

SAMARITAN RELIGION AND THE TORAH

by

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Judaism is not the same as the religion of the old Testament, though we do see the origins of Judaism in the post-exilic writings of the old Testament. Samaritanism of the present had its origins in the early post-exilic period(1). It is a plausible suggestion at least, that prior to the Jewish Samaritan schism, early Samaritanism was very like early Judaism. After the schism any inter exchange of religions beliefs and practices must have ceased.

Judaism we know developed in the Tannaitic(2) Amoraitic(3) and Geonic(4) periods into something like Judaism of today. Samaritanism too probably developed from what it had been at the time of the schism; but it is generally believed that the Samaritans have been very conservative and that any development which has taken place was not on a great scale. Certainly there has not been any development in Samaritanism similar to the Mishnah, Talmuds and Geonic Responsa of Judaism.

The Samaritans do not regard the Traditional Oral Law as on the same level as the written Law. This article will in fact attempt to examine the question as to whether the Samaritans have any of Oral Law at all. The Samaritans are like the Protestants in this respect that for them the Bible; (i.e. the Torah) is the word of God; whereas

(1) cf. Mantgomery "The Samaritans" p. 59 f.

(2) C. 100 B.C. — 200 A.D. The product of the Tannaitic period was the Mishnah compiled by Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi C. 200 A.D.

(3) C. 200 A.D. — 500 A.D. The product of the Amoraitic period was the two Talmuds: The Babylonian Talmud and the Palestinian Talmud.

(4) C. 500 A.D. — 1000 A.D. During this period began the codifying of the legal opinions of the Babylonian Talmud which process went on along after 1000 A.D. and finally culminated in the authoritative Shulhan Arukh of Joseph Caro of the 16th century.

the Jews like the Roman Catholics do not consider the Bible as sufficient by itself but regard the Oral Law (or in the case of the Roman Catholics the tradition of the Church) as on the same level as the Bible.

The Samaritan Bible is the Torah and is the same Torah as the Jewish. It is however a different recension from the Jewish. The differences fall into several categories. In the first category there are readings in the Samaritan Torah which are probably better than those in the Jewish Torah, since scribal error has led to corruption in the latter; in some such cases the Samaritan readings are supported by the LXX(1).

The second category of differences are cases where the Samaritan text has amplified the Jewish Hebrew either by harmonisation of parallel statements (e.g. cf. the Numbers XIII 2-33 account of the spies and that in Deuteronomy I 23-29); or the Samaritan has in Exodus IX 1, 12 when God tells Moses to go to Pharaoh and say such and such, repeated the message as delivered by Moses; where as the Jewish Torah merely stated that Moses went in to Pharaoh and said(2) what he had been told to say, without repeating the message verbatim.

This second category of differences between Samaritan and Jewish Torah shows that the Samaritan Torah represents a secondary recension which sought to fill out imagined gaps. The harmonisation and the amplification of the Hebrew text as seen in the Samaritan recension perhaps owes something to idea that God's word must in no sense be lacking, but be perfect(3).

The third category of differences refers to the central Samaritan claim that Mt. Gerizim is the divinely chosen site of the Sanctuary. The differences between the Samaritan and the Jewish texts in this general category are of two types. First whereas in Deuteronomy in the Jewish Torah we find frequent reference to the place which God shall choose for His worship, in the Samaritan Torah in such cases we find "the place which God has chosen(4)"

(1) e.g. Deut. XXXII 35.

(2) cf. Ex. IX 12.

(3) cf. Abu'l Fath Annales Samartani ed. Vilmar Gotha 1865 p. 94 f.

(4) cf. Deut. XII 5, 11, 14, 18, 21.

The Jewish Torah makes Moses look forward to the choosing of some as yet undefined place for God's Sanctuary. When the book of Deuteronomy was discovered (1) in the reign of King Josiah (2) of Judah in 627 B.C. Jerusalem was understood to be the place which Moses had been looking forward to being chosen. As in well known many sanctuaries (3) had existed prior to this and worship at them had not previously been condemned except perhaps in the reign of Hezekiah (4).

However from the time of David and Solomon. Jerusalem (5) had been the royal sanctuary par excellence. Deuteronomy seemed to confirm Jerusalem's prestige, and as a result all other sanctuaries in Judah and in the Northern territory were suppressed (6).

The Samaritan argument has always been that God would not have told Moses to tell the people to offer sacrifices and to bring tithes etc. unless he told them where to bring them (7). The Samaritans maintain that Mt. Gerizim had been chosen to as the Holy Place. It was known to the Patriarchs, the Samaritans make it the mountain on which Abraham was prepared to sacrifice Isaac (8). This is probably as convincing as the Jewish claim (9) that the site of the 'Akedah was Mt. Moriah at Jerusalem.

