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The Advocate: America's Jewish Journal, Volume 46

**The Reform Advocate**

Chicago, Ill., October 11, 1913

Published every Saturday in the interest of Reform Judaism

7 South Dearborn Street, Chicago

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Bloch & Newman: Publishers

(p. 274)

**The Samaritans.**

By Dr. S. Weissenberg, Elisabethgrad.

Translated from the German for the Reform Advocate by J. H.

As one of the most convincing proofs, that the historical development of Judaism, beginning with the Bible and continuously adding new strength through the rejuvenating forces of tradition, is not a delusion but the steady aim and object of deep thought and conviction, is furnished by the fact of the survival of Judaism to the present time. In spite of its existence during several thousands of years, the defamed and numerically weak Judaism has not suffered through internal disintegration caused by sectarianism, such as the powerful and proud Christian religion had to face from its very inception. True, Judaism, too, had its sects as the necessary consequence of the ever pondering human intellect, but these were quickly absorbed and they did not create any permanent internal feuds or gaping chasms. Judaism deserves (p. 275) special honor for having undergone these painful operations, without resort to brute force and power, but through logical evolution and the application of its tenets to practical life, thereby establishing the truth of its immutable teachings and principles.

Two special sects have survived to this day, the Samaritans and the Karaites. Their existence, however, only confirms the contention set forth in the preceding lines, as, compared to the ever alert and progressive Judaism, both sects have proved intellectually unproductive and inferior and also physically degenerating and sterile and their total extinction is only a question of time.

In furnishing herewith a picture of the life of the Samaritans on the basis of the personal observations made by me during the year 1908 I shall retain the privilege at some later date to also give the description of the Karaites, whom I have visited and studied in their own homes.

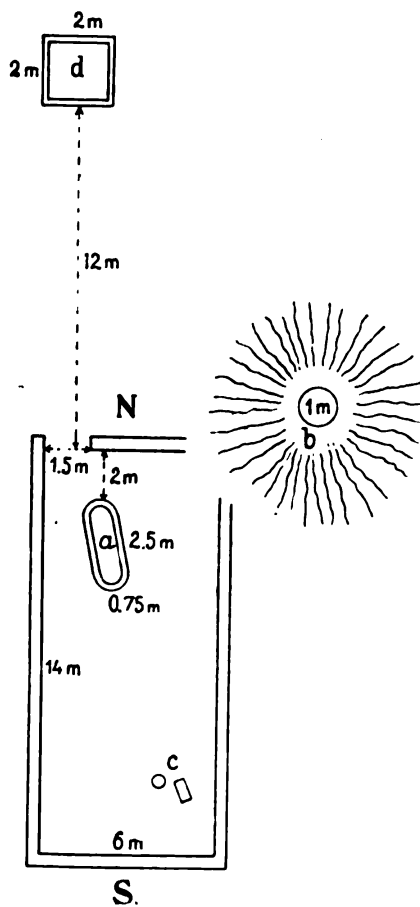
The origin of the Samaritans is described in Kings II. 17, 24-41. According to that record the King of Assyria, after the conquest of Samaria, settled different peoples from Babylonia, Kuta, Ava, Hamat and the Sefarvajim in the cities and country of the children of Israel.

As these people did not fear the Lord, He sent lions to destroy them. Thereupon they asked for help from the King of Assyria. He ordered one of the deported Priests to return in order to teach the new people the ways and the customs of serving the God of the

country. Some of the people did not give up their own old religious rites entirely and “thus these people adored the Lord God and at the same time worshipped their old idols.” Thus religiously and ethnologically the conditions for a mixed race were created.

When at a later period the surviving Jews had secured from Cyrus the permission for the restoration of the Temple the Samaritans desired to share in that work and they appeared before King Serubabel with their request: “We wish to erect the building with you as we are anxious to seek your God with you,” but they were told: “It is not your privilege to erect a house for our God with us.” (Esra 4, 2-3.) This was the beginning of the separation between Judaism and the Samaritans, that in the course of time has become unreconcilable.

The Samaritans, filled with hatred and embittered with rancor, did all in their power to frustrate and hinder the plans of the Jews, but for a long period they seem to not have given up all hope for an amicable settlement of the struggle. When Nehemia appeared in Palestine about 100 years later he said to the inhabitants of Samaria: "You have no share and no right and no remembrance of Jerusalem. (Nehemia 2, 20.)



