Exile and Return in the Samaritan Traditions

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In 2017 there were 805 Samaritans living in Israel, 418 of them in the city of Holon with Israeli citizenship and 387 in Kiryat Luza, a village on Mount Gerizim in the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority, which is under Israeli security control. The inhabitants of Kiryat Luza also have Israeli citizenship, but since this village is connected with the municipal area of Nablus (Shechem), its inhabitants have Palestinian citizenship as well.

The Samaritans, who call themselves “Shomrim” [Keepers of the Torah], reject their definition by others as a community and define themselves as an ancient people and as a unique religious-ethnic group that constitutes a direct continuation of the Children of Israel. This claim of the Samaritans is the main issue in the debate concerning their origins, which will be dealt with later on in this essay. The essay is part of an extended project, The Samaritan’s History in Ancient Times: Samaritan Chronicles versus Non-Samaritan Sources.

One of the characteristics of the Samaritans is the fact that they live only in Israel, especially on Mount Gerizim in the village of Kiryat Luza and in the city of Holon in Israel. In their opinion, in order to be an Israeli of the Samaritan community, one of the most important identifiers is “settlement in the Land of Israel and never leaving it.” Therefore, “for them, one who lives outside the Land of Israel cannot be considered as an Israeli Samaritan.” On the face of it, in the absence of a “Samaritan diaspora,” the subject of my essay is impossible. However, when I began my research on the Samaritan diaspora, it became clear that in course of time a Samaritan diaspora had indeed existed; it had been created for political or economic reasons. Samaritan communities were scattered in various places such as Egypt (Alexandria and Cairo), Sicily, Delos, Thessaloniki, and Damascus.

My essay focuses on exile and return in ancient Israel and Judah during the periods described in Jewish, Assyrian, Babylonian, and Samaritan sources. I compare the different sources and try through them to understand the Samaritan question. During the history of Israel and Judah, a number of expulsions of the people of Israel and Judah occurred.
THE ASSYRIAN EXILE

The exile of the inhabitants of the northern Kingdom of Israel and the inhabitants in Transjordan had already begun in 733 BCE, during the reign of the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 BCE). This king developed the method of a two-way mass exile, a policy that gave the Assyrians advantages in their control over the foreign peoples they had conquered through a demographic transfer that created loyalties and commitments toward the conqueror.¹¹

According to 2 Kings 15:29, Tiglath-Pileser III captured these regions: Galilee, the land of Naphtali, and the Gilad in Transjordan. In his annals, he reported that 13,250 captives were deported from these areas.¹²

In the year 725 BCE Shalmaneser V, king of Assyria (727–722 BCE), began a siege of the city of Shomron that ended three years later during the reign of his heir, Sargon II (722–705 BCE) with the total destruction of the northern kingdom in 722 BCE during the reign of Hoshea, the last Israelite king.

After Sargon’s destruction and elimination of the northern kingdom, he exiled the tribes of Israel to Assyria. The Bible says of the Israelite deportation: “The king of Assyria captured Samaria, he exiled Israel to Assyria” (2 Kgs 17:5–6). “And he carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes” (2 Kgs 17:18).¹³

The campaign of Sargon II against the countries that rebelled against Assyria is reported on the walls of the royal palace in Dur-Sharrukin (=Khosarag),¹⁴ where it is written in the Khorsabad Summary Inscription that “I besieged and captured Samaria. I took as spoil 27,290 [or 27,280] people who lived there; I organized (a contingent of) 200 [or 50] of their chariots and I instructed the rest of them in correct conduct.¹⁵ I appointed my eunuch over them and imposed upon them a tribute of the former king.”

The Calah Summary Inscription added that Sargon II exiled “the rest of them and I settled in Assyria,” and he “resettled Samaria more densely than before and brought there people from the lands of my conquest.”¹⁶ In light of this, only 27,900 people were taken as exiles by Sargon. In addition, we mentioned the 13,250 who were exiled earlier from the Galilee without listing the number of exiles from the eastern side of the Jordan River. If Sargon II had really expelled all the local population, “the rest,” he would certainly have boasted of it in his records, which would have added glory and prestige to him as an imperial leader.¹⁷

These facts stand behind the research assumptions that deal with the Assyrian exile, which claim that a significant part of the inhabitants of the
former northern kingdom were not exiled but remained in their places of residence. Support for this assumption can be derived from biblical testimony concerning the conduct of the kings of Judah after the destruction of Shomron and the expulsion of its inhabitants.

There are two accounts in the Bible after the destruction of Shomron about the marriage of kings of Judah with women from regions that once belonged to the northern kingdom.


Through these diplomatic marriages the kings of Judah wished to link prominent families still living in the Galilee with the House of David through family ties and thus connect the Israelite population that remained in the area of the northern kingdom with the Kingdom of Judah.

