

The Division of Authority Amongst the Leadership of the Samaritan People Helped Their Survival [A & B Editorial] Issue no. 1090-1091 15.7.2011

From the very beginning in which a chain of command for the top leadership of the people of Israel was created, sharing the authority between the High Priest with a leader of the people who was not from the tribe of Levi was tradition. The beginning of creating the roles was not between Moses and Aaron, because both of them were Levites chosen by the Almighty; Moses who centralized all roles of authority as a priest and as a prophet, as a judge and a recognized representative of the People of Israel before the nations: the Egyptians, the Moabites, the Edomites, the Ammonites and the Midianites. Aaron started his activity as the spokesman of Moses and ended it when he was crowned with the crown of the priesthood upon his head, as the main activist in offering the sacrifices in the tabernacle. The authority roles started with the clear division between the civil role of the leaders from among the people - Joshua bin Nun, the successor of Moses in the leadership alongside Elazar ben Aaron the first High Priest of the People of Israel in the Land of Israel of whom from him derived the family of the High Priests. Joshua served as a chief of staff, the leader who took out and brought in the army of Israel during its wars to fulfill the promise of dwelling in the Land of Israel for the People of Israel. His partner in the leadership, High Priest Elazar, continued in his father's role for being responsible for the cult in the tabernacle of Moses, that was erected at the top of Mount Gerizim, but in addition to his religious leadership role was added the fame of being the representative of the Almighty here on earth; the personality who made the coronation of the king and the chief judge in regard to all matters that were connected with fulfilling the commandments of the Torah. After centralizing most of the roles in the hand of one person, Moses, his duties were divided between the heads of the tribes of Israel to the head of the tribe of Levi. However, there is a clear difference between the two leaders at the time that the leader from within the people is a man of initiative that was prominent with his natural leadership over all heads of the People of Israel, whereas the High Priest serves by being the choice of the Almighty and the successor of the chosen family to lead the People of Israel, the family of Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aaron the Priest; that through it the High-priesthood is delivered from father to son or to another family member if there were not natural siblings to the holder of this great position. However, here enters the factor of the personality of the two holders of these greatest positions, in most number of cases he who held the position of the High Priest had his control directly from the blessing of the Almighty, and due to that he was the chief leader, the most prominent between the two. In some other times the military leader himself was a member of the chosen priestly family, as it happened during the Byzantine period in the Land of Israel, when the High Priest was the Iqbon ben Natanel, and the main leader of the People of Israel, the head of the army and the chief of judges who renewed the religious cult; and yet the builder of the synagogues to reinforce the religion was his brother Baba Raba the Great. The main role of these leaders, the high priest and the leader of the people, was to take care of the continuation of the political and religious activity of the people. Sometimes the leaders of the people was the prominent one, and sometimes the high priest was the one who directed everything in the leadership.

So was the High Priest Yair, son of Yonaton, from his place in Mount Gerizim before King David, so was the High Priest Hezekiah, before Alexander the Great, so was Baba Raba before the Byzantine rulers, so was the High Priest Elazar before the Islamic rulers. At the time of the Mameluke rulers, the leadership was divided between the high priest alongside a president position. During the Ottoman period the position was divided between the Phinchas high priest alongside the position of the Judge of Israel. Both the president and the judge were from within the people and not from the priestly family, and they fulfilled their civil position by representing the Samaritans before the authority of that time in which the high priest continued to be holding the supreme religious authority that centralized the cult and encouraged the religious and social culture. In this way the priest Abisha ben Pinchas, ben Yosef, described the duty of the high

priest in a short hymn that is sung on the Shabbat of the ten days of forgiveness. "The prayer ended, with the praising of our God. The noon prayer started with the Name of our God. I have to mention who established it for us, they are the high priests, our forefathers."

