

THE SAMARITANS



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U3A STONNINGTON,
COMPARATIVE RELIGION,
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When we hear the word, **SAMARITAN**, most of us think of two disparate things. Firstly, that it is a definition of good people, particularly those with a charitable disposition. Secondly, that they were a section of the populace who lived in the time of Jesus and who would have ceased to exist many centuries ago. Both of those *beliefs* contain inaccuracies.

Wikipedia used to have two disparate pages:

- **SAMARITANS** which dealt with the charities of that name;
- **SAMARITAN** which dealt with the religion, the Samaritans.

The names of the pages have now been changed to **SAMARITANS (CHARITY)** and **SAMARITANS** respectively. Ironically, this makes finding the right page easier for new readers but harder for seasoned readers because the former name of the charity page now leads one to the page about the religion.

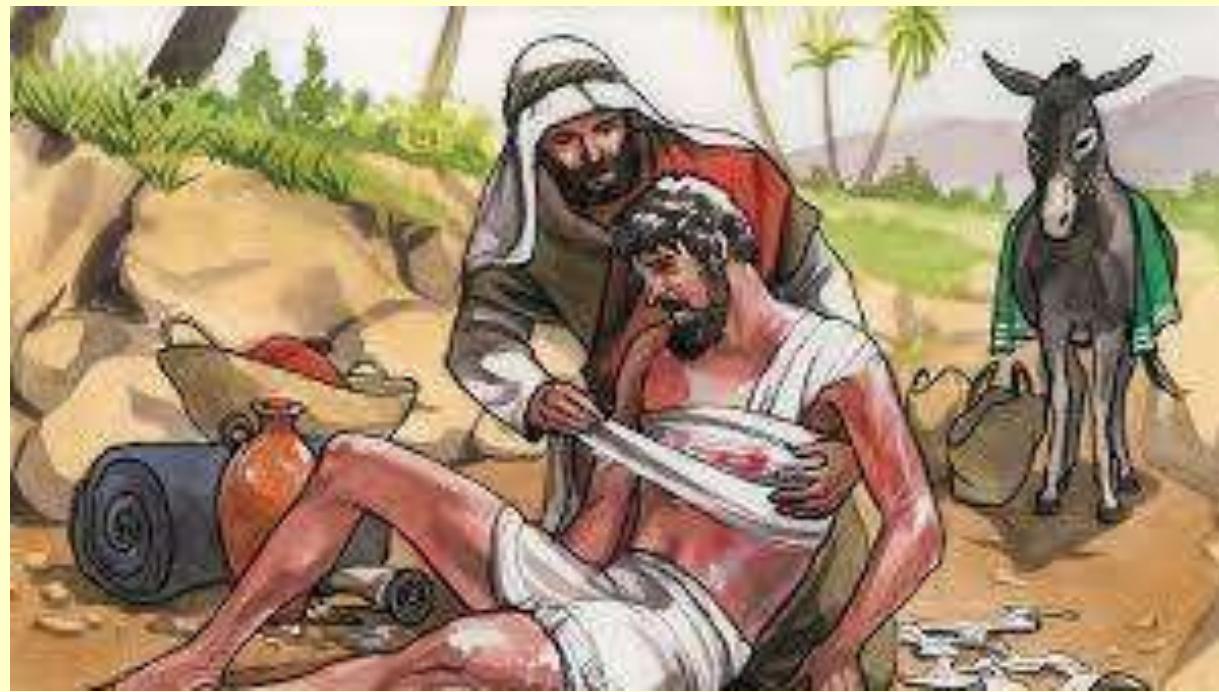
In most regions of the world, including Australia, charities have been set up which include the word “Samaritan” in their title. Slogans such as “Need a boost in Life? Call us.” and “Confidential, non-religious, non-judgmental” are used.



The use of the word by charities just highlights the fact that the word, Samaritan, has entered the English language with a meaning that is somewhat contradictory to its Biblical meaning.

According to Luke (10:29-37) a traveller (presumably a Jew) is stripped of clothing, beaten, and left half dead along the road. First a Cohen (a priest) and then a Levite (a priests' assistant) comes by, but both avoid the man. Finally, a Samaritan comes along. Samaritans and Jews generally despised each other, but the Samaritan helps the injured man. Jesus is described as telling the parable in response to a question regarding the identity of the "neighbour", which Leviticus 19:18 says should be loved.

