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THE SAMARITAN REMNANT AT NABLOUS (SHECHEM.)

Rev. L. Zeckhausen writes from Jerusalem to *The Voice of Israel*, of witnessing the Passover of the Samaritans on Mount Gerizim. He says: "As a community, the Samaritans are very poor. Tailors, cobblers, and small traders, they eke out a precarious existence. They live together at Nablous in what one might call the Samaritan colony—an irregular square of old houses. In the middle of the square is their unpretentious little synagogue.

"The first thing that met our eyes on nearing the summit was a thick column of smoke. Presently we saw before us an encampment of some thirty-five to forty tents pitched in two long rows on a level piece of ground, and a motley, surging crowd near and round it. The bulk of these people were Moslem and native Christian sight-seers, who seemed to regard it all as a huge joke. They unceremoniously pushed and pressed everywhere, and had to be kept in order by half a dozen armed soldiers and several zapteeyes (policemen). "We were asked into the tent of the high priest, and received most cordially. Every possible information was willingly given (p. 93) us. So we learned that the high priest's name was Jacob Ben Aaron; that he has been filling his office for many years; that the whole of the Samaritan community consisted of only two hundred souls, all told; that they had priests and Levites of their own, claiming a direct succession from Aaron and the ancient tribe of Levi, while the rest believe themselves to be descendants of Joseph. There would seem to be three families of priests, but they themselves preferred to speak of but one priestly family in three households. Every priest is a Nazarite from his birth, and has to let his hair grow long, and observe other precepts of the Nazarites. One had no difficulty, therefore, in detecting a priest from an ordinary Samaritan.

"As the sun was near setting, the high priest donned a long silk robe and walked out of his tent, we following closely behind him. Near the entrance to the camp there was a rough, low enclosure, some 150 feet by 30, at one end of which two big boilers, full of water, were steaming over a fire kept up in holes under them. About forty or fifty adult Samaritans, clad in long white linen robes, were squatting on little mats, performing their privy devotions entirely in the Moslem style. Presently they all got up (except the high priest, who still remained kneeling before a low pillar), and commenced chanting noisily and with wild gesticulations a Passover hymn. The high priest then mounted his pillar, or stone, turned to the people and read, with a peculiar intonation, the twelfth chapter of Exodus. More chanting followed, during which time seven white lambs were brought into the enclosure, placed in position round the boilers, and surrounded by a double chain of young men, to prevent an outsider touching the lambs after they had been consecrated, and so defiling them. Three priests, with long knives in their hands, were standing over the prostrate sheep, waiting for a signal from the high priest to despatch them.

"The temper of the Moslem mob, standing on the low wall of the enclosure and pressing from behind it, became by now so unruly that the policemen had to strike hard

with their whips and clubs to keep them in their places, and prevent their making havoc with the poor Samaritans' sacrifices.

"The high priest's voice was rising more and more above the reigning Babel around him, and the moment he pronounced the words: 'And the whole assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel shall kill it in the evening,' the seven lambs were slain with a rapidity that was simply astonishing—in probably less than a minute—and the victims were lying about with their (p. 94) throats cut and consciousness extinct. Several of the Samaritans caught the oozing blood with their hands and smeared it on their faces, washing them, however, with water soon afterwards. The high priest having satisfied himself that the lambs were properly despatched, the people squatted in groups round the carcasses of the animals, and, by pouring boiling water on them, caused the wool to come off cleanly and readily, and all the time another party were reciting endless hymns. When the wool was off and burnt, a pole was driven through the lamb's hind legs, by which it was lifted on to the shoulders of two men, the heart and the intestines were deftly removed and burnt, too, and the right leg, with the shoulder, cut away as the priests' portion.

"After this all the lambs were laid on a hurdle, carried to the pit, out of which we saw smoke issuing when we first had reached the summit, and there they were, one at a time, lowered by their respective poles. The pit itself looked like the mouth of a disused cistern, but was only some ten feet deep. Its sides and bottom were of solid masonry, and a strong fire was kept up in this improvised oven for some five hours previous to the lambs being lowered into it. The hurdle was then placed on the mouth of the pit, and by means of grass, mud and earth, this was hermetically closed. For over three hours' did the carcasses remain in the oven, and it was going on midnight when, under the accompaniment of more hymns, they were taken out, carefully carried in new wicker-baskets back into the enclosure, deposited on mats spread on the ground, and there and then eaten by all the males—each pulling a piece off with his fingers and eating it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. No women -were to be seen at the place of sacrifice, but pieces of meat were taken into the tents for them and the little children.

"The unleavened bread of the Samaritans looks not unlike very thin pancakes, and is in color just like the ordinary native bread.

"The Samaritans possess but the Pentateuch, in a style of writing which is extremely ancient. Its language is pure Hebrew, and differs but slightly, on the whole, from the text of our Hebrew Pentateuch. We were shown an ancient scroll of the law, the writing of which is in parts already defaced. It is preserved in a really fine case of embossed silver, lined with rich green velvet, and engraved on the outside with representations of the tabernacle, the ark, the altars, the seven-branched candlestick, the table of shewbread, and Aaron's rod. We were calmly informed that the scroll had been written by a great-grandson of Aaron, to wit, by Abishua, the son of Phineas, 1 Chron. iii :4; and that the case, together with its engravings, was the work of no less a person than Bezaleel, the renowned constructor of the tabernacle! Exodus xxxi :2. The articles are certainly of a respectable antiquity.

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.

Direct link [Salvation: Volume 5 - Page 93](#) Rev. **L. Zeckhausen** was a Missionary.