

# Missions in Samaria

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## Preface

A few years ago I was asked to preach a series of four sermons on missions at a church. I decided to structure the sermons around the idea of missions to Samaria. Dr. Michael Janapin suggested that I could expand on the idea and make it into a book. I did not plan to do this, but eventually, I created an article that was broken into four sections based on the four sermons. Eventually, I decided to create a short book at a leisurely pace. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic and the enhanced quarantine placed on us here in the Philippines, I found I had time to put my efforts into it sooner rather than later.

Additionally, Acts 8 tells of how the church of Samaria was started because of a scattering of the Church of Jerusalem. That scattering was due to persecution. Today, we have a scattering of the church of a different form--- not being able to gather because of a contagion. Perhaps, however, we can gain from the experience of Acts 8. Perhaps this time of scattering can be redeemed. Joseph, in Genesis 50 could tell his

brothers that although what they did was intended to do great harm, God intended it for good to accomplish His will and save many lives.

I don't think it is beneficial to say that God acted to spread the COVID-19 virus or to come up with broad guesswork regarding the future or the mind of God. But much like Joseph in Genesis and Philip in Acts 8, perhaps we can serve in some small way as God's servants in taking something that does great harm, and find a way to create great good.

## **Table of Contents**

Introduction	5
Chapters	
1. The Problem of Samaria	9
2. The Preparation for Samaria	19
3. The Potential of Samaria	28
4.. Backpedalling in Samaria	36
5. The Pattern of Samaria	43
6. Missions in our own Samarias	56
Conclusions	69
Endnotes	73

## **Introduction**

This book started from a simple question. Why did Jesus specifically mention Samaria in Acts 1:8? One reason could be that the structure of the Book of Acts supports it. The gospel went out from Jerusalem to Judea AND Samaria and from there to the ends of the world. However, no other nation or region is mentioned. Galilee, the center of the ministry of Jesus is not listed. Babylon, the home of the largest group of Jews at the time was not listed. Syria was not included in the Great Commission of Acts 1, although it was the primary launching point of Gentile missions.

This book works from the premise that Samaria was specifically noted because the ministry to Samaria was important to Jesus, and perhaps He was concerned that it would not be as important to His disciples. If this is true, why would the apostles not be interested in reaching out to the Samaritans?

We will look at Samaria from two missiological fronts. First, we will look at it historically as an

example (good and/or bad) of missions outreach. Second, we will look at Samaria metaphorically as a type of mission field--- one close to home and yet decidedly not local in some key ways. From these two fronts I hope we can come up with a few tentative thoughts for us to day.

As Christians we know that we are supposed to love our enemies. However, history has shown that far too often we have fallen back into the pattern of loving our friends and hating our enemies. This is hardly a deep observation. It is a seemingly natural tendency of mankind to define social groups, establishing imaginary walls separating “Us” and “Them.” To reinforce these categories we begin to associate positive commendable qualities with those seen as “Us” and negative, contemptible, qualities with those seen as “Them.” How rarely do these qualities stand up to outside scrutiny.

However, as Christians, we are really called on to do better than that. We are called to love our enemies, and to show kindness to strangers or aliens among us. Certainly, if the Great Commandment, Golden Rule, and Great Commission are relevant in our actions and attitudes as Christians, they are relevant in our interactions with all peoples. Again, this is hardly a groundbreaking observation, but one that needs to be given as periodic reminders.

This book is broken into several chapters.

Chapter One is “The Problem of Samaria.” It looks at the issues that the Jews had with Samaria and the Samaritans in the Old Testament and Intertestamental Period.

Chapter Two is “The Preparation for Samaria.” It looks at how Jesus ministered in Samaria, and prepared His disciples for future ministry in Samaria.

Chapter Three is “The Potential of Samaria.” This looks at the expansion of the Gospel and the Church into Samaria as described in the Book of Acts.

Chapter Four is “Backpedalling in Samaria.” We might be tempted to think that the work in Samaria in the Book of Acts continued deep into the church age. Surprisingly, Christians soon rejected Christ's example and command, leading, arguably to a form of genocide. This is not exactly a happy ending to the story, but it can be lesson for us. Besides, the ending has not actually be written yet.

Chapter Five is “The Pattern of Samaria.” This looks at how we might learn from the past, the good and the bad. From this we can consider what we can learn as we find our own

“Samarias” today.

Finally, in Chapter 6 we will look at “Missions in our own Samarias.” What can and should missions in our own 'Samarias' look like?

This is a short book, and sometimes I feel it should be shorter. But I hope you will take the time to read it and consider if it has any worthwhile meaning for you, and me, and the church today.

## **Chapter One**

### **The Problem of Samaria**

As we see the development of a Jewish perspective of the group that came to be known as the Samaritans, it is understandable that these people were missional challenges for both the Jews and the early church. So let's consider, briefly, their history from the period of the divided kingdom up through the Intertestamental period.

Samaria was originally the term for the city established by King Omri, the ruler of the Kingdom of Israel (the "Northern Kingdom"). He established it as the capital. It was built to rival Solomon's Jerusalem. It was expanded and beautified under King Ahab. <Endnote 1> Of course it was not meant to rival Solomon's Jerusalem only, but also to serve as part of the rivalry with the Southern Kingdom and the line of Solomon and David. The city of Samaria gradually gained prominence and the name became associated with the region over time. Later, the term Samaria became associated with the region of Northern Israel. Samaritans then

became associated with residents of the region of Samaria, and the religion that was practiced by Samaritans became known as Samaritanism. It is possible that the name “Samaritan” was actually pejorative--- tying the people to the rivals of the Jews and linking them to the stereotype of the Northern Kingdom as religious apostates.

So what were some of the challenges or problems that Samaritans provided, unwittingly generally, to the Jews (and later to the early church)?

**The first problem was their ancestry.** Samaria was the land in Present-day Israel that at one time was the land inheritance of the children of Israel... particularly the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. According to the Old Testament, when the Northern Kingdom was broken up, Assyria took away tens of thousands of the Israelites and relocated them in present-day Iraq and Syria. Then they brought in thousands of foreigners into this region who intermarried with the Israelites that were left behind. King Sargon II of Assyria had recorded regarding the cities of the Northern Kingdom, “I set up again and made more populous than before. People from lands which I had taken I settled there.” <Endnote 2>

Ezra 4:2 spoke of people of mixed race who wanted to help in building the temple in Jerusalem. This help was rejected and led to conflict in Ezra and Nehemiah.

Ezra chapter 10 and Nehemiah 13 spoke of the efforts of both Ezra and Nehemiah to prevent Jews, especially priests from intermarrying with foreigners. This became a very big issue with calls for men to divorce themselves from their wives and families. Ignoring, just for a moment, the appropriateness of this response, one can see the growing attitude towards racial intermarriage. They tended to see this “unfaithfulness” to race as unfaithfulness to God. The Jews in the time of Christ thought of the Samaritans as descendants of these mixed groups. In other words, Samaritans were viewed as Israelites who violated God’s call to maintain racial “purity” and intermarried with other people.

