

A Samaritan Background for Paul's Letter to the Romans?*

There is nothing controversial about claiming that Jesus and his earliest followers had significant contact with Samaritans. The presence of Samaritans in Roman-era Palestine is a well-established fact of both text and archaeology. A more questionable matter is whether the missionary followers of Jesus encountered Samaritans outside their native land. Even more speculative is how much contact someone like Paul had with Samaritans in his travels, writings, and mission.

I will argue that Paul utilized an interpretive tradition addressed to ethnic identity issues between Judeans and Samaritans. The readers of the Letter to the Romans were so familiar with this tradition's screeds and polemics that Paul did not need to mention how memory of this tension between the two groups applied to Rome. In fact, it was to Paul's benefit to keep the issue unspoken so that he could draw out implications that applied to the current relationships between Jews and Gentiles without destabilizing the church's status in Rome.

I will proceed along three lines of explication. First, I will give a brief exegesis of two passages, Rom 9:25-26 and 10:19-20, to reveal that Paul has the Judean-Samaritan strife in mind. Secondly, I will speculate on how Paul would have known about the interpretive tradition and how he might have encountered Samaritanism in his mission and travels. Thirdly, I will suggest a social and historical context that might explain why Paul would bring up this extraneous controversy in a non-Palestinian setting, namely, Rome around the years 58-60 C.E.

* רַב־אָדָם יִקְרָא אִישׁ חֲסִדּוֹ וְאִישׁ אֱמוּנִים מִן יִמְצֵא: (Prov 20:6): Troy Martin, friend and colleague.

The part of the Letter to the Romans that deals with ethnic relations—in this case Jews and Gentiles—is chapters 9-11. In this section of the text, Paul makes an argument that Jews and Gentiles have an eschatological identity as coheirs of salvation. The image that Paul settles on in ch. 11 is a domesticated olive tree (καλλιέλαιον, 11:24) onto which the Gentiles have been grafted. By nature, Paul says twice, the Gentiles are from a wild stock (ἀγριέλαιος, 11:17, 24), but now by their faith they are receiving the life-giving sap from the tended tree.¹ Thus, more than a shared destiny, Paul seems to suggest the two groups belong together in some kind of shared ecclesial life. The exact nature or organizational side of their shared common life Paul does not spell out here. Rather the overall context for both passages has to do with how two ethnic or racial identities can view each other and get along together.²

One observation is worth making in regard to ethnic identity in Romans 9-11. When Paul speaks of the two groups brought together as coheirs or co-members of the ecclesial community,

¹ The image of Israel as a domesticated sapling that could be nurtured and and transplanted was common in Second-Temple Jewish literature. A sampling of such readings includes Jer 11:16-17; Ezek 17:3-9; Hos 14:5-7; Jub 1:16, 7:34, 16:26, 21:24, 36:6; 2 Baruch 36. Paul simply extends this agricultural image to grafting and hybridization.

² In general, see Mark Kinzer, *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2014), who imagines how the image applied to community life in the early Church and how it might work today. Kinzer of course is thinking of interethnic relations, while this paper proposes an intra-ethnic background for Paul's teaching.

he mostly avoids using narrow and stereotypical terminology for their identities.³ For example, he vaguely refers to one side as “my brothers, my kinfolk according to the flesh” (9:3), and then more loosely for the rest of this section on ethnic relations he specifies the group as “Israel,” the “Israelites,” or “children of Israel” (9:27). Twice he calls them “Jews” (9:24; 10:12), but far more often (11 times) he uses more general terms as if to be as inclusive as possible in his argument. It leaves the reader less clear about the target of his rhetoric: who exactly are the Jews, Gentiles, Greeks, Israel, children of Israel and others? Beyond the rhetorical quest for synonyms, the fluidity of his referents suggests that Paul himself is begging questions and open to broader definitions.

Now to the broad exegesis of both passages.

The first passage that fits the Judean-Samaritan interpretive tradition is Rom 9:25-26, and I will offer a wider swath of verses to give some perspective:

²² What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the objects of wrath that are made for destruction; ²³ and what if he

³ For ethnic nomenclature in this passage and in other Second-Temple texts, see Jason A. Staples, “What Do the Gentiles Have to Do with ‘All Israel’? A Fresh Look at Romans 11:25-27,” *JBL* 130 (2011): 371-390, esp. 374-378; for epigraphic nomenclature, see Philippe Bruneau, “Les Israélites de Délos et la Juiverie Délienne,” *BCH* 106 (1982): 466-504, esp. 478-79. Interestingly, Daniel R. Schwartz (*Judeans and Jews* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014], 48-61) says that Josephus signals in the course of his life and circumstances the need to define “Jew/Judean” in flexible ways. Just as ethnic labels are not fixed for Josephus, so they are not fixed for Paul in Romans 9-11.

has done so in order to make known the riches of his glory for the objects of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory--²⁴ including us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?²⁵ As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'"²⁶ "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they shall be called children of the living God."²⁷ And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "Though the number of the children of Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved;²⁸ for the Lord will execute his sentence on the earth quickly and decisively."²⁹ And as Isaiah predicted, "If the Lord of hosts had not left survivors to us, we would have fared like Sodom and been made like Gomorrah."⁴

Paul's reference to Hosea's words is significant both because of who the prophet is (a resident of Samaria) and the audience's familiarity with the ethnic group who would be most readily identified with those whom the prophet addressed as "not my people" (the Samaritans/Samaritans).⁵ Yet the impression is not dire because they are joined to God's people as beloved children.