It is usually asserted that the Samaritans altered the the Deuteronomic phrase the phrase "the place which God shall chose" to "the place which God shall chose". Actually if Deuteronomy was written in the northern kingdom in the eighth century B.C. it is possible that the original reading was "the place which God has chosen," and

(1) cf. Oesterly and Robinson. A History of Israel vol. I. p. 418 f. and p. 425.

(2) cf. Ibid, p. 392.

(3) cf. II Kings XXIII 13, also of Oesterly and Robinson, A History of Israel, pp. 316 and 323 (Ebjah thought protested against the introduction of the worship of the Tyrian Baal in Israel complained that the people had thrown down the Altars of Yahweh, G. I Kings XIX 10, 14.

(4) cf. II Chronicles XXX 13 f. and II Kings XVIII 4.

(5) cf. II Samuel XXIV 25, and ch. VI 16 f and II Kings, VIII 1 f.

(6) cf. II Kings XXIII passim, and cf. also Oesterly and Robinson, Ibid ; pp. 420 - 421.

(7) Abu'l-Fath, Ibid p. 94 f.

(8) cf. Gen. XXII 2.

(9) J.E. Vol. 9 Moriah p. 17.

referred to Mt. Garizim. After Deuteronomy came to the Southern kingdom logic would demand that if the phrase was to refer to Jerusalem a Jebusite city with no Israelite associations, until time of David, that it must read "shall chose" (if Deuteronomy was supposed to have been written by Moses).

In Deuteronomy Ch. XXVII⁵ the Samaritan Bible makes Moses instruct that an altar was to be built on Mt. Gerizim. The Jewish Recension of Deuteronomy XXVII⁴ reads instead Ebal Although wen the Jewish Bible makes Ehal the mount of cursing and Gerizim the mount of blessing Deut. XXVII²; the Old Latin Vession has in Deut. XXVII 4 the same reading Gerizim as the Samaritan.

The most notable difference between the Samaritan and Jewish recensions of the Torah is the so-called extra Samaritan Tenth Commandments. The Samaritans divide up the Ten Commandments of the Jewish Torah⁽¹⁾ so that they number only nine. Actually their division is an old one attested in both Jewish and Roman Catholic tradition except that the latter divide the official Jewish and Protestant Tenth Commandment (the ninth according to the Roman Catholic and one form of Jewish traditional enumeration) into tow⁽²⁾. The Samaritans do not do this but supply a new tenth commandment of their own. This Samaritan Tenth Commandment is drawn from Deuteronomy XVII 2-3 (Samaritan reading Gerizim for Ebal).

It is usually understood that the Samaritan Tenth Commandment is a sort of example of harmonisation of one part of the Torah with another. At the end Ex. 20 i.e. 24-26 reference is made after the ten Commandments to the building of an altar of earth to offer sacrifices to God where soever he reveals himself⁽³⁾. The Samaritan noted the apparent discrepancy between the idea of building altars in various parts of the country as suggested by Ex. 20²⁴ and the Deuteronomic regulation that offerings should be made only at the place which God chose⁽⁴⁾.

(1) cf. Ex. XX 1-17 and Deut. V 6-21.

(2) cf. Samaritan Decalogue by J. Bowman and Talmon, "Bulletin of the John Ryland Library" Manchester, March 1951, p. 220; for tables of the different ways of dividing the Ten Commandments see *ibid.*, pp. 222-223.

(3) cf. Ex. XX 24.

(4) cf. Deut. XII 5 etc.

Now in Deuteronomy XXVII 4, 5 we have the command, according to the Samaritan recension to build an altar on Mount Gerizim. (Jewish version Ebal). The Samaritan version in Ex. 20²⁴ changes the statement about building an altar wheresoever God reveals himself to building an altar where God had chosen. To be Samaritan the Law was uniform, God had chosen one place for worship, an altar was to be built at Gerizim(1) therefore Gerizim must be the place which God had chosen for this worship.

It was only reasonable to expect that God would tell men where to worship him, and therefore the Samaritan inserted Deuteronomy XXVII⁴⁻⁷ as the final commandment telling the place where God was to be worshipped. It would fit in all the better since "Exodus XX²⁴" went on to tell where sacrifice was permitted and both Ex. XX²⁵ and Deut XXVII⁵⁻⁶ say that the altar is to be made of stone unworked by a tool. The Samaritan did not understand the source criticism of the Torah, but he may have been carrying on what had been the old Northern Kingdom tradition that Gerizim was the place to worship God.

The Qiblah is towards Gerizim. We know from the Book of Daniel VI 10 that the Qiblah for the Jews was towards Jerusalem (2).

