

SAMARITANS

By Mark E. Moore, Ph.D.

I. Origin

- A. Their name, "Samerim," means keepers (i.e. of the Torah)
- B. Peoples imported by Esarhaddon after the Assyrian captivity of 722 B.C. They intermarried with the poorest of the Jews who were left in the land. They had a commitment both to their own idols and to Jehovah (2 K. 17:24-29). 2 Kings 17:41 betrays their dual commitment.
 - 1. The Samaritans, however, claim that only 27,290 Israelites were deported according to the figures of Assyrian documents. Thus a sizeable population of Israelites remained and made proselytes of the imported peoples.
 - 2. Furthermore, Samaritans claim that unfaithful Jews caused Eli to move the sanctuary from Shechem to Shilo 1100 B.C.
- C. Jesus calls them "aliens," Luke 17:18.

II. Causes of Division

- A. The civil war between Rehoboam, son of Solomon (c. 930 B.C.) and Jeroboam and his golden calves (2 Chron. 10)
- B. Rebuilding of the temple (538-516 B.C.)
 - 1. They pretend to want to help, although Ezra 4:1 calls them adversaries of "Judah and Benjamin."
 - 2. When they were rudely rejected they turned to open hostility. Through their complaints to the Persian kings they delayed the building progress until 519 B.C. under Darius (Josephus, *Ant.* 11.4.3; Neh 2:10-6:14; 13:28).
- C. Rival Temple; cf. John 4:20 & Josephus, *Ant.* 11.8.2-4; 13.9:1.
 - 1. As the tensions between the two groups grew, and as the idolatry in Samaria lessened, the resentment escalated.
 - 2. In 409 B.C. a certain Manasseh, the son of the High Priest, was expelled from Jerusalem by Nehemiah because of an unlawful marriage. He found refuge in Samaria and through the permission of the Persian king Darius Nothus, he built a rival temple on Mt. Gerezim for the Samaritans. (Josephus, *Ant.* 11.7. 8, is considered by some scholars to be a Midrash on Nehemiah).
 - 3. An alternate (and more likely) scenario has the Samaritan temple built by the permission of Alexander the Great during his Palestinian conquest 332 B.C.
 - 4. They rejected the Jewish interpretation of Deuteronomy 12:5-7, 11-14; 16:2; and 26:2, that there be only one acceptable temple to God and that on Mt. Zion. In fact, the Samaritan Pentateuch at Deut. 27:4 has Moses commanding that an altar be built on Mt. Gerezim rather than on Mt. Ebal.
 - 5. John Hyrcanus leveled the Samaritan temple in 127 B.C. (Josephus, *Ant.* 13.9:1). When Herod the Great offered to rebuild their temple they refused because they learned that he would also rebuild the temple of Jerusalem (Josephus, *Ant.* 15.8.3-11.1).
- D. This crystallized the animosity between the two groups and the Samaritans did everything they could to annoy the Jews.

1. They took a pro-Syrian position during the days of Antiochus Epihanes IV (2 Macc. 6:1f.). They, in fact, claimed to be descendents of the Sidonians and fought alongside the Seleucids against the Jews, B.C. 167-164 (Josephus, *Ant.* 12.5.5).
 2. They refused hospitality to Jewish travelers in Samaria (cf. Luke 9:52-53). Thus, most Jews began to cross to the East side of the Jordan when travelling between Galilee and Judea.
 3. They had their own Pentateuch, which they claimed was older and superior, and which they claimed to observe more faithfully. They did not consider the other books canonical.
- E. Josephus, *Ant.* 18. 2. 2. claims that at one time the Samaritans broke into the temple in Jerusalem and defiled it with bones.

III. Jewish contempt for Samaritans

A. They spurned them as Kin

1. They constantly reminded them that they were mere Assyrians. As early as Ecclesiasticus 50:25-26 they were lumped together with Idumeans and Philistines as the three greatest enemies of the Jews.
2. Because Samaria was frequently a refuge to Jewish renegades, they considered the Samaritans guilty of Jewish bloodshed.
3. Alexander the Great, c. 332 B.C. rejected their claim to be true Jews and therefore exempt from tribute in the Sabbatical year.
4. Even today there is great reluctance about intermarriage between Jews and Samaritans and Jews will not allow Samaritans to be buried in the Jewish cemetery at Tel Aviv.
5. Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great and Malthace, his Samaritan wife--this caused significant animosity.