**PLACE OF SACRIFICE.**  
 A.—Trench for Killing.  
 B.—Steaming Pit.  
 D.—Oven.

(Fig 1 from page 275)

The complete rupture seems to have been effected when Nehemia undertook to enforce the dissolution of mixed marriages between Jews and Samaritans, which step had been decided upon during the time of Esra, but at that period had not been carried into effect. Through this dissolution of marriages many families, among them some of great prominence and influence and even some in the circles of Priests were affected. Among the Jews there were large numbers opposing the harsh measure and they were forced to seek asylum and find shelter among the Samaritans. The stricter the Law was enforced among the Jews, the more was the injustice thereof felt among the Samaritans and the long smoldering hatred grew into permanent enmity. The Samaritans sought to treat the Jews with equal severity and they considered the Jews to be heathens, that had to be kept aloof at all hazards and this caused the creation of a separate congregation and the erection of a Temple for the exclusive use of the Samaritans. This was the origin of the Samaritan sect.

The name of Samaritan is derived from the city of Samaria, founded by King Omri, which name in time was applied to the entire Central Palestine. The Samaritans themselves do not call themselves "Schomeronim," which would be the proper name, but "Schomerim."—Guardians (of the Law.) They

will not recognize the name of "Kutim" used in the rabbinical literature and by preference they insist upon being called "Israelim."

As to the numerical strength of the sect at the time of its origin there are no reliable sources of information available. At no time during its history does it seem to have gained material strength of numbers and it has always remained confined to the narrow limits of Samaria. Some idea of the greatest strength of the sect can be gained from historical sources. According to Jos. Flavins (Bell. Jud. III. 7. 32) when the Samaritans tried to oppose the advance of Vespasian on Mount Garizim in the year 67 (A. D.) (p. 276) there were 11,600 of them slain in battle. They seem to have recovered from this serious defeat, as it is known they were granted special favors by the Romans on account of the valuable assistance they had given to the Roman forces in their campaigns against the Jews during the period of Bar-Kochbas. Their intense hatred towards the arising and not yet firmly established Christian Church was particularly pronounced and can probably be traced to their deeply rooted monotheistic belief, that repeatedly led them



GROUP OF SAMARITANS. (from page 275)

to indiscriminate slaughter of the adherents of the new faith and to the destruction of Christian Church edifices. In the year 529 they even rose in arms against the powerful East Roman Emperor Justinian, and after destroying and plundering many Christian settlements they declared themselves independent of the Roman Empire and elected one of their own numbers, Julian Bar-Sabar, as King. The revolt was, however, quickly suppressed and the defeat at that time seems to have crushed all national ambition among this small people and the succeeding persecutions by the victors probably aided in the complete annihilation, of all hopes of political independence. The defeated Samaritans fled in different directions, but they seemed to have been unable to arouse new life in the several colonies in the Diaspora, Egypt or Rome, where they must have arrived at about the same period when the Jews reached there. These colonies were quickly absorbed in the general population, the same was the case of others on Asiatic territory, such as Babylon and Damascus, where many Samaritans had found asylum after being driven from home through the Justinian persecutions. According to the reports of Benjamin of Tudela their numbers had been reduced to a mere 1,500 in all Palestine and Syria by the end of the 12th century. It is safe to assume, that at this period several hundred of

Samaritans lived in Egypt, as Meschullam ben-Menachem reports some fifty Samaritan families residing there in 1480. After the complete elimination of the foreign colonies the



numbers of Samaritans have rapidly diminished, so that since the beginning of the 19th century they could only be found in Nablus and their number has never exceeded 200 since that time.

**HIGH PRIEST WITH SCROLLS.**  
(From page 276)

The sexual proportions fully warrant a sceptical view as to the future of these people, as the males far exceed in numbers the females and a large number of young men have to remain, unmarried. The search for wives among the neighboring peoples has had but poor results, as but few young women were inclined to relinquish their religious views and adopt customs entirely foreign to them and in conflict with their own education and established views of life. Even a few attempts to establish closer relations in view of securing wives with the Falaschas have miscarried. I shall never forget the pained expression on the features of the Samaritan Highpriest when, upon my departure, I saluted him with the Biblical saying: "Be fertile and may your numbers

increase." He shrugged his shoulders and lifted his face heavenward with a yearning expression as if to say. "Hence comes the judgment." The desperate conditions can readily be understood when it be known that at the time of my visit there were 25 grown men, all unmarried, all of whom hoped to secure for wife the only grown up young woman of about 19 years in the community. The disproportion between the sexes is the more astonishing as it was claimed at that time, that there were 110 men and only 70 women in the community. But even these figures seem exaggerated, as Huxley (Jew. Enc. X) in 1901 gives the following figures as an accurate census:

