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**The Ride through Palestine**

By **John W. Dulles, D.D.**

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(p. 246) CHAPTER XV.

*JACOB'S WELL AND SHECHEM.*

WE turned our horses' heads away from Shiloh's desolate hill with a silent thoughtfulness. Most truly has "its glory departed." "Ichabod" is written on its ruins, which speak of what it has become in its downfall rather than of what it was in its days of prosperity. But our eyes were soon lifted, for now our way lay through a pretty vale where silver-leaved olives stood amid the green corn, and where the smoothness of the road permitted us to indulge in the luxury of a canter. After resting under a noble holm-oak (*balluta*), and then ascending and descending a hard hill, we came out into the richest plain we had seen since entering Palestine—the Plain of Mukhnah. It stretches to the north as far as Mount Ebal, a carpet of green grain unbroken by fence or hedge, but banded with brown stripes of new-ploughed land, and here and there dotted with fig, olive and mulberry trees. In our own country such a stretch of fine farming land, seven miles long by two broad, would not excite remark, so richly are we blessed with plains as fertile and vast in their extent; but after the sterile mountains of Judaea and amid the rugged mountains of Ephraim the Mukhnah kindles

(p. 247) *THE PLAIN OF MUKHNAH.*

warm admiration. Ploughmen were at their work, and villagers passed to and fro. Yet not a house was to be seen in all the plain. High up on the western hills rested the villages in which the tillers of the soil dwell. From these villages they must go to their fields, miles away, in the morning, and to them they must return in the evening. Afraid to live in the plain, they cluster in towns for mutual help and protection.

When Jacob returned from the far East with wives, children and herds, he made his first tarrying-place where this plain meets the Vale of Shechem. Perhaps the fact that his father's father, the great Abraham, erected here his first altar to Jehovah in the Land of Promise<sup>1</sup> may have influenced Jacob in his choice. But it will not be very uncharitable to suppose that the rich pasturage of the plain had as strong an attraction for this thrifty man. Just at the northern end of this plain he purchased a camping-ground,<sup>2</sup> that he might have a right to soil enough to dwell upon; and though the Vale of Shechem abounds in flowing fountains, he there dug the well that still bears his name, so that he might have unquestionable right to water for his family and servants, his flocks and herds.

Coming from the south, you continue up the plain of Mukhnah until Mount Gerizim faces boldly upon it on your left. Passing the eastern front of Gerizim and looking westward, you see at a glance the Vale of Shechem, running east and west, with Mount Gerizim on the south

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. xii. 6, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. xxxiii. 10.

and Ebal on the north. Just where you turn is Jacob's Well. Gerizim and Ebal, it will be p. 248) noted, are lofty parallel ridges, with the narrow Vale of Shechem between them. Gerizim stands two thousand eight hundred and forty-eight feet above the sea, and Ebal three thousand and seventy-six feet. At the eastern opening of the vale is Jacob's Well; a mile to the west is the city of Nablus, replacing the old Shechem and lying at the foot of the ridge of Gerizim. About a half mile north of Jacob's Well is a village called Askar, probably the Sychar whence came the "woman of Samaria" with whom our Lord held converse as he sat by Jacob's Well.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus had been in Jerusalem at the Passover season. He had cleansed the temple of those who profaned it with their buying and selling, and then turned his face northward, accompanied by his faithful followers, that he might teach in Galilee. It was usual for the Jews to cross the Jordan and travel through Peraea, the land east of the river, so as to avoid the abhorred Samaritans, whose country lay between Judaea and Galilee. But Jesus had good reasons at this time for passing through Samaria and encountering the hate and bitterness of its people, to whom the Jews were as odious as were the Samaritans to the Jews.

It will be remembered that the mixed people of Samaria were treated with disdain, as not true Israelites, by the Jews, and in return tried to prevent the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem after the Captivity. From these beginnings of strife arose a feud which grew more and more bitter from age to age, so that at the time of Christ "the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans." Indeed, when the Jews came

(p. 249) *CHRIST AT JACOB'S WELL.*  
from Galilee through Samaria to attend the Passover it was not uncommon for them to be



attacked by these  
Sometimes many lives were lost in these conflicts.

(map of Israel) bitter enemies.

<sup>3</sup> John iv.

But our Lord had a message for some of these very (p. 250) Samaritans. There were chosen ones of God in Sychar who were to be led by him to a knowledge of the truth, and so to eternal life. No doubt Jesus took our route from Jerusalem. He came by Bethel, left Shiloh on his right (for it is off the main road), walked through the green expanse of the Mukhnah, and reaching Jacob's Well, "wearied with his journey," sat there (sketch of Jacob's Well) whilst his disciples went to the town to buy provisions. So it fell out that the Samaritan woman, coming to draw water, found the water of everlasting life. The people of the town, too, moved from their enmity to the Jews by his wondrous teachings, "besought him that he would tarry with them; and he abode there two days."