Two religious reforms were carried out by the kings of Judah after the destruction of the northern kingdom. Both were an attempt to include the Israelite population remaining in the north with these activities.

2 Chronicles 30 describes the Passover celebration of Hezekiah, king of Judah (698–727 BCE). He invited the inhabitants of the former Kingdom of Israel to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem. Hezekiah sent word to all Israel and Judah “and also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, inviting them to come to the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel” (2 Chron 30:1). They decided to send a proclamation “throughout Israel, from Beersheba to Dan” (2 Chron 30:5). The couriers went from “town to town in Ephraim and Manasseh, as far as Zebulun” (2 Chron 30:10). Some of the people scorned and ridiculed them. “Nevertheless, some from Asher, Manasseh and Zebulun humbled themselves and went to Jerusalem” (2 Chron 30:11). In order to allow a significant number of them who were not purified to participate in the feast in its proper time, the date was postponed for a month, and most of the celebrants who came “were from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun” (2 Chron 30:18). “When all this had ended, the Israelites who were there went out to the towns of Judah, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. They destroyed the high places and the altars throughout Judah and Benjamin and in Ephraim and Manasseh. After they had destroyed all of them, the Israelites returned to their own towns and to their own property” (2 Chron 31:1).
Josiah, King of Judah (640–609 BCE), in his religious reforms after the discovery of the “Book of the Law of the Lord that had been given through Moses,” intended them mainly as a struggle against the cult of high places in order to bring about a unified cult in Jerusalem. Within the framework of this struggle, he also included the areas of the northern kingdom in which a remnant was still residing: “In the towns of Manasseh, Ephraim and Simeon, as far as Naphtali, and in the ruins around them, he tore down the altars and the Asherah poles and crushed the idols to powder and cut to pieces all the incense altars throughout Israel. Then he went back to Jerusalem” (2 Chron 34: 6–7).

“They went to Hilkiah the high priest and gave him the money that had been brought into the temple of God, which the Levites who were the gatekeepers had collected from the people of Manasseh, Ephraim and the entire remnant of Israel and from all the people of Judah and Benjamin and the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (2 Chron 34:9).

The various verses in connection with these reforms therefore indicate that most of the autochthonic population of the northern kingdom was not exiled. Many of the indigenous Israelite residents remained on their land, and Hezekiah and Josiah hoped to incorporate them into their kingdom. The Calah Summary Inscription reads “I resettled Samaria more densely than before (and) brought there people from the lands of my conquest.”

In 2 Kings it is told that the Assyrians settled exiles from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and Sepharvaim in Samaria, without mentioning their numbers: “And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof” (2 Kgs 17:24). According to Haim Tadmor, this verse sums up two deportations to the Land of Israel: the first in 720 BCE, when the Assyrians transferred exiles from Ava, Hamath, and Sepharvaim to Samaria, and the second of uncertain date when exiles were brought from Babylon and Cuthah. In his opinion, this second exile can be dated to 689 BCE, to the period of King Sennacherib (705–680 BCE) after the destruction of the city of Babylon, or to 648 BCE, when Ashurbanipal suppressed the uprising in Babylon. The transfer of Arab tribes to Samaria by Sargon in 716 BCE is described in this way: “The Tamudi [Iba]didi |Mar-simani Ḥayappā, the far-off Arabs . . . I exiled their remnant (and) settled (them), in Samaria.”

Ezra 4:2 refers to another expulsion to Israel. This verse mentions the name of Assyrian king Esarhaddon (681–669 BCE) as the one who transferred
exiles into the area of Samaria. This exile can be dated to 671 or 669 BCE during the campaigns of Esarhaddon in Egypt.\footnote{In Ezra 4:9–10 there is a reference to the deportees of various peoples to Samaria in the reign of Osnappar, who should apparently be identified with Ashurbanipal (669–627 BCE). Osnappar transferred inhabitants from Babylon, Arach, and Susa either in 648 BCE after suppressing the uprising in Babylon or in 646 BCE after he destroyed Ealam and Susa.\footnote{These testimonies show that the Assyrians gave great importance to the province of Samaria as an administrative center in the western part of the empire, and the transference of exiles carried out between 720 and 646 BCE to the Samarian area was meant to strengthen this center. Since the testimonies do not indicate the number of exiles brought over during these years, the matter is subject to estimates and suppositions based on other facts, which in themselves arouse many difficulties. However, the fact that only about 50,000 people were exiled from the northern kingdom, together with the figures from the Assyrian records that mention the exile from certain cities with low numbers of 625 to 656 people from every city,\footnote{The estimation of the number of those exiled from Samaria and the assessment of the number of new inhabitants are directly connected with the question concerning the origin of the Samaritans. If we say that the Assyrians exiled most of the population of the Kingdom of Israel, then after 720 BCE most of the population in the province of Samaria consisted of those exiles transferred there by the Assyrians. Therefore, those who make this assumption also claim that the Samaritans are the descendants of foreign pagan inhabitants who were settled in Samaria, adopted the belief in the God of Israel, and were later called Samaritans. On the other hand, if there was no mass exile of the Israelites and most of the inhabitants of the northern kingdom remained in their ancient settlements, the foreigners brought by the Assyrians were a relatively small percentage of the local population and therefore did not have any influence on them. This claim has led some scholars to regard the Samaritans as the descendants and the continuance of the former population in the Kingdom of Israel.} leads to the reasonable conclusion that the number of new inhabitants settled in the province of Samaria was not much greater than the number of people who had been exiled from it.}}
that only some of them were exiled and that most of them remained in the country. Either way, there was a different situation, with new inhabitants settling in the province of Samaria. Even if their number was not large, they influenced their surroundings, since this was why the Assyrians brought them there. The discussion of the origin of the Samaritans must therefore take into consideration the new situation that was created in the area of Samaria.24

