

The History of Samaria and the Samaritans

- In the ninth and eighth centuries BCE, Samaria was the capital of the Northern Kingdom (Israel). Jerusalem, the “city of David,” was the capital of the Southern Kingdom, Judah.
- During the reign of Israel’s King Ahaz, Israel attacked Judah and took 200,000 Judeans captive. The prophet Oded in Samaria told the Israelites to send the Judeans back home, which they did (2 Chronicles 28:8-15).
- The Assyrians conquered Samaria in 722 BCE, and the Northern Kingdom’s people were exiled or assimilated into non-Israelite peoples (2 Kings 17:21-24), becoming the so-called “Ten Lost Tribes of Israel”; the Northern Kingdom, now known as “Samaria,” was populated by members of the ten tribes who remained coupled with others whom the Assyrians relocated into the area.
- When former exiles in Babylon returned to Jerusalem (circa 538 BCE) and started rebuilding the Temple, they experienced hostility from people living in the region of Samaria (Nehemiah 4:1-8).
- Jews who rebelled around 165 BCE against Antiochus IV Epiphanes resented the Samaritans for not helping them.
- In Jesus’s day, suspicion and resentment between Jews and Samaritans persisted (Matthew 10:5; Luke 9:51-55; John 4:9).
- Samaritans call themselves Shomrim or Shamerim—“guardians” or “observers” of the Law—and believe the Northern Kingdom sanctuary at Mt. Gerizim taught the correct interpretation of Torah.
- Samaritans accept only their version of the Pentateuch (the Bible’s first five books) as authoritative; their Scripture does not include the Prophets or the Writings.