Males over 15 years of age .....	72
Males under 15 years of age .....	<u>25</u>
Total .....	97
Females over 12 years of age .....	44



Females under 12 years of age ... 11  
Total..... 55

Thus it would seem as if the sexes are as badly proportioned for the growing generation as for the adult population.

Nablus, the Biblical Sichem, was always the headquarter of the Samaritans and now is their only place of residence. This preference for Nablus probably is accounted for by its vicinity to the holy mountain of Garizim. Their temple on this mountain must have been erected during the time of Nehemia when the separation from the Jews took place and mount Garizim may have been selected on account of having been called the mountain of blessing in the Bible. (Deut. 11-29 and 27-12). This Samaritan temple in general fared no better than did the Jewish edifice in Jerusalem. It first was destroyed by the Maccabae: 1 Johannes Hyrkanos in 129 B. C. because the Samaritans not only refused to assist the Jews in their war against (p. 277) the Syrians but had made common cause with the latter. The temple must have been rebuilt at a later period as the coins of Flavia Neapolis (as the old Sichem was called in honor of this Emperor after the destruction of Vespasian- hence the name Nablus still in use at this time, bear the picture of a mountain on top of which a temple building is visible. The final destruction of the temple took place during the reign of Emperor Zena, who erected a Church in its place. At present the top of the mountain is covered by ruins from the center of which arises a rock, which is designated by the Samaritans as the place where the altar of their temple had been located.

(photo from p. 277. SONS OF PRIESTS)



But like Zion to the Jews so is Garizim still the holy place to the Samaritans. To increase the sacredness of the site some of the Biblical legends have been associated with it. Thus Paradise has been located on this spot and the sacrifice of Isaac is supposed to have taken place. The top of the mountain was not reached by the waters of the flood. The holy ark of the covenant is supposed to be hidden in one of its numerous

caverns. At all events the belief in the sacredness of mount Garizim is one of the fundamental, if not the most important, principles upon which the whole scheme of the Samaritan religious belief is built.

Their creed runs as follows: "I believe in the one Lord Jahwe and his servant Moses, the son of Amram, also in His holy Law, and in the mountain of Garizim, the seat of the Lord and in the day of punishment and retribution."

The Samaritans are strict monotheists and they must have been such at the time of the rupture with Judaism, as it is plain, that they could not independently have developed monotheistic ideas after that period, as the fanatical adherence to the original principles is the characteristic tendency inherent to all sectarian spirit. This assumption is strengthened by the fact, that the Samaritans do not possess or know any Biblical literature beyond the

Pentateuch as the separation took place before the closing of the canons and preceded the life and work of the majority of the prophets. For this reason they only know and honor Moses and to a limited extent also Joshua.

The strong adherence to the Biblical commands has created many differences between the religious practices of the Jews and the Samaritans. Thus the latter only know and celebrate the Biblical festivals, but ignore Purim and Chanukkah. The use of phylacteries, Talissim and Mesusahs are entirely unknown to them. Circumcision is practiced without the Periah. The slaughtering methods differ from those of the Jews. The carcass of the animal is not inspected as to its prior physical condition, which is the absolute requirement under the Jewish law. There are no restrictions as to the simultaneous use of meat and milk. In consideration of always having the festival of Pentecost occur on Sunday the Samaritans might to a certain extent be considered the precursors of the later day Sadduceans, whose religious views are still adhered to by the present day Karaites.



(PHOTO FROM P. 277

**SAMARITAN CHILDREN.)**

According to the Biblical command the pilgrimages to the holy mountain Garizim are still maintained on the three Regalim- Pesach, Pentecost and the feast of week, in spite of the destruction of

the temple. During the entire Pesach week the Samaritans dwell on the mountain in tents order to be sure not to come in contact with leavened bread, a task not always possible in the midst of a population not adhering to that ceremony. During the other festivals only short visits are paid to the holy site.

