

## The Marker Phrase in the Samaritan Pentateuch

[NOTE: In the study that this analysis accompanies the “marker phrase” has been identified as: **בַּעֲצָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה**. It is more accurate to identify our subject as an element of that phrase, that is, **בַּעֲצָם**. It is that element that, when associated with the fairly common **הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה**, renders the full expression unique. We use the full expression here for convenience and consistency.]

Scholarly opinion has converged in recent years on the view that, in the second century BCE, the Samaritans selected, as the basis for their version of the Pentateuch (the SP), a text that was very close to the Masoretic Text (the MT), and that they adapted that base text to reflect their own beliefs about a few specific issues.<sup>1</sup> Besides those specific ideological changes, the Samaritan text also reflects differences in scribal practices and spelling conventions, most of which have no impact on the meaning of the text. Stefan Schorch has characterized the significant alterations to the base text as a “thin layer of proper Samaritan additions and corrections.”<sup>2</sup> Gary Knoppers describes the Samaritan alterations of the base text as “a series of small ideological changes.”<sup>3</sup> Many others have expressed similar views.

The SP as we have it today was probably not the earliest version of the Samaritan scripture. The finds in the Judean Desert, primarily in Qumran, have included many texts that are seen as pre-Samaritan. The earliest of those, according to Emanuel Tov, dates to the mid-third century BCE.<sup>4</sup> And some of those are closer to the Septuagint than to the MT, which suggests to

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<sup>1</sup> Eshel, E. and Eshel, H. “Dating the Samaritan Pentateuch’s Compilation in Light of the Qumran Biblical Scrolls.” *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov*. (ed. S. Paul et al.; VTSup 94; Leiden: Brill, 2003) 215-240.

<sup>2</sup> Schorch, Stefan. “A Critical edition maior of the Samaritan Pentateuch: State of Research, Principles, and Problems.” *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 2. Mohr Siebeck. Tübingen. 2013. p 4

<sup>3</sup> Knoppers, Gary N. “Parallel Torahs and Inner-Scriptural Interpretation: The Jewish and Samaritan Pentateuchs in Historical Perspective.” *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research*. (eds. T. Dozeman, et al. Forschungen zum Alten Testament 78; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) 507–31. p 26

<sup>4</sup> Tov, Emanuel. *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*. Third Edition. Fortress. Minneapolis. 2012. p 91

some that they might be older. If the Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim was initially built as early as the fifth century BCE, as seems to be the case, those who worshipped there likely had some version of a written scripture that, among other things, guided their liturgical practices. That written expression was probably similar to that of their Jewish contemporaries. The two communities worshipped the same God in essentially the same way. It was the belief regarding the proper *place* of worship that most clearly divided the two. The early text used by the Samaritans might have been a version of the text brought by Ezra to Jerusalem in the fifth century BCE.<sup>5</sup> And that early text might have evolved within the Samaritan community over time toward the form of the texts that have been found in Qumran. We suggest elsewhere that the Samaritan community was required by later circumstances to re-create their scripture in the second century BCE. In order to do that they might well have selected a version of the Jewish scripture that was available to them at that time. Part of the re-creation process would have involved the editing of the selected base text to include the ideological issues particular to the Samaritans. On that theory, the ideological stratum of the current SP might have existed in older texts not available to us now and might have been transferred to the new text during the process of the re-creation of the SP. On that theory it might be better stated that, in the second century BCE, the Samaritans selected a text that was close to that of the current MT on which to base *the current version of the SP*.

Our purpose here, though, is to compare the text of the SP, as we now have it, to that of the MT, to determine whether the SP contains the marker phrase found in the MT. Eleven of the fourteen occurrences of the marker phrase, *b'etsem ha'yom ha'zeh*, appear in the first five books

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<sup>5</sup> There is a view that the direction of textual transmission was from the Samaritan community to Jewish community. That view assumes a very different historical development of the territory and the people that once constituted the northern kingdom of Israel. For the purposes of this paper, we do not need to detail that argument, although it will be discussed in the larger study that this paper supports.

of the bible. One of the four variant occurrences, *ad etsem ha'yom ha'zeh*, is also in the Pentateuch, at Leviticus 23:14. The scriptures of the Samaritan community do not include the books of Joshua or Ezekiel.<sup>6</sup> The Samaritans hold that only the Pentateuch has scriptural authority.

