I was never interested in the Talmud or Rabbinical writings. So for a few years we were pursuing Karaite Judaism. They believe that only the Old Testament is "sacred". As I studied the Old Testament I began to have questions about the Prophets and specifically about King David and Solomon and Jerusalem. I began to have questions about the Priest Eli and his two sons and the prophet Samuel. What kept playing over and over in my mind was "do not add to or take away from Torah." Well, the Jewish Tanak has added the Prophets and the Writings to the Torah. It adds Jerusalem, and a messiah of the lineage of David. Well, that does not fit with Torah. I was wondering if there were any people on the planet that just kept Torah. Then some friends of mine heard about the Samaritans from the Internet and asked if I had ever heard about them. I said, "Do you mean like the Good Samaritan from the New Testament?" They said, "Yes. And they still exist and they say only Torah is sacred." My friends were not interested in pursuing any more information but I was and I began to do as much research as I could about you Israelites. Unfortunately, most of

what you'll find on the Internet is either written by Christians or Jews or academics, and they usually focus on negatives or don't have accurate facts. But I did find some information written by Samaritans themselves including information from Benny Tsedaka and his e-mail address. I decided I needed to hear what the Samaritans say about themselves so I contacted him and asked many questions. I was delighted to hear his sincere love for Torah and willingness to answer our questions. Then a year and a half ago Benny was so kind to meet us in Texas and spent five wonderful days answering questions and sharing with my wife and kids and I about the Samaritans. So for two years now we have been learning about the traditions kept by the Samaritans and have been trying to keep Torah as best we can in Texas. Then I decided I needed to come and see you all and the Mountain for myself. I came to Israel as an observer and visitor and student. You had questions about me and I had many questions about you. I wondered if the Samaritans were sincerely keeping Torah or just following rituals passed on from generation to generation. As you can see most people in this world just do what they have been given to do without asking if they are on the right path. I wondered if you had added to Torah or taken away from Torah. I just did not know what to expect. So I came to see for myself. I am thrilled to say that I found a sincere people that obviously love Torah and keep Torah to the best of their ability. I found a people that love God and fear God, love their families, and love their community. One Samaritan was explaining to me that the Israelite Samaritans are a people of peace. They do not want to destroy other people and they respect others because they fear God. They are not like animals. They are men created in the image of God. That statement was very important for me to hear because I wanted to know specifically if the Samaritans are a people that fear God. I want to be around people who have the fear of God. I want my children to grow up to love God and fear God. All of my experiences were so wonderful and so new that it is hard to say one was more incredible than the other but a few do stick out. I had the great honor of meeting both the Samaritan High Priest and the Vice High Priest on different days. This world does not understand, like you do, that the High Priest is the highest authority of mankind granted by God. I would rather meet him than the President of the United States, or the Pope in Rome, or any movie star. They were both so kind to me and welcomed me into their homes. I pray that the whole country of Israel would acknowledge their authority some day. Wouldn't that be incredible? Visiting many of your homes was wonderful. I was overwhelmed with how many of you said to me, "welcome, welcome." I enjoyed sitting in your homes, sharing tea and bread and listening to your stories. Much of the time I could understand only a word here and there but I could see your passion and kindness. I felt welcome. Sitting in many of your homes reminded me of when I would sit in my relatives' homes as a small child listening to the adults. It felt very comfortable. I also loved to observe when two of you would debate. The boldness that you would speak to each other with and yet remain friends was refreshing to see. Voices could be raised, people could express their opinions and even get mad, but it was very healthy and honest and good. In the U.S. people are often too polite. They smile and listen but don't express their true feelings. They are too careful to not hurt feelings and it just is not honest. I would much rather have an honest relationship where people can express differences and not worry about it. One of my very favorite things was to hear the Torah read out loud in the Ancient Hebrew. I especially enjoyed the Memorial Day of "the Assembly on Mount Sinai" on Wednesday when the whole Torah was read out loud. I happily sat for many hours listening. One embarrassing event that you may have heard

about happened on that evening. I was given a most delicious meal of potatoes, onions, and lamb that had been roasted by the family of Yoseph Alteph. When asked what I had eaten I explained that I had had the most wonderful potatoes, onion, and CHICKEN I had ever tasted. Well, it was lamb. They must of thought I was crazy. You see, I have only had lamb maybe three times in my entire life. I have chicken many times a week so without thinking I just assumed it was chicken. So, it was the best lamb I had ever tasted and all I can do is laugh about it. Finally, I was there as an observer but I was also there as a worshiper. How could I not be? I believe Torah with all my heart. I was at the Mountain of Blessing with God's people. I was a visitor but my desire was also to worship and obey the Almighty with all of my heart for I do fear God. So as the week went on I did try to worship more. I could not understand the ancient Hebrew but I loved hearing it. It was beautiful music to my heart. I could only pray in English but I was praying to the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the Samaritan Israelites. When you would bow down I bowed down also. When you would stand I would stand also. If any of my actions were offensive to any of the Samaritan Israelites I am deeply sorry. You must realize that I and my family are like children just learning about you now. We have not had parents and grandparents to pass on the traditions, songs, prayers, or language. Benny is like a father to us now teaching us and I ask that you will all be patient with us and kindly point out to us anything we may need to know. The next step for us: We know that we are commanded to make the pilgrimage to the Mountain three times a year but we do not have the money or time off from work that would allow that. So our goal is to someday live in Israel where we can keep Torah as completely as possible. We need the Israeli citizenship to be allowed to work. But, as it stands right now, the Jewish Government says we must become Jews to become Israeli Citizens and they will not allow a convert to the Samaritan Israelites to be acceptable for citizenship. Well, obviously, that is unacceptable. Your people have never left the land. You are Israelites in every way. The Jews are your brothers. You should have every right that they do and more when you consider that you have the system of Levitical Priesthood still functioning. This may be a battle that will have to go to your Supreme Court but it is important for the Israeli government to acknowledge the Samaritans' rights. So our prayer is for God to make the way and we will be patient and do this in the right way. I hope that the next time I can come and visit you I will be able to bring my whole family. That of course is very expensive so maybe we will be coming to stay. I pray that God would bless your people and keep you safe in the middle of this world of turmoil. We will be praying for prosperity and health and joy for you and your families. And we will be praying for the ability to join you someday.

Sincerely with Highest Regards,
Tsafon Etzion,
Dallas, Texas

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