are the people, of the city of Samaria, and the inhabi­tants of the province of which Samaria was the capi­tal city. In this ſenſe, it ſhould ſeem that we might give the name of Samaritans to the Iſraelites of the ten tribes, who lived in the city and territory of Sa­maria. However, the ſacred authors commonly give the name of Samaritans only to thoſe ſtrange people whom the kings of Aſſyria ſent from beyond the Euphrates to inhabit the kingdom of Samaria, when they took away captive the Iſraelites that were there before. Thus we may fix the epoch of the Samaritans at the taking of Samaria by Salmaneſer, in the year of the world 3283. This prince carried away captive the Iſraelites that he found in the country, and aſſigned them dwellings beyond the Euphrates, and in Aſſyria, (2 Kings xvii. 24.) He ſent other inhabitants in their ſtead, of which the moſt conſiderable were the Cuthites, a people deſcended from Culh, and who are probably of the number of thoſe whom the ancients knew by the name of Scythians.

After Salmaneſer, his ſucceſſor Eſar-haddon was in­formed, that the people which had been ſent to Sama­ria were infeſted by lions that devoured them, (2 Kings xvii. 25.); this he imputed to the ignorance of the people in the manner of worſhipping the god of the country. Wherefore Eſar-haddon ſent a prieſt of the God of Iſrael that he might teach them the religion of the Hebrews. But they thought they might blend this religion with that which they profeſſed before; ſo they continued to worſhip their idols as before, in con­junction with the God of Iſrael, not perceiving how abſurd and incompatible theſe two religions were.

It is not known how long they continued in this ſtate; but at the return from the captivity of Babylon, it ap­pears they had entirely quitted the worſhip of their idols; and when they aſked permiſſion of the Iſraelites that they might labour with them at the rebuilding of the temple of Jeruſalem, they affirmed, that from the time that Eſar-haddon had brought them into this coun­try they had always worſhipped the Lord, (Ezrah iv. 1, 2, 3.) And indeed, after the return from the cap­tivity, the ſcripture does not any where reproach them with idolatrous worſhip, though it does not diſſemble either their jealouſy againſt the Jews, nor the ill offi­ces they had done them at the court of Perſia, by their ſlanders and calumnies, or the ſtratagems they contrived to hinder the repairing of the walls of Jeruſalem. — (Nehem. ii. 10*,* 19. iv. 2, &c. vi. 1, *2,* &c.)

It does not appear that there was any temple in Sa­maria, in common to all theſe people who came thither from beyond the Euphrates, before the coming of Alexander the Great into Judea. Before that time, every one was left to his own diſcretion, and worſhipped the Lord where he thought fit. But they preſently comprehended, from the books of Moſes which they had in their hands, and from the example of the Jews their neighbours, that God was to be worſhipped in that place only which he had choſen. So that ſince they could not go to the temple of Jeruſalem, which the Jews would not allow of, they bethought themſelves of building a temple of their own upon mount Gerizim, near the city of Shechem, which was then their capital. Therefore Sanballat, the governor of the Samaritans, applied himſelf to Alexander, and told him he had a son-in-lawi called Manaſſes, ſon to Jaddus,

the high-prieſt of the Jews, who had retired to Samaria with a great number of other perſons of his own na­tion; that he deſired to build a temple in this province, where he might exerciſe the high-prieſthood; that this undertaking would be to the advantage of the king’s affairs, becauſe in building a temple in the province of Samaria, the nation of the Jews would be divided, who are a turbuſent and ſeditious people, and by ſuch a diviſion would be made weaker, and leſs in a condition to undertake new enterprizes.

Alexander readily conſented to what Sanballat deſi­red, and the Samaritans preſently began their building of the temple of Gerizim, which from that time they have always frequented, and ſtill frequent to this day, as the place where the Lord intended to receive the adoration of his people. It is of this mountain, and of this temple, that the Samaritan woman of Sychar ſpoke to our Saviour, (John iv. 20.) See GARIZIM.

The Samaritans did not long continue under the obe­dience of Alexander. They revolted from him the very next year, and Alexander drove them out of Samaria, put Macedonians in their room, and gave the province of Samaria to the Jews. This preference that Alexander gave to the Iſraelites contributed not a little to increaſe that hatred and animoſity that had already obtained between theſe two people. When any Iſraelite had deſerved puniſhment for the violation of ſome important point of the law, he preſently took refuge in Samaria or Shechem, and embraced the way of wor­ſhip according to the temple of Garizim. When the Jews were in a proſperous condition, and affairs were favourable to them, the Samaritans did not fail to call themſelves Hebrews, and pretended to be of the race of Abraham. But no ſooner were the Jews fallen into diſcredit or perſecution, but the Samaritans immediately diſowned them, would have nothing in common with, them, acknowledged themſelves to be Phoenicians ori­ginally, or that they were deſcended from Joſeph and Manaſſeh his ſon. This uſed to be their practice in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes.

The Samaritans, having received the Pentateuch, or the five books of Moſes, from the prieſt that was lent by Eſar-haddon, have preſerved it to this day, in the ſame language and character it was then, that is, in the old Hebrew or Phoenician character, which we now call the Samaritan, to diſtinguiſh it from the modern Hebrew character, which at preſent we find in the books of the Jews. Theſe laſt, after their captivity, changed their old characters, and took up thoſe of the Chaldee, which they had been uſed to at Babylon, and which they continue ſtill to uſe. It is wrong, ſays F. Calmet, to give this the name of the Hebrew character, for that can be ſaid properly only of the Samaritan text. The critics have taken notice of ſome variations between the Pentateuch of the Jews and that of the Samaritans; but theſe varieties of reading chiefly regard the word Gerizim, which the Samaritans ſeem to have purpoſely introduced to favour their pretenſions, that mount Gerizim was the place in which the Lord was to be adored. The other various readings are of ſmall im­portance.

The religion of this people was at firſt the Pagan. Every one worſhipped the deity they had been uſed to in their own country (2 Kings xvii. 25, 30, 31.)