Portraying a Samaritan in a positive light would have come as a shock to Jesus' contemporary audience. In modern language, he was actually saying something like: *Look, even though these people may be despised and loathed, I have to remind you that there is good in all people.*



So who are these Samaritans?

Some may be surprised that the present tense was used in the last sentence but, yes, Samaritanism exists today, some 2,700 years since they split from Judaism.



Despite the various Levantine overlords, the Samaritans have had a continuous presence in the Holy Land for all that time. They consider themselves to have come from the northern Hebrew tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, in the area known as Samaria (west of present-day Tel Aviv and north of Jerusalem).

As well as six New Testament references, the Hebrew Bible refers to them in a number of places, such as 2 Chronicles 30:1-31:6. The Talmud also cites them, using the alternate name, Cutheans, a reference to the ancient city of Cuthah in what is now Iraq.

↑ A group of Samaritan men from Nablus, with their *intended*, the young girls who will be their wives. Photo taken in the early 20th century. (Until the mid-20th century, Samaritan men were permitted to have two wives.)

The Hebrew word *Sumarim* means Keepers, and Samaritans refer to themselves as Keepers of the Law. Theirs is an Abrahamic religion based on the *Memah Markah*, the Samaritan Torah, which is very similar to the Five Books of Moses, the first Books of the Hebrew Bible.

Their basic difference from Judaism is that they do not include the rest of the Hebrew Bible (the Prophets and the Writings) amongst their holy texts.

Today, the Samaritans are almost exclusively found in two centres, Kiryat Luza on Mount Gerizim, their sacred site on the West Bank, and Holon just outside Tel Aviv. Nowadays, the Kiryat Luza settlement consists of modern homes.

There are also four semi-isolated Samaritan families in Binyamina, Giv'at Ada, Matan and Ashdod.





The Samaritans' contemporary West Bank settlement at Kiryat Luza.



A modern Samaritan synagogue in the Samaritan neighbourhood of the city of Holon, Israel. Note the typical Samaritan stylised Hebrew text on the building.



At the time of Jesus there were about a million Samaritans, compared to a total population in Roman-occupied Israel of about 2.3 million. However, in 2017, the total Samaritan population was no more than 796 souls. Numbers are decreasing! The main reasons for this are a general refusal to accept converts and a history of genetic diseases caused by the ever-decreasing size of the gene pool. (There are only four Samaritan families: Cohen [the Priests]; Tsedakah; Danfi; and Marhib – a fifth family died out in the 20th century).

The Samaritan population has also been affected by a few cases of intermarriage, one of which will be discussed later.



21st century celebration of Shavuot (the giving of the Law) at Mount Gerizim.



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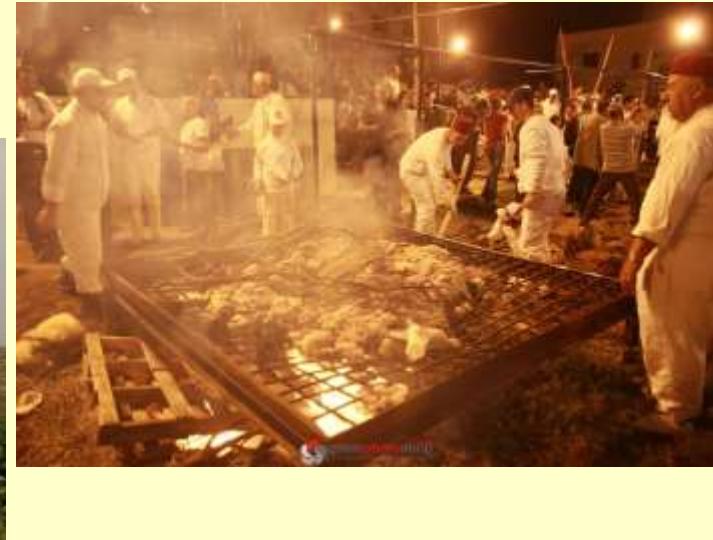
They have a priesthood and a High Priest. Aabed-El ben Asher ben Matziach → has been High Priest since 2013. He is regarded as the 132nd High Priest of the Israelite-Samaritan people since Aaron, Moses' brother.

