

THE TRUTH OF THE ISRAELITE SAMARITAN VERSION OF THE PENTATEUCH IS BECOMING CLEARER

Benyamim Tsedaka

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As time goes by the consideration of the Biblical research and the history of the People of Israel is changing to the right consideration in dealing with the Torah Version in the hands of the Israelite Samaritans. There is a growing number of researchers who can no longer ignore the overwhelming evidence of archaeological findings as well as deeper comparative studies between different biblical sources and different translations.

Until a decade ago even well known Biblical scholars used to claim the next three following claims against the Israelite Samaritan Version of the Torah.

1. The Samaritan sages of old made adjustments to the texts in the books of Moses, which explains the lack of double texts in the Massoretic = Traditional version of the Torah [i.e. the Jewish Version].
2. The Samaritan sages added to the text to adjust it to their belief in Mount Gerizim, such as adding the Tenth Commandment about building an altar on Mount Gerizim, which is not in the Jewish Version. They also changed the text in Deuteronomy 27:4-6 from building an altar to the Almighty "On Mount Gerizim" to "On Mount Ebal" as it is written in the Jewish Version.
3. The completeness of the Jewish Version was preserved throughout the many generations until present times, however the Samaritan Version has been corrected by Samaritan sages with additions and changes, and sometimes with no need for a change.

These are the main claims against the Samaritan version of the Torah. These claims were considered valid and accepted naturally in the biblical research. However, as biblical research and biblical criticism began to be exposed to new criteria that were not known to scholars in the near past, like the finding of 510 inscriptions on stone on Mount Gerizim in the last 25 years, thanks to the excavation of Dr. Yitzhaq Magen since 1983; additional discoveries from the Dead Sea Scrolls, deeper comparative studies of Bible sources and its different ancient translations – the picture started to get clearer slowly in regard to the Israelite Samaritan Version of the Torah. Now it is easy to reject all these three claims one by one, and there is a new stream of Biblical scholars in a way of thinking "out of the box" in which the conclusions of the former Bible researchers are not sufficient for them any more.

The first claim is that the the Samaritans have harmonized the texts by adjusting texts (identical texts between the books of Exodus and Numbers to the Book of Deuteronomy) using the same words but inserted throughout the different books of Moses. It is known that the Book of Deuteronomy repeats events that happened to the Sons of Israel and Greek Translation of the Bible, The Septuagint] that was composed in the third century BCE, in 1900 of 3000 significant differences between the Samaritan and Jewish versions, the LXX is identical to the Samaritan version and contradicts the Jewish Version. It is logical to say that the most ancient manuscripts of the Pentateuch prior to the third century BCE were available to the translators of the LXX, much more ancient than the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran with dates between the second century BCE to the first century CE. Following this logic the Samaritan Version of the Torah preserved the most ancient texts of the Torah.

Therefore it is not logical to make claims against the Samaritans in adjusting texts within the Five Books of Moses when identical versions were found in Qumran and when there was much better suitability between the Samaritan Version and the LXX than the Jewish Version. It is not recommended to understand that the remaining 1100 significant differences of the 3000 are identical between the Jewish version and LXX, maybe only less than half of them, because the other differences of the 1100 show independent variants of the LXX that do not appear in the Samaritan text nor in the Jewish version.

This first claim about harmonization of the Samaritan text is rejected also from the next point of reason: If Samaritan sages harmonized the texts systematically to harmonize them exactly in the same words within the books of Exodus and Numbers to the Book of Deuteronomy, why according to this system didn't they write the Decalogue in Exodus Chap. 20 and the Decalogue in Deuteronomy 5 using the same words since both Decalogues are different from one another by many words?

The second claim is that the Samaritans changed the original text of the Torah in many places in order to adjust it to their belief in Mount Gerizim. The main claim in this regard is that the Samaritans added a tenth commandment about building an altar to the Almighty on Mount Gerizim. It claimed that they also changed the word רחבי = Will chose to רחב = Has chosen in 22 different verses in Deuteronomy and also changed the text in the Book of Deuteronomy 27:5 רהב לביע = In Mount Ebal to מיזרגרהב = in Mount Gerizim as the place of the altar to the Almighty built by Joshua right after the entrance into the promised land.

The question remains of why the Samaritans added a tenth commandment to the Decalogue if it is so clear from the Torah that the place of the Altar on Mount Gerizim was the sole chosen place? Only what should be done is to read together the end of Chap. 11 in Deuteronomy with the beginning of Chapter 12 to find out that offering the blessings on Mount Gerizim is the title of the words of Chap. 12 about destroying all places of worship in favor of one chosen place of worship [we must remember that the division of the text into chapters was done by a Christian monk in the thirteenth century CE].

Moreover, the opposite could be claimed against the Jewish sages of the Second Temple Period in reducing the Tenth Commandment from the original text about building the Altar on Mount Gerizim, because it didn't fit their belief in the Jerusalem Temple, that was consecrated many hundreds of years after the Torah; therefore, in order to complete the number of the Commandments to 10 they made the introductory words of the Decalogue as a commandment although it is clear that it is not a commandment and it does not contain any commandment but only words of introduction of the Almighty before starting the Ten Commandments. Hence the Ten Commandments in the Jewish version have one commandment missing.