Assyrian sources indicate an additional deportation during the reign of King Sennacherib (705–681 BCE). In the campaign, dated to 701 BCE, against the uprising coalition of Syrian and Phoenician kings headed by King Hezekiah of Judah, Sennacherib locked up Hezekiah within Jerusalem: he “besieged forty-six of his fortified walled cities and surrounding smaller towns, which were without number. . . . Sennacherib, king of Assyria, marched against all the fortified towns of Judah and seized them. . . . The King took 200,150 people young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, cattle and sheep, without number and counted them as spoil.”25

The number 200,150 from Judah is an exaggerated amount of deportees; it is out of proportion to the size of the total population in Judah.26 According to Bustenai Oded, this large number is the invention of the author. By citing the outsized number of deportees, he is coping with the fact that the king did not conquer Jerusalem and was not able to deport its population.27

THE BABYLONIAN EXILE

In contrast to the Assyrians, the strategy of the Babylonian deportation28 was a one-way policy that included mainly the various levels of the aristocracy and craftsmen in the conquered country, while the lower classes remained behind.29 Royalty, aristocracy, priestly families, and craftsmen were deported from Judea to Babylon and held there under conditions of captivity in Babylon.

The rest of the deportees were considered as having the Shushanu status. In this status they worked for a number of years on leased lands that belonged to the Babylonians. These lands were later given to them as their property. This status allowed the deportees freedom of movement, social mobility, and the preservation of their ethnic solidarity.30

Partial information is available regarding the places in which the exiles settled: Babylon, Sippar, Uruk, Nippur, Āl-Yāhūdu.31 In the book of Ezekiel, two geographical locations are mentioned for the places where the exiles resided: ‘Nar Kabari and Tel Aviv (Til-Abubi). The books of Ezra and Nehemiah mention Telharsa, Telmelah, Cherub, Addan, and Immer.32
According to both the description in the Bible and to historical analysis on the basis of Babylonian records and archaeological excavations, the exile of the inhabitants of Judah to Babylon was conducted in a number of stages or expulsions. These deportations are dated to 597 BCE for the first, with others dated to 587/586 BCE and 582/581 BCE, respectively.

The exile of Jehoiachin and the deportation of 597 BCE. Nebuchadnezzar II, king of Babylon (605–562 BCE), invaded Judah, and Jehoiakim, king of Judah (608–598), became his vassal. After three years, following Jehoiakim’s disloyalty, Nebuchadnezzar sent his army against Judah. When Jehoiakim died, his son Jehoiachin succeeded him as king (2 Kgs 24:1–8). After a short reign of three months, Jehoiachin surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar II. Jehoiachin was exiled to Babylon and was replaced by his uncle Mattaniah, whose name was changed to Zedekiah (2 Kgs 24:8–19).

These stormy events described in the Bible are confirmed through the Babylonian Chronicles, the royal Babylonian records that were used for the kings of Babylon. They describe in one sentence the main events of that year.

In Tablet No. 5 in the sentence for the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar II (597 BCE), it is written that “In the seventh year (of Nebuchadnezzar) in the month Chislev (Nov/Dec) the king of Babylon assembled his army, and after he had invaded the land of Hatti (Syria/Palestine) he laid siege to the city of Judah. On the second day of the month of Adar (16 March) he conquered the city and took the king (Jeconiah) prisoner. He installed in his place a king (Zedekiah) of his own choice, and after he had received rich tribute, he set forth to Babylon.”

2 Kings 24:14 reported a total deportation from Jerusalem—“He carried all Jerusalem into exile”—and enumerated the different expatriates from Judah: “King Jehoiachin, his family: mother and wives; his officials and prominent people all were exiled to Babylon” (2 Kgs 24:15). Nebuchadnezzar “exiled all the ministers, all the fighting men, and all the skilled workers and artisans—a total of ten thousand deportees” (2 Kgs 24:14).