The celebration of the Pesach festival, during which the Passah lamb is slaughtered according to the Biblical commands, has been fully described by Moulton in the Journal of the German-Palestinian Society. (1904 B. 27.) Hence it is not necessary to here repeat the details and I shall confine this report to a description of the site of the celebration, which has not been done by any prior visitor probably on account of most of the visitors only arriving when the place was filled by the celebrating Samaritans.

The sacrificial place is not located at the top of the mountain, but some distance away. It is an open square surrounded by a wall of rough stone reaching a height of a trifle over 3 feet and showing the wear of time in some places. Its approximate contours and

measures can be seen from the accompanying map. (Fig. 1). In the northern portion can be seen a shallow trench lined with stones that serves the purpose of receiving the blood and the offal of the sacrificed animals and to burn these parts therein. In the northeast corner the place adjoins a small hill, which Moulton considers of artificial origin in order to gain sufficient depth therein to provide a pit for the steaming of the animals intended for sacrifice. Moulton gives the depth of this pit as about 10 feet and he states, that after the Pesach festival the pit is filled up with stones in order to prevent its defilement. During my visit the pit was open and empty and its depth did not appear to be over 5 feet.

(p. 278) Moulton counted during his visit at Pesach of 1903 the number of 38 tents in the camp of the Samaritans. It would thus appear that each family occupied a tent by itself, which is plausible as they all spend the entire week there. The camping is omitted during the celebration of Pentecost and the feast of weeks. During my visit to the Samaritans the first day of the feast of weeks on a Saturday. As this is a day of absolute rest there were only the usual services in the Sinagog. On the following day, Sunday, the visit to the mountain; did not take place for some reason unknown to me. On Monday the customary pilgrimage was undertaken and when I arrived at the top of the mountain at an early hour there was only one tent erected in which some 20 men and boys were assembled including the High priest. It would be impossible for me to say whether any prayers had been recited during the stay, but I can safely state that there was considerable consumption of spirits and of victuals in which all present participated.

The first day of the feast of weeks was celebrated by solemn services in the synagog, while the services on the eve preceding seemed less impressive and all those attending wore their everyday clothes. On the festival day all the men wore white tunics in the synagog. The Sukkah is replaced by a room in the houses which is decorated with ferns, flowers and selected specimen of fruits for this occasion. The "Lulab" is unknown to the Samaritans. During the week days intervening between the first and last day of the festival all kind of work seems to be permitted and I found all those I visited during that period following their usual avocations.

As to the worship of the Samaritans and their synagog I can report as follows: The synagog, called "Kemiset es-Samire (Assembly room of the Samaritans) or in ordinary conversation "Bith Allah (house of the Lord) is a dark hall with several recesses and a larger vestibule. One of the recesses serves as the depository of the Torah rolls, which are considered sacred. There are no ornaments or decorations of any kind and only the stands used to unroll the Torah and a few chairs for the Priests vary the prevailing monotony. Among other Pentateuch rolls the Samaritans possess one which they call the "Holy Roll." It is supposed to date from the early Christian era and is only used on the day of atonement. A peculiarity of the Samaritan Torah rolls consists in the receptacle with three handles, while the Sephardim and all those following their ritual, the Persian, Bocharist and Caucasian Jews, only use the two handled receptacles and the Aschkenasim cover their rolls with cloaks. The handles are covered by silver ornaments that remind of our "Ez Chajim." The center handle is of no service as only the two side handles are used in rolling the parchment scrolls.

The worship consisted mainly of the recitation of prayers and hymns during which the congregations remains in the outer vestibule with faces turned towards the holy mountain, while the High priest with his assistants faces the congregation from the main hall. The prayers are recited by one of the priests and the hymns in alternate lines by a