Animal sacrifices are still practiced, particularly at *Pesach* (Passover) when the Paschal lamb is sacrificed, distributed and eaten . (*see next slide*).

Modern Samaritan practices include many features that are reminiscent of Judaism prior to the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE. For example they use ancient Hebrew script ← (although Ivrit, or Modern Hebrew, is now spoken).



PASSOVER AND THE SACRIFICE OF THE PASCHAL LAMB



THE BELIEFS OF THE SAMARITANS

THE BELIEFS OF THE SAMARITANS – PART 1

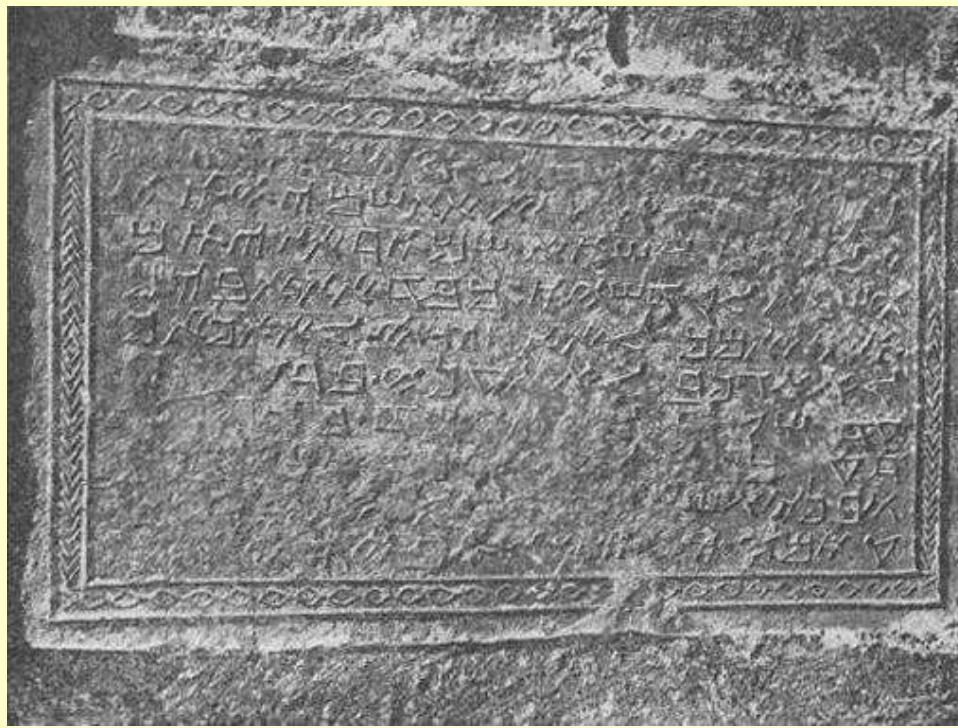
- There is one God, YHWH, the same God that was recognised by the Hebrew prophets;
- The *Memah Markah* or Torah was given by God to Moses;
- Mount Gerizim, not Jerusalem, is the one true sanctuary chosen by God;

Two modern photos of Mount Gerizim, the one on the right showing exposed archaeological remains.



THE BELIEFS OF THE SAMARITANS – PART 2

- At the end of days, the dead will be resurrected by Tabeh, a restorer and possibly a prophet, perhaps Moses. (This is a belief of many but not all Samaritans);
- Heaven or Paradise exists (a belief also associated with Christianity and Islam, but not necessarily with Judaism);
- The priests are interpreters of the Law and the keepers of tradition; scholars are secondary to the Priesthood;



← An ancient inscription in Samaritan Hebrew.

From a c1900 photo taken by the Palestine Exploration Fund.

THE BELIEFS OF THE SAMARITANS – PART 3

- Samaritans celebrate the New Year in the northern spring rather than the northern autumn, as do Jews. However, *Yom Teruah* (the Biblical name for *Rosh Hashanah* [Jewish New Year] is celebrated as a separate festival at the beginning of the month of *Tishrei*, so that it coincides with the Jewish *Rosh Hashanah*.

- As in Judaism, *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) ↙ is a fast day which follows The Ten Days of Pardons, that commence with *Yom Teruah*. *Yom Kippur* is a day of repentance and a fast day, which is followed by a great feast.