In addition, “he took captive to Babylon the entire force of seven thousand fighting men, strong and fit for war, and a thousand skilled workers, craftsmen and metal smiths” (2 Kgs 24:16). Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin captive to Babylon and also took from Jerusalem to Babylon the king’s mother, his wives, his officials, and the prominent people of the land. Without pointing out the number of people left in Jerusalem, 2 Kings emphasized that Nebuchadnezzar left a limited size of its population, only the poorest of the land (2 Kgs 24:14).

Jeremiah, summing up the deportations during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, stated in general, “So Judah went into captivity, away from her land”
(Jer 52:27). Later, he listed the number of people Nebuchadnezzar carried into exile. For the first deportation, during the seventh year of the king, he counted only 3,023 exiled Jews (Jer 52:28).

The exile after the destruction of the Temple in 587 BCE. In addition to the destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the temple (2 Kgs 25:8–10), Nebuzaradan, commander of the imperial guard, an official of the king of Babylon, completed the plans of Nebuchadnezzar II by exiling the king, Zedekiah, together with the other people who remained in the city, along with the rest of the populace and those who had deserted to the king of Babylon, leaving behind in Judah the poor people of the land to work in the vineyards and fields (2 Kgs 25:11–12).

Nebuzaradan arrested some higher-position holders and took them to the king in Riblah, where they were executed by the king. Among them were Seraiah the chief priest, Zephaniah the priest next in rank, and the three doorkeepers as well as an officer in charge of the fighting men and five royal advisers. Nebuzaradan also took the secretary, who was the chief officer in charge of conscripting the people of the land, and sixty of the conscripts who were found in the city (2 Kgs 25:18–21).

Again in a general statement, 2 Kings argued “So Judah went into captivity, away from her land.” But the biblical text continues by stating that Nebuchadnezzar had left people behind in Judah, and for them he appointed Gedaliah, son of Ahikam, to be over them (2 Kgs 25:22).

The exile after the assassination of Gedaliah son of Ahikam (582 BCE). Jeremiah, in his summation list of deportees exiled during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, argued that in the twenty-third year, 582 BCE, 745 Jews were taken into exile by Nebuzaradan, the commander of the imperial guard (Jer 52:30). The background of this deportation is related to the anti-Babylonian uprising headed by Ishmael ben Nethaniah, a member of the royal house of David, in cooperation with Baalis, king of the Ammonites, against Gedaliah ben Ahikam, who was appointed by the Babylonians as the governor of Judah. Gedaliah was murdered by the rebels.

Ishmael also killed all the men of Judah who supported Gedaliah and were with him at Mizpah as well as the Babylonian soldiers who were there (Jer 41–43). As a result, some of the rebels fled to Egypt (2 Kgs 25:26), and others were exiled by Nebuzaradan.

Jeremiah lists the numbers of exiles carried in the three deportations dated to Nebuchadnezzar’s reign: “In the seventh year, 3,023 Jews; in the eighteenth year, 832 people from Jerusalem; and in his twenty-third year, 745
Jews taken into exile by Nebuzaradan the commander of the imperial guard.” He sums up by saying that there were 4,600 people in all.39

These low figures for the total number of expatriates in the exiles in Judah contradict the claims “So Judah went into captivity, away from her land” (2 Kgs 25: 21) and “He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his successors until the kingdom of Persia came to power” (2 Chron 36:20). This conflict raises many questions focused around the subject named “The Empty Land” or “The Total Exile.”40

At this stage I want to point out that in the descriptions of the exiles from Judah to Babylon, neither the Samaritans nor the population of the former Kingdom of Israel are mentioned at all. In 539 BCE Babylon was conquered by the Persians headed by Cyrus, king of Persia. Unlike Assyria and Babylon, they took a different approach toward their conquered subjects. They preferred to send the exiles back to their previous home countries together with their possessions and the plunder taken from them in the past and to help them to restore their political and religious centers as a means to ensure their loyalty to the Persian kingdom.

The declaration of King Cyrus to the Jewish exiles in Babylon was the first step in the return to Zion and the rebuilding of the Second Temple, which was dedicated in 516 BCE. In view of the economic and religious crisis in Judah during the fifth century BCE, the kings of Persia continued to support the returned exiles. Ezra the Scribe was sent by the king to solve the various difficulties, and later Nehemiah was sent to complete the work of Ezra and to restore Jerusalem.

Ezra 2 lists in detail the people who returned from the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had taken to Babylon. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each of them to their own towns (Ezra 2:1). Ezra 2:64–65 sums up the list: “The whole company numbered 42,360, besides their 7,337 male and female slaves; and they also had 200 male and female singers.”41

We shall now turn to the description of the above events in the major Samaritan Chronicles that are conveyed in the history of the community:42 (1) Tulida, or the Genealogy;43 (2) the Samaritan Book of Joshua;44 (3) Abu l’ Fath; and (4) Adler-Seligsohn.45 The main difficulties in using the Samaritan chronicles as historical sources are their late composition and their legendary parts. Some of them were written between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, relating events dated hundreds of years earlier, and some continued to be written afterward, describing events of their own time.46
The *Tulida*, for example, was written in Hebrew by Elazar the priest in 1346, and in later periods it continued to be written and to document the history of the Samaritans until the year 1856. The Samaritan Book of Joshua was written in Arabic, with its first part in the year 1362 and its last part in the year 1513. Its final chapters deal with the events of the Samaritans during the periods of Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, Hadrian, and other emperors until the days of the Christian emperors.