I would like to take a bit of an aside on this issue for a bit. It is interesting to note that the Mosaic Law does not condemn intermarriage between Israelite and non-Israelite. In Deuteronomy 7:3, it states that the Israelites should not intermarry with the major Canaanite tribes. However, the main reason for this was because God had put these tribes under condemnation and so they were to be utterly destroyed (Deuteronomy 7:1-

2) Therefore the command was limited to specific tribes, for a unique reason that applied to no other people group. However, a cautious note was added that directly applied to these seven tribes, but could also be applied, loosely, to intermarriage in general. Intermarrying with foreigners risks leading to sons and daughters following foreign gods,

Generally, moral unfaithfulness that could spring from “racial” unfaithfulness was the big concern, as can be seen by stories of Samson, Solomon, and Ahab. Some marriages were not condemned, such as Moses and Zipporah, Salmon and Rahab, and Boaz and Ruth. In all three cases, the pagan spouse appears to have become a follower of the God of Israel. As such, the key issue was moot. By the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, this concern of intermarriage with foreigners leading to unfaithfulness to God became such a great (Nehemiah actually pointed out Solomon's mistake as the basis for this concern) that intermarriage with foreigners could be viewed as equivalent to violating the Mosaic Law. *(Note that the Samaritans for centuries prohibited intermarriage with non-Samaritans in a similar way for similar reasons. This only changed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where sons could marry non-Samaritan women as long as the women convert to the Samaritan faith.)*

The Samaritans were relatives of the Jews... but

they were the type of relatives that one likes to ignore... “black sheep of the family.” Samaritans were the black sheep of the Jewish family. Strangely, however, the Samaritans appeared to demonstrate a positive side of intermarriage. The Samaritans in the time of Christ were monotheists, worshiping the God of Abraham, and following the Law of Moses. It would not be too great a stretch to say they were one of the relatively few success stories of the Israelites sharing their faith beyond themselves.

**The second problem was their history.** After King Solomon died, Israel had civil war and the nation divided in the Kingdom of Israel in the North, and the Kingdom of Judah in the South. The Kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of Judah not always, but often, fought with each other. The Kingdom of Judah had as its capital, the city of Jerusalem.

The terms Samaria and Samaritan connect with Jewish history as terms of rivals. The term harkens back to the rivalry, and even warfare, between the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. The term suggests of a region and people who were unfaithful to the line of David, and the line of the Messiah. Even though the political breakaway was a response to the actions of King Rehoboam (grandson of King David), and was prophesied by as well as seemingly approved of by God, it is

understandable that the Jews, people of the Southern Kingdom would see the action as treasonous. The term "Samaria" was associated with that treason.

So the Jews--- the people of Judah--- were often in conflict with the people of Samaria, for hundreds of years. <Endnote 3> After the Babylonian captivity, Nehemiah returned to rebuild the destroyed walls of Jerusalem. While he was doing this, local people tried to prevent the rebuilding of these walls, even sending letters to Persia suggesting that the Jews were involved in sedition.

The Jews considered the Samaritans to be descendants from these enemies of Judah and Jerusalem. Continued feuding, and occasional violence, continued up until the time of Christ. So to the Jews, the Samaritans were bad neighbors. But because they were also related, they were more than bad neighbors... in fact, there were bad family. There was bad blood.

In truth, if one was quite honest, it could be argued that the Jews were worse neighbors to the Samaritans than vice versa. During the Hasmonean era, the Jews exercised their growing power in the region by attacking Samaritan sites. During the leadership of John Hyrcanus (ca. 111-112 BC) the Samaritan temple was destroyed along with other sites of

importance to the Samaritan faith. <Endnote 4>

We can fall into this trap as well. It is easy for us to view someone through the lens of social class or caste, political party, or group allegiance. It is often hard to see people as God sees them.

**The third problem was their faith.** According to the Old Testament, after Assyria transplanted foreigners into the region of Samaria (II Kings 17), the people suffered from a curse (wild animals). The people followed a tried and true method... learn about the local god and try to appease him or her. Recall Naaman grabbing bags of Israeli soil to bring with him to Damascus. Presumably, in his mind, to be a follower of the God of Israel meant that he should bring some of the land of Israel to his home.

The transplanted people set up a religion reminiscent of the local faith of Israel. Ultimately, they developed a competing religion that utilized a version of the Pentateuch, and eventually its own competing temple and synagogues. Their faith and beliefs were very similar to Judaism. They both believed in the God of Abraham, and in the Mosaic Law. Their differences stemmed from differences in how to interpret the Law. Much like Muslims centuries later, they revised the narrative so that the primary blessing came through them, not the Jews. (Jesus corrected

this with the woman at the well, in John 4, by stating that salvation is indeed through the Jews, but also that the disagreement between the two parties was becoming moot.) As such, despite similarities, the Samaritans were seen as apostates. The Jews of Jerusalem and surrounding areas believed that the only legitimate temple was the one in Jerusalem. The Samaritans had their temple on Mount Gerizim. Both locations had great religious significance in Israelite history.

Their faiths, however, were so similar that it may be more accurate today to describe Samaritanism not so much a separate religion, but a separate denomination within Judaism. In 70AD the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and, like the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim, has never been rebuilt. Unlike modern Judaism, Samaritanism did not end the priesthood and sacrifices on their temple site. Until today, Samaritans maintain a priesthood that they believe to be descended from Zadok and hold annual Passover sacrifices there.  
<Endnote 5>

**But these problems were not the real problem.**

Many Jews had allowed these differences to engender hate in their hearts for Samaritans.

They would commonly avoid Samaria in their travels. It seems that (from John 8:48) one of the harshest things a Jew could say about someone was that he was a demon-possessed Samaritan.

The disciples were not immune to this attitude. Luke 9:53-54 describes two of Christ's disciples wanting to destroy an entire Samaritan village due to a lack of hospitality. They asked Jesus permission to call down fire on a Samaritan who did not welcome them. Jesus did not permit this, but offered a preferable alternative--- go to a different village to receive hospitality.

The attitude of the disciples described in Luke 9 was a problem that Jesus had to correct. Just going to the next town would not be adequate. It is not surprising in Luke 10:5 that Jesus told His disciples NOT to go minister to Samaritans or Gentiles. Some have seen this as a racist attitude on the part of Jesus, or evidence that He saw His ministry as local only-- just to the Jews. A reasonable alternative explanation is that Jesus knew that His disciples were not ready to effectively minister cross-culturally.

I have certainly known good Christians who are so enmeshed in their own culture, that they could not effectively minister to people in other cultures. Many missionaries have funny, and sometimes tragic stories, of short-term missionaries who come to another country and just cannot deal with people of another culture.

They needed preparation. In some cases, they just they should not go. Humans are social creatures, but that social nature demonstrates itself not only in drawing people together, but also driving people apart.

Jesus did not choose His disciples just to reach out to Jews in Judea and Samaria (and Babylon, and diaspora groups throughout the Roman Empire and the Middle East). He was preparing them to go to ALL peoples. In the next chapter we will see some ways that Jesus did this.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Preparation for Samaria**

Clearly, the disciples were not ready to reach out to Samaritans. Much like Jonah, they seemed more open to the thought of God destroying them than saving them.

The attitude of the disciples needed to be changed first. As noted before, it is hardly surprising that Jesus warned the disciples not to go off and work in Gentile or Samaritan villages. They needed to be prepared.

Jesus prepared them on a number of occasions and in a number of ways. He made statements making it evident that His message and mission was to all people (Luke 4 in message in the synagogue of Nazareth, for example). He used non-Jews in positive roles in his messages (such as “The Good Samaritan”) and even compared them favorably to Jews on a number of occasions. Many of his parables suggested that God was ready to open the doors to people of all types, not just the “chosen few.” He did

miraculous acts for Gentiles, such as to the Gadarene demoniac, and the Samaritan leper.

