

The Ancestry of Our English Bible
An Account of Manuscripts, Texts, and Versions of the Bible
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Chapter IV
The Samaritan Pentateuch

27. The Samaritans were and are a peculiar people. Their idiosyncrasies are found on every page of Palestinian history since 400 B.C. Their friendship for, or antipathy against, the Jews rests upon definite historical facts. Their religious proclivities appear in some periods of history in strangely opposing relations. When it was to their advantage to be Jews, they were Jews, when derogatory to such a claim, they were not Jews. They seemed to stand alone for long centuries, and not to mingle freely with any people. In New Testament times they looked with disdain upon the Jews, and this spirit was heartily reciprocated. The few New Testament references to their beliefs and spirit classify them among the enemies of the Jews. It also locates their seat of worship at Shechem in opposition to that carried on in Jerusalem. The clannish, provincial character of these people is doubtless due in large part to their composite origin. The same spirit that made them clannish also stimulated them in their opposition to the Jews, and whatever they believed and held sacred.

28. These strange peoples owe their origin to the governmental policy of the new Assyrian empire, established by Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 B.C.). (page 40)

From a purely military control of his provinces, he established a civil government, imposing definite local responsibility. In order to compensate for the deported peoples of any province, and also to lessen the liability to revolt among new subjects, he imported peoples from distant provinces and compelled the two to reside side by side. This mingling and commingling of foreign peoples resulted, within a few years, in a confusion of customs, religions and nationalities. Such conglomeration only served to make the province thus constituted less liable to stir up trouble for Assyria, and better able to take part in some local government.

29. The specific instances that brought about the beginnings of the Samaritans occurred in 722 B.C., when Sargon II captured Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. His own records tell us that he carried away 27,290 of its inhabitants. The Old Testament (2 Kings 17:24) records read in these words: "And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon and from Cuthah, and from Avva, and from Hamath and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of [the province of] Samaria instead of the children of Israel, and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof." Sargon himself in his own inscriptions which were found in the ruins of his old palace at Khorsabad, just north of Nineveh (Annals, 95-97), says: "The tribes of the Tamud, Ibadid, Marsiman, Chayapa, the distant Arabians who inhabit the desert, whom no scholar or writer knew, who had

(page 41) paid tribute to no king, I smote in the service of Asshur my lord; the remaining inhabitants I carried away and settled in Samaria.” In other words, Sargon and 2 Kings agree on the general policy that was carried out regarding the re-populating of the northern kingdom from which captives had been carried to the East.

Both records together give the names of ten different nationalities, including the Jews already there, who were settled down in the same territory together. Within a few generations they intermarried, they combined heathen and Jehovah worship, and formed a distinct and unique population (compare 2 Kings 17: 24-41). To this conglomerate, other peoples were added at a later time, as seen in Ezra (4:2), where the Samaritans say to the Jews: “Let us build with you; for we seek your God, as you do; and we sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria [681-668 B.C.], who brought us up hither.” In the form; protest against the building activities of the Jews, sent to Artaxerxes, king of Persia, the Samaritans give this astounding list of foreign peoples who made up their populace, imported at a still later date (Ezra 4:9, 10): “Then wrote Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions, the Dinaites, and the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Shushanchites, the Dehaites, the Elamites, and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnappar [Assurbanipal, (page 42) king of Assyria, 668-626 B.C.] brought over, and set in the city of Samaria, and in the rest of the country beyond the River, and so forth.”