Abu l’ Fath, Ibn Abi al-Hasan al-Samiri al-Danafi, was a fourteenth-century chronicler. His main work, the *Kitab al-Tārikh*, a chronicle of the fourteenth century written in Arabic, describes the history of the Samaritans until the year 756. The *Adler Chronicle*, written in Hebrew, describes the history of the Samaritans until 1899.

The main question in regard to the authenticity of the chronicles is whether the parts that are similar to biblical stories or to Talmudic sources are proof of their antiquity or their originality and whether it is possible through them to reconstruct the history of the community.

Adolph Büchler, for example, in his research on the Samaritan Book of Joshua, chapter 47, which is centered on the Samaritans and Hadrian in the second century CE, opposed the main claims for negating the value of this chronicle. In his opinion, despite the late date of the chronicle, we have to examine whether it is completely composed of legendary material without any basis or historical value or perhaps whether some of the descriptions in it at least preserve a reliable historical kernel that allows us to provide more serious consideration to this type of source.

Another perplexity that arises from a study of the chronicles is related to the fact that although the Samaritans recognized and accepted only the Pentateuch and the book of Joshua in the Samaritan version, the chronicles made use of the books of the prophets and, heaven forfend, even of the writings of their archenemy, Josephus Flavius.

James Montgomery, one of the pioneers of Samaritan studies, examined the chronicles and rejected them as historical sources. He argued that they “Add nothing to our scanty knowledge” and that at the most they are “ecclesiastical annals, framed upon a theological scheme of history and with the desire to edify.” In contrast to this extreme criticism of the chronicles, Paul Stenhouse a decade ago defended in general the importance of the chronicles and in particular that of the *Kitab al Tārik*.

Despite the profound critique of the authenticity and credibility of the Samaritan Chronicles, Benyamim Tzedaka, a Samaritan from Holon, has
recently composed a *Chronicle of the History of the Israelite-Samaritan People*, based primarily on Samaritan sources. The chronicle is written in Hebrew with the vocabulary of the Samaritan Pentateuch.\(^5\)

The Samaritan chronicles review the various exiles and present significant differences between them and the descriptions in the Bible and other sources. I shall briefly summarize the deportations in the late Samaritan sources and examine how these sources adjusted their description to the Samaritan beliefs and attitudes.

The Assyrian exile as testified in the Bible, mainly in 2 Kings 17, raises major difficulties among the Samaritans. The biblical description mentions a “total” expulsion in which the Assyrians make a two-way exchange, leaving the northern kingdom “empty” of its Israelite population and replacing them with people from various places in the Assyrian Empire. One of these places, named Cuthah, is the source for the negative tone of the name “Cuthim,” used for the Samaritans by their opponents; this term, with its pejorative connotations, connects the Samaritan community with their possible non-Israelite origins.

Although we can learn from additional biblical and Assyrian sources that some of the population of the northern kingdom was not exiled but remained in the territory of the kingdom under Assyrian rule, the Assyrian chronicles, as we have seen above, present the events of 745–722 BCE in a slightly different manner. They note the conquests of Tiglath-Pileser III and the exile to Assyria of all the Israelites residing in the northern parts of the Kingdom of Israel. They describe Hoshea ben Elah and the reactions of the Assyrians to the contacts between Hoshea and the king of Egypt, Osorkon IV (=So, 730–715/13 BCE).\(^5\) This was interpreted as a rebellion against Assyria and led to a three-year siege of the city of Shomron and the elimination of the northern kingdom and the capital city of Samaria.

For this essay, I shall focus my discussion and arguments mainly on the Samaritan Book of Joshua, chapter 45: “The History of Bokhtonassur (Nebuchadnezzar), the king of el-Mausil (Mosul).”\(^5\) The Samaritan Book of Joshua in chapters 43–44 describes the history of the premonarchic religious center in Shiloh in the eleventh century BCE, under the leadership of Eli, son of Yafni the priest, who is called the “erring man who was envious of the descendant of Finhas the Imam.”\(^5\)

The chronological order of the next chapters of the chronicle is unexpected. Chapter 45 deals with Nebuchadnezzar II, who lived in the seventh–sixth centuries BCE. Chapter 46 describes Alexander the Great, the hero of the
fourth century BCE, and chapter 47 focuses on the Roman emperor Hadrian, who lived in the second century CE.