One of these evidences of Jesus' favor of Gentiles is in Matthew 15:21-28, <Endnote 6>

*And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and cried, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely possessed by a demon." But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." And he answered, "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.*

In this you can see three attitudes exhibited by Jesus that seem out of character. They draw into question Jesus's favor of this woman--- perhaps even Gentiles in general. He acted and responded in ways that suggested that the woman was:

**Not worthy of His time v. 23**

**Not worthy of His attention v. 24**

**Not worthy of His respect v. 26**

Many struggle with this, but in the broader context it appears as if Jesus was teaching his disciples a lesson by mimicking their attitudes. The disciples said to Jesus... Send her away... She is annoying us... She is bothering us. She is not worthy of our respect, not worthy of our attention, not worthy of our time.

But the interaction of Jesus with the woman undermined these attitudes, and in the end Jesus gave her all three. He gave her His time. He gave her His attention. He gave her His respect. It seems as if Jesus used this drama to convey a message to his disciples.

The question is, Did the disciples get the message? It seems as if they did. Firstly, thirty plus years after this event, Matthew

remembered it and took time to tell us it. Not only did Matthew remember, but Peter did as well, because Mark recorded Peter's version of this event as well.

Secondly, according to Matthew, right after this event Jesus took them to an area near the Sea of Galilee. But this was an area where the people were predominantly Gentiles, not Jews. Many focus on the feeding of the 5000, but often ignore the feeding of the 4000 (or consider it a competing tradition of the same event). But perhaps the feeding of the 4000 is in some ways more important. The feeding of the 5000 was for the Jews. But the feeding of the 4000 was for the Gentiles. Matthew specifically notes the people praising the God of Israel, suggesting that up to this point, He was not their god. This event was the largest single event that was recorded where Jesus shared the good news with Gentiles (non-Jews), and He did it right after helping the Canaanite woman. Continuing with Matthew 15: 29-33

*And Jesus went on from there and passed along the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain, and sat down there. And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the dumb, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, so that the throng*

*wondered, when they saw the dumb speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.*

*Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days, and have nothing to eat; and I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." And the disciples said to him, "Where are we to get bread enough in the desert to feed so great a crowd?"*

Here, the disciples did not tell Jesus to send those people away because they were bothersome. They did not suggest that the people were not worth their time, attention, and respect. The only concern was that they did not know how they could help in feeding them.

The feeding of the 5000 already occurred, and one might say that they should have known what Jesus would do. But to be fair, Jesus did not feed every group that came to Him. And the only other group that Jesus fed was made up of Jews. Perhaps the disciples were not ready to see that what Jesus did with the Jews, He desired to do, and could do, with the Gentiles.

*And Jesus said to them, "How many loaves have you?" They said, "Seven, and a few small fish." And commanding the crowd to sit down on the ground, he took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied; and they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces left over. Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children.*

This showed Jesus working with Gentiles. Jews, as a group at least, saw themselves at odds with Gentiles, especially those Gentiles who lived and ruled on land they considered to be their own. Yet they had even bigger problems with Samaritans. Jesus gave another lesson.

A third passage was John 4. It is interesting that in the previous chapter Jesus is speaking to a well-respected Jewish religious leader. In the next chapter He is talking to a Samaritan woman who has had many husbands. The fact that she has had many husbands could point to loose morals, or perhaps a more likely scenario is that she is barren. Either way, in stark contrast to Nicodemus, she is a person shunned by Jews,

and even to some extent from her own people, on several levels.

John 4 is a long passage so you can take a moment and read it for yourself. Consider first the three passages, the previous two that I have put in the book for you to read, and then this new passage.

- In the first passage, Jesus goes to a Gentile region and reaches out to a Canaanite, or Gentile woman.
- In the second passage, Jesus goes to a Gentile region and reaches out to a group of Gentiles.
- In this third passage, Jesus reaches out to a Samaritan woman, and then to an entire Samaritan village.

Jesus spoke to the Samaritan Woman... in a caring manner. He did this when the disciples were not around. When they came back they were surprised to find Jesus talking to a Samaritan woman. But this time they were getting smarter... They were thinking (in verse 27) "What is Jesus doing... why is he talking to her." But they kept silent.

Jesus let them know that he was planting the seed of God's work in this Samaritan village and giving the disciples the opportunity to join in God's work by harvesting what was planted. (Verse 37) It goes on to say that many Samaritans responded (Verses 38-42). The disciples were able to witness a great revival and even, in some small way, be a part of it. Jesus was modeling what He wanted His disciples to, ultimately, do themselves.

These passages suggest a few lessons.

- We need to learn that others are worthy of our attention
- We need to learn that others are worthy of our time
- We need to learn that others are worthy of our respect
- We need to learn to interact with others (talk, share, help)
- We need to see that God is already working with others
- We need to jump in and join God in what He has already started with others

As we read further in the New Testament, we discover that the disciples did learn these lessons from Jesus. Even then it was still a slow process. Despite the last talk that Jesus shared with His disciples telling them to go into all the world, and despite the Pentecost event that clearly showed that the message of God was for all people by showing it was for all languages, they were slow in putting this understanding into practice. But they did eventually act, as we will see in the next chapter.

## **Chapter Three**

### **The Potential for Samaria**

With Pentecost, the church age formally started, and the twelve disciples were now commissioned as apostles... going out into the world to share the good news of Christ. So what did they do?

They stayed in Jerusalem. Not a bad idea at first. But they stayed in Jerusalem quite awhile. They were designated to be apostles. The term "apostle" means that they are called out or sent out, or to act as ambassadors. They were not supposed to stay in Jerusalem or any church. They were supposed to reach out to new areas and new peoples. Some have found it strange that James the half brother of Jesus took on the chief elder or pastor role in Jerusalem when the apostles were there. But it was not the job of an apostle to lead, at least not to lead in a formal hierarchy. They were to reach out.

But finally, the people in Jerusalem began to

reach out to neighboring towns and communities... because of St. Paul. It was not Paul the Apostle of Christ that motivated them, but Paul (aka Saul) the persecutor of the brethren who did. At this time, he wasn't yet what would normally call a saint. According to Acts chapter 8, Saul (aka Paul) went around Jerusalem house to house of Christians dragging them off to jail. So Christians began to scatter and tell others about Christ. Persecution is NOT always bad. Suffering is NOT always bad. In Acts 8:4-8,

*Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs which he did. For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city.*

Philip was not one of the twelve disciples. He was not described as an apostle, although he embrace the apostolic role of opening up new mission fields for Christ. He was actually a

deacon at the church of Jerusalem. In Acts 6 there were 7 deacons assigned to help out in the church. Philip was one of them. Philip was different from the twelve disciples in that he was a Hellenized Jew. That is, he was Jewish by blood but Greek in many aspects of culture. It is interesting that many of the great early missionaries and evangelists of the early church were people who were comfortable living in two different cultures. Philip had roots in Jewish culture and in Greek culture and appeared to be comfortable in sharing with people of other cultures. Barnabas was a Jew raised in Cyprus. Paul was a Jew raised in Tarsus, a Greek city known as a center of philosophy.

So Philip leaves Jerusalem because of the persecution and goes to Samaria, and he begins sharing God's love with the people of Samaria. And they responded. Continuing with verses 14-17,

*Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.*

Here we get to a confusing spot in the Bible. The Samaritans received the Holy Spirit and did so linked to a miraculous gift... in this case speaking in tongues (miraculously speaking foreign languages). Now this is not the only time where the receiving of the Holy Spirit was linked to a miraculous sign. In fact, four times in Acts, the receiving of the Holy Spirit was tied to a miraculous gift. It was a sign, pointing to a great truth.

In this case there is a time difference between belief in Christ and the receiving of the Holy Spirit. This is the only case that we know of after Pentecost where this has happened. In fact, when we go to the Pauline Epistles, such as Ephesians and I Corinthians, Paul makes it very clear that all Christians have the Holy Spirit, even though not all Christians have miraculous gifts.

