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The Samaritans and the Book of Deuteronomy

BY

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The Samaritans had the Torah before the Samaritan Jewish schism. The Torah had already been canonized, and was accepted by all Israel. Not so the Earlier and Later Prophets and Kethubim which the Samaritans have never accepted. Not only was the Law canonized before the Jewish Samaritan schism, but its text had been divided into small *parashiyyoth*. Setumoth and Petuhoth are old; such divisions did not appear for the first time in the Isaiah scrolls. Setumoth and Petuhoth are the earliest Massora. The Samaritan Torah is divided into fixed Qatzim, i.e. *parashiyyoth*. There is considerable similarity between some of the Setumoth and Petuhoth in the Jewish Bible and the Qatzim in the Samaritan Bible especially in *parashiyyoth* read at Moadim. Cf. J. Bowman: "Samaritan Studies," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, vol. 40, pp. 315 ff. Such similarities of textual layout must be pre-schism. (page 10)

The Law must have come to the Samaritans through one of the Jerusalem priestly families which had returned from the Babylonian Exile. Cf. J. Bowman: "Ezekiel and the Zadokite Priesthood," *Transactions of Glasgow University Oriental Society*, vol. xvi (1957). From the fifth century B.C. the Samaritan priesthood was Zadokite. Cf. J. Bowman: *Transcript of the Oriental Text of the Samaritan Chronicle Tolidah* (University of Leeds, 1954), p. 13. The Samaritan Tolidah claims descent for its High-priests from Aaron through Phinehas and Zadok just as I Chron. 6 does; but we will be content in holding that the Samaritan priesthood was Zadokite from the time when the grandson of Eliashib and son-in-law of Sanballat was expelled from Jerusalem and presumably went to Shechem with the Torah. The Samaritan priests have kept that Law within their control. The Zadokites of Jerusalem had reacted (cf. Ezek 44:13 f.) against Deuteronomy's allowing non-Zadokites to be priests at Jerusalem, the Zadokite priestly prerogative since the time of Solomon. As I have demonstrated in the article on "Ezekiel and the Zadokite Priesthood" (*G.U.O.S. Transactions*, 1957), the P (Priestly) code arranged a compromise between the priests of the Abiathar stock and the priests of the Zadok stock by allowing that the Abiathar stock, descended from Ithamar and the Zadok stock, descended from Eleazar, were both entitled to be priests, as descendants of Aaron; the High priesthood, however, remained with the Zadokites as the descendants of Phinehas.

In Shechem the Samaritan Zadokite priests were not embarrassed with rivals of Ithamar stock, so P's compromise of allowing descendants of both the sons of Aaron to be priests were unnecessary. The Samaritans therefore returned to the D (Deuteronomy) position of allowing all Levites to be priests, cf. Deut. 18: 6, 7. It was not necessary to assert like Ezek.

44:15 that only the priests the levites the sons of Zadok were priests, for only such were priests in Shechem. If D was a northern code the Samaritans could claim to be following northern usage that all priests were levites. The Samaritans follow D and not P regarding Passover, cf. Deut. 16: 5-7. If D was a northern code the Zadokite Samaritan priests presumably stressed the public celebration of Passover at the Chosen Place rather than the domestic celebration allowed by P, so as to favour northern usage. If D was of Judean origin, (Page 11) and remembering that D insisted on sacrifices at the One Chosen Place, why was Deuteronomy's only altar to be built on Ebal? Evidence for reading "Gerizim" is strong, but why a northern mountain at all?

The Samaritan priesthood was a branch of the Jerusalem Zadokites; the Samaritans received the Law as edited in Babylon, brought to Judah from Babylon, and from Jerusalem to Shechem by Jewish priests, the ancestors of their own priests. I do not attempt in this paper to discuss the origins racially of the Samaritans. To a great extent they were of Israelite stock. Even if pagan colonists had come to the land in 721 B.C., by the fifth and fourth centuries the faithful witness of the righteous remnant in the north and south must have had its effect in the north. Whether any religious rites of the ancient north Israelite kingdom survived is uncertain, but such things die hard in a land where a *Makam* of the present day may be a lineal descendant of a *Bamah*.

