

## 63. The Samaritans

Between Israel and Judah, Israel was the richer prize. When the Assyrians conquered its capital Samaria, they removed many of its elite, and replaced them with outlanders, keeping it prosperous for tax purposes (which need a literate elite), but disabling it for war (war requires racial homogeneity).<sup>1</sup> Among the newcomers were a people from the east, with their own language. They soon learned Hebrew, and some were converted to the Yahweh religion. These are the people we here call the Samaritans.

When the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple began, some of the northern converts to Yahwism offered their assistance, but were rebuffed. This offer and refusal are remembered in different ways in different texts. We looked at several echoes in the previous chapter. Here are some more:

**Ezra 4:1.** Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity were building a temple unto Yahweh . . . [2] then they drew near to Zerubbabel, and to the heads of fathers' houses, and said unto them, Let us build with you; for we seek your God, as ye do, and we sacrifice unto him since the days of Esharhaddon King of Assyria, who brought us up hither. (3) But Zerubbabel and Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of fathers' houses of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us in building a house unto our God, but we ourselves together will build unto Yahweh the God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us.

Jeremiah has a more violent account of what may have been the same offer.

**Jer 41:4** . And it came to pass the second day after he had slain Gedaliah, and no man knew it, [5] that there came from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria, even fourscore men, having their beards shaven and their clothes rent, and having cut themselves, with meal-offerings and frankincense in their hand, to bring them to the house of Yahweh. [6] And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah went forth from Mizpah to meet them, weeping all along as he went, and it came to pass, as he met them, he said unto them, Come to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam. [7] And it was so, when they came into the midst of the city, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah slew them . . .

Some have suggested that there are also echoes of this event in Nehemiah, who is ostensibly concerned with rebuilding, not the Temple, but the city wall. Notice the mention of sacrifice, as what that rebuilding would make possible:

**Neh 4:1** But it came to pass that, when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. [2] And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What are these feeble Jews doing: Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, seeing they are burned?

<sup>1</sup>Persian policy was the same. The Babylonians preferred a policy of destruction.

And from later in that text:

**Neh 4:7.** But it came to pass that, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem went forward, that the breaches began to be stopped, that they were very wroth, and they conspired all of them together to come and fight against Jerusalem, and to cause confusion therein . . .

Longest of all is the account of Josephus, from the year 94. He had access to all the OT texts, including the above. Josephus himself disliked the Samaritans. Here is part of his version. The rebuilding of the Temple has begun:

**Antiquities 11:83.** But louder than the sound of the trumpets and the joy of the multitude was heard the wailing of the elders and priests because the temple seemed to them inferior to that which had been destroyed. [84] On hearing the sound of the trumpets, the Samaritans, who were, as it happened, hostile to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, came running there, for they wished to learn the reason for the disturbance. And when they found that the Jews who had been taken captive to Babylon were rebuilding the sanctuary, they approached Zorobabelos and Jesus and the chiefs of the families, and asked to be allowed to join in constructing the temple, and to have a share in the building. [85] “For we worship God no less than they,” they asserted, “and pray fervently to Him and have been zealous in His service from the time when Salmanasses, the king of Assyria, bought us hither from Chuthia<sup>2</sup> and Media.” [86] Such was the speech they made, but Zorobabelos and the high priest Jesus and the chiefs of the Israelite families told them that it was impossible for them to have a share in the building since none but themselves had been commanded to build the temple, the first time by Cyrus and now by Darius. [87] They would, however, allow them to worship there, they said, but the only thing which they might, if they wished, have in common with them, as might all other men, was to come to the sanctuary and revere God.

[88] On hearing this, the Chuthaeans – it is by this name that the Samaritans are called – were indignant and persuaded the nations in Syria to request the satraps, in the same way as they had formerly done under Cyrus and again, after his reign, under Cambyses, to stop the building of the temple and put hindrances in the way of the Jews as they busied themselves about it. [89] At the same time, Sisines, the governor of Syria and Phoenicia, and Sarabazanes together with certain others went up to Jerusalem and asked the leaders of the Jews who it was that had given them permission to build the temple in such a way that it was more like a fortress than a sanctuary, and why indeed they had build porticoes round the city, as well as very strong walls. [90] Thereupon Zorobabelos and the high priest Jesus said that they were servants of the Most High God and that this temple, which had been built for Him by one of their kings, a fortunate man who surpassed all others in virtue, had stood for a long time . . .

Details differ, but the situation is roughly the same. The Samaritans then *did* seek to prevent the rebuilding of the Temple, as though to say,

“If not us too, then not you either.”

<sup>2</sup>Chuth or Cuth is most likely the modern Tell Ibrahim, 20 miles NE of Babylon.

### The Samaritan Temple

The northerners did build a temple of the own, on sacred Mount Gerizim. It is now only an altar, and modern Samaritans say it was always so,<sup>3</sup> but they may be simply denying that it is a much reduced version of something grander. We know that there *was* a temple; the one Josephus says was destroyed by John Hyrcanus I.<sup>4</sup> And only a real temple would have been a satisfactory response to the rejection of the Samaritans by the Yahwists of Jerusalem.

### The Samaritan Pentateuch

For practical worship, the basic texts, the Pentateuch, were also needed, and these were translated into Samaritan, probably at the earliest possible moment: continued use of the Hebrew text would acknowledge the superiority of the Jerusalem Temple, which was not the mood of the time. We then ask: what are the latest passages in the Septuagint? Apparently those predicting the Return; they must have been added soon after the Return itself, in 0538. Here is one:

**Deut 4:29.** But from thence ye shall seek Yahweh thy God, and thou shalt find him, when thou searchest after him, with all they heart and with all thy soul.  
[30] When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, in the latter days thou shalt return to Yahweh thy God, and hearken unto his voice:  
[31] For Yahweh thy God is a merciful God; he will not fail thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he sware unto them.

There is another one at Deut 30:1-3. They are the latest firmly datable passages in Deuteronomy. Does the Samaritan Pentateuch include them? Yes, it does.<sup>5</sup> With other adjustments (naming *Gerizim* as the place God will “put his name”) and with a few narrative improvements of its own, the Samaritan Pentateuch includes everything which we find in the Hebrew Pentateuch.

As with the Samaritan Temple, nothing dates the Samaritan Pentateuch to a period much later than the Second Jerusalem Temple itself.



Northern animus toward the south continued. As a Samaritan woman said to a Jewish traveler of a later day, who had stopped to rest by Jacob’s Well,

**John 4:9.** How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, who am a Samaritan woman? For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

Few things in this world are more durable than hatred.

<sup>3</sup>Pummer **Altar** 3, “The Samaritans are . . . convinced that such a temple building never existed.” [p10] “Turning . . . to the Samaritan sources, it will be seen that with the exception of one account, they know neither of the construction nor of the destruction of such a temple, and the contemporary Samaritans preserve no memory of it either.”

<sup>4</sup>Josephus **Antiquities** 13:254 The date is uncertain; most suggestions range from c0130 to c0120. For one consensus date, 0128, see Anderson **Samaritan** (2012) 15.

<sup>5</sup>Tsedaka **Israelite** (2013) 417, 477.