Different groups choose different directions to deal with the contradiction. Some focus on the events of Acts as normative over the statements in the Epistles. Some focus the statements in the Epistles and view the unique events in Acts as non-normative. This is not that kind of book--- a book to deal with such an issue. However, it would suggest a missiological solution to the time lag issue in Acts 8.

Perhaps, God was still trying to teach His

disciples (and us) something very important. Consider the four miraculous signs of the Spirit in Acts:

- The first miraculous arrival of the Holy Spirit was to the Jews... the 120 in the upper room on the day of Pentecost... in Acts chapter 2. It involved the visible sign of flames and the auditory sign of foreign tongues. None of the other three events includes flames as far as we know.
- The second miraculous arrival of the Holy Spirit was to the Samaritans, here in Acts 8.
- The third miraculous arrival of the Holy Spirit was to the Roman Cornelius, and other Gentiles, in Acts 10.
- The final miraculous arrival of the Holy Spirit recorded was to followers of John the Baptist who followed Christ in Acts 19. (The followers of John the Baptist could easily have been thought of by the early Christians as the one group that might “inclusively” be redeemed by Christ without truly following Christ).

The receipt of the Holy Spirit is available to all

people who place their faith in Christ... to Jews, to Samaritans, to Gentiles. But why would the Holy Spirit delay in coming to the Samaritans when, as far as we know, He never delayed elsewhere after Pentecost? The Apostles were present at Pentecost. Peter was present in the house of Cornelius when Gentiles came to Christ. Paul was present when the followers of John the Baptist accepted Christ.

But the apostles were not there when the Samaritans accepted Christ-- only Philip the Evangelist... a deacon of the church of Jerusalem. God needed the apostles to see something not just hear about it. We are the same way sometimes. It is not good enough to hear about something amazing, or read about something amazing. Like Thomas, sometimes we need to see to truly believe.

The question is, did it work? Did the apostles learn something that changed their attitude and actions. The answer is without a doubt, Yes. Continuing with verse 25 of Acts 8,

*Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.*

Peter and John stayed in Jerusalem for years without sharing the Gospel with Samaritans. When Peter and John went up to Samaria to see what Philip was doing, it appears that they went directly there without sharing the Gospel with Samaritans on the way. But once they saw that Samaritans were accepted by God in the same manner as Jews, the text states that they stopped in many Samaritan villages along the way back to Jerusalem preaching the Good News.

Some years later, Peter spoke at the Jerusalem Council and summed things up. Acts 15: 6-11. The question was whether a non-Jew had to become a Jew... or at least act like a Jew to become a Christian. A good question. But Peter learned something from this event and the event with the Gentile Cornelius and his family.

*The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter rose and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit just*

*as he did to us; and he made no distinction between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”*

The Apostles learned their lesson, and through them the Gospel of Christ has gone from Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth.

So why is this chapter described as “The Potential in Samaria.” The disciples of Jesus saw the problems of Samaria. They experienced the preparation for Samaria as disciples of Christ. Jesus set up the plan for Samaria, training His disciples so that they could not only see the potential, but be part of turning that potential into a reality. As Jesus told them while in Samaria, the harvest is indeed ready, but the laborers are few.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Backpedalling in Samaria**

In the first century, Samaria was a region with a sizable populace, over a million residents, with a vibrant (Samaritan) faith. Not so today. Why is this? One might wonder what happened to the Samaritan faith. Did it lose the war in the battle of ideas/ideologies? Or perhaps they were lost to assimilation in conversion to Christianity since the Book of Acts describes such a mass conversion. And yes, over 2000 years there were many Samaritans who converted, often willingly and sometimes unwillingly, to Christianity or Islam.

The truth is that the Samaritan faith did not simply die so much as it was murdered. Samaritism did not just fall, it was pushed. This part is a bit sad, but we learn from both the good and the bad.

During the time of the Byzantine Empire, Samaria was a turbulent place. Christian writers often used Samaritans or Samaritanism in

negative analogies. The government was oppressive, both to non-Christians and to Christians who were not of the same form of Christianity as the emperor. This was so true that Coptic Christians in Egypt welcomed Islamic invaders in the 7<sup>th</sup> century to free themselves from the tyranny of the Christian rulers of Byzantium. The oppression often showed itself in violence. Samaritans experienced this oppression in terms of taxes, laws, and violence.

*Despite the centrality of Christianity to Byzantium, there seems always to have been a certain savagery in the empire. The belief of the early church that Christianity and killing were fundamentally incompatible had long since been abandoned in Byzantium past as it had in Western Europe. The conversion of Rome to Christianity in the fourth century had led to a rapid reinterpretation of warfare as potentially undertaken in service to God; the Christian soldier could fight for his emperor safe in the belief that the emperor's cause was that of God.*

<Endnote 7>

During the reign of Emperor Zeno (474-491AD) tensions grew. According to one account, the

emperor had required Samaritans to convert to Christianity. When they refused, they revolted and this led to a violent response killing tens of thousands of Samaritans. Some argue that the story is backward and that the revolts preceded the demand to convert. Either way, conversion was less connected with embracing the good news of Christ voluntarily, and more connected to risk of the sword and death.

During the time of Emperor Justinian during the next century an edict was established that virtually made being a Samaritan by faith, illegal. There were a series of revolts by the Samaritans that led to violent reprisals by the government. This resulted in the Samaritan population reducing from the hundreds of thousands to tens of thousands. <Endnote 8>

The Islamic invasion gave some reprieve, but special taxes and periodic forced conversions and killings, especially during the Abbasid Caliphate and Ottoman Empire, took their toll. By the end of the Ottoman Empire in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Samaritanism reached its lowest point with just over 100 adherents. Since then, under the British mandate, the Israeli government, and the Palestinian Authority, Samaritanism has grown such that it has in 2020 over 800 adherents.

Today, the people who identify themselves as Samaritans are located in two small communities, both of approximately equal size.

One of these is on Mount Gerizim, while the other is in a suburb of Tel Aviv. There seems more of a tendency today to see Samaritanism as a unique sect of Judaism, as opposed to a distinct competitor to that faith. In fact, their similarities to Judaism greatly outweigh their differences. In some ways, the remaining Samaritans are a testimony to the tenacity of faith in the God of Abraham.

Sadly, they are also a testimony to the tendency of Christians not to take the message of Christ seriously. Jesus sought to undermine the prejudices of the Jews regarding Samaritans, and specially commanded His apostles to reach out to Samaritans with the Good News. Yet as Christianity grew in power these prejudices grew in strength and violence, in opposition to Christ's message.

This should serve as a warning to us. There is often a tendency in religion to focus on power. When the Samaritans appeared to have power, in the 4<sup>th</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC and the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, this was when they were attacked most viciously, by the Jews in the first case and by Christians in the second case. Their perseverance was not only a testament to the strength of their faith but also their relative weakness around larger and more aggressive faith groups. Their weakness made them less threatening to those around them.

Christians were called to love friend and enemy, not fear and attack. Why would Christians often choose violence over love? There are obvious answers--- sin, selfishness, and tribalism. But these terms are abstract. Sometimes we must personalize it, and try seeing a situation from an uncomfortable position.

Consider some situations from Biblical lands. It is easy to cheer with the Israelites as they marched around the walls of Jericho as the walls begin to give way. It, however, takes a special effort to picture oneself as a father (or mother) in Jericho standing on the walls of the city looking out, fearful for himself and his family and friends, as his world (literally) crumbles around him. The same can be said today as many Christians seem to find it easy to side with the Israelis in the West Bank, while being shockingly unsympathetic of the plight of Muslim and Christian (and Samaritan) Palestinians.

