

Samaria

Some of the text of this article is taken from an article on Samaria found at: <http://www.crystalinks.com/samaria.html>

In the Hebrew Bible the name Samaria refers to the capital city of Israel, the northern kingdom. Omri ruled from 876-869 B.C.E. - and purchased a hill from a man named Shemer. After fortifying the hill, Omri constructed the city of Samaria, naming it after Shemer.

This detached hill was 1454 feet above sea-level, and more than 328 feet above the surrounding hills.

Omri's son, Ahab, married to Jezebel, a Sidonian princess, introduced the worship of Baal.

Shortly afterward, the Prophet Elias announced the famine which for three years and more devastated the city and surrounding country.

Samaria suffered her first siege from Ben-hadad, King of Damascus.

Omri's son, Ahab built as his palace, an 'ivory house'. This means a palace decorated with ivory plaques like those uncovered in the Samaria excavations. A number of these plaques were found, Phoenician in style, though since some are only partly finished, it is likely they were made in Samaria. They are decorated with a variety of pictures and motifs including animals and flowers, often showing Egyptian influence.

After the disaster which this same king suffered at Aphec, he concluded a treaty with Ahab. The body of Ahab was carried there from Ramoth Gilead, and the dogs licked his blood in the gutters, according to the prediction of the Prophet.

Elias prophesied that King Ochozias, who fell from the window of his palace, would die of this fall, which prophecy was very shortly fulfilled.

His brother and successor, Joram, threw down the statue of Baal, erected by Ahab.

The history of Samaria is connected with various episodes in the life of the Prophet Elias, notably on account of the siege of the city by Ben-hadad.

Jehu, founder of a new dynasty, exterminated the last descendants of Achab, and destroyed the temple of Baal in Samaria; then he was interred in the city as his predecessors had been. Nevertheless the worship of Astarte still continued in the city.

Joas, who had transported the treasures of the temple of Jerusalem, pillaged by him, to Samaria, was buried in the tomb of the kings of Israel as also was his son Jeroboam II. Then followed a series of regicides and changing of ruling families.

Zachary, after reigning six months, was assassinated by Sellum, who reigned one month, and was in turn killed by Manahem, who ruled ten years.

Ella, seems to have been crowned or placed upon the throne by Tiglathpileser III, King of Assyria.

Finally Salmaneser IV and his general, Sargon, took possession of Samaria (721 B. C.) after a siege lasting not less than three years.

The inhabitants who survived the siege were transported into Assyria to the number of 27,290, according to an inscription. Thus were realized the threats of the Prophets against haughty Samaria.

The first historical period, and not the least glorious, since it was for nearly two hundred years the capital of the kingdom of Israel, was thus ended. There remained only the temple of Baal, which had preceded the temple of Augustus, erected by King Herod, repaired by the American mission of Harvard University, also the palace of Amri, discovered by this same mission.

Instead of the Israelites transported into Assyria, colonies were sent over, formed of various nations, Chaldeans, Cutheans, Syrians, Arabs, and others; these mingled with the native population, forming an amalgamation of religion and superstition; thus the Israelites with their own national worship gave birth to the people and the religion of the Samaritans.

The latter became furious enemies of the Jews, but Sichem or Neapolis, and not Samaria, became their principal religious and political centre.

FALL OF SAMARIA - 721 B.C.

In the expansion of Assyria, Samaria fell in 721 B.C. to Sargon. The native population was deported, others were settled in its place, and the city was made the capital of an Assyrian province.

When it fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. it was the end of the Northern Kingdom of Israel when many were taken into exile in Assyria and other foreigners were brought in to replace the exiled Israelites. The region was known as Samaria and its people were called Samaritans - some of whom still live at Nablus and Jaffa, Israel.

In the Bible the Samaritans recognize only the Pentateuch and are even more scrupulous about observing its ordinances than are Orthodox Jews. They worship on Mt. Gerizim, where they had a temple in ancient times.