The second passage is Rom 10:19, and it reads:

⁴ All standard biblical quotations are taken from the NRSV.

⁵ See 2 Kgs 17:24-33 for the foundational passage branded upon the Samaritans of Paul's day. For a discussion of Samaritan/Samaritan terminology, see Gary N. Knoppers, *Jews and Samaritans: The Origins and History of Their Early Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 14-16. Since the topic here is largely fixed in Roman era, Samaritan is the label that will largely identify the group that Paul is assuming in Romans 9-11.

¹⁹ Again I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, "I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry." ²⁰ Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, "I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me."

Simply stated, Paul says that Moses predicted a retrograde people would serve as a catalyst for Israel's provocation. The second citation above from Isaiah has less to do with this paper's topic and more to do with Paul's overall concern for Gentile-Jewish relations.⁶ It contextualizes and clarifies that Paul's main focus is on a bigger rift than the one between a restored remnant people and natives of the land.

Both Rom 9:25-26 and 10:19 are constituent parts of a bloc of material, stretching from 9:6-10:21. Here Paul retells the story of Israel from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob to Moses to the prophets and the exile. It is this context that allows both passages to speak about the formation of Israel as a people, but the two passages in focus raise a more particular matter of who is the "not my people"/"not beloved" and "not a nation/foolish nation"? It is this topic that I will address in this paper.

The background for both pairs of epithets is likely the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32) and its allegorical depiction of a fickle Israel as the beloved object of his care. In this speech is

⁶ The second passage from Isaiah 65:1, however, does not entirely leave out a concern for the remnant from the north (Samaria) as its context plainly shows in 65:9.

found the line that Paul quotes in Rom 10:19.⁷ The poetic name that LXX Deuteronomy 32-33 gives for Israel is “beloved one” or “darling one,” the same phrase (ὁ ἠγαπημένος) that Hosea addresses his consort in Hosea 1-2.⁸

There are at least four roughly contemporary literary references that hark back to Deut 32:21 as the authority for their teaching about the Samaritans. From the Hellenistic era, there is the Testament of Levi 6-7 that follows the biblical account of the rape of Dinah as a kind of original sin tagged to anyone from Shechem. Why conjure up this ancient place? Shechem is shorthand for those who revere the city’s sanctuary at Mount Gerizim instead of Mount Zion.⁹ The vitriol laced into the story leads up to its pronouncement that “from this day forward shall Shechem be called a city of imbeciles” (T. Levi 7:1-4). The foolish nation for the Testament of Levi is a “city of imbeciles” named Shechem.

⁷ Deut 32:21 reads: “²¹ They made me jealous with what is no god, provoked me with their idols. So I will make them jealous with what is no people, provoke them with a foolish nation.”

⁸ It is clear that Paul explicitly taps into these final words of Moses often in the latter half of the Letter to the Romans (10:6-8, 19; 12:19; 15:10). Though for the most part Paul is not quoting the LXX as we have it but most probably from another Greek Bible or a *testimonia* with its own phrasing. See Martin C. Albl, “*And the Scripture Cannot Be Broken*”: *The Form and Function of the Early Christian Testimonia Collections*, NovTSup 96 (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

⁹ John J. Collins, “The Epic of Theodotus and the Hellenism of the Hasmoneans,” *HTR* (1980): 91-104, esp. 96.

The second relatively contemporary example to consider for identifying Samaritanism with Deut 32:21 is 4Q372 1.¹⁰ While the text is at best fragmentary, the background narrative lays hold of the same polemics that the “foolish people” are the Samaritans. It is not clear why Samaritans earn this opprobrium, but it probably has something to do with Mount Gerizim’s claim to be the divine sanctuary sanctioned by the Torah. The gist of the legible fragments implies that if Joseph is in exile, the Samaritan claim to be descendants of Joseph, Jacob’s son, is ludicrous and so its claim for the divine sanctuary and Israelite genealogy are bogus.¹¹ The theological rationale for ridiculing Samaritanism may assume that their claims and presence would eventually provoke the return of the true residents of Samaria, the lost northern tribes, as predicted by the prophets in the latter days (e.g., Jer 30:3; 31:2-6; 33:7) and accepted and

¹⁰ Otherwise called *4QNarrative and Poetic Composition*. See Eileen Schuller “4Q372 1: A Text about Joseph,” *RevQ* 14 (1990): 349-76.

¹¹ For the Samaritans’ claim that they are descendants of Joseph, see John 4:12; Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 13.26 (PG 14, 445A); Genesis Rabbah 94:6. James D. Purvis (“Joseph in the Samaritan Traditions,” in *Studies on the Testament of Joseph*, ed. George Nickelsburg, SCS 5 [Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975], 147-53) gives Samaritan texts for this self-understanding. For the northern tribes’ claim to be descendants of Joseph, there are abundant biblical references: Ps 77:16; 78:67; 80:2; 81:5; Amos 5:6, 15; 6:6; Ezek 37:15-23; Zech 10:6-10; or see *T. Naph.* 5-6.

allegorized by later first-century Jews¹²—like Jesus (e.g., Matt 10:16, 15:24), Baruch (2 Baruch 77-87), and none other than Paul (e.g., Rom 11:26a).

