

WHY DID THE JEWS AND SAMARITANS HATE ONE ANOTHER SO MUCH?

In the time of Jesus' ministry there was a lot of animosity between the Jew and Samaritan. The explanation that we usually give is that the Samaritans were viewed as half-breeds in that they were offspring of the Israelites that married outside of the nation of Israel and that is true. But the hard feelings go deeper than that.

You remember the parable of the "Good Samaritan" and how unusual it was for a Samaritan to help to injured Jew. Then there was the Samaritan woman at the well. She understood the prejudice between the two groups of people. *John 4:7-9 There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. (8) (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.) (9) Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.* Why did the Jews not have any dealings with the Samaritans? To find the answer we have to go back to the Old Testament.

In 1 Kings 12 we find in the days of Rehoboam that the nation of Israel was divided into two nations; Israel and Judah. Israel was composed of the ten tribes to the north and was known as the Israelites while Judah was made up of Judah and Benjamin to the south and was known as Jews. The animosity between the Jews and Israelites began immediately after the division. The split resulted from the heavy burden that Rehoboam was going to place on Israel so ten tribes decided to succeed from the kingdom and formed their own nation. Jeroboam was elected king and Samaria was the capital city of the northern kingdom. In an attempt to reunite the nation, Rehoboam assembled an army to make war against the newly formed nation of Israel, but God intervened through His prophet Shemiah. *1 Kings 12:24 Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me. They hearkened therefore to the word of the LORD, and returned to depart, according to the word of the LORD.*

1 Kings 15:1 Now in the eighteenth year of king Jeroboam the son of Nebat reigned Abijam over Judah. Abijam continued the resentment toward Israel. *1 Kings 15:6 And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of his life.* So, it is here that the seed of bitterness was sowed.

Immediately after the division, Jeroboam changed the worship of the Israelites. (*1 Kings 12:25-33*. No longer did the inhabitants of the north travel to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice and worship as they were commanded as a united nation. Instead, Jeroboam set up idols in Dan and Bethel. *1 Kings 12:28-29 (28) Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. (29) And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan.* But back up to v27 and notice his motive for altering God's plan. *(27) If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.* Jeroboam was willing to alter God's plan of worship for his own selfish gain. The animosity between the two nations began with personal vindication between the two kings.

After the separation of Judah and Israel in the ninth century, King Omri of the Northern Kingdom bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer. *1 Kings 16:23-24 In the thirty and first year of Asa king of Judah began Omri to reign over Israel, twelve years: six years reigned he in Tirzah. (24) And he bought the hill Samaria of Shemer for two talents of silver, and built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill, Samaria.* He built there the city of Samaria which became

his capital.

It was strong defensively and controlled the valley through which the main road ran between Jerusalem and Galilee. In 722 B.C. the city fell to the Assyrians and became the headquarters of the Assyrian province of Samarina. While many of the inhabitants of the city and the surrounding area of Samaria were led off into captivity, some farmers and others were left behind. They intermarried with new settlers from Mesopotamia and Syria, which was contrary to teaching given by Moses (Deuteronomy 7:3-5). This is why the Jews referred to the Samaritans as “dogs,” or “half-breeds.”

Later still Judah was taken captive by the Babylonians but after 70 years were allowed to return to their homeland and began to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. The Samaritans were a continuous source of difficulty to the Jews in this rebuilding process. *Ezra 4:1-2 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the LORD God of Israel; (2) Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither.* The adversaries of verse 1 would have included the Samaritans.

Ezra 4:4 Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building.

With the rejection of the Samaritans came political hostility and opposition. The Samaritans tried to undermine the Jews with their Persian rulers which slowed the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its temple.

Eventually, the religion of the Samaritans evolved to the point that they held only the Pentateuch (Genesis-Deuteronomy) as being the law of God. They rejected all the books of poetry and prophecy. Furthermore, they claimed their copy of the Pentateuch was the only original which claim was rejected by the Jews.

The Samaritans built a temple on Mount Gerizim as the Holy Place for Israel to worship while the Jews recognized the temple in Jerusalem. This location of the Chosen Place to worship God too became a major issue between Jews and Samaritans. This is what provoked the question by the Samaritan woman. *John 4:19-20 The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. (20) Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.*

The fact that there was such dislike and hostility between Jews and Samaritans gives the deed of the Samaritan in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) such force! The Samaritan was able to rise above the bigotry and prejudices of centuries and show mercy and compassion for the injured Jew after the Jew's own countrymen pass him by!

But the blood of Christ washed away such prejudice and bigotry in the life of the Christian. *Ephesians 2:13-14 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. (14) For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;*

Galatians 3:28-29 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. (29) And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Invitation.