Comparing the Jewish and Samaritan texts of the Pentateuch confirms that *every instance of the marker phrase and its variants that appears in the Jewish text also appears in exactly the same form and location in the Samaritan text.*<sup>7</sup> The comparisons of each instance are shown below.<sup>8</sup>

The MT version of the marked verse is shown first, and the marker phrase there is shown in boldface type. The SP version is shown immediately below that of the MT, with the marker phrase underlined. Where the SP text differs from the MT, the MT version is in bold, and the SP is underlined. Where the difference is the absence of a word in one version compared to the other, we indicate the absence by inserting blank, underlined spaces.

## The Comparison

### The Noah Event: Genesis 7:13

MT

יג בעצם היום הזה בא נח ושם וחם ויפת בני נח ואשת נח ושלת נשי בניו אתם אל התבה:

SP

יג בעצם היום הזה בא נח שם חם ויפת בני נח ואשת נח ושלת נשי בניו אתם אל התבה:

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<sup>6</sup> There is a Samaritan version of Joshua that is not considered scriptural by the Samaritans. It is thought to be from a much later period than the Samaritan Pentateuch, possibly as late as the fourteenth century CE, and is quite different from the Hebrew book of Joshua. We will, nevertheless, look briefly at the Samaritan Joshua in our discussion of the marker phrase at the MT Joshua 5:11.

<sup>7</sup> The language of both versions is the same: Hebrew. In this discussion we will use Hebrew and Jewish as synonymous, as distinguished from Samaritan.

<sup>8</sup> For this comparison I used: Shoulson, Mark. *The Torah: Jewish and Samaritan Versions Compared*. Evertype. Ireland. 2008. Shoulson used the Masoretic Text of the Leningrad Codex and the Samaritan text from the Shekhem Synagogue as published by Abraham Tal for the comparison.

The boldface text of the marker phrase in the MT and the underlined text of the parallel SP version are identical, which is the pattern we will find in all cases. There are two additional words shown in bold in the MT and underlined in the SP. In this verse, the letter *vav*, which precedes the names of Noah's sons, Shem and Ham, in the MT, is not found in the text of the SP. The *vav* in the MT is the conjunction *and*. The absence of the conjunction in the SP is not material and probably reflects scribal choice.

The Abrahamic Circumcision Event: Genesis 17: 23 & 26

MT

כג ויקח אברהם את ישמעאל בנו ואת כל ילידי ביתו ואת כל מקנת כספו כל זכר באנשי בית אברהם וימל את בשר ערלתם בעצם היום הזה כאשר דבר אתו אלהים:

SP

כג ויקח אברהם את ישמעאל בנו ואת כל ילידי ביתו ואת כל מקנות כספו כל-זכר באנשי בית אברהם וימל את בשר ערלתם בעצם היום הזה כאשר דבר אתו אלהים:

In Genesis 17:23 the comparison of the marker phrase is, again, obvious, but again there is a change in the SP. The word מקנת in the MT acquires an added *vav* in the SP; the spelling is changed to מקנות. That change is not substantive.

MT

כו בעצם היום הזה נמול אברהם וישמעאל בנו:

SP

כו בעצם היום הזה נמל אברהם וישמעאל בנו:

In Genesis 17:26 the SP again presents a different spelling of one word. In this case, though, a *vav* is omitted. The MT נמול becomes the SP נמל. That change is not substantive, but

it interestingly shows the fuller spelling in the MT, which is the opposite of the change found in Gen 17:23.

The Observance of Passover: Exodus 12:17

MT

יז ושמרתם את המצות כי בעצם היום הזה הוצאתי את צבאותיכם מארץ מצרים ושמרתם \_\_\_\_\_ את היום  
לדורתכם חקת עולם: MT הזה

SP

יז ושמרתם את המצוה כי בעצם היום הזה הוצאתי את צבאתיכם מארץ מצרים ושמרתם ועשיתם את היום  
הזה לדורתכם חקת עולם:

In Ex 12:17 the SP text spells two words differently than the MT: the *vav* in MT צבאותכם is dropped in SP, and a *vav* is added in the לדורתכם of SP. An inconsistency in the SP spelling conventions is becoming apparent. Neither of the two spelling changes here are substantive, but there are two additional and meaningful changes in the SP.

