

Jews and Samaritans: The Origins and History of their Early Relations. By Gary N. Knoppers. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. ISBN 978-0-19-532954-4. xi and 316 pages. Cloth. \$55.

Readers of the New Testament are familiar with the schism between Jews and Samaritans, and now Knoppers, a Professor at Pennsylvania State University, has written an authoritative and innovative account of the history of the relationship between these two communities.

While the population in Samaria declined after the Assyrian destruction in the eighth century, the number of exiles from foreign states forcibly imported was not high, and these immigrants were gradually absorbed into the local population. Most of the indigenous population remained in the land. Hence, the “ten lost tribes” were never lost. Knoppers detects contrasting pictures of the northerners in 2 Kings 17. In vv. 23-34a the author describes discontinuity with Israel from the point of view of ethnicity, but substantial continuity in religious practice. A second account in vv. 34b-40 disputes whether the residents of the former Northern Kingdom truly worship Yahweh, but treats them ethnically as Israelites. It is the second account that seems to be presupposed in Josiah’s reform activities in the north (2 Kgs 23:15-20). According to the books of Chronicles, northern Israel retained its social fabric after the Assyrian conquests, and the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah witnessed a degree of northern support for centralization and Israelite solidarity not seen since the time of the united monarchy.

By the mid-fifth century the Samaritans had constructed a sanctuary on Mt. Gerizim according to recent excavations. There was considerable cultural continuity between Samaria and Judah in the Persian and Hellenistic periods, and Knoppers concludes that there was a continuous, albeit evolving Israelite presence in Samaria during post-monarchic times. Scholars

once detected a definitive split between Jews and Samaritans about 400 B.C.E., but Knoppers and many others now lower that date to the late second century B.C.E. While Nehemiah inveighs against Sanballat and Tobiah, it is clear that they were self-professing Yahwists. Prophetic figures in Nehemiah were uneasy with those aspects of Nehemiah's separatist program that seemed to pit Judeans against all others.

In 111-110 B.C.E. the Hasmonean leader John Hyrcanus destroyed the Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim. This caused a serious degradation in Samaritan-Judean relations. It was not the construction of the temple on Mt. Gerizim, but its destruction that embittered the Samaritans against their Jewish neighbors. The Dead Sea Scrolls have shown that a number of variants from the Masoretic Text in the Samaritan Pentateuch result from the Samaritans' use of an expansionist Pentateuch now also known from Qumran. The Samaritans did make clear by a relatively few changes in their Pentateuch that the place that Yahweh had chosen as his central sanctuary was Mt. Gerizim, but the Judeans in turn changed Mt. Gerizim to Mt. Ebal in Deut 27:4 as the place Moses commanded the Israelites to erect stones containing the laws and an altar. The Pentateuch that formerly united the two communities now came to divide them.

Even in the Roman period there were occasional contacts between Jews and Samaritans, and there were no doubt a variety of stances by Jews toward Samaritans and vice versa.

This brief summary of this book does not begin to explore the depth of exegesis and historical judgment shown by Knoppers. He favors the use of the term Samaritans for these separated northern Israelite sisters and brothers during most of their history, employing the term Samaritans only after the definitive split.

Ralph W. Klein

Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago