

Samaria

Samaria, the central region of ancient Palestine. Samaria extends for about 40 miles (65 km) from north to south and 35 miles (56 km) from east to west. It is bounded by Galilee on the north and by Judaea on the south; on the west was the Mediterranean Sea and on the east the Jordan River. The mountain ranges of southern Samaria continue into Judaea with no clearly marked division.

Ancient Shechem (near modern Nāblus), in the centre of Samaria, served as the crossroads and political centre of the region.



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At the time of the Israelite conquest of Palestine, the strategic sites of the region of Samaria were in the hands of the Canaanites. Although the Israelites were able to win footholds in the hill country, some of the key Canaanite strongholds in the neighbouring plains or valleys successfully resisted them until the days of King David (10th century BCE). The region of Samaria was assigned to the house of Joseph, that is, to the tribe of

Ephraim and to half of the tribe of Manasseh. After the death of King Solomon (10th century), the northern tribes, including those of Samaria, separated from the southern tribes and established the separate kingdom of Israel. Its capital first was at Tirzah (perhaps modern Tall al-Fāri‘ah) and then, from the time of Omri (876–869 or c. 884–c. 872 BCE), it was moved to the city of Samaria, then a new town built on a hilltop about 7 miles (11 km) northwest of Shechem. Although the northern kingdom was often stronger than Judah to the south and enjoyed greater economic development, it was crushed by Assyria in 722, and much of its population was carried into captivity.

In New Testament times Samaria was under Roman control and was to some extent a centre for Hellenistic culture. Jesus had little to do with the Samaritans, but, in the apostolic age, Greek-speaking Christians preached to them; this preaching marked a transition stage in the extension of the church into the gentile world. The Samaritan sect, which traces its origin back to the northern Israelite form of the Mosaic religion, still exists in small numbers at Nāblus and accepts only the Pentateuch as Scripture (*see Samaritan*).

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