The third and often cited reference establishing Shechem as the target for the Song of Moses passage is Sir 50:25-26: “²⁵ Two nations my soul detests, and the third is not even a people: ²⁶ Those who live in Seir, and the Philistines, and the foolish people that live in Shechem.” The third group mentioned here is Shechem, and they are “not a people” and are “the foolish people.”

What Ben Sira is saying here has been taken several ways: Does he mean that they are not part of the people of Israel, or are they simply ignorant about what it means to be an Israelite? Is he indicting the sanctuary near Shechem? The LXX version reads differently, substituting “those who settled on Mount Samaria” as the first member, thus, those that the Assyrians transplanted and so not a part of the people of Israel, while perhaps the third member of the trio are true but misguided members of Israel living in Shechem.¹³ In either case, it is a slur against the Samaritans.

¹² Matthew Theissen, “4Q372 1 and the Continuation of Joseph’s Exile,” *DSD* 15 (2008): 380-95, esp. 389-95. Theissen concludes that the text teaches that as long as the Samaritans are in the land, the prophecies cannot come to pass—thus, the Samaritans by this measure are not truly members of Israel, since the ten tribes are still abroad. The Samaritans are simply a temporary and necessary evil until the eschatological restoration.

¹³ See Knoppers, *Samaritans*, 15; Reinhard Pummer, *The Samaritans in Flavius Josephus*, TSAJ 129 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 10-11.

At least one and possibly two other sources make the connection between Samaritans and the foolish people, both roughly coinciding with Paul's generation. The first source is Josephus.¹⁴ He reflects hostility toward the Samaritans, though a careful reading cannot determine whether he finds common ethnic identity with them in spite of their faults. He seems to be influenced by polemics that cast aspersions on the Samaritans, yet their racial or ethnic identity is not necessarily separate from the Judeans. Josephus twice scorns the Samaritans' fair-weather sympathies: when it goes well with the Jews, the Samaritans claim to be related; otherwise they deny it.

And when they see the Jews in prosperity, they pretend that they are changed, and allied to them, and call them kinsmen, as though they were derived from Joseph, and had by that means an original alliance with them; but when they see them falling into a low condition, they say they are no way related to them, and that the Jews have no right to expect any kindness or marks of kindred from them, but they declare that they are sojourners, that come from other countries. (*Ant.* 10.14.3 §291)

For such is the disposition of the Samaritans, as we have already elsewhere declared, that when the Jews are in adversity they deny that they are of kin to them, saying, that they

¹⁴ In general, see Pummer, *Samaritans*; Knoppers, *Samaritans*; and Gary N. Knoppers, "The Samaritan Schism or the Judaization of Samaria? Reassessing Josephus's Account of the Mt. Gerizim Temple," in *Making a Difference: Essays on the Bible and Judaism in Honour of Tamara Cohn Eskenazi*, ed. D. J. A. Clines, I. K. Richards, and J. L. Wright, Hebrew Bible Monographs 49 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012), 163-78.

belong to them, and derive their genealogy from the posterity of Joseph, Ephraim, and Manasseh. (*Ant.* 11.8.6 §341)

Still, in spite of his best efforts to discredit the Samaritans, he also concedes them to be the twin sibling people when he explains how they ingratiated themselves to Alexander the Great (*Ant.* 11.8.4 §323). In this excerpt Sanballat, leader of the Samaritans, urges Alexander to recognize that if the Jews are divided into two factions (Judean and Samaritan), Greek hegemony would only benefit from their rivalry. This is an eye-opening admission in light of Josephus's characteristic chauvinistic aloofness toward the Samaritans.

Josephus claims that Shechem, as “mother city” for Samaria, was a magnet for “apostate” Jews (*Ant.* 11.8.6 §340); then later (*Ant.* 11.8.7 §346-47) he reinforces this point by saying that transgressors of ceremonial law from Jerusalem fled to Shechem as a refugee city when they felt unfairly prosecuted by fellow Judeans.¹⁵ This is probably another subtle jab at Samaritanism's claims for Gerizim, rival to Jerusalem's Zion, and not because it was all that important as a population center. It is a way of doubly incriminating the Samaritans as a nation of a false religion attracting renegades and lawbreakers.¹⁶

Wayward Judeans fleeing to Shechem was bad enough, but Josephus records that its residents called themselves “Sidonians” (*Ant.* 11.8.6 §344), transplants from the days of the

¹⁵ Etienne Nodet (*A Search for the Origins of Judaism: From Joshua to the Mishnah*, trans. E. Crowley, JSOTSup 248 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997], 137) calls these emigrating Jews “dissidents” to mainstream Judean ideology.

¹⁶ A triply incriminating charge was that their nation stood as a bogeyman for the rape of Dinah, the foundational story about ethnic purity for Judeans (cf. *T. Levi* 6-7; 4Q372 1).

Persians and Medes (12.5.5 §257-64), a pejorative label that would stand for foreigner.¹⁷ This probably refers to the mixed population that inhabited Samaria ever since Assyrian times, and points to their cultural accommodations with dominant foreign rulers like Alexander the Great, Antiochus Epiphanes, and later the Romans. Taken together, it is most likely the case that the interpretive tradition that began at Deut 32:21 about “no people” and a “foolish people” passes through Josephus’s writings. For him, the Samaritans are justly maligned no matter what their ethnic origins are.