30. What a background for the Samaritans! out of this composite sprung the peoples who developed such rivalry with the Jews as appears immediately after the exile. The Samaritan antagonism to Israel on the latter's return to Jerusalem, and their attempt to rebuild their temple and city, must have gradually cooled off. For Ezra and Nehemiah find the Jews had not only formed friendly relations with all the surrounding peoples, but had freely intermarried with them. This infraction of Jewish law grieved Ezra and angered Nehemiah. They adopted drastic and cruel measures to break of all domestic relations with these foreigners (Neh. 13: 23-27). In his investigations Nehemiah (13: 28) found that “one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son-in-law to Sanballet the Horonite,” therefore he drove him out. Josephus (Antiquities II, 8,2) tells us that this grandson of the high priest was Manasseh; that he preferred rather to lose his wife than his prospects of the high priesthood in Jerusalem. His father-in-law promised him, however, if he would go with his wife and forsake Jerusalem that he (Sanballet) would build a temple for him on Mount Gerizim like that in Jerusalem, and furthermore would see that the Persian king should bestow on him the high priesthood. Elated by such promises, Manasseh forsook Jerusalem, his prospects of promotion, and (page 43) the temple, and followed his wife and his father-in-law to Samaria.

31. This expulsion of Manasseh from Jerusalem (in 433 B.C.) engendered only bitterness and enmity between the Samaritans and the Jews. It meant, too for the former a new fixed religious trend. The temple is said to have been built on Mount Gerizim as a rival of that at Jerusalem. Its first high priest, Manasseh, had sufficient regard for the law of Jehovah to make it a basis for worship on Gerizim. It is generally believed that this was the time that the Pentateuch was adopted as the authoritative scriptures of the Samaritans. With Gerizim as a place for the worship of Jehovah, and influential officials and friends to support him, Manasseh could gradually crowd out and eradicate the various species of idolatry that had been dominant among these nations since the time of

Sargon II. In fact, the worship of Jehovah and heathen divinities had existed side by side, and had even commingles for centuries. Manasseh's great missionary endeavor had now given the worship of Israel's God first place in the hearts and life of the Samaritans, and established the Pentateuch as their sacred book. It is thought that this was the only portion of the Old Testament at that time that had been recognized by the Jews as holy scriptures. When the Prophets and Hagiographa were adopted at a later time, the Samaritans refused to adopt them.

32. The Samaritan Pentateuch is not a translation (page 44) of the original Hebrew, and so properly not a version. It is a Hebrew text, which has been maintained independently since the fifth century B.C., but written in the old Hebrew characters that were extant before the beginning of the use of the square characters. Hence it reaches back farther for its origin than any other except the Hebrew text itself. Its adoption by the Samaritans may have been attended by certain changes in the text conformable to their place of worship and their peculiar beliefs. One of the most striking deliberate changes in the text is the substitution, in Deuteronomy 27:4, of "Gerizim" for "Ebal" in the Hebrew text, thus pointing to the pre-eminence of Gerizim, the seat of their temple over Ebal.

The chief value of the Samaritan Pentateuch is that it is an independent text that has had its own transmission by copyists from the time of Manasseh without any known contact with the numerous Hebrew texts. It is thus a check on the errors and corruptions that may have crept into the Hebrew text in its numerous copyings from the fifth century B.C. down to the time of the printing of the Hebrew Old Testament.

33. The existence of the Pentateuch as the Bible of the Samaritans was known to European scholars in the sixteenth century. Joseph Scaliger, the famous linguist, complained that Christians traveling in the East took no pains to secure a copy of it. The first specimen of it to be seen in Europe was brought (page 45) by the Italian traveler, Pietro de la Valle, in 1616. He spent twelve years in visiting the East, and published the best information then extant about Turkey, Persia, Egypt and India. The Samaritans, though now confined to modern Nablus, the ancient Shechem, consisted in his day of several small communities, located at Gaza, Cairo and Damascus. Pietro de la Valle, at the urgent request of the French ambassador at Constantinople, M. de Sarcey, attempted to secure a copy of the Samaritan Bible. After failing at three of the places, he finally succeeded in buying two copies from the Samaritan colony at Damascus. The first was the Hebrew text of the Pentateuch in Samaritan characters on parchment. This he presented to the ambassador, who in turn deposited it in the library of the Oratoire in Paris. The second, a Samaritan version of the same, written on paper, he kept for himself. Since that day scholars and travelers have secured a goodly number of these sacred documents, and they are now found either as private possessions or in various libraries of Europe and America.