The continual hatred between Jew and Samaritan apparently governed the choice of characters in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The Samaritan language is a variety of Palestinian Aramaic (a Semitic language). The Samaritan manuscripts, although pre-Masoretic are not believed to be ancient, but they supply some useful variants of biblical passages.

SAMARIA

From 721-355 B. C., Samaria was a Babylonian and Persian city; finally it fell into the power of Alexander who to avenge the murder of his governor, partly exterminated the inhabitants, replacing them by a Graeco-Syrian colony.

Having thus become Graeco-Samaritan, the city continued its hostilities against the Jews, and following an attack upon Marissa, it was taken after a memorable siege and utterly destroyed by John Hyrcanus about 110 B. C..

It was rebuilt by the proconsul of Syria, Gabinus, between 57 and 55 B. C..

The city was then returned to the Samaritans.

Herod the Great eventually received it from Octavius (31 B. C.) after the death of Cleopatra, the previous ruler. He enlarged and embellished it, in the centre built a magnificent temple to Augustus (of which the monumental staircase may still be seen), and called it Sebaste (about 25 B. C.) in honour of the sovereign.

Herod made it one of his favorite residences, although it was maritime Caesarea which obtained

his political preponderance. After Herod came his son Archelaus, who ruled the city. At the death of the latter the province was annexed to Syria as a gift to Herod Agrippa I, A. D. 41.

Jesus visited Samaria where he spoke with the woman at the well and told a parable about the good Samaritan.

The *Book of Acts* relates that Philip engaged in missionary activity in Samarian, marking an extension of the gospel beyond traditionally Jewish regions.

Excavations in 1908-10 and 1931-35 - uncovered fortifications and the palace of Omri, as well as ostraca, or potsherds, and ivories probably made by Phoenician artists. There are also extensive Roman remains.

On the southern side of the Omalos plateau, the Samaria National Park was established to protect the endemic flora and fauna of this fascinating region that encompasses Europe's longest gorge and a number of smaller gorges. It is one of the two remaining habitats to the Cretan wild goat or Kri-Kri that lives in secluded hollows on the mountainside.

The Kri-Kri are usually seen in the afternoon but their shyness makes it unlikely that you will glimpse one. Unfortunately, there are only about 2000 animals remaining on the entire island and they face an insecure future: hunters still seek them for their tender meat, grazing grounds have become more scarce and disease is a harsh reality for these beautiful creatures. Other endemic animal species include the Cretan badger, the Cretan marten, the Cretan spiny mouse, and the Cretan weasel. If you are fortunate, you might also see some of the rarest birds of Europe such as the griffon vulture and the lammergeier.

Bonelli's eagle and the golden eagle are sometimes sighted here as well.

The 18 km hike through the Samaria Gorge begins at Xyloskalo on the Omalos plateau 1200 m high. The scenery is fantastic. To the south is a majestic view of Mt. Gygilos with its lunar landscape that is of great interest to rock climbers. Sheer cliffs and mighty peaks surround the fertile highland plain of Omalos where ancient olive trees still grow while below, the great gash of the Samaria gorge was carved by mountain torrents making their way steeply to the Libyan sea. According to Greek Mythology, one of the Titans living on Crete slashed the land with his knife to create the gorge while Cretan-born Zeus, the god of the heavens, placed his throne on

top of Mt. Gygilos and raced his chariot on the nearby mountain plain of Angathoti.

A path drops down to the bottom of the gorge through a fragrant forest of pine and cypress trees. There are benches along the way that encourage you to stop periodically to relish the grandeur of nature and to notice the wild herbs tucked into the crannies of the cliffs. A mere touch to their leaves releases delightful, aromatic fragrances while cool, sweet-tasting spring water is available at organized rest sites along the trail.

Although this area has been relatively isolated, remnants of ancient settlements exist. The Sanctuary and Oracle of Apollo are believed to be located under the church of Aghios Nikolaos and in the vicinity of Afentis Christos. You can also explore the Samaria settlement which was abandoned when the gorge was proclaimed to be a National Park. Nearby is the church that was dedicated to Saint Maria of Egypt after whom the gorge and settlement were named.