The second Roman-era source is a little more oblique: Philo. For him, the city of Shechem represents the city of worldliness and distraction, although his allegorical meaning does not permit us to speculate very much on whether its inhabitants were Jews or not. The journey toward wisdom is a pilgrimage every Israelite must figuratively make with Jacob and his sons—and this route goes right through Shechem. Thus, Philo’s allegory goes back to the rape of Dinah by Shechem (seat of Samaritanism). Philo flirts lightly with the “foolish people” image by describing Shechem as a name and a place of “irrational nature” [given to] “folly and being bred up with shamelessness and audacity...[attempting] to pollute and to defile the judicial faculties of the mind...” In Dinah’s case, restoration to a right mind—her virginal state—was possible through the intervention of her brothers, themselves stirred to relentless action against

¹⁷ Another Hellenistic-era Jewish writer Theodotus devotes an epic poem to the rape of Dinah, whose perpetrator Shechem, he says, is the son of “Hermes” (frag. 1; Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 9.22.1). The whole point is to emphasize their foreign contamination as non-Jews so as to marginalize and denigrate them.

foolishness.¹⁸ One might detect in Philo's interpretation of Shechem an allegorical fulfillment of Deut 32:21, where a foolish people provoked anger and restitution for beloved Israel.

Now we return to Paul. What is the conclusion that Paul would draw from this trajectory that would serve him in his communication with the Romans? Where would he put the Samaritans in the taxonomy of peoples? What inherited caricature of the Samaritans contributes to his ultimate conclusion that the God-fearing Gentiles, "of wild stock," are grafted into the "domesticated" tree of Israel?

While many of the sources project a derogatory perspective, most concisely summed up as ethnically mixed and spiritually foolish, there is no clear-cut verdict that they are decidedly Gentile or Greco-Roman non-Jews. They are more or less a *tertium quid*, something between, which Paul would profitably cite as a model for Jew-Gentile relations in the community of believers at Rome. If this is true, it helps to explain Paul's fluid nomenclature when speaking about the Jews as Israelites or the children of Israel: he means more than Judeans as a religious ethnicity and less than any generic resident whose origins are Palestinian. Below I will suggest several reasons why Samaritanism served as Paul's platform of inclusiveness, but it was also the elephant in the room of Romans 9-11 that he dare not talk about.

First of all, the binary position between the two factions was not as hardened as the polemical documents might indicate. There were times of violence and strife, as in the late

¹⁸ *Migr.* 39.223-225 (trans. C. D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993). If Philo also is borrowing from interpretive tradition, his view, according to this passage, would seem to be that Jews dabbling in Samaritanism could be restored to the faith because it never really lost their Jewishness.

second century BCE when John Hyrcanus invaded Samaria and rampaged through the Gerizim sanctuary. Yet as the biblical record illustrates, and as Josephus observes, there were numerous voluntary transmigrations, intersections due to pilgrimages and religious outreaches, and residential and political exchanges that made ethnic and religious separation impossible.¹⁹

In the first-century world, as is evident in the pages of the New Testament, Jews and Samaritans lived in close proximity, and natives in the land simply made their peace with this social reality. The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) and the woman at the well in Shechem (John 4) may have made heroes out of the unlikely candidates, but their stories were conceivable simply because neither faction could avoid regular interaction.

Nor does there seem to be a definitive break between the two groups in the next century, at least to the extent that rabbinic documents grasp the historical facts on the ground. None of them of course endorses the Samaritans, whom they call “Cutheans,”²⁰ and it is always a

¹⁹ For a sampling of biblical-era interchanges between Samaritans and Judeans, see Jer 41:5; Ezra 4:1, 12-14; Neh 3:33-34; 4:1-2, 13-28. For an overview and a political interpretation of the relationship between the two areas, see Hayim Tadmor, “Judah,” in *The Cambridge Ancient History; VI: The Fourth Century B.C.*, ed. D.M. Lewis et al., 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 261-96, esp. 286-90. Otherwise, see Knoppers, “Schism,” 173; Reinhard Pummer, “Samaritan Synagogues and Jewish Synagogues: Similarities and Differences,” in *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction during the Greco-Roman Period*, ed. S. Fine, (London: Routledge, 1999), 118-160, esp. 139.

²⁰ “Cuthean” is the ethnic slur that identifies the Samaritans with the migrants whom the Assyrians transplanted from “Cuth” in Babylonia (2 Kgs 17:24, 30).

question about how far they were removed from Israelite status. Yet they do not come to a consensus about what the right Jewish response is. The fact is that though late Jewish literature often cites the Samaritans, the rabbis show limited understanding and curiosity about them.²¹ About the only thing the reader can conclude from the Tannaim is that the Samaritans are on par with the ignorant *'am ha'aretz*, the people of the land: they are Jews, but far from observant.

The Mishnah speaks of R. Eliezar's hardline position that "one who eats the bread of the Samaritans (Cutheans) is like the one who eats swine," but the more venerated R. Akiva pointedly refuses to draw this comparison, and then he explicitly silences his interlocutor (*m. Shebi. 8.10*). In general the Talmud expresses no unanimous verdict about their status, and on balance prefers to sketch interrelationships based on individual cases and places. Nonetheless, the rabbis leave an impression that the Samaritans who live among them are Israelites and not Gentiles, even if those who live abroad in uncontrolled religious environments, such as Rome, are suspect.²² No one endorses the Samaritans—they are always by various degrees separated from bona-fide Jewish practices.