The Samaritan Pentateuch is regarded as a secondary recension of the Jewish; even the Deuteronomy that came to Shechem must have been based on the edition of Deuteronomy discovered in the Jerusalem Temple in the time of Josiah. We can be sure that that copy which came to Shechem spoke of "the place which God shall choose" and not "the place which God has chosen." But are all Samaritan readings secondary? It is begging a big question to suppose that the Massoretic Text represents the prototype in all respects. If one studies the Samaritan Deuteronomy one finds that often it agrees with LXX Peshitto and Targums. The Samaritan Pentateuch represents not merely a Samaritan recension but one sort of Palestinian text used by Jews and Samaritans alike. Even the harmonizations in the Samaritan Pentateuch between one account of an event and another, e.g. the way in which the early chapters of Deuteronomy have been used to fill out the Numbers "spies" narrative, are not a peculiarly Samaritan practice. The characteristic Samaritan reading in Deut. 32:35 ליום נקם ושלם "against the day of Vengeance and recompense" instead of the Massoretic לי נקם ושלם "to me belongs Vengeance and (Page 12) Recompense" seems to have been known to the compiler of Targums Onkelos and Jerushalmi as one Jewish reading.

The typically Samaritan reading "Gerizim" instead of "Ebal" in Deut. 27:4 and "the place that God chose" instead of "the place which the Lord shall chose" in Deut. 12:14, 26, etc., it is easy to say, are deliberate Samaritan alterations. I agree, but to go on to ask are they innovations or restorations? If Deuteronomy had been compiled in the north, and only after the fall of the Northern Kingdom come south, could the northern compiler not have imagined Moses to have held Gerizim as "the Place which God had chosen?" For the Patriarchs had sojourned there. When D came south the reading became "shall choose" referring to the Jerusalem temple to be built long after Moses' day by Solomon. It is unbelievable that Deuteronomy was compiled by Zadokites of Shechem stressed Deuteronomy, unless it had a northern connection. It is strange that Deuteronomy (if we are to understand "the place that God shall choose" as in Judah) calls Gerizim the Mount of Blessing. I hasten to point out that as events have proved God did choose Jerusalem and Zion and not Shechem and Gerizim, and in that respect the Jewish scribes were right in writing "the place which God shall choose." But if Deuteronomy was written in the north the original reading was "has chosen."

Jerusalem can be so certain of its ultimately having been chosen by God, that we can surely review objectively and sympathetically the claims of Gerizim to have once been chosen by God until it proved unworthy. It is highly unlikely that the Samaritans, at the schism with the Jews in the fourth century B.C. or even in the sixth century B.C. when they were not allowed to help build the temple at Jerusalem, decided then for the first time to make Gerizim their one sanctuary. Such a view is unrealistic. Apart from the fact that

Gerizim by its very eminence must have been a ready choice for a *Makam* long before the Samaritan Jewish schism, Gerizim and its neighbourhood are associated with the earliest stages of the history of the Hebrews. Shechem was the first city of Palestine to be visited by Abraham, Gen. 12:6. It is significant that he came to (Page 13) “*the place of Shechem*” **עַד מְקוֹם שֶׁכֶם**. I understand **מְקוֹם** as a sanctuary at Shechem, cf. Deut. 12:2, where the Israelites are told to destroy all the places wherein the nations served their Gods. “Unto the plain (**אֵלֹן** *Elon*) of Moreh which could be the oak by the sanctuary of the Lord at Shechem, cf. Joshua 24:26. True, in Joshua we have **אֱלֹהִים** (*Allah*) and here (Gen. 12:6) **אֵלֹן** (*Allon*). In gen. 12:7 we know that Abram built there an altar to the Lord. It is at Shechem at the “oracle-giving terebinth” (I.C.C. Gen., p. 246) that God appears to Abram and promises the land to his seed. Gen. 12:8 tells us that Abram removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Ai on the east: and there built an altar to the Lord. The name Bethel I understand here as the actual town of Bethel known to the writer of this part of the Torah. Certainly on his return from Egypt Abraham, Gen. 13:3, 4, returns to this altar place. I understand Bethel in Gen. 13:3 as used in two senses: “And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai,” the second mention of Bethel referring to the town Bethel. It appears that Abraham built altars both in the vicinity of Shechem and of Bethel and not only Shechem. But Bethel, like *Makom*, can sometimes refer to sacred places, just as in Judges 20:18 the Bethel to which the children of Israel went up need not refer to Bethel but only to the sanctuary where they consulted the deity; cf. also Judges 21:2.

