

# So you are the Samaritans!

## *Key information to read and discuss:*

Samaritans are inhabitants of Samaria, a district in central Palestine, between Galilee and Judea. After the split of Israel into the northern and southern kingdoms after the death of King Solomon, Samaria formed part of the northern kingdom of Israel (see 1 Kings, chapters 11–12). Its capital was the city of Samaria, constructed by King Omri and his son Ahab in the ninth century (see 16:24). At this time the people were simply known as Israelites. The city of Samaria was conquered by the Assyrians in 721 BC, and many of its leading citizens were deported. The Assyrian king settled colonists from Babylon and other cities in the region of Samaria (see 2 Kings 17:24). The religious rites of the colonists (including worship of the Babylonian god Marduk) were mixed with the worship of the Lord (see 17: 29–33). According to the biblical record, Samaritans in Jesus' time were descendants of these colonists. The Samaritans themselves, however, claimed direct descent from the Israelite tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. It is after the Babylonian Exile that the people are called Samaritans. From the time of the return of the Judean exiles from the Babylonian Exile, tensions between Jews and Samaritans arose. The major dispute involved the proper worship of the Lord. The Samaritans were opposed to the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple (see Ezra 4:1–4, Nehemiah 2:18–20), favoring their holy place built on Mount Gerizim in Samaria. The dispute is reflected in the words of the Samaritan woman to Jesus: "Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain [Mount Gerizim]; but you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem" (John 4:20). In addition, Samaritans accepted only the first five books, the Pentateuch, of the Old Testament as their Scriptures. Their version of the Pentateuch differs slightly from other ancient Hebrew versions. The most striking difference is the addition of a commandment to build an altar at Mount Gerizim (see Exodus 20:17). Samaritans shared with Jews the expectations of a Messiah (see John 4:25); Samaritans focused especially on the prophecy that God would raise up another prophet like Moses (see Deuteronomy 18:18). At times the conflict between Jews and Samaritans turned violent. The Hasmonean King John Hyrcanus destroyed the holy place at Gerizim in 128 BC; Samaritans massacred some Jewish pilgrims in AD 52. Jews in the time of Jesus thus despised Samaritans as foreigners who worshipped the Lord in the wrong way. Jesus seemed to have had some wariness of the Samaritans as well. He warned his disciples, "Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town" (Matthew 10:5). Yet in other ways, Jesus, as a first-century Jew, had a remarkable openness to Samaritans. His Parable of the Good Samaritan contrasts a priest and Levite who ignore a man in need with a Samaritan who stops to help (see Luke 10:25–37, see also 17:11–19). This parable would have deeply offended Jesus' Jewish listeners. Most striking is Jesus' conversation with a Samaritan woman at a well (see John 4:4–42). The early followers of Jesus continued his openness. Philip (a member of the first church in Jerusalem), Peter, and John preached about Jesus in Samaria. As a result many Samaritans accepted the Gospel and were baptized (see Acts of the Apostles 8:5–25).

[https://www.smp.org/dynamicmedia/files/0fd53742db7ecdea61a6b02c15ad6150/TX001327\\_1-Background-Political\\_and\\_Religious\\_Structure\\_in\\_Jesus\\_Time.pdf](https://www.smp.org/dynamicmedia/files/0fd53742db7ecdea61a6b02c15ad6150/TX001327_1-Background-Political_and_Religious_Structure_in_Jesus_Time.pdf)

## Samaritans

Samaritans were of Jewish origin, but they had married foreigners over many generations. Because of this, their traditions had been mixed up with foreign traditions and customs. In doing so, Jews no longer regarded them as their own kind. Samaritans were excluded, and this caused them to erect their own temple in Samaria (where they got their name), as opposed to the [Temple in Jerusalem](#).

Jesus wanted to show Jews that Samaritans were compassionate, grateful and faithful. Jesus loves everyone, even if they don't love Him. (Luke 10:25-37, Luke 17:11-19)

<https://firstcenturypalestinejl.weebly.com/religious-and-social-groups.html>

### **Questions to discuss:**

The Jewish / Samaritan hatred was not unlike the Catholic / Protestant hatred of the 1950s era. Both had the same roots. How did Jews end up despising the Samaritans so much?

As the Samaritans were taken from their homeland, how could you have kept your religion alive if you could not get to the Temple in Jerusalem?

Check out the texts above to see what you could highlight about Samaritans to the whole group.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+10%3A25-37%2C+Luke+17%3A11-19&version=NABRE>

### **Interesting things your group could highlight:**

Explain briefly how the Jewish / Samaritan spilt happened.

A point that most people miss is that in the story of the 10 Lepers, the only one who turned around to say thank you was a Samaritan! It's also a story about stereotypes, as no Jewish listener every expected that ending. As a Samaritan, point out to the rest of the group that Jesus actually realised you were good people, and none of the rest of them did!