The answer, is not to pick a side. When Joshua was alone (in Joshua chapter 5. read it now if you don't remember), he saw a soldier dressed for battle. Joshua asked if this soldier was on his side or the enemy. The answer was neither. He was of the army of God. Joshua immediately responded bowing down and taking direction. The question is not whether God was on the side of Israel or the side of the Canaanites. Neither was it whether God was on the side of

the Jews or the Samaritans, nor the Israelis or the Palestinians, nor the Christians or the Muslims. The question is are we on God's side--- or not. Jesus has told us that if we truly love Him, we keep His commandments. If we don't keep His commandments, we are not on His side. Pretty simple, but it is hard to let go of the temptation to try to bargain with God to follow us rather than we follow Him.

This chapter is a bit sad because it looks like what Jesus and the early church did was destroyed. There is some truth to that, but not entirely. Many Samaritans chose to follow Jesus. Gradually they assimilated into the broader Body of Christ, losing their cultural identity. (This is not the book to decide if this lose of cultural distinctives is a good thing or not.) Additionally, there are examples that we can look back on for positive inspiration.

For example, the Byzantine emperor Theodosius forbade special taxes upon the impoverished Samaritans; the Christian Germanus helped the Samaritans continue their rite of circumcision after the authorities had forbidden it; the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem declared to the Ottoman Turks that the Samaritans, like Jews and

Christians, were people of the Book and ought not be persecuted; and the American E.K. Warren built medical and educational facilities for the fragile community at the beginning of the twentieth century. <Endnote 9>

These first chapters described a complex history with a wide range of relations between Jew and Samaritan, and between Christian and Samaritan. But what does this mean to us today? Even though Samaritanism has grown almost 700% in the last 100 years, it is still unlikely that many of us will interact with a Samaritan in our lifetime. But since few of us are likely to live in a completely monocultural society, we have the blessing of the story of the many groups, including the Samaritans, that shared Palestine over the centuries. For the Samaritans, there were have painful times (2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD to name just a couple), there has been (relatively few) highpoints such as the 1<sup>st</sup> century. We can learn from the 1<sup>st</sup> century church. Still, our role is not to recreate the 1<sup>st</sup> century church, but create, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the 21<sup>st</sup> century church. So the following chapters will suggest some patterns and lessons.

## **Chapter Five**

### **The Pattern of Samaria**

In the history of Samaria, we can see at least two major patterns. One of these is very negative, and the other quite positive. History, sadly, often is quite ambivalent in this way, and Samaria is no exception.

#### **Pattern #1**

When one looks at the Judeo-Christian relationship with Samaritanism, one sees a pattern. Things started out pretty bad four centuries before Christ and things did not improve. In fact, arguably, it reached its lowest during the destructive attacks by John Hyrcanus. By the time of Christ things had reached an uncomfortable peace. This peace hid the great anger and distrust that existed between the two groups. As noted before, this attitude can be seen by the disciples of Jesus asking Him permission for them to call down fire to destroy a village that had failed to show them hospitality.

With the ministry of Christ things changed. He challenged the attitudes of the Jews, and then demonstrated care and concern for Samaritans in both symbolic and practical ways. During the Church Age, this openness continued (although it is interesting that it was initiated by a Hellenistic, bicultural, Jew, not by any of the Apostles who were Hebraic Jews. This outreach into Samaritan land may have been the highwater mark. After this, things seemed to go downhill, although it is hard to be certain based on the limited sources. As Christianity became more Greek and less Jewish, animosity to Jews and Samaritans grew... leading to violence a few centuries later.

What drives this pattern? I am not necessarily competent to say. However, I would like to make a few tentative suggestions. First, the negative attitude of Jews to Samaritans was deeply ingrained, so when the example of Jesus and the early church was removed, the old resilient attitudes returned. This may seem a bit ridiculous, but Christians today can still align themselves emotionally with the Old Testament writers... feeling anger at groups, like the Assyrians, Babylonians, Philistines and more, that don't even exist as extant groups today. It is really strange if you think about it. There are Christian groups today that still hold animosity for the Jews for reasons that are nearly

incomprehensible in light of God's sovereign choice to work through them historically for our benefit. There are others that place such an unwavering support to the Jews in Israel today, that they will overlook nearly any atrocity done by them. Humans are funny.

A second possibility is rejected love. As the followers of Christ grew in the first century there were growing conflicts with the Jewish populace who did not decide to follow Christ. This rejection resulted in truly unhelpful polemics by a number of the early church fathers. A similar thing happened in the life of Martin Luther struggling with Jewish rejection of the grace of God through Christ by faith alone. Those that self-identify as Samaritans during the Church Age are essentially those who rejected the message of Christ. As illogical as it may be, love easily transitions to hate when overtures of love are rejected. This is especially true when the love exhibited is conditional--- essentially "I love you, but only as long as you do \_\_\_\_\_ for me." In a Christian sense, certainly, this is not love.

A third possibility, at least an exacerbating factor, is tokenism. Again, this is a problem that simply doesn't make sense, yet repeats itself across societies and time. Maybe it is easier to use a

story to explain this one.

Imagine Tom. Tom is a racist-- perhaps he is racist against people whose skin tone is different than his own. He is racist in attitudes and many practices. However, if you suggest to Tom that he is a racist, he will tell you in no uncertain terms that he is not a racist at all. His proof of this is Bill. Perhaps Bill was a neighborhood kid he grew up with. Or maybe Bill is a friend of his at work. Or maybe Bill is a guy who married a cousin of his and so joins family reunions. Bill is noticeably different in skin tone and therefore it is obvious (in the thinking of Tom at least) that Tom could not be a racist if he is, or was, a friend of Bill.

The reality, however, is that Tom may, in effect, be using Bill as a “free pass” of sorts to feel good about his own openmindedness, allowing himself to maintain his racist attitudes. In most cases Tom would not be self-aware of this process. I have known many men who have married a woman of a different ethnicity and yet are surprisingly prejudiced against that ethnic group. It really should not be so, but the human mind just works that way. Perhaps the openness of Jesus and the early church to the Samaritans helped give comfort to later Christians that they were open and loving Samaritans even while enacting legislation and promoting violence against them.

You might say that this has nothing to do with us today. Few if any Christians now feel open animosity about Samaritans living today (although some do so indirectly by holding animosity against Palestinians, who include hundreds of Samaritans). It would be embarrassing for Christians, members of the largest religion on earth to be holding deep resentment against a group of less than 1000 adherents.

However, the pattern can exist elsewhere. Many Evangelical Christians bristle at the charge that they tend to focus on spiritual concerns to such an extent that they show little concern for social needs. In response to this, the name of William Wilberforce is often brought up. He was a 19<sup>th</sup> century British Evangelical politician who worked tirelessly for slaves and other abused groups. He is often used, along with a few others who joined in the Abolitionist movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to show that Evangelical Christians are deeply concerned about social justice and social care.. However, is it possible that Wilberforce and the others from almost two centuries ago have allowed many Evangelicals to feel good about their standing in terms of social responsibility-- incorrectly.

## **Pattern #2.**

While pattern #1 was unfortunate, Samaria is

also part of a more positive pattern. Acts 1:8 speaks of missions outreach beginning in Jerusalem and expanding to Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Of course, as noted earlier, this statement simply could be looked at as descriptive... what had actually happened as described in the Book of Acts. Additionally, it could be looked at as thematic... providing the structure for the book of Acts. But one can also look at this passage as prescriptive... providing a structure for missions. If the last of these was the case, one could say that missions exists as:

- Jerusalem. Local or E-1 missions
- Judea and Samaria. Regional or E-2 missions
- Ends of the earth. International/cross-cultural or E-3 missions

If one looks at these places as describing different types of missions, it DOES affect how mission work is done.

