

What is the importance of Samaria in the Bible?

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Samaria-in-the-Bible.htm>

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Samaria was both a region and a city that experienced many changes throughout biblical history. In Hebrew, the name Samaria means “watch-mountain” or “watch-tower,” which correlates with its hilly features (Easton’s Bible Dictionary, “Samaria”). The place is referred to as “the hill of Samaria” in 1 Kings 16:24. The city of Samaria was located in central Israel, about 30 miles north of Jerusalem and about 6 miles northwest of Shechem.

Samaria’s hilly geography matches the ups and downs of its history. As the Israelites were dividing the Promised Land, the region of Samaria was given to the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. King Omri, the sixth king of the northern kingdom of Israel, bought a hill in the Valley of Shechem in the region of Samaria and built the city of Samaria, which became his capital city (1 Kings 16:23-24). Eventually, the name of the capital was applied to the entire northern kingdom. Omri’s son, King Ahab, erected a temple to Baal in the city of Samaria (1 Kings 16:32).

Within the region of Samaria, in the city of Sychar, was Jacob’s well. This was the location of Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman, who asked, “Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?” (John 4:12). Later in the conversation, she brought up a centuries-old controversy: “Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem” (verse 20). “This mountain” is a reference to Mount Gerizim in the central Samaritan highlands, the place where the Samaritans had built their own temple, which they considered the true temple of God.

The region of Sychar (also called Shechem) in Samaria was also the place where Abram built an altar, after God promised him the land of the Canaanites (Genesis 12:6-8). Later, Abraham's grandson Jacob bought some land near Shechem and built an altar there (Genesis 33:18-20).

The Jews of Jesus' day disliked the Samaritans because of their religious syncretism and their mixed racial heritage. The temple in Samaria located on Mount Gerizim was destroyed in 129 BC by the Jews, adding to the hostility between the two groups. Modern Samaritans continue to worship at the ancient site (William Smith, Smith's Bible Dictionary, Revised Edition, A. J. Holman, 1979, p. 113).

Samaria is included as one of the geographical locations in Jesus' Great Commission: the good news must be proclaimed there (Acts 1:8). Once the church was scattered after Stephen's martyrdom, many Christians fled to the surrounding areas, including Samaria (Acts 8:1). Luke records that "Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. So there was great joy in that city" (Acts 8:5-8).

Being the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, the city of Samaria, now modern-day Sebastia, holds a significant place in the Bible. As a region, Samaria was significant in the Old Testament as being synonymous with the northern kingdom and in the New Testament as an idolatrous area Jews tried to avoid. Despite Samaria's checkered history and the Jews' general dislike of the people of the region, Jesus Himself evangelized the

area and mandated that the gospel be preached there after His ascension. God's message of salvation extends to all.