

RBL 03/2015



**Benyamim Tsedaka and Sharon Sullivan, eds.**

***The Israelite Samaritan Version of the Torah: First English Translation Compared with the Masoretic Version***

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013. Pp. xxxvi + 522.  
Cloth. \$100.00. ISBN 9780802865199.

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The main focus of this book is Benyamim Tsedaka's English translation of the Samaritan Torah (often called the Samaritan Pentateuch and abbreviated SP) presented in one column next to a second column containing a translation of the Masoretic Text (MT). The book also includes marginal notes, four introductory essays, and two appendices.

The first of the four introductory essays, Emmanuel Tov's four-page foreword, focuses on features that distinguish the SP from the MT. He distinguishes for readers which of these features are present in the biblical scrolls found at Qumran and which SP features are not found in the Qumran biblical scrolls. Steven Fine's two-page essay provides a very brief history of the initial European discovery of the SP and earlier comparisons with the MT. James H. Charlesworth's six-page introduction, "What Is the Samaritan Pentateuch?" first compares and contrasts the "old view" and the "new view" regarding the text of the Hebrew Bible. The biblical texts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls underlie the shift from the old to the new view, the shift from assuming that the MT "alone was the major witness to the Hebrew Bible" to recognizing the early pluriform nature of the text of the Hebrew Bible (xv). This shift paved the way for greater current appreciation of the value of the SP and other early witnesses to the text of the Hebrew Bible from the Second Temple period.

Benjamin Tsedaka's sixteen-page preliminary essay, "The First English Translation of the Israelite Samaritan Torah," gives a quick preview of the "approximately six thousand differentiations, almost half due to different orthography of the written words" between the SP and the MT (xxi). He includes some history of the SP, and where appropriate he includes opinions from several recognized text critics and other scholars of the Hebrew Bible. He also explains the Samaritan view of the textual traditions and history, arguing for the priority of the Mount Gerizim tradition and other textual readings of the SP.

More important, in this essay Tsedaka explains the features of this volume. English translations of the SP and the MT are presented in parallel columns. Tsedaka translates the SP from four manuscripts dating between 1199 and 1225 CE. The English for the MT is "based on *The Holy Scriptures*, the 1917 Jewish Publication Society edition" (xxxiii). The features of the volume identified include the following:

(1) Differences between the SP and the MT are printed in bold. When appropriate, dots appear in the shorter text to keep the parallel material in approximately the same place in their respective columns.

(2) Several times the SP of Numbers includes text not found in the MT of Numbers. This material is usually similar to portions of Deuteronomy common to both the SP and the MT (see, e.g., SP Num 10:10–11 and Deut 1:6–8; SP Num 20:13 and Deut 2:2–6). This material is printed in bold in Numbers in the SP, and dots appear in the MT translation to keep similar material near its parallel in the other column. There are no marginal cross-references to these parallels.

(3) At least once the SP and the MT have a very similar passage in different locations (cf. SP Ex 26:35 and following with MT Exod 30:1–10). Here each translation includes the passage at the location appropriate for that translation, and dots appear at that place in the other column. In this case both the SP and the MT have a marginal note identifying where the passage may be found in the other text, unlike the material in SP Numbers shared with Deuteronomy. The biblical text is printed in bold in both locations, even when the English translation of both texts looks identical or similar.

(4) In addition to these cross-references, the marginal notes provide other information. Tsedaka uses the marginal notes to give a Samaritan perspective on several issues, since "the Jewish commentary is already widely known in the field of Biblical Studies" (xxxiii). One can see examples at Gen 5:24, 12:7, 18:1, Exod 2:20, 12:40, and elsewhere. There are notes about Samaritan liturgy and practice in the margin (e.g. Gen 1:1; 2:15; Exod 12:2, 18; 13:9, 16; 14:10). Some notes include additional explanations or details about language,

e.g.: Gen 3:12; 3:20; Ex 3:5, etc. Other notes include historical information. Rarely, notes call attention to literary structure, as at Gen 28:21.

(5) Samaritans traditionally recognize fifty-two weekly reading portions, similar to but not identical with the weekly readings in the Jewish tradition. This volume notes both of these traditions at the appropriate point in the respective translation. The Samaritan reading portions are also divided by a distinctive graphic. Additionally, divisions between 963 smaller passages traditionally forming a unit in the Samaritan tradition are marked with a double asterisk. Also, while the SP is not traditionally divided into chapters and verses, the chapters and verses of the MT are used to help readers familiar with that system find specific texts quickly.