In the MT, the first clause, ושמרתם את המצות, is understood to require the observance (or the guarding) of *the matzot*, which refers to the feast of unleavened bread. The SP, though, seems to speak of *the mitzvah*, המצוה.<sup>9</sup> That would represent a material difference, but the MT might also be vocalized differently to be read as *ha'mitzvot*, rather than *ha'matzot*. In that case the requirement might be understood as referring to the multiple commandments that immediately precede 12:17 and the difference might not be seen as material.

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<sup>9</sup> Von Gall's version has the same reading as Shoulson's comparison, and the critical apparatus of Von Gall does not indicate variants in other manuscripts. See Von Gall's 1918 text here: [https://archive.org/details/vonGall\\_SamaritanPentateuch/page/n306/mode/1up](https://archive.org/details/vonGall_SamaritanPentateuch/page/n306/mode/1up).

In the second case, the SP seems to expand on or intensify the MT's requirement "to observe, guard, or watch" by adding the requirement **ועשיתם**.<sup>10</sup> Most often that verb is understood to mean "to do or to make." It is not unusual in the MT to find the two verbs—"to watch or observe" along with "to do or make"—used together, especially in Leviticus and Deuteronomy.<sup>11</sup> But in none of the MT Pentateuch instances is the object of "to do, or make" a "day" as it is here in the SP. Here it seems the SP is using the verb to mean "observe, perform, or keep" as it is used in the MT of Ex 12:47, which commands the community regarding the Passover sacrifice. That seems to give added emphasis to the day and to its observance. It seems also to be an expansion in comparison to the MT, as opposed to an element of the sectarian stratum. It is more likely that the SP would add emphasis as compared to the MT than that the MT would remove emphasis. If that is the case it would argue for the SP as a later text than the MT.

As a check against the MT and SP versions we can look to the Septuagint. There we find that the LXX agrees with the SP in the first case. That is, the LXX requires that "the commandment" be observed as opposed to the MT requirement to watch "the matzot." However, the LXX does not include the additional equivalent to **ועשיתם**. That absence in the LXX adds some weight to the argument that the SP provision is an expansion.

The Exodus Event: Exodus 12:41 & 51

MT

**מא** ויהי מקץ שלשים שנה וארבע מאות שנה ויהי בעצם היום הזה יצאו כל צבאות יהוה מארץ מצרים:

SP

**מא** ויהי מקץ שלשים שנה וארבע מאות שנה ויהי בעצם היום הזה יצאו כל צבאות יהוה מארץ מצרים:

<sup>10</sup> Von Gall's edition also includes this additional word/requirement.

<sup>11</sup> Lev 19:37, 20:8, 22; 22:31; 25:18; & 26:3. Deut 4:6, 23; 7:12; & 29:8.

The SP of Exodus 12:41 does not vary from the MT. The texts specify that the exodus event occurred after (understood as “exactly”) 430 years. But the SP of the preceding verse contains two interesting and material variances. The MT specifies that the “children of Israel” had “dwelled in Egypt” for those 430 years. But the parallel SP verse specifies that the people referred to in 12:41 are בני ישראל ואבותם, “the children of Israel and their fathers”, and the 430-year period refers to the time they dwelled בארץ כנען ובארץ מצרים, “in the land of Canaan and the land of Egypt.” The Septuagint text interestingly agrees with the SP in both of those cases.

Those two substantive differences represent a point of view that is clearly not aligned with the MT. The agreement between the LXX and SP might suggest a textual basis older than the MT. But the fact that this variance expresses a different view of history means it is probably expressive of a characteristic Samaritan belief. If that is true, the variances have a sectarian character and so we would not draw conclusions from them regarding the timing of the SP as we now have it. What is obvious is that this section of text was of particular importance to the Samaritans and that their tradition of the history differed from that found in the MT.