Actually, in a chronicle named the “Book of Joshua,” the main subjects should be related to the entrance to the land, its occupation, and the settling process. The exceptions in the Samaritan Joshua are very challenging. The more important question is not about the episodes of history that the chronicle cited but rather those stories that were omitted.

The Samaritan Chronicles mostly ignore the Assyrian exiles of the years 721–701 BCE, trying (as discussed above) to separate the Samaritans from the events in the northern kingdom, Israel, apart from some events during these years that support the Samaritan traditions. Therefore, for them the first exile is related to Nebuchadnezzar II, king of Babylon (605–562 BCE), whose name in Jewish history symbolizes the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and the deportation of the Judean religious and military leadership and its elite to Babylonia. The events in Jerusalem are described in length, since it was an occasion for them to illustrate the destruction of the city el Quds [Jerusalem], the annihilation of its inhabitants, and the peak event of it: the burning of the edifice that was built by King Solomon.

Following the events in Judah, the chronicles shift their description to the north, which is called “our country.” The story gets a twist: the chronicles present a Samaritan exile, when the king forced them to leave their places in seven days. “Thereupon he took to goading the people and driving them out unto every country.” And “the children of Israel, who now got to the most remote parts of the world, scattered and dispersed throughout the regions east and west.” The Samaritan Book of Joshua mentions here that king Nebuchadnezzar II “brought people from el-Furs [Persia] and settled them in this country, the home of the children of Israel.” These exiles are mentioned later as those who were driven out from the land.

These descriptions raise some historical questions. First, the dating of the first Samaritan exile is problematical. Nebuchadnezzar II ruled for almost 130 years after the major exile of people from the northern kingdom in 720 BCE. Second, according to biblical and other external sources, Nebuchadnezzar II had no interest in the territory that the Samaritans called “our country.” Third, the Babylonians did not use two-way deportations. Therefore, speaking of the above-mentioned Persian deportees as people who were settled in the north is probably the author’s imagination based on his knowledge of 2 Kings 17:18–24.

The next verses of the chapter bring together some topics connected with the Samaritans “return” and “restoration.” “And God shall scatter thee among
all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth” (Deut 28: 64). In the framework of the account of the return and restoration, the author includes letters written by the Persian exiles living in the Samaritan territory, complaining to the king that “The earth is refusing her crops and fruits; for when the fruit promised well, the destroying blight would waste it.”

The book of Joshua ignored the episode about the lions and its ending and the aftermath described in 2 Kings 17:25–40 about the lions sent by God that attacked the new population in Samaria, since they did not worship him. In the biblical version, when the Assyrian king heard about the attacking lion, he ordered that a captive Israelite priest who originated from Samaria be sent to teach the new exiles the local religious customs and how to worship God in order to stop the outbreak.

Nevertheless, although the new settlers worshipped the God of Israel, they continued to serve their own gods in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they had been brought: “They would not listen, however, but persisted in their former practices. Even while these people were worshiping the Lord, they were serving their idols. To this day, their children and grandchildren continue to do as their ancestors did” (2 Kgs 17:40–41).

In their version of the book of Joshua, the Samaritans initiated the request for the king’s help regarding the drought in their country. The king consulted the Samaritan leaders in exile, who connected the situation in their homeland with their removal and the abandonment in it of the service of their God. They asked him to return them to their land so they could serve God on the Holy Mount. Here again the author of the chronicle is rejecting any ties between them and the “newcomers” brought by the Assyrians to Samaria.

King Nebuchadnezzar II responded to their request and declared, “Go and build the house of thy Lord and offer up the offerings, and serve your Lord as was your custom, and I will assist you.” Is this a Nebuchadnezzar II declaration? Can we consider the Babylonian king as an earlier Cyrus?

Cyrus’s declaration to the Jews in Babylon represented the general policy of the Persian Empire toward its subjects, most of whom were exiled by the Babylonians. This broad policy was also approved in the Cyrus Cylinder $^{56}$ as it applied to the subject nations in order to obtain their loyalty and faithfulness and the cooperation of their religious leadership. This was achieved by allowing the subject nations to return to their homelands, restore the temples that were destroyed by the Babylonians, and take with them all the articles belonging to the temples that were plundered by the Babylonians. However, Cyrus did not expel his subjects, and the return to the homeland was done
voluntarily. Those who preferred to stay in Babylon could stay, but they had to support the returnees with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.

In the cylinder and in the biblical declaration, Cyrus appears as divine messenger: “The great lord Marduk rejoiced in my deeds. Kindly he blessed me, Cyrus, the king, his worshipper, Cambyses, the offspring of my loins, and all of my troops, so that we could go about in peace and well-being.” In the Bible, “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah” (Ezra 1:2; Ezra 2; see also 2 Chronicles 36:23).

Comparing the two declarations creates some major difficulties. The Babylonians used to deport those conquered by them to Babylon. They used to exile the elite of the occupied population in order to exploit their expertise and left behind only the poor population. There is not a single shred of evidence that the Babylonian kings ever permitted exiles to return to their homelands.