The Samaritans have a Creed (3) which is recited in private prayer accompanying ablutions before public prayer in the Kanisah. The Creed is also repeated at the beginning of each service. The Creed is of 5 points :

1. The belief in one God.
2. The belief in the one Prophet Moses.
3. The belief in the Torah.
4. The belief in the place to worship God.
5. The belief in the Day of vengeance and recompense.

(1) cf. Deut. (Samaritan reading) ch. XXVII 45.

(2) cf. The book of David is usually assumed was written in the middle of the 2nd. century B.C. since the Samaritans had a temple of their own on Mt. Gerizim from the 4th. century B. C. It is perhaps safe to assume that by the 2nd. century B. C. they too had a Qiblah i.e. that they prayed facing Jerusalem.

(3) cf. J. A. Montgomery, *The Samaritans*, p. 207, also cf. J. Bowman's article, *Faith in Samaritan thought*, a paper delivered in March 1956 to the Society for the Study of Theology, Oxford meeting. This paper is to be published in September 1957 in *John Ryland's Bulletin*, Manchester.

The Creed is old. The Jewish Tractate on the Kuthim (Samaritans)(1) seems to mention the last two points; the Tractate Kuthim says when shall we receive them (i.e. within the Jewish community), and answers when they give up faith in Mt. Gerizim and confess the resurrection of the dead(2) The last article of the Samaritan Creed merely mentions belief in the Day of Vengeance and Recompense, saying nothing of the Resurrection.

The Samaritans however do believe in the Resurrection. Proof of the Resurrection is found by them in God's curse on Adam(3) "Dust thou art and to thy dust (Samaritan reading) thou shalt return". (i.e. at the Day of Resurrection) so they teach their children(4).

The Samaritans stress belief(5). The Jews do not stress belief except in the one God and the Resurrection. Judaism stresses practice of ritual acts founded on the Law-Samaritanism also stresses practice but only of the 613 commands and Prohibitions in the Law.

The Samaritans keep the same festivals as the Jews, but their method of observing them is more biblical. Their Passover ritual is actually earlier than that of the P Code in the Torah and resembles rather that of Deuteronomy(6).

(1) For a translation into English of this Tractate see J.A. Montgomery, *The Samaritans*, pp. 196 - 203.

(2) Article 28 of the Tractate Kuthim, quoted "when shall we take them back, when they renounce Mt. Gerizim and confess Jerusalem and the Resurrection of the dead. From this time forth he that robs a Samaritan shall be as he who robs an Israelite".

(3) cf. Gen. III.

(4) cf. Malef.

(5) cf. e.g. the Samaritan Catechism called the Malef which is taught to Samaritans children. The Malef Ms. (G) 1169 has been discussed in J. Bowman's paper. *The Fourth Gospel and the Samaritans* which is being published in the *Bulletin of the John Rylands library*, September 57.

(6) cf. Deut. XVI 1-8. For description of the Samaritan Passover cf. J. A. Montgomery *ibid.*, pp. 38, 39. Our contention that the Samaritan Passover is nearer Deuteronomy XVI is that the Samaritan Passover cannot be sacrificed and celebrated except as a congregational function on Mt. Gerizim. The Deuteronomic Passover was not to be sacrificed within any of the gates, G. Deut. XVI 5 but only at the place which the Lord chooses (Samaritan reading) This the Samaritans do. When they cannot find access to the sacred Mountain, they had a service in the town but it was not and is not sacrificial. cf. Cowley. *The Samaritan liturgy*, vol. I, pp. 167 - 201 for these special prayers, cf. also I. Lerner's Doctorate thesis on the Samaritan Passover Liturgy; Leeds 1956.

The Jews however regard Passover as a domestic festival celebrated at home. This they have done since at least New Testament times, cf. e.g. Mark XIV 17 f. The Passover lamb would be slain at the temple sacrificially but taken home to be cooked and eaten. Leviticus XXIII 5 f. does not say that the Passover had to be celebrated publically and eaten at the chosen place as did Deuteronomy XVI 7.

The Samaritans at three of their festivals (Unleavened Bread, Pentecost and Tabernacles) make a pilgrimage⁽¹⁾ to Mt. Gerizim, the question is to what extent these festival pilgrimages are survivals of early Israelite religion or are much indebted to Muslim influence? However such pilgrimages seem to be commanded in the E Code and Deuteronomy⁽²⁾.

The Samaritan Calendar is in the power of Samaritan priests⁽³⁾ who issue it twice yearly in the Spring and then in the Autumn. While the Samaritans keep the same festivals as the Jews, the Samaritans have in addition two minor festivals which have almost fallen into abeyance among the Jews. These Festivals are called by the Samaritans Zimmuth Pesah and Zimmuth Sukkoth⁽⁴⁾ and are sixty days before Pesah and Sukkoth respectively.