But should one separate between Judea and Samaria? Both are regional. The obvious difference is that Judea was populated by people that the Apostles would be fairly

comfortable with. Samaria, however, was populated with people who were not appreciated. The term Samaritan was used not only to describe people from Samaria, but also “bad” Jews. Jews disliked the Samaritans as a group but tended to deal with them by ignoring them.

I have heard people argue against international or cross-cultural missions on the basis of “Why send missionaries overseas when we have so many people who need to be saved who live next door to us?” On one level I must disagree with this. There is probably no place on earth where there is 100% success in evangelism so failing to move outward while there are unsaved nearby is nothing less than a call never to reach out beyond borders.

On a different level, there is some truth. The gospel is like water in that it flows along the paths of least resistance. A former missions professor of mine described the world as being a waffle, not a pancake. When one pours syrup on pancakes, it spreads smoothly and evenly across the surface. However, waffles are different--- one must intentionally move the syrup around intentionally because the surface creates resistance to even spreading. The resistance for the gospel message comes from physical distance, language, and culture. However, often these resistances can be just as great locally. Consider the following resistances

or barriers that can be more local:

- **Aliens and foreigners.** Samaritans were seen as foreigners who had taken over Jewish lands. It is easy for many to be excited about evangelism of foreigners in foreign lands ("where they belong"), while being very uncomfortable with similar foreigners among us. The Mosaic Law required the Israelites to demonstrate hospitality to these people (Leviticus 19:33-34). The argument is that Israelites should be able to empathize with these people since they were aliens in Egypt. As an American myself, my ancestors came from Sweden to the US in the late 1800s. In theory, most Americans should be able to draw from this and empathize with foreigners (legal and illegal) among them. But this often doesn't happen, even among American Christians. I must admit that my ability to empathize with foreigners in lands not their own comes mostly because I am in that situation, living in a foreign country.
- **Religion.** While to us today, we may see Samaritanism as being a version of Judaism--- worshiping the same God, utilizing the same sacred text, and practicing their faith in almost the same

way as Jews--- for the Jews the Samaritans were part of a competitive, even virulent, faith. The nearness of Samaria to Judea and Galilee most likely has been a factor in this. The places on earth that are religiously monocultural, are rapidly becoming few and far between. Many struggle with this. When I first moved to Baguio City, local pastors warned me about the “invasion” of Muslims from Southern Philippines with their intent of creating a sultanate based in Baguio. I don't know about that, but the opportunity of Christians to reach out to people of other faiths is so much easier if they live next door. Despite that, Christians (like most groups) like to be around people that they BELIEVE share the same culture, values, feelings, and motivations. It is hard to see diversity as a good thing.

- **Classes, castes and “moral groups.”** Samaritans were an entire society in Samaria. As such, it included many classes and other groups existing together. However, Samaritans can also serve as a group within Jewish society or other societies. For many centuries a sizable population of Samaritans lived in Damascus-- a minority culture in the broader culture. Sadly, centuries ago that

population was destroyed by a Muslim ruler. In situations like this, such a group could be lumped in with some other classes or marginalized groups. This could include economic classes such as the poor, the destitute, or the homeless. They may be groups looked down on or judged because of profession. In the first century in Judea, publicans (tax collectors) were looked at unfavorably based on stereotypes as to how they act in a criminal manner, as well as the view that they were treasonous against their own people. Prostitutes were also looked down as as being especially sinful. Some groups may be looked down upon not because of profession but because they may be seen as especially under the judgment of God. This may include the leperous, those with visible disabilities, or those who are seen as sexually deviant.

When you get right down to it, there are an awful lot of people in any community that may be avoided by those who claim to have the good news of Christ. Even when reached the local church may struggle to open up to them. I have seen people who were desperately poor, or recovering drug addicts, or former Muslims, or former prostitutes, or those struggling with sexual identity find themselves not welcomed

into the local church. This pattern repeats itself in societies around the world.

Perhaps we can look at Samaria as describing the people near us that we ignore, actively avoid, or act against. Perhaps we hold stereotypes about them. Or maybe we don't appreciate their unique qualities. Or maybe we don't understand them... or we are made uncomfortable by them.

Often Christians are not good at recognizing their own Samaritans. All Christians (definitely myself included) need to consider who and where are their Samaritans.

So what are the characteristics of this pattern I am talking about in this section? First, it is intentional. The Great Commission is not just about moving further and further outward. There is an intentionality to reach those that are despised and/or ignored. Jesus spoke to many different people and peoples, but He did, with intentionality, prioritize His time and energy to be where such groups (including the Samaritans) were and demonstrate God's love to them. Second, God uses the right people to reach these groups. The "woman at the well" was the right person to open the heart doors of the people to listen to Christ. In the New Testament,

it was Philip the Evangelist (a Hellenistic Jew) who first reached out to the Samaritans (and the Ethiopian eunuch). It wasn't the Hebraic Jews who initiated this. Perhaps the bicultural standing-- one foot in Judaism and one in the Greek culture- gave him an advantage to be open to those of other cultures. Certainly, it took the command of Christ, a special vision, a divine command, and miracle of the Spirit to open Peter's mind to the idea Gentiles are welcomed into the Kingdom of God. Even then, it was still more common for Gentiles to be reached by Hellenistic Jews, such as Barnabas and Paul.

The “right person” may be an outsider or an insider. In fact, it is likely to include both. In different ministries names for such a person may include: Missionary, Man of Peace, Good Informant, or Champion. The terms describe those who can bridge the gap between the Gospel and the people, or between outsiders and insiders.

With all of this in mind, I believe we can explore a few possible responses. Jesus did not accept the status quo. He broke cultural taboos... and today as then, there are taboos that deserve to be broken. During the persecution of the Church in Jerusalem, many Christians used the scattering of the church to spread the faith to other parts of Judea. Philip, however, used it as an opportunity to spread the gospel into

Samaria. We live in a time of fear and uncertainty as well. What opportunities does this provide us today?

The next chapter we will explore this further. Such a chapter should be a whole book. Instead, we will explore just a couple of ideas and expand them for ministering in 'Samaria.'

## **Chapter Six**

### **Mission to our own Samarias**

So how do we reach out to our own Samarias? If one accepts the metaphor that Samaria is that community near us that is different to us that we don't really interact with, and Samaritans are those who live in these communities, how might we break down these barriers? Here are a few, tentative suggestions.

#### **Change the Narrative**

While we may say that we care about truth, we really care about how truth interacts with feelings. Truth plus feelings equals meaning. Stories are more meaningful to us as humans because stories pull us in emotionally, not just intellectually. Barriers often exist because of stories that we tell ourselves (or “they” tell “themselves”). How might we do this? Stories can, however, also tear down barriers.

One way is to Subvert the Tropes. Jesus did this in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The story

could have followed a classic structure maintaining a mythic role supporting cultural values and prejudices. Consider the following story:

*One day a Gentile had business in Jericho and so started the windy arduous road down to that village from Jerusalem. At one of the blind turns of this road he was accosted by highwaymen who stole everything he had and left him for dead.*

*As he was lying there bleeding, a tax collector came up to him. However, the tax collector did not even slow down but hurried on past. "No profit here for me," he thought, "and whoever attacked him may be waiting for me as well." Soon another man came along the trail-- a Samaritan. "Better him than me. One less Jew to worry about." He also hurried onto his destination.*

*After awhile, a poor Jew came by. He saw the Gentile and had pity on his plight. He thought to himself, "The Law says that I must show hospitality to all, including aliens and strangers. I certainly cannot just leave this man here." So the poor Jew cleansed and bandaged the Gentile's wounds and clothed him as best he could, and put him on his donkey and brought him to Jericho where he tended to the man until he was able to care for himself.*

This story fulfills the common tropes of the time with tax collectors being too concerned with self and with money to provide help, and Samaritans being bigoted, selfish, and not obeying the Mosaic Law. The poor Jew, however, piously does what is right in honor to his faith and to his God.