The author of the Samaritan Book of Joshua turns King Nebuchadnezzar II into God’s messenger, adopting some characteristics of the biblical story about Cyrus and relating them to Nebuchadnezzar II. Though he did not initiate the return of the Samaritan exiles to Shechem, as Cyrus did with the Judeans, he accepted their request to return in order to save their fields.

The author added some details, such as the Samaritans asking the king for letters to all the Samaritan exiles to allow all the deportees to return together to their land. In his letters, the king permitted the expatriates to return to their homeland with his support. He allowed them to return to their holy place, build it up, and sacrifice to God.

In contrast to Cyrus, the Babylonian king urged all of them to assemble their wives and children, take their belongings with them, and leave quickly in order to serve their god who is “Mighty and Powerful.”

Unexpectedly, the chronicle also mentioned that among the Samaritan returnees there were also descendants of Judah from the exile to Babylon. According to the chronicle, these Judeans made a proposal to the Samaritans: “We will unite all of us and go to el-Quds [Jerusalem], and build it up, and we will be one word and one soul.” But the descendants of Aaron and Joseph, the Samaritans, rejected the proposal and said to them “No, on the contrary, we will go up to the Mount of Blessing and build up the holy place, and we will be one soul and one word.”

The author of the Samaritan Book of Joshua based this on a clash dated to 538–521 BCE described in Ezra 4. In this incident, the people who did
not leave the land as well as those who were exiled to Samaria by Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, in the mid-seventh century BCE requested the leaders of the return to Zion to let them participate in building the temple in Jerusalem. Their request was rejected, with the argument that “You have no part with us in building a temple to our God. We alone will build” (Ezra 4:3).

The interference of these people caused a delay in building the temple during the reign of Cyrus until the days of King Darius I, when the Jews were permitted by the king in 521 BCE to begin the building of the temple in Jerusalem.

The chronicle made use of the story in the book of Ezra but changed the role of its heroes. In the chronicle the Jews were the ones who caused the dispute between the Samaritans and Jews about which site is holier according to the prophet Moses, whether it was Mount Gerizim, the Mount of Blessing, or Jerusalem. And they continued the dispute until it became necessary for the intervention of the king. Zerubbabel and Sanballat came before the king and argued against each other concerning the question of the holiest site: was it Mount Gerizim or Beit el-Muqaddas [Jerusalem]?

The two based their claims on their holy books. The Samaritans centered their arguments on the book of Musa [Moses], in which it is said that the holy and proper place is the Blessed Mount Gerizim. Zerubbabel, on the other hand, relied, according to the Samaritan Book of Joshua, on certain books written after the days of Musa, which designated Beit el-Muqaddas [Jerusalem] as the holy place. Sanballat the Levite argued that Zerubbabel’s books were a lie and a fraud. In order to prove this accusation, he asked the king to allow him to throw the books into the fire to see which of them would be burned up.

The king permitted Sanballat to throw the books of Zerubbabel into the fire, and he did so, and they burned up. Zerubbabel, on the other hand, refused to throw the Samaritan book into fire, saying “My books are mine alone, but the Holy Book belongs both to him and to me.”

Zerubbabel’s refusal was interpreted by the king as fear that his books were false, and he was afraid that Sanballat’s book would not burn. However, since Zerubbabel was afraid that the king would put him to death, he took the book and threw it into the fire. The book jumped out of the fire. He cast the book once again, and it was not affected by the fire in the least. The third time he took the book and spat on a paragraph and cast it into the fire, and the place that he had been spat on burned, and then the book sprang out into the bosom of the king. The king then decided in favor of the Samaritan’s book.

The king immediately became angry at the children of Yehudah, and right away he put to death 36 souls of those who were present. As for Sanballat
and the Samaritans, they were honored by the king, and their leaders were promoted. The king sent them away with the whole multitude of Israel who returned from the exile, and their number was 300,000 men.

The author of the chronicle “purified” the existence of the Persian exiles. According to him, “The king sent unto all the Persians who had taken up residence in their assigned land and removed them from it to their own country.” The Samaritans entered into their assigned land, which is their holy place. And they built the sacred apparatus, similar to that which was in the former temple, and offered up a large number of offerings.\(^{58}\)

Reviewing the dispute between the two recalls the arguments between Jews and Samaritans in Egypt during the Ptolemaic period about the rightful temple. Was the Samaritan author familiar with Josephus’s descriptions in *Jewish Antiquities* 12.7–10, 13.74–79?\(^{59}\) Another question relating to the chronicle concerns the return of the Samaritans to the Samaria region and the building of a sacred apparatus similar to that which was in the former temple. Could this have been evidence that there was a temple on Mount Gerizim?\(^{60}\)

To sum up, what can be learned from the differences between the biblical sources and the Samaritan chronicles? The writers of the chronicles had to cope mainly with 2 Kings 17, which was perceived as testimony to the origins of the Samaritan community. In order to reject the biblical description, they had to create a different exile, diaspora, and return. On the one hand, they broke off any connection between the Samaritan community and the population that had been exiled from the northern kingdom and never returned, whose places of settlement are unknown. On the other hand, they distanced themselves from the peoples who had been brought by the Assyrians to Samaria and to the area of the northern kingdom after its destruction.