²¹ In fact, though the early rabbis are obviously running into Samaritans often, their comments are surprisingly spare in their knowledge of the "Cuthean" way of life. The rabbis do not even appear curious, and simply more or less associate the Cuthean with the ignorant people of the land. For a survey of rabbinic references to the Samaritans, see Yitzhak Magen, *The Samaritans and the Good Samaritan*, Judah & Samaria Publications 7 (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2008). All of the quotations from the Talmud come from Magen's book.

²² Magen, *Samaritans*, 72.

The one absolute judgement comes in the third-century when R. Abbahu categorically rules the Samaritans of Caesarea as non-Jews. Yet, even so there is obviously much interaction between Jew and Samaritan in other places outside Caesarea if we accept the literary contexts of later Talmudic texts. They hint at a social environment where Jews and Samaritans fraternized in such things as money-lending, leasing land, and storing goods. You might dislike Samaritan Sabbath practices, their Passover matzah, and their graveyards, but usually your taxonomy gave them a *tertium quid* status.²³

Abroad and in uncontrolled environments, especially among Greco-Romans, it was a different story. As mentioned above, Josephus was most vexed about Samaritans when they lived among Greco-Romans and set aside their distinctive ethnic claims and lifestyle. The aforementioned R. Abbahu excommunicated the Samaritans in Caesarea for precisely this

²³ Reinhard Pummer, “Religions in Contact and Conflict: The Samaritans of Caesarea among ‘Pagans’, Jews and Christians,” in *Samaritan Researches, Volume V*, ed. Vittorio Morabito, Alan D. Crown, and Lucy Davey, *Studies in Judaica* (Sydney: Mandelbaum, 2000), 3.29-53; esp. 47-48. The alternative designation as *tertium quid* may not be any more positive, as other voices may testify. For example, the Judeans in John 8:48 charge that Samaritans are possessed by demons; and the minor Babylonian Talmudic tractate Kutim [Samaritans] declares that Samaritans are no longer welcome in the “Israelite” community unless “they recant Mt. Gerizim and accept Jerusalem.” See Isaac Kalimi, “Zion or Gerizim? The Association of Abraham and the Aqeda with Zion/Gerizim in Jewish and Samaritan Sources,” in *Samaritan Researches, Volume V*, ed. Vittorio Morabito, Alan D. Crown, and Lucy Davey, *Studies in Judaica* (Sydney: Mandelbaum, 2000), 2.32-46, esp. 44.

reason.²⁴ This tendency toward assimilation probably became an irritant in Diaspora environments where Samaritan and Judean mingled together. Josephus speaks of many Diaspora examples where the two groups lived together.

Tensions particularly mounted when both groups competed for recognition from the Gentile powers for their respective temples, Gerizim and Jerusalem. Recognition brought privileges and protections, as Josephus reports about Alexander the Great's different reactions to both sites' claims (*Ant.* 11.8.4 §321-22, 11.8.6 §340-345; cf. Ptolemy II Philadelphus's benefices granted to the Jerusalem temple in *Lett. Ar.* 37). Similarly, in Diaspora environments, rivalry over allegiances to Gerizim or Jerusalem often resulted in violence between the two groups requiring Gentile political intervention (*Ant.* 13.3.4 §74-79).

Roman sources, on the other hand, did not make much of the differences between these ethnic twins who hailed from Palestine, if they noticed them at all in far-flung places.²⁵ There is

²⁴ “Your fathers [in Samaria] did not spoil their conduct, but you [in Caesarea] have spoiled your behavior” (*y. Abod. Zar.* 5:44d; quoted by Magen, *Samaritans*, 71). Thus, when the Samaritans migrated among the Romans, they assimilated culture and religion so much that they “spoiled” their Jewishness.

²⁵ It is hard to know what to make of Origen's observation that the Samaritans were singled out for persecution after the ban on circumcision was dropped against Jews (see *c. Celsus* II; *Commentary on Matthew*, X—both cited by Gedaliah Alon, *The Jews in Their Land in the Talmudic Age (70-640 C.E.)* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989], 743 n. 11). For one thing he is speaking of a later time—much later than Paul—and perhaps it only applied to his area (Caesarea) where tensions already existed.

no imperial reference to them as a people until *Historia Augusta* in the late fourth century CE, and even then they are regarded as an Egyptian religious sect, not a nation.²⁶ Not until the Justinian Code in the sixth century was there something on the books about the Samaritans as a distinct ethnic group.

The extent of Judean-Samaritan commingling abroad is unknown both because of a lack of literary evidence and also because the archaeological record does not easily distinguish between their architectures and lifestyles.²⁷ For ancient Romans like for modern-day historians, there was no easy way of telling them apart. In foreign settings, the Samaritans and Judeans alike often blended together as “Israelites.”²⁸ The only other way of telling the two apart was through inscriptions, and of these there are few with clear marks of Samaritan identity. The most that can be said about these findings is that Samaritan inscriptions have been found near synagogues, but what kind of synagogue cannot be surmised. It may well be that Samaritans and Judeans attended the same synagogues in Diaspora communities or shared buildings due to residential proximity.

The second basic reason for Paul using the interpretive tradition that dealt with the Samaritans is that Paul probably would have encountered them himself in his travels among the

²⁶ See Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1980), 637-41.

²⁷ Epiphanius, native of Palestine (ca. 375 CE), confirms that Samaritans set up their own synagogues in Neapolis, but they “mimic all the customs of the Jews” (“Against Massalians,” *Panarion* 60 [80].1.6).