Whilst Samaritans celebrate their separateness from Judaism, they do refer to themselves as part of *B'NEI YISRAEL*, the Children of Israel.



Some more views of the Samaritan settlements at Kiryat Luza (↑) and Holon (→)

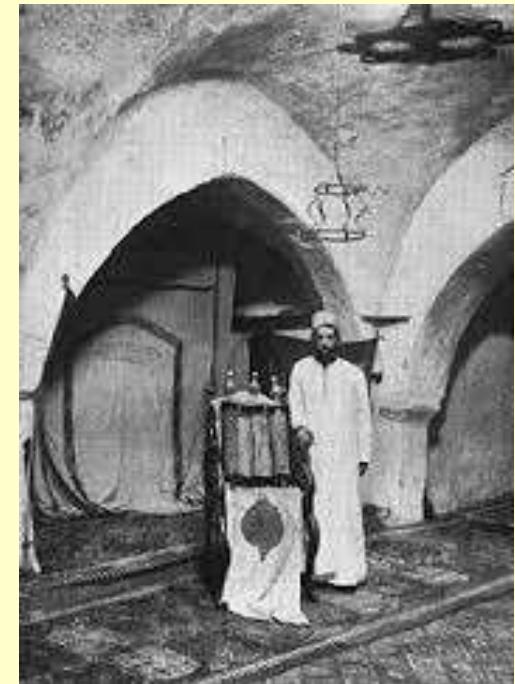
Samaritans have studiously avoided taking sides in all disputes between Israelis and Palestinians. However, those living in Israel (rather than the disputed territories) enjoy full Israeli citizenship.

Those living on the West Bank have been granted passports by both the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority. In the 1996 Palestinian election they had a seat reserved for them in the Palestinian Legislative Council.



Until the 20th Century, there were nothing but ruins on Mount Gerizim as these C1880 (↑) and C1900 (↗) illustrations show.

Some images from just over 100 years ago (1920).
Clockwise from centre left:
Yitzak benAmram ben Shamla ben Tabia, then High Priest; the interior of the Nablus synagogue, Mount Gerizim;
two views of evening Passover prayers on Mount Gerizim;
Samaritans with scroll on Mount Gerizim; .



ARE SAMARITANS A DISAPPEARING PEOPLE?

Let us now listen to portion of a EUROMIDEASTNEWS documentary from 18th June 2013. It mainly deals with the fact that the Samaritans are dying out.

ARE SAMARITANS A DISAPPEARING PEOPLE
June 18th 2013 - YouTube [360p].mp4

SAMARITANS AT PRAYER DURING PASSOVER

The following film from 21st April 2014, shows Passover prayer on Mount Gerizim. In a wonderful example of universality, we have to thank the Indian television network, NDTV (New Delhi Television Limited) for this short clip.

[Samaritans Hold Mountain Top Prayer - YouTube 15.mp4](#)

FILM – *THE LONE SAMARITAN*

The Lone Samaritan is a 2009 Israeli documentary film by director Barak Heymann. We will be watching an important extract. It tells the story of Israeli actress Sophie Tzadaka and her three sisters, who were forced out, or who left the Samaritan community.

It includes a brief scene of Samaritan worship. Other scenes, set in the Samaritan sector of Holon show Samaritans in traditional garb intermingling with other Israelis in modern attire.

[**The Lone Samaritan part 1 - YouTube 17.mp4**](#)

POSTSCRIPT

I (Albert) acknowledge and commend the Wikipedia site,
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samaritans>. It is also recommended that one consult the accompanying discussion page (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Samaritans>) which, inter alia, includes some fascinating academic discussions on background material and about what should or should not be included in the actual Wikipedia article, *Samaritans*.

In parenthesis, it should be acknowledged that the veracity and intellectual quality of Wikipedia sites varies greatly because it is the nature of Wikipedia that it is open to all and any contributors. However, it can be suggested that a good way of gauging the calibre of people contributing to any Wikipedia site is to consult the discussion page and take note of the background discussions that led to the various contributions in the specific article.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- *GESHER*, journal of the Council of Christians & Jews (Vic), November 2010
- Wikipedia (Samaritans)
- Jewish Women's Archive, Encyclopedia – Samaritan Sect
- The Samaritans (W.A.) website
- Quotidian Grace
- Various You Tube videos
- Various other websites