This claim of the Samaritan sages was reinforced recently in the identical words of the building of the Altar to the Almighty "on Mount Gerizim" as it is in Deuteronomy 27:5 in a fragment from Qumran exposed by Prof. James Charlesworth of Princeton University, USA. The fragment was written in Aramaic by a Jewish scribe, since there were not Samaritans in Qumran. This text about building the Altar "on Mount Gerizim" מיזרגרהב is similar to the text in some translations of the Bible.

Before Qumran discoveries the Samaritans and some scholars did claim against the lack of logic to the text of the Jewish Version in Duet. 27:5 "On Mount Ebal" רהב לביע instead of "On Mount Gerizim" מיזרגרהב. First, because it is not logical that an Altar of the Almighty would be built on the Mountain of Cursing, and secondly, on Mount Gerizim where the blessing was offered stood the 6-7 main tribes of Israel, Simon and Levi, Judah and Yissaschar, Joseph [Menashe and Ephraim] and Benyamim, while on the Mountain of Cursing=Mount Ebal stood the less important tribes of the second and third positions: The tribes of Reuben and Zebulan and the four tribes the sons of the concubines, Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. This fact shows exactly the priority of Mount Gerizim over Mount Ebal as the place of the first Altar of the Almighty built by Joshua. Yes, many scholars think today that the variant "In Mount Ebal" רהב לביע was installed by the Jewish sages against the sole sacred place of the Samaritans.

Also in the matter of ""Has chosen" רחב in the Samaritan version against the variant "Will chose"

רחבי in the Jewish version it is all clear with the newly discovered fact that in some manuscripts of the LXX the variant "Has chosen" רחב like in the Samaritan Version appears, which proves that not only the variant "Has chosen" רחב reflects the fact of the sole holiness of Mount Gerizim as the places where the Almighty chose to dwell His Name there [as demonstrated above by putting together the end of Duet. 11 and the beginning of Duet. 12], but also it proves that the variant "Will choose" רחבי is a Jewish correction in order to adjust the text of the Pentateuch to a future choice of the chosen place to a period much later than the period of the Torah.

The frustration of the ancient Jews to accept the fact that Jerusalem was never mentioned in the Torah has effected some scholars from old generations. [The place Shalem מלש mentioned in Genesis is today the Arabic village Salem east of the city of Nablus, that is called in Samaritan sources "Shalem Rabta" = the big Shalem = מלש התבר].

The fact that the Torah never meant Jerusalem as the chosen place appears in Duet. chapter 31 when the People of Israel were ordered to read the Torah in the chosen place at the Festival of Tabernacles at the end of the seventh year to the entrance of the People of Israel to The Promised Land. In this seventh year Jerusalem was a tiny city and waited hundreds of years for David and Solomon the kings to make it an Israelite cult center.

Concerning the third claim of the Jews, and many past scholars, there were few decades that the Jewish Version was completely preserved through all generations as an authentic text while the Samaritan sages have corrected the original text sometimes with no need.

After all that was written above it is now clear that the Jewish sages of the Second Temple period have disqualified the Samaritan sages with their own defect, when they themselves indeed corrected the text in order to adjust it to their belief in Jerusalem, by reducing one commandment, by changing every "Has chosen" in regard to the chosen place of the Almighty to "Will chose", by changing in Duet. 27:5 "On Mount Gerizim" to "On Mount Ebal" and by omitting what they considered as double texts on the books of Exodus and Numbers vis a vis the Book of Deuteronomy.

The question is when were those Jewish corrections of the original text of the Torah made? Many scholars have confirmed the corrections but they don't agree about its time. There are those who think that the changes were done at the time of Josiah king of Judea in the Seventh Century BCE, following the "discovery" of the Book of Deuteronomy in the Jerusalem Temple, when writers of the destroyed Kingdom of Israel escaped from the Assyrian invaders to Judea. Than changes were done in the text of the Torah as part of reformation, king Josiah did so to reinforce the holiness of the Temple of Jerusalem. It is hard to accept such a determination since the Assyrians never stopped in borders of Judea but put Judea also under their jurisdiction.

There are scholars who delay the changes that the Jews made in the original text of the Torah to the time of the Hasmoneans in the second century BCE in the framework of the reformations that they did to reinforce the holiness of Jerusalem. It is hard to accept this determination since the fragment from Qumran of the second century shows that the variant "On Mount Gerizim" is still kept at this time also in the Jewish text.

It should be suggested that all changes the Jews have done to the original text of the Torah were made until the end of the first century CE when they completed the process of changing the script from ancient Hebrew to Aramaic. At that time they completed all changes including the reduction of text to the edition of the Jewish Traditional Version [MT].

Comments on this section from the Editor of theSamaritanUpdate.com

This reference is not located in ***A Bibliography of the Samaritans, Third Edition, Revised, Expanded, and Annotated***, by **Alan David Crown** and **Reinhard Pummer**, ATLA Bibliography, No. 51, **The Scarecrow Press, Inc.** Lanham, Maryland, Toronto, Oxford. 2005