The fact is that the Samaritans call Mount Gerizim “Har Gerizim Bethel.” The Samaritans doubtless knew and know of Bethel Beitin but nevertheless call Har Gerizim Bethel. It is just possible that there was a Bethel in ancient times on Mount Gerizim. After all, there was another town Bethel in the south of Judah; cf. Josh. 12:16 and I Sam. 30:27.

But when did the city Bethel exclusively receive its name Bethel? There are two accounts of Bethel receiving its name from Jacob. (1) In Gen. 28:19 when Jacob was journeying to Haran, and (2) when he was returning from Padan-Aram, Gen. (Page 14) 35:14. 15. The first when he dreamt with a stone for a pillow and he set the stone up as Bethel, the second when God spoke to him and changed his name to Israel, and again he erected a *Matzebah*. There must have been many Bethels or sacred pillars. Every *Matzebah* was somebody’s Bethel. Gen. 33:18 tells how Jacob returning from Padan-Aram comes to Shalem, a city of Shechem, and erected there an altar to the El the God of Israel. But **וַיָּבֵא יַעֲקֹב שָׁלֵם עִיר שֶׁכֶם** could be translated “And he came safely to the city Shechem.” Jacob in gen. 28:20 f. after setting up the Bethel stone had vowed to pay his respects at the stone if he returned safely (**בְּשָׁלוֹם**). Here in Gen. 33:18 it is specifically stated that he came safely (**שָׁלֵם**) to Shechem. Here too he sets up an altar which he dedicates to the El who is the God of Israel (Jacob’s new name acquired in Gen. 32:29). Since the vow at Bethel in Gen. 28:20 before going to Padan-Aram and his return there from and his coming to Shechem are both part of JE. It may be that the **שָׁלֵם** of Gen. 33:18 deliberately picks up the **בְּשָׁלוֹם** of Gen. 28:20 f. and that the building of the altar is to be seen as part of the fulfillment of the vow of Gen. 28:20f. If this is so there is a level of tradition here which identifies Jacob’s Bethel and Shechem. When in Gen. 35:1 Jacob is commanded to go up to Bethel and make an altar unto God that appeared to him when he fled from his brother Esau, Bethel is not necessarily meant. The LXX reads, instead of **אֵל בֵּית** **עַד מְקוֹת אֵל**. The Samaritans believe that Jacob’s dream occurred on Mount Gerizim Bethel. In their view the command here in Gen. 35:1 is for Jacob at Shechem to ascend Mount Gerizim, which is not impossible. The account in Gen. 35 is not simple. Jacob buries the household gods under the oak at Shechem. As the account now stands we are to understand that Shechem is polluted, and a new sanctuary at Luz becomes the

sanctuary called Bethel (*par excellence*). Yet there was the sanctuary of the Lord by the oak at Shechem in the time of Joshua (Josh. 24:25, 26). The stories of the patriarchal shrines have been recast in the light of their fortunes in later times. If there were *Matzebhoth* there, there were Bethels on Mount Gerizim. If Gen. 35 appears to pick up Gen. 28:20 f. (Page 15) and Jacob's vow made there (as Skinner, I.C.C. Gen., p. 423, thought), it does this as part of a deliberate attempt to discredit Shechem. Certainly, though Gen. 35 has elements to E and J, verses 9 and 10 give P's version of J's change of Jacob's name (Gen. 32:28 f): verses 6a, 11-13, and 15 deal with the place and occasion of the Promise to Jacob, being P, parallel to Gen. 28: 10 ff. (cf. Skinner, I.C.C. Gen., p. 425).

