

The Samaritan Temple of Mount Gerizim. The Context Of John Chapter 4 and the Samaritan Woman

BIBLE DICTIONARY

Josephus gives the following account of the erection of this temple: Manasseh, brother of Jaddua the high priest, was threatened by the Jews with deprivation of his sacerdotal dignity because of a marriage he had contracted with a foreign woman. His father-in-law, San-ballat, obtained permission from Alexander the Great, then besieging Tyre, to build a temple on Mount Gerizim. Manasseh was its first high priest. It became the refuge of all Jews who had violated the precepts of the Mosaic law. With this account must be compared [Neh. 13: 28](#), which from the names and circumstances probably relates to the same event. Josephus places the event 90 years later than the Bible. The establishment of the counterfeit worship on Gerizim embittered and perpetuated the schism between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Samaritans altered their copies of the Pentateuch by substituting Gerizim for Ebal in [Deut. 27: 4](#), and by making an interpolation in [Ex. 20](#), and so claimed divine authority for the site of their temple. Antiochus Epiphanes, at the request of the Samaritans, consecrated it to Jupiter, the defender of strangers (2 Macc. 6: 2). John Hyrcanus destroyed it (109 B.C.). Though the Emperor Zeno (A.D. 474-491) ejected the Samaritans from Gerizim, it has continued to be the chief sacred place of the Samaritan community. There the Paschal Lamb has been almost continuously offered by them up to the present day.

view north on road from Jerusalem
with Mt. Gerizim & Mt. Ebal in distance

Mount Gerizim

Ridge southwest of [Shechem](#) on the only east-west route through central [Samaria](#). The summit is almost 2900 ft. above sea level & more than 700 ft. above the narrow pass between Gerizim & the even higher ridge on the north side of the road, Mt. Ebal [3100 feet]. These mountains were of both strategic & religious importance from the time of the Hebrew patriarchs (18th c. BCE). They gained particular significance for later Israelites as the site of the first covenant renewal ceremony between the 12 tribes under Joshua (13th c. BCE). During four centuries of Israelite monarchy shrines to the south [[Jerusalem](#)] and north [Bethel] became more important than the area around Shechem.

But Gerizim reemerged as a religious center rivaling Jerusalem in the mid-5th c. BCE. Israelites who were excluded from the Judean temple because they did not meet the standards for purity established by Jewish religious reforms developed in the Babylonian exile were authorized by Sanballat, the Persian governor of Samaria, to erect their own temple on Mt. Gerizim. [Josephus](#) credits extensive reconstruction of this shrine to [Alexander the Great](#) (ca. 331 BCE). Under Greek dominion (330-130 BCE) Samaritan leaders sought to get [Hellenistic rulers](#) to favor their shrine over the temple at Jerusalem. So, when Judean armies occupied Samaria under [Johanan Hyrcanus](#) they destroyed the temple on Gerizim (127 BCE).

Yet Samaritans continued to regard the mount itself as sacred. Samaritan tradition identified it as the site for the appearance of an eschatological prophet

who would restore the Mosaic covenant. So it remained the focal point of Samaritan worship much as Jerusalem did for Jews after the destruction of their temple by the Romans (70 CE). The Samaritan Passover celebration is still conducted annually on its summit.

view north from top of Mt. Gerizim towards Mt. Ebal



The Remains of the Temple on Gerizim



A Modern View of Shechem from the Mountains