If we compare with the Jewish Calendar, we find that sixty days before Pesah the 14th. Nisan is the 15th. of Shebat which is the Jewish New Year for Trees⁽⁵⁾; sixty days before Sukkoth brings us in the Jewish Calendar to the 15th. of Ab which according to Mishnah To'anith 4¹⁰ was once⁽⁶⁾ a very joyful Jewish Festival.

Megillath Ta'anith notes that no mourning was to be permitted on 15th. Shebat and 15th. Ab. The Samaritan Festivals of Zimmuth Pesah and Zimmuth Sukkoth are therefore old and are not merely Samaritan innovations. These Festivals mark the beginning of the preparation for the Spring and Autumn Equinoxes. It would be argued that though these Festivals are old, the Samaritans have grafted on

(1) The Samaritan Festival Liturgy underwent considerable development from the 14th. century on, up till then the Samaritan Liturgy for ordinary Sabbath and Festivals was basically the same except that for the Festivals a few additional pieces were added, G. e. g. Ms. V. 3 the earliest complete Samaritan Liturgical Ms. However the Samaritan Liturgy now runs to two volumes whereas until the 14th. century the complete Liturgy was that comprised in the first 92 pages of the first volume of Cowley's two volumes Samaritan Liturgy.

(2) cf. Ex. XXIII 14, 15 Deut. XVI 16.

(3) cf. Montgomery, The Samaritans, p. 312.

(4) cf. Cowley. The Samaritan Liturgy, O. U. P. 1959, vol. II, Glossary, p. LXVII.

(5) cf. Mishnah Rosh ha Shanah I.

(6) cf. J. E. Vol. VIII, pp. 427 - 428. (The Megillath Ta'anith was composed at the beginning of the Christian era, probably about 7 A.D.)

to them their association with the fixing of the calendar and its promulgation by the priests ; on the other hand the nearness of these Festivals to the Equinoxes perhaps shows that they always had some significance for fixing main events in the Samaritan Festival year⁽¹⁾

We note that they are called Zimmuth Pesah and Zimmuth Sukkoth ; Zimmuth means conjunction ; i.e. conjunction of the sun and moon in the constellation dragon. The Samaritans in the liturgy of Zimmuth Pesah commemorate the meeting of Moses and Aaron⁽²⁾ in Egypt after Moses return from Midian.

For the Samaritan there is only one prophet Moses⁽³⁾ who is the seal of the prophets.

The Samaritans claim that their priests have retained the secret of the calculation of the calendar which had been given to Adam by God⁽⁴⁾. One thing we can say for certain is that the Samaritan priests have always tried to keep the secret of fixing of the calendar to themselves ; however Professor Robertson of Manchester in the John Rylands Bulletin of 1939 has demonstrated that the Samaritan calendar is calculated by the priests with the help of al-Battani's tables. The basic element in the Samaritan calendar is the calculating of the conjunction of sun and moon at the Dragon point in Spring and Autumn and fixing on the basis of this and al-Battani's tables, the calendar for the next six months.

(1) The Samaritans have 7 Festivals :

a. Passover, the moth of Nisan.

b. Mazzoth (Unleavened Bread) which starts at the same time as Passover but the feast of which celebrated seven days afterwards.

c. Pentecost (Shavuoth) fifty days from the morrow of the Sabbath after the Passover.

d. The beginning of the seventh month (Tishri).

e. Yom Kippur (day of atonement) tenth Tishri.

f. Tabernacles starting from 15th. Tishri. 7 Mo'id Ha-Shemini, being the 23rd. of Tishri.

(2) cf. Ex. IV 27, 28.

(3) cf. The Samaritan Cread referred to above. " seal of the prophets is found in the Samaritan Liturgy as a discription of Moses".

(4) cf. J. Bowman, Transcript of the original Text of the Samaritan Chronicle Tolidah, p. i. Leeds, 54.

The Samaritans believe in the Day of Vengeance and Recompense. The Day of Vengeance and Recompense is found mentioned in the Samaritan Bible Deut. XXXII³⁵. The Hebrew Jewish Bible reads "To me belongs Vengeance and Recompense"; no mention is made of a day of Vengeance; however the LXX reads "day of Vengeance instead "to me belongs Vengeance".

In the time after the schism the Samaritans looked for the return of Moses or one⁽¹⁾ like Moses⁽²⁾, to be God's agent at such a Day of Vengeance.

There is reason to believe that for long some sects of the Samaritans did not believe in immortality, but hoped for the return of Moses or the coming of the Restorer like him and his righting their fortunes in this world.

(1) cf. J. Bowman's article in the *Journal of Jewish Studies*. Vol. VI No. 2 A 55 p. 67.

(2) cf. Deut. XVIII 18.