

# Bibliology — Samaritans

"Samaritan. suh-mairuh-tuhn (Heb. mrn H9085, gentilic of mrn H9076; Gk. Samarits G4901). An inhabitant of SAMARIA (TERRITORY); the term may also signify the religious sect associated with that region. Racially, the Samaritans are difficult to identify. In 721 B.C. SARGON of ASSYRIA destroyed Samaria. He recorded the fact on the walls of the royal palace at Dur-Sarraku (Khorsabad), as well as his subsequent policy of depopulation, deportation, and reestablishment: "In my first year of reign...the people of Samaria...to the number of 27,290 I carried away ....The city I rebuilt—I made it greater than it was before. People of the lands which I had conquered I settled therein. My tartan I place over them as governor." It seems that the policy of deportation applied particularly to the city of Samaria rather than to the region. See SAMARIA (CITY). Jeremiah 41:5, for example, seems to imply that a remnant of true Israelites remained in SHECHEM, SHILOH, and Samaria a century later; so a substratum, or admixture of the Hebrew stock in the later total population must be assumed. The newcomers from the N may be presumed to have intermarried with the Israelite remnant, and ultimately the population took the general name of Samaritans. The completeness of the devastation left by the Assyrian invasion evident from the infestation by wild beasts of which the immigrants complained (2 Ki. 17). Superstitiously, the intruders concluded that "the god of the land" was angry at their presence and their ignorance of his propitiatory rites. They sent to the Assyrian monarch and asked him to select a priest from among the deportees to instruct them in the necessary ritual of worship. The king (ESARHADDON) acceded to the request, and some instruction in the faith of the true God penetrated the stricken district. A mixed religion resulted. "They worshiped the LORD," we read, "but they also served their own gods" (17:33). The reforms of JOSIAH, king of JUDAH, crossed the border at BETHEL and seem to have extended into the northern districts. There was little, indeed, to prevent their infiltration. Religious revival was not the sort of military penetration that invited Assyrian attention (2 Ki. 23:15; 2 Chr. 34:6-7). The measure of purification, which may be presumed to have taken place in the Samaritan religion about this time, did not, however, reconcile the Samaritan and the Jew racially. After the return from EXILE, enmity became inveterate between the Samaritans and the Jewish remnant of EZRA and NEHEMIAH. On the strength of their worship of the LORD "since the time of Esarhaddon" (Ezra 4:2), the Samaritans sought a share in the rebuilding of the TEMPLE in JERUSALEM, but they were firmly rebuffed; hence the policy of obstruction from SANBALLAT of Samaria, which was a serious hindrance to Nehemiah's work (Neh. 2:10, 19; 4:6-7). Both Sanballat and his partner TOBIAH the Ammonite were Yahweh worshipers. The struggle, therefore, was primarily political rather than religious. It may, however, have ended as a religious schism, if one follows the reasoning of the historians who date the Samaritan break to this feud. In any case, the rift led to the establishment of the sect of the Samaritans through the building of a schismatic temple on Mount GERIZIM. In 109 B.C., the Jewish Hasmonean ruler John Hyrcanus destroyed the temple; and when Herod provided another temple in 25 B.C., the Samaritans refused to use it, continuing to worship on the mount (Jn. 4:20-21). Founded as it was before the rise of the great prophetic tradition, the religion of the Samaritans was based on the PENTATEUCH alone. Their position was held with some firmness, and JOSEPHUS (Ant. 13.3.4 §§74-79) mentions a disputation before PTOLEMY Philometor on the question that the Samaritan woman poses in Jn. 4:20, the answer to which resulted in the death, according to the rules of the debate, of the defeated Samaritan advocates. CHRIST's firm answer (4:21-23) stressed the incompleteness of the Samaritan tradition, its inadequate revelation, and the common transience of the cherished beliefs of both Samaritan and Jew. The greatness of Christ is shown in the passage, for at no time had the bitterness between the two groups been greater. At one Passover during the governorship of Coponius (A.D. 6-9), when, according to annual custom, the gates of the temple were opened at midnight, some Samaritans had intruded and polluted the Holy Place by scattering human bones in the porches. Samaritans were thereafter excluded from the services (Josephus, Ant. 18.2.2 §§29-30). They were cursed in the temple. Their food was considered unclean, even as swine's flesh. The whole situation narrated in Jn. 4 is therefore remarkable: the buying of food in SYCHAR, the conversation at JACOB'S WELL, and the subsequent evangelization of the area. (See also Acts 8:5-25.) It is a magnificent illustration of the emancipation that Christianity was to bring to those grown immobile in the bondage of Judaistic prejudice."

— James Dixon Douglas, et al. Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary. e-book, (Zondervan, 2011), 2644-2647.

"Acts 8:4. Went every where preaching the word— As the apostles were natives of Judea, and had no notion of the conversion of the Gentiles, but would have confined their ministry within the narrow bounds of their own country; this dispersion was nicely ordered by Divine Providence, to render the design of Christ's coming among men fully effectual, which was both to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of his people Israel" Thomas Coke Commentary on the Holy Bible, Commentary on Acts 8:4. "Now the partition wall was about to be broken down, and the Gentiles to be taken into the pale of the church, God provides this strange means towards it. The disciples are forced to flee for their lives out of Jerusalem, and have an opportunity to preach Christ and the gospel wheresoever they came: thus God can make light to come out of darkness, and makes Japheth to dwell in the tents of Shem, Genesis 9:27" Matthew Poole's English Annotations on the Holy Bible, Commentary on Acts 8:4. "There is a second important dimension to this section. Those who respond are not Jews but those on the edge of Judaism, namely, Samaritans and an Ethiopian (Schneider 1980: 480; Witherington 1998: 279-80). The reach of the gospel is moving toward those beyond the center of Judaism in fulfillment of Jesus's postresurrection commission (Acts 1:8), on its initial journey "for all who are far away" (Gaventa 2003: 134). By use of a bridge that involves those on the periphery of Judaism, the unit sets the stage for the outreach to

the Gentiles.”

—— Darrell Bock, Acts, e-book (Baker Publishing Group, 2007), 395.