As you know, I am sure, Jesus did not do this. The unmerciful ones were not only Jews, but they were Jewish religious leaders. The merciful one, the hero, was the Samaritan.

By learning the stories, tropes, prejudiced views that exist driving communities apart, we have the tools for subverting them. Stories that challenge the status quo and the preconceived notions of a culture have a parabolic role-- serve in the roll of a parable. Jesus did that a lot. His stories would often subvert commonly-held values. The one most precious is the one that wandered away. Divine love is most clearly visible when it is given to those that seem to deserve it the least. The most weak or seemingly insignificant things are often what matters most. The wealthy may not only NOT be closer to God, but the wealth may actually be a hindrance to that closeness.

A second way to change the narratve is to Change the Focus. Consider the old trope of

the silent era (lampooned in the cartoon shorts of “Dudley Doright”) of a love triangle of a rejected ugly bad man, a beautiful but helpless young woman, and a handsome noble hero. Ultimately and predictably, the hero overcomes the bad man and wins the heart of 'fair maiden.' There are many options to subvert, such as making the woman heroic and capable rather than helpless. However, the narrative also changes when one changes the focus. In this classic example, the focus is on how the hero resolves the conflict by “saving the day.” But one can also focus on the woman who lives in a world of objectification, or on the bad man, driven to hate and revenge for reasons that could be fascinating to explore.

In the story of the ten lepers we see a change of focus from the norm. Jesus tells ten lepers who are seeking to be healed to go to the priest to be declared clean (a requirement in the Mosaic Law quarantine). On their way, they discover themselves healed. Nine of them joyfully continue their journey to be legally declared clean. One however, turned back to express thanks to Jesus. The story specially notes that the man who thanked Jesus was a Samaritan. The story could be presented as many other stories in the Gospels with Jesus as the focus. In this one, however, the focus is not on Jesus primarily. It is also not primarily on the lepers as a whole, but is rather on the Samaritan who

returned to express gratitude.

Sometimes we need to change focus. A few years ago in the United States there was a movement called “Black Lives Matter.” It was a response to some questionable shootings of African-American men by police officers. In many of those cases the police were exonerated by the justice system, often despite pretty damning evidence against them). Some people responded negatively to the Black Lives Matter movement suggesting that it is better to say “All Lives Matter.” In a sense they are right--- All Lives Matter. However, when there has been a strong amount of discrimination and marginalization in a society, it needs to be responded to with focus, not with generalities. Consider first century Judea. Saying that one must love one's neighbor, or one must love everyone, may be true but is too general to hit home. Focus is needed to make the message hit home. You must love your enemy. You must love Samaritans. You must love the poor. You must love Gentiles. You must love tax collectors and prostitutes.

And you must demonstrate that love not only through words but through action. This leads to the second point.

## **Christian Community Development Principles**

If one considers Samaria to represent a community that is marginalized and discriminated against, then such a community is very much like the communities that John Perkins has targeted as part of Christian Community Development (CCD). <Endnote 10> He is well known for the “3-Rs” of Christian community development. However, for this book, I will follow the expanded list (adding five more principles to the original three) as described by Wayne Gordon.<Endnote 11>

Relocate. Incarnational ministry. One must go to them. To reach the Samaritans, one must go to Samaria. This may seem obvious, but to many it isn't. There is still the temptation of Christians to try to do stuff to entice them to come to us. The Christian church in the book of Acts reached out to Samaritans by going to them because the Samaritans would not show up in a church group in Jerusalem on the Lord's Day. In CCD, being a long-term form of ministry, the focus is not simply on going into the community, but dwelling in the community. One does not simply visit and leave, visit and leave. The assumption of this is that the one who is ministering is an outsider, and the hope given is an outside hope. More generally, however, when one seeks to reach out to marginalized

communities, one must minister incarnationally, practicing a ministry of presence-- going there and being there with them.

Reconciliation. Reconciliation is the breaking down of barriers. Moving into the marginalized, stigmatized communities around us is a beginning of reconciliation. Evangelizing is a ministry that seeks to reconcile people to God. But both fall short of transforming society. The barriers of mistrust and stereotypes must be addressed directly and honestly through both words and action. Jesus said that a day is coming, and now is when the old argument of where one should worship, Jerusalem or Mt. Gerizim, is irrelevant. Where must one worship was the single greatest barrier between Jews and Samaritans, These words strengthened what he had already demonstrated through action--- in going to Samaria and speaking to a locally shunned Samaritan woman. Philip went to preach in Samaria. However, barriers between Jewish Christians and Samaritan Christians were torn down, symbolically, when the Apostles went there themselves and affirmed God's acceptance of them as His children and part of His church.

Redistribution. Barriers are not meant to be broken down simply to create dependent second-tier churches. I have to admit, living in the Philippines, I am not a big fan of churches

that were started by outsider mission groups that use terms like “Mission Church” or “Mission Outreach” to emphasize their secondary, dependent status. God's plan was neither to have Samaria second-tier to Judea, nor Samaritan (or Gentile) second to Jew. In CCD, the economic and power disparities must be dealt with. In the broader sense, we must act to remove the hints of superiority of one group of Christian over another. The Jerusalem Council was established (in Acts 15) with the explicit concern of the status, and validity, of Gentile Christians. It was determined that Gentiles did not need to become Jews to be Christians. That same applied, by inference, to Samaritans. Samaritans did not need to become Jews to be Christians. Extending what Paul said, In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither male nor female, neither slave nor free, neither Jew nor Samaritan. This is not an attack on diversity, but a recognition that there is no hierarchy of groups before God.

Leader Development. Samaritans should be led by Samaritans. For the Samaritan church, this was shown, symbolically with the Apostles affirming the validity of the Samaritan church, and then leaving. The Apostles evangelized, Philip evangelized and baptized, but each went elsewhere. Presumably, the churches formed were left to be led by Samaritans. It is important to recognize that despite the resilience of

Samaritanism, many did become Christians, but much like with the Jews who converted, most all left their own unique cultural identity. One can argue whether loss of this identity was a good thing or bad. However, ultimately, the local churches formed were locally led. It is not clear to what extent this was intentional or to what extent it happened organically.

Listening to the community. It is tempting to enter a community and talk, talk, talk. However, the Great Commission of Christ to be a witness is secondary to the Great Commandment to love others. Love is tied to respect, and respect is tied to listening. Besides, it is hard to know how to demonstrate love, and how to be an effective witness unless one has first listened to them and found out their fears, hopes, and needs (both felt and real needs). Perhaps the two most well-known conversations Jesus had were with Nicodemus in John 3, and the Samaritan woman in John 4. Jesus listened to each and His responses were different because the concerns of the two were different. Every community is different. We need to honor this uniqueness and see what God will do uniquely in that group. In the book of Acts, God demonstrated that unique aspect. Samaritans responded to the gospel message. These, however, did not receive the Holy Spirit until a later time. As noted previously, this unique occurrence appears to have been necessary in building a connection between the

church of Jerusalem and the young believers in Samaria. These young believers were led to Christ by Philip, a deacon, but God wanted the Apostles to witness in no uncertain terms that the Samaritans have received the Holy Spirit as they have.

