“MOUNTAIN MEN – Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim”

And Moses commanded the people on the same day, saying, "These shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people, when you have crossed over the Jordan: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin; and these shall stand on Mount Ebal to curse: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali. (Deuteronomy 27:11-13 NKJV)

An antiphon is a song or poem in which two persons or choirs answer back to one another. I have heard Johnny Cash and June Carter sing songs in which one of them responds to what the other one sings. Sea shanties are another example of antiphonal songs. The classical composer Gabrielli introduced antiphony into classical music using two choirs. During the Baroque period, antiphonal responses were introduced into church music also. In Europe there are some churches that were built with two choir lofts facing one another and even a few churches were fitted with two organs.

Many of the psalms in the Bible are written in a poetic style which has parallel phrases or sentences with the same meaning. Such a style lends itself very easily to antiphonal singing. One psalm which is plainly an antiphon is Psalms 136. Every verse begins with a statement of praise to the LORD and ends with the same response in every verse, “For His mercy endures forever.”

The origin of antiphonal praise was fourteen hundred years before Christ on the slopes of Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. At one point the slopes come together forming a natural amphitheater. Scientific tests of the acoustics there have concluded that it is feasible for hundreds of thousands people to hear unaided human voices. Genesis 27 and 28 contain the curses and the blessings they used. It begins with curses, continues with blessings and concludes with curses.
1.) Then Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan Aram; and he pitched his tent before the city. And he bought the parcel of land, where he had pitched his tent, from the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money. Then he erected an altar there and called it El Elohe Israel. (Genesis 33:18-20 NKJV)

From the time of Jacob until the time of David, Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim were the hub of the religious life and the political life of Israel. When the Israelites entered the Promised Land, after conquering Jericho they conquered Ai. Then in the shadow of Mt. Ebal and Mount Gerizim they worshiped God and renewed their covenant with Him. Then all Israel, with their elders and officers and judges, stood on either side of the ark before the priests, the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, the stranger as well as he who was born among them. Half of them were in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel. (Joshua 8:33 NKJV)

This is where Jacob’s Well is located. This is where they buried Joseph’s bones. The town of Shechem was located in the narrow valley between these two mountains. In the vicinity of Shechem Jacob purchased a plot of land. He passed it on to his son Joseph. Joseph requested that when Jacob’s descendants returned to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that his bones be buried there. It is in that same vicinity that his mother was buried. Not far from here the Tabernacle was placed in Shiloh along with the Ark of the Covenant. The prophets you read about in Judges, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, and 2 Kings were prophets who ministered chiefly in the area dominated by the mountains Ebal and Gerizim.

In Moses’ instructions Mount Ebal was designated for the curses. It is a barren mountain with little vegetation. It has only one small spring. Mount Gerizim is lush with vegetation and has twelve springs of water.
2.) And Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone to Shechem to make him king. (1 Kings 12:1 NKJV)

Even though David had established Jerusalem as the capital and Solomon, his son, had ruled the united kingdom from Jerusalem, the political power was still in the land dominated by Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. That was where Israel went to make Rehoboam, Solomon’s son, their king. When they asked how he would rule, Rehoboam said, ...

"My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!" (1 Kings 12:14b NKJV)

Now when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, saying: "What share have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Now, see to your own house, O David!" So Israel departed to their tents. (1 Kings 12:16 NKJV)

The kingdom was now divided. Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to the throne of David and Jerusalem. The remaining tribes chose Jeroboam as their king. Where would he rule from? He fortified Shechem and lived there. Later the kingdom of Israel would build a capital city which was named Samaria and Samaria also became the name of their kingdom.

Jeroboam did not want the people to go to worship in Jerusalem. He built shrines in the high places, and himself appointed priests of the high places. At Bethel and Dan he had golden calves placed and altars built. He and the people of Israel worshiped at these idolatrous altars.

The kingdom was divided in 975 B.C. For over two hundred years the LORD sent prophets to the people of Israel calling on them to repent. During this time Elijah and Elishah preached and trained other men to preach, calling upon the nation to return to the true God. In 750 B.C. the king of Assyria invaded the entire land and marched to Samaria. He captured it and deported the Israelites to different parts of Assyria.
3.) Then the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Secharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities… Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD. (2 Kings 17:24,28 NKJV)

As the years went by these Samaritans built a Temple on top of Mount Gerizim. They made copies of the five books of Moses and followed Moses’ instructions for worship and sacrifices. Over time they came to believe that Moses commanded that worship should be on Mount Gerizim. Further, they came to believe that they were Israelites. For these reasons there was animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans. Eight hundred years had passed when Jesus had this encounter with a woman of Samaria.

But He needed to go through Samaria. So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." …The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.” (John 4:4-7, 19-23 NKJV)

Jesus’ story of the Good Samaritan is the exact opposite of this story, but they both have the same message. This woman had had five husbands and was then living with a man who was not her husband. Her hear was not right with God. Her hope of salvation was in that beautiful temple on top of the mountain. In the story of the Good Samaritans the priest and the Levite attend the Temple in the right place and are true Jews, but their hearts were not right with God..