MT

נא ויהי בעצם היום הזה הוציא יהוה את בני ישראל מארץ מצרים על צבאתם:

SP

נא ויהי בעצם היום הזה הוציא יהוה את בני ישראל מארץ מצרים על צבאתם:

The second verse used to mark the exodus event, like the first, is identical in both versions.

The fact that there are material variances in both the text requiring the observance of Passover and in the verse immediately preceding the first marked verse of the exodus event

itself suggests that the entire subject of the exodus event and its annual commemoration was of particular importance to the Samaritans.

The Shavuot Observance: Leviticus 23:21

MT

כא וקראתם בעצם היום הזה מקרא קדש יהיה לכם כל מלאכת עבדה לא תעשו חקת עולם בכל מושבתיכם לדרתיכם:

SP

כא וקראתם בעצם היום הזה מקרא קדש יהיה לכם כל מלאכת עבדה לא תעשו חקת עולם בכל מושבתיכם לדרתיכם:

The only difference between the SP and the MT in this verse is in the spelling of one word.

In this case the fuller spelling is in the SP.

The Yom Kippur Observance: Leviticus 23:28-30

MT

כח וכל מלאכה לא תעשו בעצם היום הזה כי יום כפרים הוא לכפר עליכם לפני יהוה אלהיכם: כט כי כל הנפש אשר לא תענה בעצם היום הזה ונכרתה מעמיה: ל וכל הנפש אשר תעשה כל מלאכה בעצם היום הזה והאבדתי את הנפש ההוא מקרב עמה:

SP

כח וכל מלאכה לא תעשו בעצם היום הזה כי יום כפורים הוא לכפר עליכם לפני יהוה אלהיכם: כט כי כל הנפש אשר לא תענה בעצם היום הזה ונכרתה מעמיה: ל וכל הנפש אשר תעשה כל מלאכה בעצם היום הזה ואבדתי את הנפש ההיא מקרב עמיה:

In the three marked verses that specify the requirement to observe Yom Kippur, the SP varies from the MT in three words whose spelling is changed. In one of the spelling variances the SP adds a *vav*, in another the SP adds a *yud*, both of which are common changes and neither of which is material. The third spelling variance, though, is meaningful. Where the MT has הנפש the SP has הנפש ההיא. That is important not because it changes the meaning of the text but



because, as we will discuss below, it represents a possible indication that the SP version is later than the MT.

In addition to the spelling changes, the SP uses a different form of the verb “to destroy”; it has **ואבדתי** rather than **והאבדתי**; but that does not significantly change the sense of the passage.

#### The Day of Moses’s Death: Deuteronomy 32:48

MT

מח וידבר יהוה אל משה **בעצם היום הזה** לאמר:

SP

מח וידבר יהוה אל משה בעצם היום הזה לאמר:

The SP does not vary from the MT in the verse that introduces the death of Moses.

#### The Variant Form: Leviticus 23:14

MT

יד ולחם וקלי וקרמל לא תאכלו **עד עצם היום הזה** עד הביאכם את קרבן אלהיכם חקת עולם לדרתיכם בכל משבתיכם:

SP

יד ולחם וקלי וקרמל לא תאכלו עד עצם היום הזה עד הבאיכם את קרבן אלהיכם חקת עולם לדרתיכם בכל מושבתיכם:

The variant form of the marker at Leviticus 23:14 appears in the SP just as in the MT. There is one word in that verse that shows a difference in spelling with the SP being the fuller version, adding a *yud*. There is one word in which there appears to be a transposition of letters: **הבאיכם** in the SP rather than the MT **הביאכם**. The same word appears in the SP of 23:15 without the transposition. Some other SP manuscripts, and Von Gall’s edition, have the word as **הבאכם**.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Both Von Gall and Benjamin Blaney identify multiple manuscripts that have the same spelling as the MT. See: Von Gall p 311 and Blaney, B. *Pentateuchus Hebraeo-Samaritanus*. Clarendon. London. 1790. p 313

Scribal choice or scribal error, or both, are the likely explanations. Neither would be significant.

