

## “SAMARIA”

In geography, place names can be confusing. If I just say Washington, do I mean the only city in the District of Columbia or do I mean the state in the northwest of the United States? If I just say New York, do I mean the city or the state? Then there are places that have the same place name. How many Warrens do you think there are or how many Greenvilles?

Today we are taking the place name Samaria and we have a difficult subject to understand. If you just say “Samaria” it could sound like Sumeria. That is the name for modern day Iraq. There were a number of civilizations located in different part of Sumeria over a period of four thousand years. Cities such as Babylon, Ur, and Nineveh were there.

We are looking today at Samaria spelled with three “a”s. It was the name of a city, the name of a kingdom, and then the name of a province of three empires – Assyrian, Greek, and Roman.

Let us try to unravel this ball of yarn so that when we read the place names Samaria in the Old Testament and the New Testament we won’t confuse them and we will know where they belong in Biblical history and geography.

The Israelites became a nation under David. He united the twelve tribes of Israel into a powerful nation that exercised influence over surrounding nations. Under Solomon the kingdom became wealthy and even more powerful. In the capital of Jerusalem Solomon built a splendid palace and a magnificent Temple. Here he accumulated treasures from all over the world. When he died, his son Rehoboam

could not hold the kingdom together. Ten of the tribes rebelled against him and followed Jeroboam. Thereafter, the ten tribes were called Israel and the people remaining loyal to Rehoboam were called Judah after the sole entire tribe that remained loyal to the throne of David.

### 1.) Samaria the city

The first king of Israel, Jeroboam, initially made Shechem the capital, then he moved it to Tirzah. During the brief reigns of Elah and Zikri and the first six years of King Omri, Tirzah remained the capital. Then Omri bought the hill on which the city of Samaria was built. It is in a bowl of rich land surrounded by mountains on every side. The hill was in the shape of a melon with steep sides and a flat top.

...Omri became king over Israel, and reigned twelve years. Six years he reigned in Tirzah. And he bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver; then he built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, Samaria, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill. Omri did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and did worse than all who were before him. (1 Kings 16:23b-25 NKJV)

Here Omri built a palace of ivory and a temple to Baal. He appears to have been pressured by the Syrians to allow them to build a street in Samaria. These were bankers and merchants from Damascus and other parts of Syria. The city was highly adorned with public buildings. The prophets, including Elijah and Elisha, denounced the idolatry in it.

In time the ten tribes became known by the name of their capital. Their kingdom was called Samaria.

### 2.) Samaria the country

The ten tribes were united in rejecting the rule of Rehoboam and establishing their own kingdom. However, their sin of rebellion quickly led them into many other sins, especially against the word of God and

the religion God had taught them through Moses and the prophets. It was God who had given the throne to David and his descendants forever. In rebelling against Rehoboam, they were rebelling against God. God had established Jerusalem as the place they should come to worship and sacrifice. He had appointed the sons of Aaron to be priests and to be assisted at the temple by the Levites.

Jeroboam placed golden calves and altars in Bethel and Dan so that the people would not go to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices. He said "These are your gods, Israel." These were known throughout Israel's history as "the sin of Jeroboam." Anyone who wanted to, could be a priest.

Three times Samaria was attacked by Benhadad II of Syria. Even though his forces greatly outnumbered Israel, he was soundly defeated in his first two attempts. The third time he laid siege to the city for a long time. The city's inhabitants were reduced to dire extremes. Just when it seemed Benhadad would succeed, his forces broke off the siege and fled in panic, alarmed by a mysterious sound of horses, chariots, and a great army. The starving inhabitants of Samaria were soon feasting on the provisions the Syrian army abandoned in haste.

The Israelite kingdom lasted 200 years. Its authority began to weaken. King Josiah sent messengers from Jerusalem throughout Israel inviting its people to a Passover celebration. Under King Hezekiah portions of the tribes of Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Manasseh, and Ephraim recognized the authority of Hezekiah, king of Judah.

Shalmanezzer, king of Assyria, began a siege of the city of Samaria which would last for three years. His successor Sargon II captured and destroyed the city in 720 B.C. and took its inhabitants captive.

### 3.) Samaria the province

Following the policy of the Assyrians, the people of the kingdom of Israel were taken as captives to Assyria, and the Assyrians reseeded Samaria with people from other lands they had conquered.

Then the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities. And it was so, at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they did not fear the LORD; therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which killed some of them. So they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, "The nations whom you have removed and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the rituals of the God of the land; therefore He has sent lions among them, and indeed, they are killing them because they do not know the rituals of the God of the land." Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, "Send there one of the priests whom you brought from there; let him go and dwell there, and let him teach them the rituals of the God of the land." Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD. (2 Kings 17:24-28 NKJV)

They embraced the religion of the Jews and subsequent generations began to think of themselves as true Jews. When the Jews came back from captivity in Babylon under Ezra and Nehemiah, the Samaritans wanted to help rebuild the Temple. They were rebuffed by the Jews and told that they had no part with them. Later the Samaritans built their own temple on Mount Gerizim.

The army of Alexander the Great attacked the city of Samaria and resettled it with Greeks. Later, a Roman army attacked and destroyed the city. It was given to Herod the Great and he rebuilt it. He built a temple to Caesar Augustus. He built many magnificent buildings with hundreds of columns. It was here that Herod murdered his sons and the only human being whom he ever really loved, his wife Mariamne.

Samaritans of Jesus' day were a polyglot people of many nations, brought there from lands conquered by Assyria, Macedonia, and Rome.