²⁸ Allan D. Crown, “The Samaritan Diaspora,” in *The Samaritans*, ed. J. D. Crown (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 197-217, esp. 201.

communities of believers mentioned in the New Testament. For this assumption, all we have to go on are the implications of Acts of the Apostles and the Gospel of John. While these New Testament sources also carry with them questions of historicity and dating, they still provide a likely first-century witness that many Samaritans were connected to the early missions of Jesus and his disciples. Doubtlessly, these followers would have sympathized with as much ecumenism as the interpretive tradition would allow.²⁹

As far as can be ascertained, the Samaritans did not accept into their canon such Hebrew prophets as Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. Yet they would have resonated with the way Paul and Jesus distilled their message into a theme of reunification of the Twelve Tribes and the concomitant union of Samaria and Judah. Samaritans always subscribed to the idea that they were the valid heirs of the land and the legitimate offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As the woman at the Samaritan well asserted, Jacob was their father who gave to Joseph the land they lived in and used. At any rate, their attitude toward the ethnic identity of their southern siblings, the Judeans, is mostly unknown and probably less negative as gauged by available evidence.³⁰

It is even possible that Paul spent time with Samaritans as he traveled. Caesarea would be the leading candidate for this hypothesis. Acts of the Apostles (21:8) claims that Caesarea was the residence of the leading evangelist among the Samaritans, Philip, whose place served as

²⁹ Knoppers (*Samaritans*, 211) claims that Jesus considered the Samaritans neither Greco-Roman (pagan) nor Jewish, but as an ethnic group in-between. This evaluation does not differ from that of the Talmudic rabbis.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3-4 n. 7.

Paul's guesthouse. It was also a stop for Paul during his periodic pilgrimages to Jerusalem (e.g., 18:22). From the aforementioned R. Abbahu came the judgment that the Samaritans in Caesarea were "spoiled" as Jews because of their dealings with the Roman people there. He claimed that the Samaritans in Caesarea were more numerous than the Jews and Gentiles combined (*Avoda Zara* 1, 2, 39c, 23-28). Also the Samaritans were upper-class members (*officium*) of Caesarean society, probably the type of people Paul encountered during his extended period of incarceration before his journey to Rome.³¹

In general, the Samaritans were quick to abandon Samaria for Roman cities abroad, so Caesarea and coastal areas were natural options.³² From later sources it is clear that Samaritans not only became Hellenized and Romanized more eagerly than their Judean counterparts, but they may have deviated more easily as well from their faith-based moorings.³³ Since the

³¹ Pummer, "Religions," 3.32.

³² Pummer, "Religions," 3.46. The Samaritan chronicle *Ktāb al-Tarīkh Abū 'l Fath* (=AF) reports that the violence done to the Samaritans at the time of the Maccabeans caused "widespread emigration in reaction" so that Samaritans began "sailing away in ships to the ends of the earth" (AF 108, quoted by Crown, "Samaritan," 204). AF presents some reliability problems, not least of which that its earliest manuscripts come from the 14th century. Nonetheless, many of AF's observations resonate well with other ancient authorities and probably reflect ancient sources. For a list of scholarly perspectives on AF, see Pummer, "Samaritan Synagogues," 149 n. 19. Also see Alon, *Jews*, 742-46.

³³ The evidence for this possibility is late, cited by M. Avi-Yonah, "The Samaritans in Romano-Byzantine Times," [Hebrew] *Eretz Israel*, IV (1956), 34-47, in Crown, "Diaspora,"

Samaritans had no centralized sanctuary and clergy after the Hasmonean invasion, the religious practices became more and more decentralized and unregulated. This meant that they could more easily adapt, but more likely stir up resentment among more accountable and increasingly rabbinical Jews.³⁴ Because the Samaritans lacked both regionalized religious authorities outside of their native land and centralized standards for halakic observance as eventually laid out for their counterparts by the Mishnah or Talmud, they often drifted into other belief systems.³⁵ Thus, Paul traveled to sites that were known by contemporary and later sources to be populated by Samaritans, and many of them may have converted to faith in Jesus—precisely the picture the NT portrays about early apostolic activity among them.

Third, more speculatively, the city of Rome may have experienced troubles with Samaritan cults and consequent quarrels with observant “Jews.” If Caesarea was a destination for enterprising Samaritans and Judeans, it is safe to assume that Rome would be next in their social climb.³⁶ In successive passages, Josephus seemingly corroborates this tendency for both

213. For earlier evidence, see below in the discussion of the pastoral structures of synagogues in first-century Rome.

³⁴ Crown, “Samaritan,” 207.

³⁵ Ibid., 201. Crown says that in contrast to the rabbis who set up Diaspora centers, like that in Babylon, the Samaritans did not have such centers. As far as intermediaries, it was Gerizim or nothing for them.

³⁶ The Samaritans already had been doing mercenary service for other empires, so it not unlikely that they did the same for the Romans. Especially inviting were seafaring opportunities as Phoenician and Greek maritime networks collapsed. Many Samaritans came into contact with

Judeans (*Ant.* 18.3.5 §81-84) and Samaritans (*Ant.* 18.4.1-2 §85-89), as they interacted with Romans. *AF* perhaps fancifully mentions that Samaritan sources suggest that Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius had Samaritan wives.³⁷

Moreover, the city of Rome may have experienced troubles with the commingling of Judean and Samaritan. Patristic sources report that a Samaritan cult figure named Simon Magus, who probably lived in the time of Paul, traveled extensively around the Mediterranean, and created a sensation wherever he went. While it is unclear what Simon Magus claimed about himself, his primary audience, the Samaritans, might have been seeking their *taheb* (deliverer), whose divine confirmation necessitated miracle-working.³⁸

The earliest report about Simon is in Acts 8:9-11. The Samaritans audaciously proclaim that Simon was the embodiment of “power of God that is called Great.” Perhaps this was on par with the divine identity that the apostles were claiming for Jesus. Before disappearing from the

the imperial administration in Neapolis, and obtained administrative transfer to Rome where they settled (*ibid.*, 207-209).