Church-based. There is something to be said for short-term missions. Jesus promoted short-term missions by travelling from town to town, and He established it by sending His many disciples out two-by-two to villages. The main Twelve, He sent to Jewish towns. The seventy disciples He placed no such limitations. This is hardly surprising since 12 would make the people think of the 12 tribes of Israel, while the 70 would make people think of the 70 nations of Genesis. Presumably at least some of the 70 went to Samaritan villages. There is nothing wrong with mission organizations or other parachurch organizations. However, the defining characteristics of a local church are, firstly, it is local, and secondly, it is a spiritual community of people. Ministry to a community is not truly successful until it has become local. It also does not become successful until the local people take ownership of it.

It is curious that the Bible does not give explicit information that Samaritan churches were established. Ministry was done there but the establishment of local churches has to be

inferred. However, early church history shows that many churches were established in Samaria and other areas in the region. While we may rightfully bemoan the estrangement that Christianity had with Samaritanism in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD (particularly), the conflict came, in part, because there were established local churches existing within walking distance of Samaritan synagogues. Sadly, close proximity of diverse groups does at times create conflicts.

It is sad that there could not have been a better peace. It is worthy of note that the tensions that we know most about came from outside, from Byzantium. It would be nice to think that Samaritan Christians were a positive presence living in community with their Samaritan neighbors. If that did not happen, however, that does not imply that it cannot happen. We can learn from the past and (prayerfully) do better.

Holism. Holism speaks of the philosophy of intentionally seeking to meet the needs of the entire person and entire community, not just one aspect (such as spiritual needs, or food, or employment). When Philip went to Samaria he followed the example of Jesus in providing miraculous healings and exorcisms. These are often seen as signs of the Kingdom of God. They certainly are, but they also meet the diverse felt and real needs of the people. Combined with this, such service expresses

value and concern for them as human beings rather than merely as 'lost souls' or 'potential converts.'

A classic verse of Holism is Luke 2:52 where it states that Jesus grew in wisdom (psychoemotional growth) and stature (physical growth), and in favor with God (spiritual growth) and man (social growth). There are other models for holistic health or growth, but regardless of the one chosen, the key idea is that the whole gospel of God is concerned with the whole individual and whole community.

## **Summary**

I suppose if one looks at this chapter, the principles of pastoral care fit here in many ways. We need to exercise the ministry of presence. We don't minister from a safe distance (I will ignore the fact that I am writing this during the COVID-19 pandemic). Being there starts to break down barriers, prejudices, and assumptions. Jesus and Philip specifically and intentionally went to where the Samaritans lived, rather than complaining that the Samaritans did not come to them.

We need to practice the ministry of silence. We need to overcome the idea that ministry is happening only when we are talking. More often

we need to listen, and be there in their pain and struggles.

We need to practice the elements of pastoral care, including:

- Sustaining
- Healing
- Guiding
- Reconciling
- Nurturing
- Liberating
- Empowering <Endnote 12>

## Conclusions

I am writing this during the COVID-19 pandemic. On one side the disease drives us apart. It places us in our own homes, physically distanced and masked. We may live in voluntary quarantine, or in enhanced quarantine, or in lock-down. And yet it can also tear down barriers. When faced with a common curse, if you would prefer such language, we begin to identify the commonality that we have as human beings. Before, we may focus on our differences, but the common enemy can lead us to recognizing our commonality. It can drive reconciliation.

Yet it doesn't have to happen. The Roman threat did not really bring the Jews and Samaritans together. Today, we still find many people trying hard to make barriers higher--- blaming political, national, or ethnic groups for the virus and the suffering we are undergoing during this disease event. Self-labeled Christians appear to be as prone to this as anyone else. Nations are being blamed for the problem, right or wrong. But clearly wrong is the temptation of some to blame people of certain ethnicities tied, no matter how

loosely to those nations.

If a common experience, a common enemy, cannot bring us to break down our prejudices, what will? And as Christians, if the example of Christ of building bridges (to Samaritans, Gentiles, publicans and sinners, to religious elite) cannot inspire us as Christians to do likewise, than what would inspire us?

Perhaps this is a good time--- many of us have some time right now--- to think about what are our Samarias? Who are the Samaritans in our lives? How can we be different in the future to reach out to them, tear down barriers, and create beautiful moments of reconciliation, regardless of the fear and anger that appears to dominate our society.

There was a study that came out a few years ago that looked at various forms of written media, in the English language for approximately a century. The researchers identified different feeling words and their prevalence. The researchers discovered that most feeling words declined over the decades, except one. That one is FEAR. It grew throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Fear is a God-given emotion. We are called upon to have courage through fear, rather than called to not feel fear. One of the great fears is "Fear of the Other." <Endnote 13>

However, when Jesus spoke to His disciples, now described as Apostles (“sent out ones,” ambassadors/missionaries of Christ) Jesus said that they will receive power from the Spirit of God. From there they would be able to serve in their apostolic role as missionaries, witnesses of the good news of Christ, starting at home (Jerusalem), and Judea (moving out into the broader neighborhood), and Samaria (those people you once wanted fire from heaven rained down upon) and even to the ends of the world (the most terrifying and alien places). In all of those places, God will already be there waiting for them, and providing power for them.

I don't believe God has changed in this. Do you?

## Endnotes

1 See I Kings 16:24. Also you may refer to Bernard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1986), 265.

2 Robert T. Anderson, Terry Giles, *The Keepers: An Introduction to the History and Culture of the Samaritans* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 2. This book is a very thorough look at the Samaritans. If that is what you are looking for, please read it. For more on the quote of Sargon, refer to Daniel Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, 1927, Vol. 2, Part 4: Sargons's annals.

3 The Samaritans recognize the canonicity of the Pentateuch (and perhaps to a lesser extent the Book of Joshua). However, they don't see the other parts of the Hebrew Bible as canonical. Some may see in this information as to when the Jewish and Samaritan faiths separated. On the other hand, it may be that Samaritans saw much of the other writings as having a pro-Jewish slant. Certainly, some of the prophets used the term Samaria harshly, often representing the

sins of the region. Consider:

-Isaiah 10:9-11

-Hosea 7:1; 8:5-6; 10:5; 13:6

-Amos 3:9; 4:1

-Micah 1:1, 5, 6

4 Bernard Anderson, 530-531.

5 Robert Anderson, 6.

6 Revised Standard Bible is used here, but you are welcome to use the version of your choice.

7 *Jonathan Hill, Zondervan's Handbook to the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2006), 132.

8 Wikipedia article, "Samaritans." Yes, I am well aware that intellectual snobbery dictates that one should not reference wikipedia. Sometimes such an attitude is well-founded. However, the article on Samaritans is very good. Definitely worth a read.

9 Robert T. Anderson, 2

10 A good place to read more about this is the website of the Christian Community Development Association ([www.ccca.org](http://www.ccca.org))

11 Wayne L. Gordon. "The Eight Components of Christian Community Development,"

<https://nsc-church.org/CCDA%208%20Points.pdf>. You are also welcome to websearch “The Eight Components of Christian Community Development” to find the slideshare presentation made by myself based on the above article.

12 Robert H. Munson and Celia P. Munson, *The Art of Pastoral Care* (Baguio City, Philippines: Bukal Life Care, 2016). These ideas are drawn from Emmanuel Y. Larty *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Philadelphia, PA: Kingsley Publishers, 2003).

13 Robert Dykstra, *Finding Ourselves Lost: Ministry in the Age of Overwhelm* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), In the Introduction.

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