B. They spurned them as human beings

1. They considered everything they touched to be like "Swine's flesh" (cf. John 4:9)
2. They did not allow their testimony in court.
3. They could not become proselytes.
4. They were publicly spurned in their synagogues.
5. Jesus was accused of having a demon and was a Samaritan (John 8:48).

C. Jesus' dealings with the Samaritans

1. Woman at the well, John 4:1-42
2. 10th leper, Luke 17:11-19
3. Great commission, Mt. 28:19-20
4. Parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:30-37

IV. History of the Samaritans

A. Chronology of rulers (From W. Fields, *N.T. Backgrounds* [Joplin: College Press, 1977], 183).

1. Sanballat I (ruling in 444 B.C., Neh. 2:10)
2. Delaiah, son of Sanballat (c. 410 ff.)
3. Sanballat II (c. 390 ff.)

4. Hananiah, son of Sanballat II (ruling in 354)
 5. Sanballat III (c. 335 ff.)
- B. Destructions
1. Alexander the Great slaughtered many Samaritans and placed there a large Macedonian colony, 332 B.C.
 2. Pontius Pilate massacred some of their number in A.D. 36.
 3. Roman emperor Vespasian slaughtered 11,600 Samaritans in the 1st century (Josephus *Wars* 3.7.32).
 4. Hadrian (A.D. 117-138), placed the Temple of Zeus over the ruins of their temple, thus they could not rebuild it.
- C. Today there are about 400 Samaritans in Nablus (this has grown from less than 200 earlier this century). They have their own synagogue and Pentateuch. They are hyper-Mosaic.
- V. Samaritan Religion
- A. Like the Jews they are:
1. Monotheists
 2. Avoid all images
 3. Loyal to the Law of Moses
 4. Hold a strong Messianic expectation, in fact they shared the Qumran (and Christian), interpretation of Deut. 18:18.
 5. Accepted orthodox feasts (as did the Qumran community). They celebrate the Day of Atonement, Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Sabbath, and Passover, during which they sacrifice lambs--the last vestige of animal sacrifice in the Western world.
- B. Unlike the Jews
1. Had a rival Temple at Gerezim
 2. Rejected Jerusalem priesthood (as did Qumran)
 3. Accepted only the Pentateuch (like Sadducees), as well as their own version of Joshua, which differs considerably from the Jewish version.
- C. The Samaritan Pentateuch
1. Changes from the Jewish books
 - a. Emendations of objectionable or questionable passages
 - i. Pre-flood men never beget a child after 150 years.
 - ii. Anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms.
 - iii. Historically questionable passages
 - b. Alterations for Samaritan theology, hermeneutics and domestic worship.
 - i. Elohim is connected with plural verbs 4 times (Gen. 20:13; 31:53; 35:7; Ex. 22:9). The Samaritan Pentateuch changes all these to singular verbs.
 - ii. The locations of Gerezim is inserted several places in order to justify it as an acceptable place of worship.
 - iii. An 11th command is added to the Decalogue--to build a temple on Mt. Gerezim, which they consider the "naval of the world." They believe it was here that Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice.
 2. Origin

- a. It was inherited by the 10 northern tribes.
 - b. It was introduced by Manasseh at the time of the building of the Samaritan Temple on Mt. Gerezim.
 - c. Not open to the Western world until the 17th century.
 - d. Its text supports the LXX, favored by Roman Catholics rather than the M.T. favored by Jews and Christians.
- D. Similarities with other religious groups
- 1. Qumran
 - a. View themselves as "Sons of Light."
 - b. Messianic expectations, especially on Deut. 18:18.
 - c. Both use very complex solar and lunar calendars.
 - d. Neither celebrate Purim or Hanukkah.
 - e. Qumranites also used an edited Torah.
 - 2. Christians
 - a. Both John and Hebrews appear to have similarities to Samaritan beliefs.
 - b. Samaritans have often been very open to Christian evangelism (cf. Acts 8).
 - 3. Islam
 - a. Similar view of "The day of Judgment"
 - b. Marqah's work (a Samaritan theologian), later reappears in the Koran.
 - c. Samaritans often use the varied Moslem slogan, "There is no God but God."