Abisha indicates that the high priests, sons of Pinchas, his forefathers were the founders of the structure of the prayers and the poems in the synagogue cult. Since ancient days after the animal sacrifices ceased from the center in Mount Gerizim the high priests of Pinchas were those who determined that the prayers replaced the offerings. Two prayers a day, in the morning and in the evening, they are the fulfillment of the commandment "the first sheep you have to make in the morning, and the second sheep between the sunsets." The prayers of Shabbat replaced the sacrifices of Shabbat, and this is the same with the first days of each month, and the seven festivals of the year. The high priests of Pinchas were those who established the ancient songs and poems in rhythm to stabilize the poetry early in the Hellenistic period. They were the first that fixed the cult of public bath purification, and they led the Samaritan synagogue that probably was earlier in purity and in the cult of the synagogue in comparison to the Jewish ones.

The Priests of Pinchas led the structure of the prayer and they were those who made changes to this structure. Yes, there were changes to the structure of the cult of the prayers from time to time. At the beginning the prayer was focused on the reading of the Torah, all of it or a portion of it, in regard to the festivals and shabbats. After that hymns of the ancient sages of the Samaritans were integrated into the cult. The best of the authors, such as Amram Dareh, Marqeh, Ninna, Yehoshua son of Baraq, The Dustan, and Matanah the Son of Abraham, and many anonymous writers. In the second golden age of the Samaritan culture during the fourteenth century the high priests of Pinchas, Joseph ben Azzi, and mainly his son Pinchas and the two sons of Pinchas Elazar and Abisha, started a new prayer structure, and they were helped by the giant poet Abed Ela Ben Shalma, the father of the High Priest of our days, and also he composed many musical vocal pieces, and processed and integrated the hymns of the contemporary writers in the cult, the authors of his days, until today the Samaritan singers are honored to give first priority to these hymns after it is agreed that the most ancient ones are the foundation of every prayer in the past and to the future. Besides all of these the clear division between the religious activity that is led by the high priests of Pinchas, to the civil and military and regular activity that was led by the national leader was prominent, because without this division it was impossible to lead and establish the people to any activity that the people demanded to do from time to time. Baba Rabba divided the land according to the Samaritan centers into twelve regions and in each region he appointed a priest who would take care of the religious activity and would be an address to all Samaritans in the region in regard to the cult and the commandments in the synagogue that was built in the region, and with him he appointed a president from within the people in which his duty was to judge and centralize the military activity in each time that the leader Baba Rabba (who lived in Shechem) asked him to draft an army for revolts against the Byzantines, in which all ended in success, this and much more.

Beside the High Priest, his brother Iqbon ben Natanel, Baba Raba appointed a supreme court of seven members, three priests and four Israelites. It was a supreme court and discussion for the religious and cultural needs of the people. Significant reference to the divisions of the authority between priests and leaders of the people is prominent in the time that Baba Rabba succeeded to establish the people around him and bring them to military, religious, and economical success in a period that was considered the most prominent golden age of Samaritan history.

This Samaritan leadership establishment that was in its prime at the time of Baba Rabba and continued among the Samaritan people through all generations. The high priests and the leaders of the people exemplified by their lives before the people in their personal behavior in which they led to have the authority to teach the people the laws of the Almighty and His book. They led the people in the hardest periods, the high priest and the chiefs of the people, the heads of the big households were like a magnet to the whole parts of the people by being personalities that could be trusted in leadership and strong during the hardest events that happened through the generations. They stood together before their persecutors, but also they worked together religiously and structurally to stabilize the people, like the stabilization of the leader Abraham, the son of Jacob the Dinfi, with the High Priest his friend Tabia son of Yitzhaq, of which both fixed the structure of the prayer and hymns of the first fourteen days of the first month and its two

shabbats.

The High Priest Amram ben Shalma was the priest and the leader in one person in the mid 19th century, and to him shouted the unmarried person in the community to help them with their marriage in the dying community of his time - to the leader of the Samaritans outside of Nablus, Yefet the son of Abraham Tsedaka approached the High Priest Abisha Ben Pinchas and Amram ben Yitzhaq to help in drafting donations for the religious institutions in Nablus during the first half of the 20th century.

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