priest and a member of the congregation selected for that purpose and who then enters the main hall. The prayers are mostly recited in standing posture but some times it seems permissible to squat crosslegged on the rug covered floor. The synagog itself is considered sacred and cannot be entered except in stocking feet. When I tried to enter the synagog in complete ignorance of this custom I was halted by the Highpriest, who called my attention to Ex. 3-5, wherein it is commanded: "Take your shoes from your feet for the place wherein you stand is holy ground." During the prayers some will assume a kneeling position with the body bent forward. Sometimes the arms and hands are stretched out as it\* in the act of receiving something. Again the hands are passed slowly over the face. Upon my inquiry as to the significance of these motions I was informed, that the stretching of arms and hands was in connection with prayers of supplication while the covering of the faces took place at the mention of God's name. As this custom has survived with us during the recital of the "Schemah" prayer its existence with the Samaritans would indicate for it a most ancient origin. The most impressive part of the services is the bringing forth of the Torah, for which the priests don a praying shawl without any stripes. At the close of the Sabbath services every attendant kissed the hand of the Highpriest and received his blessing. The more prominent members were allowed to kiss the lips of the Priest. On that Saturday I counted over 70 men and boys attending the synagog, hence the whole male population was present.

The prayers are recited in the Samaritan language, which is understood by about 60 (?) of the present generation, according to the statement made by the Highpriest. In daily intercourse the language spoken is Arabic.

The Priests seem to maintain Nazarene customs. They and their sons let their hair grow and wear it in long plaits which they tie around the head.

The office of Highpriest is now hereditary in a Levitic family, as the original family holding that office and claiming direct descent from Aron died out in the male line during the 17th century. The present Highpriest, Jacob, has led his congregation since several decades. He is a charming venerable gentleman who is ready to do most anything for the stranger against a reasonable compensation. It would be well to present letters of introduction to him accompanied by some small present. Mr. D. Jellin in Jerusalem kindly had furnished me a letter of introduction to the Highpriest, which letter I presented with a pound of tea, which is a favorite beverage of the Samaritans.

The tourists and the scientists only have themselves to blame for the proverbial greed of the Samaritans as they have accustomed the latter to receiving tips out of all proportions to the services rendered. I have no complaint to make on this score as my visit took place out of the regular season and the guides and others were well satisfied with less extravagant remuneration.

As to the conditions of the women among the Samaritans they remain invisible to the stranger and are not even allowed to attend the synagog. The only woman I was permitted to see was a "Niddah" and on account thereof she could not run away as she had to remain in one place. This lucky incident afforded me the rare opportunity of learning how the "Niddah" was treated in ancient times according to Lev. 15, 19-28. The woman sat upon a rug on the floor leaning against the wall and she was surrounded by a layer of stones that left but the small space of about 6x3 feet within which she was permitted to move. On one side of her there was placed a pitcher of water. In this close confinement the woman is kept for a period of 8 days and if at the expiration thereof she is not



perfectly well she has to remain another week. I regret not having been permitted to take a picture of the woman and of her surroundings.

What are the means of support of the Samaritans? Some earn a living by copying their holy books for sale at extravagant prices to tourists and scholars. A few are clerks in the administration offices of the government. Some are artisans, but only earn a meagre income as they are dependent on Samaritan local traffic exclusively. This is especially the case with the tailors. The Moslem neighbors do not patronize the Samaritan workmen and seem imbued with a deep prejudice against them. They even at times go the length of showing their hatred for the Samaritans by playing nasty tricks, upon the latter, no doubt highly amusing and innocent in the eyes of the Arabs, such as for instance the throwing of a dead rat or mouse into the premises of the Samaritans, which puts the latter to great inconvenience and trouble as they still adhere to the Biblical laws of cleanliness.

The Samaritan quarter occupies the southwestern part of Nablus and is called "Charet es-Samire." It only consists of a few houses closely surrounding the synagog. The restricted crowded quarters probably account for the haggard pale feature of most of the Samaritans and also for the numerous eye and lung troubles that are chronic among them.

I shall add a few words as to the anthropological traits of the Samaritans. They mostly attain considerable height of stature, are inclined towards long-headedness, have sharp long faces with small Semitic noses and a dark complexion. Their history warrants the assumption that they have retained all the original traits of their Semitic ancestors of whom they are pure blooded descendants. They certainly can be considered as being of pure Semitic origin in contrast to the present day Jews, who in their wandering all over the earth have mingled their blood with many nationalities and who have acquired the national traits of the different peoples among whom they have dwelled.

#### **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

There is a J. Weissenberg #5230 but it should read Samuel Weissenberg. This has been verified through his other publications.

*Samuel Weissenberg* (1867–1928) was physician and a German-trained Russian anthropologist, reviewed historically the changes that ... the Jewish community of his native city, *Elisabethgrad*, in the Ukraine.