No locality in Palestine is more absolutely identified than this of Jacob's Well. Jews, Samaritans, Mohammedans and Christians agree that here is the very well, dug by Jacob, beside which Jesus sat and held that wonderful discourse. Hence this spot has few rivals in interest. Yet it is a disappointing site. Upon a small knoll, beside which are broken walls and columns, you come upon a hole—in the earth, apparent- (p. 251) ly—really in the vaulted roof of a room ten feet square below the surface of the ground. You look down into this little room and see a pile of stones. But where is the well? The well is underneath that pile of stones. A portion of the roof of the small vaulted building which covered the precious well has fallen in, and the stones have choked up the mouth of the well. Letting myself down into the chamber, I peered through the crevices between the stones and saw—



JACOB'S WELL: WITHIN THE VAULT.

(Sketch of Jacob's Well: Within the Vault)

nothing! To assure myself that this truly was the well, I dropped a stone, and, listening, heard it strike below. So late as 1838 the well was one hundred and five feet deep; now it is only seventy-five feet deep. Rubbish and the stones dropped in by inquisitive (p. 252) travelers account for the diminution of its depth. When my readers visit Palestine they will please dismiss all inquisitiveness and abstain from thus testing the well.

With the helping hands of two of our company I regained the ground above, not without regret that this interesting spot should be in so neglected a condition. Yet this is better than that it should be spoiled by being enclosed in a church, surrounded with tawdry finery and turned into a place for self-righteous pilgrimages by Greek or Roman Christians. Old ruins are preferable to the superstitious gewgaws of the modern "holy place."

A few hundred yards to the north you find, amid the fields, a little whitewashed enclosure within which is a tomb. Who is buried here? Turn to Joshua xxiv 32, and you read: "And the

bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem." That this little *wely*<sup>4</sup>\* covers the tomb of the great and good Joseph there is every reason to believe.

But the generous clouds begin to shed their riches on field and tomb, and the falling flood does not exempt us from its favors. So, dressed in our rubber suits—most useful companions!—we turn westward and ride between craggy Gerizim on our left and the loftier Ebal on our right, by the Vale of Shechem, into Nablus. Shechem was a city of refuge to manslayers in the olden time. Though not manslayers,

(p. 253) *THE CITY OF NABLUS.*

we should have appreciated an open door in some hospitable home as we walked our horses through the straight central street of the town, but we found none opening to us. So on we rode, clattering over the stones and stared at by shopkeepers, and passed out of the city by its western gate. Our tents were pitched on a piece of level ground above the valley, beneath the steep ascent of Gerizim. It is probable that we were quite as comfortable in them as we should have been in a Nablus house. The average Syrian house is so populous with insects not named in polite circles as to be an undesirable resting-place. We did not altogether escape these lively little fellows even by dwelling in tents. As Shechem was a noted city from the time of Abraham down to the day when Solomon's foolish son Rehoboam was crowned there, so is



GERIZIM, WITH NĀBLŪS AT ITS FOOT.

Nablus now the most important and most populous town of Palestine north of Jerusalem. It has a charming position in the narrow vale between Ebal and Gerizim. The vale is watered by gurgling fountains, feeding rivulets of which one runs eastward, and another, with the water of most of the springs, westward, bearing verdure and fruitfulness into the lower grounds on both sides. The flow to the west forms a little stream which crosses the Vale of Sharon and enters the Mediterranean Sea. Gardens of olives and pomegranates, of walnuts and lemons, mingle with fields of wheat and barley, clad in spring-time with soft verdure.

Large quantities of soap are made from the olive oil produced in the neighborhood, which is held to be the best oil in Palestine. The antiquity of this trade is shown by huge mounds of ashes heaped up without the town. Its bazaars are thoroughly Oriental, being excelled in this respect only by those of Damascus.