³⁷ Again *AF* is the source cited (*ibid.*, 209 n. 81).

³⁸ Another Samaritan cult figure living about the same time as Simon was Dositheus, at least according to various patristic authors including Origen (ca. 200), Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 300), Jerome (ca. 350), and Epiphanius (ca. 375). Reinhard Pummer (*The Samaritans: A Profile* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015], 125-27) concludes that Dositheus was one of a few sectarians among the Samaritans of antiquity, and most likely made messiah-like claims for himself.

Acts of the Apostles, Simon Magus challenged the official representatives of the Jerusalem Church, Peter and John, because he was trying to purchase divine powers for his own advantage.

This ominous meeting tars him with the sin of simony in ecclesial history. More relevant for this paper, Simon reappears in the writings of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian, all of whom live within 100 years of Paul, and are closely in touch with early Church traditions emanating from Rome. Here I will focus on Justin Martyr, an intriguing example of the second-century Roman world because he himself is from the Samaritan homeland, now living in Rome.

Justin chimes in with his version of Simon Magus when he notes how susceptible the audiences of Rome were to heretical religion:

Simon, a Samaritan from the village called Gitthon, ...in the time of Claudius Caesar, through the art of the demons who moved him, performed magical deeds in [the] royal city of Rome and was thought to be a god and was honoured as a god with a statue. This statue was raised up [in the sacred island precinct of the Tiber] with this inscription in Latin: ‘To Simon the Holy God.’ And nearly all the Samaritans and a few from other nations even now still confess him to be the first [emanation of] god, and worship him. (I.26.2-5)³⁹

³⁹ Translation from Denis Minns and Paul Parvis, *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 147-49. Irenaeus (*AH* 1.23.2) adds that Simon’s cult had connections with the Phoenician world, venerating a woman from Tyre as a divine emanation—reminiscent of Josephus’s claim that Samaritanism had ties with the Phoenician (Sidonian) world.

Echoes of Justin's account can be found in Irenaeus (*AH* 1.23.1) and Tertullian (*Apologeticum* 13.9), and all are generally consistent with Luke's portrayal of Simon Magus.

Simon's notoriety might give clues about how to take Rom 9:25-26 and 10:19-20. Although we do not know about the internal factions among Jews and Samaritans of these days,⁴⁰ it is not hard to imagine that Simon Magus created such controversy among Roman citizens that the Emperor Claudius (fl. 41-54) expelled all Jews, including Samaritans, from the city sometime in the 40s CE. The notoriety and exotic identity of Simon Magus would only have reinforced Roman fears that religious fringe groups and sects would tear apart their carefully balanced society. Tacitus (*Annals* 15.44) and others (cf. Suetonius, *Nero* 16; Sulpicius Severus, *Chronicle* 2.29) give witness to this attitude in their recollection of strange religious movements and Nero's ease (fl. 54-68) in pasting a tawdry reputation on fanatic followers of "Chrestos" for their alleged burning of Rome.

Rome was known for taking action against cults and superstitions, especially against those which had foreign origins. Bacchanalia was a secret and exotic cult from the East that attracted large numbers of Roman citizens, destabilizing the established pantheon and late Republican ideals.⁴¹ The appearance of messianic factions 200 years later would have raised similar fears, now intensified by the Emperor's need for internal unity. The repression of the

⁴⁰ For internal divisions among Samaritans in the Mediterranean world, see Jarl Fossum, "Sects and Movements," in *The Samaritans*, ed. Alan D. Crown (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 93-389.

⁴¹ See Livy, *Hist. Rom.* 39.8. In this early case, the Senate passed *senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus*, restricting Bacchic practices to small groups with special licenses.

Bacchanalia cells represented a precedent for the treatment of Simon Magus and his fawning clique.

Closer to Paul's time and background, Josephus mentions that the teaching of four Jews about the laws of Moses fomented internal squabbles in Rome and caused the banishment of 4000 Jews during the reign of Tiberius (fl. 14-37; *Ant.* 18.3.5 §81-84).⁴² A century later, Dio Cassius records evidence for a similar or the same event: "As the Jews had flocked to Rome in great numbers and were converting many of the natives to their ways, he [Tiberius] banished most of them" (57.18.5a).⁴³ The successor emperor Claudius himself had presided over a pitiless crusade of the Druids that began as a campaign in the days of Augustus.⁴⁴ Though the campaign against the Druids was waged abroad, even more dangerous would be strife in Rome about whether Simon Magus (or Jesus) could be an incarnate deity. Jewish disruptions were increasingly a concern of the first-century Empire in other Mediterranean cities, and naturally the Romans would have been careful to snuff them out either by expulsion or execution. Claudius's expulsion of the Jews from Rome should be seen in this light.