The writers of the chronicles preferred to describe the expulsion twice, the first time in relation to the destruction of Shomron and the second time in relation to the destruction of Jerusalem. On both occasions they return to the area of Mount Gerizim, the first time after seventy-two years and the second time after sixty-five years. On this occasion, 300,000 exiles returned to the Land of Israel.

This is an impossible number, considering the known figures for all the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles. The exaggeration is again intended to break off any connection with the foreign population brought by the Assyrians after the destruction of Shomron, since whatever the number might be, they were still the main population in the area. Besides this, the second exile does not make sense, since the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar had no interest at all
in the former northern kingdom; therefore, to link his name with the exile of hundreds of thousands from its area is incomprehensible.

These remarks and the matters we dealt with above oblige us to reject some of the descriptions in the chronicles and return to the question of the origin of the Samaritan community through a discussion of what happened to the Israelite population that remained in the northern kingdom and the foreign population brought by the Assyrians into the area of the northern kingdom.

NOTES


13. 2 Kings 17:1–6; Cogan, The Raging Torrent, 89–90.


15. Cogan, The Raging Torrent, 90–92; Cogan, Bound for Exile, 42–43.


19. Tadmor, “Campaigns of Sargon II.”
23. Ibid., 83–84, No. 4.10.


33. See 2 Chronicles 36:6–10. Jehoiakim was taken as a captive to Babylon, and his son Jehoiachin was his heir and successor in Judah.

34. 2 Chronicles 36:10: “his brother.”


36. See also Jeremiah 24:1, 27:20, 29:2.

37. See Jeremiah 39:10: “But Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard left behind in the land of Judah some of the poor people, who owned nothing; and at that time he gave them vineyards and fields.”


39. For a discussion on the difficulties related to the numbers of deportees, see Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 81–90.

41. Nehemiah 7:6: “These are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken captive and they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town.” And Nehemiah 7:66: “The whole company numbered 42,360, besides their 7,337 male and female slaves; and they also had 245 male and female singers.”


49. James Alan Montgomery, *The Samaritans, the Earliest Jewish Sect: Their History, Theology and Literature* (1907; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 311: “The inspired traditions of the ignorant and debased community have preserved just such legends as please the ecclesiastical appetite of a provincial sect whose life was intentionally lived apart from the world. Indeed we must bear in mind that what we possess are ecclesiastical annals, framed upon a theological scheme of history and with the desire to edify;
hence not to expect history in our sense of the word. When at last the keen Arabic spirit of historical research infected the Samaritans, so worthy and honest a chronicler as Abul Fath had little more to build upon than a residuum of inane traditions.”


51. Benyamim Tzedaka, Chronicle of the History of the Israelite-Samaritan People Based on Their Own Sources: From the Entrance of the People of Israel to the Land of Canaan until 2015 CE [3654 Years] [Hebrew] (Holon: A. B. Institute of Samaritan Studies Press, 2016).

52. 2 Kings 17:4: “But the king of Assyria discovered that Hoshea was a traitor, for he had sent envoys to So, king of Egypt, and he no longer paid tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year. Therefore Shalmaneser seized him and put him in prison.”

53. See note 47 above. I used Crane’s English translation.

54. The events are described in 1 Samuel 2–4.

55. In the chronicles, Nebuchadnezzar II, king of Babylon, is a king of the Persians. See The Samaritan Book of Joshua, chap. 45.


57. The author of the Samaritan Book of Joshua is describing here an anachronistic interpretation that the Samaritans accepted only the five books of the Torah, while the Jews accepted the Tanach (the entire Bible—the Pentateuch, Prophets, and Hagiographa).

58. See Anderson and Giles, Tradition Kept, 129–31. See also Stenhouse, “Samaritan Chronicles,” 85–93; Anderson and Giles, Tradition Kept, 164–68. The meeting was in Haran, and the king was Surdi. The leaders who met the king were Sanballat the Levite, the Samaritan leader, and Zerubabel, the Judean leader (Anderson and Giles, Tradition Kept, 231–32). The people who were left were exiled to the cities of Babylon (Anderson and Giles, Tradition Kept, 232–34; Bowman, Samaritan Documents, 99–100).

59. Reinhard Pummer, The Samaritans in Flavius Josephus (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 179–99. Pummer argues that what we have before us is a “combination of the accounts in the letter of Aristeas and in Josephus with the outcome reserved.”