(6) When the SP has material that the MT does not, or when the same material appears in different locations, Tsedaka provides the SP with “verse” divisions by continuing to use the last verse number that matched text in the MT. In these situations, the verse number of the SP text is the last verse shared with the MT plus the appropriate letters of the alphabet. For example, the SP and the MT share material at Exod 26:35. Material immediately following this verse in the SP but not found at this location in the MT is identified as verses 35a, 35b, 35c, and so on.

(7) Tsedaka spells many proper names in the SP phonetically, attempting to convey the pronunciation used by the Samaritans. He has “not used the international phonetic and punctuation system because only a few scholars are familiar with it” but has designed his own system (xxxvi).

The book also includes two appendices. Appendix A is a list of “LXX Torah Verses Identical with SP and Different from MT.” It appears in double columns on pages 491–96. Appendix B is a list of “DSS Torah Verses Identical with SP, with Notation When LXX Is Also Identical.” This appendix appears in double columns on pages 497–503. Both appendices include the English translation of the relevant word or phrase identified by biblical book, chapter and verse. There is also a “Categorical Name Index” with columns that give the spelling of a name as translated in the MT column, Tsedaka’s English spelling of that name from the SP column, and one citation where the name occurs (504–22). The name is also assigned to one of twenty-two different categories specifying whether the name identifies a person, geographic feature, nationality, or the like.

Some differences between the SP and the MT are not readily apparent from the unpointed consonantal text. In such cases the differences between the SP and the MT may well be more apparent in this volume than in unpointed original language texts. For example, at Exod 4:24–26 the SP understands a different set of vowels and diacritical

marks to supplement the traditional consonants than those found in the MT. Rather than Zipporah cutting off “the foreskin of her son,” in the SP “Seebboora” (Tsedaka’s phonetic spelling for the name of Moses’s wife) “circumcised her blocked heart.” These phrases are printed in bold in both columns and so are very easy to notice when reading or when merely scanning this volume for differences between the texts. However this difference does not show up when I electronically compare the MT and the SP (unpointed) using my Bible software (although the SP includes a *vav* in the spelling of “Zipporah” that does not appear in the MT, and this difference does get highlighted when I compare my electronic texts).

I see a few opportunities for improvement in a subsequent edition. (1) There are no Illustrations or images. While one would not expect many in this kind of book, a few pictures of Samaritan Torahs would be interesting. Also, since Tsedaka’s essay mentions that SPs are written with a different alphabet than MTs, an image contrasting the two alphabets would be interesting for readers who might not already be acquainted with this difference. (2) Occasional unsupported references to unidentified “scholars” would be more useful if there were citations supplied (e.g., xxx and notes at Gen 48:20 and Exod 4:24–26). (3) While it is true that not everyone is familiar with the International Phonetic Alphabet or other attempts at precise written indications of pronunciation, before this volume no one was familiar with the system devised by Tsedaka. This is personal preference, but I would have preferred one of the standard systems. (4) I find myself incapable of understanding one point in Charlesworth’s otherwise excellent essay. When discussing Deut 27:4, where 4QDeut frags. 32–35 reads “Gerazim” and the MT reads “Ebal,” Charlesworth claims there are two options, both of which involve “Gerazim” replacing “Ebal.” While it is possible that the two options involve choosing between an intentional or an unintentional change from Ebal to Gerazim, my best understanding at present is that the second option needs emending. That is, the phrase “Thus, some scribe changed ‘Ebal’ to ‘Gerazim’” should instead read “Thus, some scribe changed ‘Gerazim’ to ‘Ebal’” as an explanation of the MT reading (xix).

Nevertheless, these few, minor issues in no way undermine the value of this book. Tsedeka has clearly accomplished his primary goal and the Samaritan Pentateuch is now available to a much wider audience than it was before this translation.

*The Samaritan Israelite Version of the Torah* now allows people without the requisite linguistic skills to examine the untranslated texts yet who are interested in either the textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament or the transmission of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, as well as people generally interested in traditions of interpretation and biblical studies, to access the traditional readings of the SP. It can also be a huge time saver for those whose Hebrew or Samaritan linguistic skills are limited.

Additionally, people interested in liturgy and practice may be interested in the fifty-two weekly reading portions, their subdivisions, and many of the marginal notes. Finally, those interested in Samaritan history can find a brief statement of the Samaritan perspective on many issues, with some citations to Samaritan authorities. While the arguments for the priority of the SP in Tsedaka's introductory essay are probably too brief to persuade those not already convinced, many people should find it interesting to see the outlines that one full argument for the priority of the SP might follow.

Eerdmans has packaged all this material in a hefty 8.2" x 10.2" x 1.4" volume that seems likely to endure heavy use. There are wide margins with room for lots of notes. Several sections of my copy are already heavily marked with little effect on the reverse side of the marked page.