There are few sources for the expulsion order against Roman Jews (Acts 18:2; Suetonius, *Vita Claudii* 25.4; Orosius, *Historiarum adv. paganos* VII.7.6.15-16). Suetonius simply says,

⁴² In general Josephus showed sensitivity to Roman fears about Jewish extremism by subtly shifting the blame for the Jewish Revolt from religious causes like messianism to bandits and hotheads. See Schwartz, *Judeans*, 53.

⁴³ Roman statements alluding to the problems that Jews caused are found in Suetonius, *Tib.* 36; Dio Cass. 57.18.5a, and Tacitus, *Annals* 2.85; cf. Seneca, *Epist.* 108.22.

⁴⁴ Julius Caesar, *Gallic Wars* 6.16; Strabo, *Geog.* 4.4.5; Tacitus, *Annals* 14.30.

“He [Claudius] expelled the Judeans/Jews who were continually in tumult at the instigation of Chrestos” (*Judaeos assidue tumultantes impulsore Chresto Roma expulit*). The Judeans/Jews disputed over *Chrestos* (or perhaps messiahship), according to Suetonius, provoking a massive dragnet operation against all Jews in the city, driving out the likes of Aquila, a Jew from Pontus and companion of Paul. A hint that Jews eventually crept back into Rome comes from Dio Cassius (60.6.6), but he also implies that they could not reconstitute in assemblies (synagogues?) as *collegiae*. These few sources taken together may spell out the context for Paul’s Letter to the Romans, a group of Gentiles and Jews who had set up their own new form of social organization, the house church (or perhaps *ecclesiae*) instead of a synagogue.⁴⁵

Two factors make Claudius’s decree relevant to Paul’s later audience. First, there is no mention of a mediating authority to intercede for the synagogues of Rome as there were in other imperial cities. Normally in the Eastern Empire, they had a particular legal standing and structure known as *politeia*, and their governing officials, the ethnarch and *gerousia*, gained official recognition from imperial authorities. It is therefore quite conceivable that Rome’s loose pastoral structure allowed for sectarian missionaries like Aquila or Simon Magus to promulgate their message easily. Says Raymond E. Brown and John P. Meier⁴⁶ about the implications of this historical setting:

⁴⁵ According to Rom 16:2, Aquila is back in Rome and serving the church there.

⁴⁶ Raymond E. Brown and John P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome* [New York: Paulist, 1983], 101). In general see Wolfgang Wiefel, “The Jewish Community in Ancient Rome and the Origins of Roman Christianity,” in *The Romans Debate*, ed. Karl P. Donfried (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977; rev. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 85-101, esp. 91-92, 93-94.

This [lack of pastoral oversight among Roman Jews] means that Christian preachers could have made headway in individual synagogues, without meeting concerted resistance. If some synagogues accepted with tolerance the proclamation that Jesus was the Messiah while others rejected it, there may very well have been a squabble among the Roman Jews over Christ and no centralized authority to settle it.

The suggestion is then that Rome's new *collegiae* or congregations might also have included Samaritans. In fact, it is possible to imagine that these disputes about messiahship had direct links to Palestine's religious scene. In Acts of the Apostle (chaps. 6-7), it is the Synagogue of the Freedmen that opposes Stephen, a group that oddly voices pro-Samaritan sentiments (e.g., 7:16).⁴⁷ If the Jews who persecuted him were emancipated hostages ("Freedmen") from imperial provenance going back to Pompey's measures to keep peace between Rome and Judea, then this may be yet another reason for their hyper-Judean zeal, in addition to their opposition to the messiahship of Jesus. Furthermore, one wonders about the connections between Stephen and Philip, the pioneer missionary to Samaria (Samaritan

⁴⁷ The oddity of Stephen's "theology" has been noticed elsewhere as being Samaritan in sympathy. For background see Martin H. Scharlemann. *Stephen: A Singular Saint*, AB34 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1968).

Israelites?) and colleague to Stephen—who himself settled in the aforementioned city of Caesarea.⁴⁸

Secondly and more briefly, since imperial authorities did not distinguish between Samaritans and Judeans, it is no wonder that they steamrolled everyone involved in the messianic movement, any pan-Israelite follower of Jesus or Simon. All were subject to Claudius's expulsion.

Paul's Letter to the Romans arrives a decade later and after Claudius's death, when the reign of Nero rendered the earlier expulsion order a dead letter. By now returning Jews have reconstituted either as house churches or restructured synagogues with a new issue threatening their stability: Gentiles and Jews gathered together and pledged allegiance to Jesus as messiah. Paul's citation of Deut 32:21 and the other passages related to the Samaritans must have hit home with recently resettled Jews and Samaritans that had wrangled over Israelite ethnicity in past generations. They also might have remembered wrangling over the validity of messiah figures. Paul's irenic words could have had some pastoral applications for the situation on the ground in Rome. He wanted to assist the Gentile converts to live together with Jews and not make the mistake of the infighting that Judeans and Samaritans experienced a decade earlier with dire results. The new template was Jew and Gentile joined together as the wild stock grafted onto the tended olive tree, all reminiscent of the transplant group forcibly resettled by King Shalmaneser IV (fl. 745-722 BCE) in Samaria, mixing in with remnant Israelites. In terms of

⁴⁸ These very points are raised by F. F. Bruce, "The Romans Debate--Continued," in *The Romans Debate*, ed. Karl P. Donfried (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977; rev. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 175-94, esp. 178-79.

Paul's prophetic musings, all that was left to fulfill was for the fullness of the Gentiles to be grafted into the productive olive tree so that all the tribes of Israel would reunite and be saved.

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