Where was the house of God (בית אל) Bethel) with the ark of the covenant of the Lord before which Phinehas the son of Eleazar the son of Aaron served (cf. Judges 20:21-28)? Could the Samaritan tradition be right that it was at Har Gerizim Bethel? After all, it was at Gerizim and Ebal that the great covenant ceremony was enacted by Joshua and the stone of witness (Jos. 24:27) set up at Shechem. Was this stone not a *Matzebhah*, a Bethel?

To return to Deuteronomy, E provides the upper limit for D. The Book of the Covenant (Ex. 20-4) is the basis of D. Critics are wrong who regard D as merely Deut. 12-26. The basis of the Covenant is the ten words of Deut. 5. Deut. 12-26 are an extended Midrash on them, just as Ex. 21-3 are a halakhic Midrash on Ex. 20. Just as Ex. 24 gives the covenant scene at Sinai, Deut. 27 f. give the Mosaic instruction for the covenant scene at Shechem with Gerizim as the Mount of Blessing. It is hard to see how an altar and the twelve stones would have been erected on Ebal, the Mount of Cursing. The Law written on the twelve stones would be twelve copies of the Decalogue, one for each tribe. The ten words are the Law and basis of the covenant. I think the Samaritans are right in regarding Deut. 27:1-4 as the tenth commandment. Any harmonization here in the Samaritan Pentateuch is the insertion of the tenth commandment (Samaritan) at the beginning of Deut. 27. The statement at the end of Ex. 20, in verses 24-6, as to the altar whereon offerings are to be made, is significant. Religion and Law cannot be separated as some critics do in shearing off Deut. 5-11 from Deut. 12-26. Nor can religion in an ethical sense be separated from religion in a ceremonial sense. To keep the commandments one must worship God, and God's worship demanded sacrificial offerings. It is to be expected that one be told along with the commandments where one can worship God. Ex. 20:24 says (Page 16) "In all places where I record my name I will come to thee." This is consonant with the E level. With the D reform, one has centralization and one rightly expects to have this important command included with the commandments.

The Book of Deuteronomy is influenced by the teaching of the eighth century prophets, Hosea in particular. If Deuteronomy were a northern code which was written before the northern kingdom fell, one would expect the northerners to refer to their own sanctuary. In the book of Deuteronomy (17:16, 17), it is plain that strictures on the king referred to blemishes in Solomon. We know from the book of I Kings (12:29 ff.) that Jeroboam had sanctuaries of his own and prevented the people from going up to Jerusalem. It is not impossible that Deuteronomy originally was designed for centralization of worship in one sanctuary in the north. Jeroboam had sanctuaries at Bethel and Dan. The Samaritans called Mount Gerizim Bethel. It is not impossible that when Amos condemned the worship of his time at Bethel, he was condemning the worship at the royal shrine in the northern kingdom at Mount Gerizim. Deuteronomy stresses both the altar, one central sanctuary. The only place where instructions are given in Deuteronomy to build an altar is on Ebal (M.T.; Sam. Gerizim); in any case whatever reading is followed it was on a northern mountain. The Samaritans' religion derived much from early post-exilic Judaism, but if Deuteronomy is a northern Code the Samaritans, in their regarding the place of the sanctuary as originally having Mount Gerizim, in their celebrating Passover in the place which they believe God had chosen, in their refusal to distinguish between priests and levites, in all this following Deuteronomy, may on these points be true successors of the best in North Israelite religion. In the Book of the Covenant (Ex. 23:14) and also in D. the Israelite was to appear three times before the Lord. In D it is at the place which God shall choose (M.T.; Sam. has chosen). The three times were Hag Matzoth, Hag Shabuoth and