The most sacred copy of the Samaritan law is securely kept and guarded in the synagogue at Nablus. It has this subscription: "I, Abishua, the son of Aaron the priest, wrote this copy in the court of the tabernacle, on Mount Gerizim in the thirteenth year of the settlement of the children of Israel in the land of Canaan." Scholars put no confidence in this subscription. (page 46)

Kennicott, the textual critic, collated sixteen Samaritan manuscripts. None of these documents stretches back into an extreme antiquity. The oldest manuscript is in Rome and is dated 1227 A.D., though there is another whose oldest portions claim as its date

656 A.D. Of modern prepared manuscripts there are several in this country: Drew Theological Seminary has one; the New York Public Library, one; the Rev. W. Scott Watson, one; and the Rev. W.E. Barton, of Oak Park, Ill., two.

34. The first edition of the Samaritan Pentateuch was printed under the supervision of John Morinus in 1631, and then in the Paris Polyglot in 1645. It was also included in the London Polyglot in 1657. It was later published in the square characters by Blayney of Oxford, in 1790. Kennicott, who collated the known manuscripts, published the variants in his great work already referred to. In 1668, Petermann published a grammar of the language, including in it the whole book of Genesis, as it was read by the at-that-time high priest to the little Samaritan body at Nablus, consisting of about 165 persons at the present time (1906).

35. Now what is the value of this Samaritan Pentateuch? It differs from the text of the Hebrew in about 6,000 items. A large part of these consists of conjunctions, and such other variations as have no real effect on the sense. There are more than a thousand characteristic variations that have some real (page-glossy-no page number, Photo) Jacob ben Aaron, present High-Priest of the Samaritans at Nablus, with Pentateuch Roll

(page 47) significance. These variants from the Hebrew text are of several kinds: (1) explanatory additions to the text, as in Genesis 4:8, to the Hebrew, "And Cain said to Abel his brother," the Samaritan, as well as the Septuagint, adds, "Let us go into the field." Genesis 7:3, to "of the fowls of the air," the Samaritan adds, "which are clean." Genesis 44:31, to "the lad is not," the Samaritan adds "with us." (2) Conjectural emendations by changing a letter or two, either to improve the sense or avoid some difficulty as in Genesis 49:10, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet," by the change of a single letter (r to d) the Samaritan reads, "from amidst his standards." (3) Corrections to agree with some parallel passage, Genesis 11:10f., "and he died" is added to what is said of each Patriarch as in Genesis 5. In Exodus 4:18, for the Hebrew "Jether," the Samaritan reads "Jethro," as in Exodus 18:1. (4) Corrections to relieve some supposed historical difficulty; thus in Exodus 12:40, the four hundred and thirty years are said to cover the whole period of wanderings by the additions for "in Egypt," "in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan." The most notable variation of this kind is found in the genealogical tables of Genesis 5 and 11. The Samaritans seem to have assumed that no one would have been more than one hundred and fifty years old at the birth of his first son; when this number is exceeded, as in the case of Methuselah and Lamech, one hundred years or more (page 48) are taken from it. If the remaining years were unchanged they would survive the flood. But such changes are made as to allow them all to die in the year of the flood. (5) Variations made to present Samaritan ideas, and to remove anthropomorphisms. The chief passage is Deuteronomy 27:4, where "Ebal" is displaced by "Gerizim;" and this is incorporated in Exodus 20:17, and Deuteronomy 5:21. In Genesis 49:7, Jacob's rebuke of Simon and Levi, "cursed be their anger," is changed to read, "noble was their anger."

These are the most important classes of variations for our study. They are so important that the editors of the Teacher's variorum Bible mention more than thirty of them in their footnotes, and every commentator of the Pentateuch must reckon with them before he concludes his investigations.

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CHAPTER IV

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Note from this Editor of the SamaritanUpdate.com

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