The old Shechem was replaced at the time of the Roman conquest by a new city called, after the emperor Flavius Vespasianus, Flavia Neapolis. Under Arab rule the Flavia was

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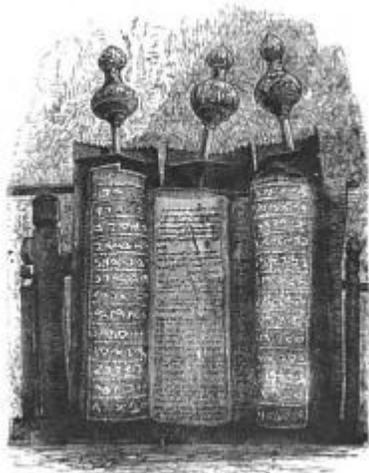
<sup>4</sup> *Wely* is the name given to the whitewashed and domed shrines built over the tombs of those recognized as saints by the Moslems.

dropped and Neapolis changed to Nablus, the name now borne by the town. Its population is reckoned variously at from ten to eighteen thousand. Mr. El-Karey puts it at twenty thousand, of whom eight hundred and thirty are Christians and one hundred and seventy Samaritans, and the remainder Moslems. The special interest of the present city gathers about the little remnant of the Samaritans found within its walls. These are the lineal and only surviving descendants of the race who have dwelt in this land from seven centuries before the birth of Christ onward. They now number less than two hundred.

(p. 255) *THE SAMARITAN PENTATEUCH.*

We were scarcely off our horses when we were called upon by the Rev. Youhannah El-Karey, a native of Nablus, educated in England, and now a Baptist missionary in his native place, where he is doing a good work through schools, Bible-class and preaching. Mr. El-Karey kindly offered us his services as our guide, and as the rain had ceased we were glad to accept his offer. He was especially helpful in leading us, by devious ways through dark alleys of questionable odor and vaulted streets of odor unquestionable, to the Samaritan synagogue in the south-western part of the city, where the Samaritans make their homes.

Their synagogue is decidedly more famous than elegant. In fact, it is a mean little place, though unique in interest. Its small room is rudely arched, whitewashed and lit by a skylight. The gem which gives value to this rude casket is the venerable "Samaritan Pentateuch" lodged here. It has been the habit of the high priest to guard this precious treasure so carefully that a more modern roll is shown to travelers and declared to be the very copy of the five books of Moses written by the grandson of Aaron. If this deception is detected through the information of the visitors, a second roll is shown whilst the venerated original is still kept hidden. Of course Mr. El-Karey was too well informed to be thus cheated. For a moderate bakshish the high priest brought the sacredly-cherished treasure of the synagogue from a cupboard behind the veil and exhibited it to us. It is kept in a silver case of Venetian workmanship which is wrapped in a silk scarf. It is writ- (p. 256) ten on sheepskin parchment, and is rolled upon two rods, so as to present by unrolling the successive columns to the eye of the reader. How old it is no one



THE SAMARITAN PENTATEUCH.

knows. The five books of Moses are the entire Scriptures of the Samaritans. They reject all else, as belonging to the hated Jews and not truly inspired.

The Samaritan high priest of to-day is a man of thirty-eight to forty years of age, tall, slender and handsome. His eyes are dark and his expression soft yet intelligent. His son, an

olive-faced boy, quite charmed us by his beauty. Father and son are fine samples of a national type of two thousand five hundred years' endurance, now almost extinct.<sup>5</sup>  
(p. 257) *EBAL AND GERIZIM.*

The Bible-reader will recall, among other references to this spot, one of memorable importance narrated in the book of Joshua,<sup>6</sup> when all Israel stood in this vale, six tribes under Ebal and six under Gerizim, to say "Amen" to the blessings on the keepers of God's law, and to the curses on those who should despise and break it. It has been found, by actual trial, that in a commodious recess forming an amphitheatre near the eastern end of the valley the voice of a speaker can be heard by an assembly on the opposing hillsides.

The parable of Jotham, uttered from Gerizim to the people of the town below,<sup>7</sup> will also be remembered, but must not be given here. The story fits in admirably with the localities. When on the ground you can easily imagine the bold speaker addressing the people below from a cliff back of the town, and then flying before he can be reached. Here, as everywhere in Palestine, the Scripture stories tally with the land so absolutely as to assure us of their truthfulness.

(p. 258) CHAPTER XVI.

*SAMARIA—D O THAN—JENIN.*

THE beautiful saddle in which Nablus sits like a queen, guarded right and left by craggy Ebal and Gerizim, is a watershed from which streams flow both eastward and westward. In going to Samaria, which is but eight miles away to the north-west, you first pass down the most delightful valley you have yet seen in Palestine.....

### **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

**John W. Dulles** is **John Welsh Dulles**, editor, born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 4 November 1823" died there, 13 April 1887. He was graduated at Yale.

They arrived in Palestine in March 2, 1879, The were on March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1879 at Nazareth after they had been to Nablus.

So Nablus visit was around the 10-15<sup>th</sup> of March.

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<sup>5</sup> To students of Bible history these Samaritans cannot fail to be an interesting study. The curious will find an instructive account of the keeping of the Passover by them on Gerizim, in Dean Stanley's *History of the Jewish Church*, First Series, Appendix III.

<sup>6</sup> Josh. vii.

<sup>7</sup> Judg. ix.