Hag Sukkoth. In the Samaritan Liturgy there are Festival Liturgies for Matzoth, Shabuoth, and Sukkoth. These have been added to from time to time. But alongside these there is for each festival- The Seventh Day of Matzoth (i.e. the Hag Matzoth), Hag (Page 17) Shabuoth, and Hag Sukkoth- a pilgrimage liturgy made up in the main of readings of the Law. The Samaritans follow a carefully fixed course up Gerizim and visit various altars towards the top; these are the altars of Jacob, Noah, Adam, etc. They then eventually circumambulate the summit, appearing before the Lord. The three pilgrimages are, in the route followed and in the *parashiyyoth* from the Law read, the same. Here we have something very old. It is a pity that B. W. Anderson in his otherwise excellent article "The Place of Shechem in the Bible" (*Biblical Archaeologist*, vol. xx, 1957, 1, pp. 10-19), while recognizing (*ibid.*, p. 18) the ancient Shechem liturgy imbedded in Deuteronomy 27 f., did not refer to the continued liturgical rites in the same area. The names of the altars may have changed, but I venture to suggest that this pilgrimage rite is at least as old as the covenant at Shechem mentioned in Joshua, whether this took place in the time of Joshua or was only supposed to have taken place then after Deuteronomy made Moses give instructions for the ceremony of the Covenant at Shechem.

While the question of an exact date for the composition of D in the north cannot be settled there are certain indications as to the period of its composition. Not only is it after E but it is influenced by the work of Hosea: cf. e.g., Hosea 10: 1-12 where the multiplication of altars and the erection of pillars are condemned, as in effect also is done in Deuteronomy 16:22. It is not impossible that Hosea's strictures on Bethaven (cf. Hosea 4:15 and 10:5) are really directed against Bethel in the Samaritan sense of Gerizim Bethel (cf. especially Hosea 10:5). But it is recognized that Deuteronomy reflects the influence of the eighth century prophets' teaching God's Righteousness and His uncompromising demand for righteousness, with quick punishment for disregard thereof. In addition Deuteronomy has been influenced by Hosea's teaching regarding the Divine *Hesed*.

Hosea was active from the end of Jeroboam II's reign till about 735 B.C. But Hosea has nothing about Pekah's alliance with Rezin of Damascus or Tiglath-Pileser's deposing of Pekah and his making Hoshea king only of the Hill country in 732. I postulate that it was in the reign of Hoshea that Deuteronomy (Page 18) was written. The eighth century had been a century of contrasts for Israel. In Jeroboam II's reign they had seen great prosperity and heard Amos' prediction of doom. In Hoshea's reign that doom was to come. In fact, when he ascended his throne Israel had shrunk to a tiny country round the old sanctuary at Shechem, not unlike the territory held at the entry to the land. Was Deuteronomy written by some person or persons who wanted to rededicate the people to the covenant of Moses just as Josiah was to do 100 years later at Jerusalem in similar circumstances? Events had proved the prophetic message that God is a God of Righteousness and punishes wickedness and unfaithfulness. Israel was being punished. Was Deuteronomy a belated attempt by some incumbent of Bethaven Bethel (at Shechem) to purify the worship there, and to reform the national life so as to avert further Divine punishment? The time was ripe for reform, but events moved too fast for the promulgation of Deuteronomy in the north. Nevertheless, what had been intended for the north was carried out in Judah at a similar juncture in her history. It is possible that Hezekiah, when Jerusalem was spared by Sennacherib, did attempt a reform inspired by what Deuteronomy had been compiled to do for the north. He, like Josiah, hoped for support from the remnant of Israel in the north to come to his Deuteronomic style Passover at Jerusalem, but though they came (II Chron. 30:18) they did not comply with the Jerusalem sanctuary usages. Was it because the remnant in the north had already their own traditions as to what Deuteronomy had originally said?