#### A Note on Joshua 5:11

While the Samaritan version of Joshua is understood to be from a much later time than the SP itself, it is still interesting to note that the marker phrase does not appear in the section of the Samaritan text that parallels the MT Joshua. In the edition by Moses Gaster, the parallel text appears is in the Samaritan Chapter 6, rather than in the MT's Chapter 5. The text at SP Joshua 6:5 reads, in part: *וישבת המן ביום ההוא*, "and the manna ceased on that day."<sup>13</sup> In the MT, the two words that begin Jos 5:12, immediately following the marked verse, are *וישבת המן*, and some later editions of the bible include those word in 5:11. That approach to punctuating the verses portrays the ending of the manna and the beginning of the people's sustenance from the land as simultaneous events. And the time of those events is emphasized by the marker phrase. The author of the Samaritan Joshua would certainly have known the MT Joshua, which used the marker phrase in describing that day. He would also have known the MT Pentateuch and the SP and would have been aware of the common use of the marker phrase in those texts. The absence of the marker in the SP Joshua, then, looks deliberate, distancing it from the MT.

#### Analysis

Two observations can be made immediately and confidently:

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<sup>13</sup> Gaster, Moses. *Das Buch Josua in Hebraisch-Samaritanisch Rezension*. Brockhaus. Leipzig. 1908. p 243. Accessed at: [https://archive.org/details/MN41923ucmf\\_0/page/n38/mode/1up](https://archive.org/details/MN41923ucmf_0/page/n38/mode/1up).

- 1) The marker phrase and its variant appear in the Samaritan Pentateuch in the same form and in the same locations that they appear in the Masoretic Text.
- 2) The SP text of seven of the eleven marked verses and the text of the verse containing the variant all reflect differences from the MT.<sup>14</sup>

Scholars have historically identified two levels or strata of variance between the SP and MT texts. The *sectarian* level of SP expresses a distinctly Samaritan self-understanding. The examples most often cited are: a) the belief that the proper location for the worship of God is Mt. Gerizim as opposed to Jerusalem, b) the expression of that distinction as the prior decision of God by use of the past tense בחר, or “has chosen”, as opposed to the future יבחר or “will choose” which the MT in Deuteronomy uses, and c) an expanded tenth commandment that includes the specification of Mt. Gerizim as the chosen location for worship. More recent scholarship has lessened the certainty of those understandings as *sectarian*, however. The details of the scholarly arguments about the sectarian layer of the SP are not critical to us. The sources from the Second Temple period make it clear that the Samaritans believed that Mt. Gerizim had been chosen by God as the proper site of worship. We know that the Samaritan temple was built on that site, probably in the fifth century BCE, and then significantly expanded, probably late in the third century BCE. Any version of the text created by the Samaritans would reflect those beliefs, whenever it was created. So, the existence of the sectarian layer—whatever it might comprise—does not, itself, give us information about the timing of the SP versus the MT.

The second level of variance is expressed by the adoption by the Samaritans of different scribal and vocalization conventions. The scribal conventions included a different script,

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<sup>14</sup> Gen 7:13, 23 & 26; Ex 12:17; Lev 23:21,28, & 30; Lev 23:14.

different spelling conventions, and greater scribal flexibility. Samaritan scribes felt freer to change text or spelling, for example, and less constrained to consistency. For the most part, those scribal conventions do not help us to date the SP with respect to the MT. The Samaritan script has been shown to be a later development, although the precise timing is still a matter of debate. Spelling and other minor scriptural modifications have too great an idiosyncratic component to serve as reliable evidence of date. While early research on the SP identified variant spelling as a key characteristic difference between the SP and MT, current research has found that, “A very prominent feature of the Samaritan text is that it has no normative spelling. That is, there neither exist clear rules for spelling nor did Samaritan scribes feel compelled to preserve the spelling they found in other manuscripts. Hence, most of the supposed variants involving spelling are irrelevant from the outset.”<sup>15</sup> Schorch points out that regarding spelling “...even manuscripts written by one and the same scribe display internal variation.”<sup>16</sup> As to the adoption by the Samaritans of different pronunciation conventions, we have no reliable evidence of the timing of that development.

There is one scribal indication in the marked verses of the SP that gives us a hint, though, that these verses are later than the MT. In Leviticus 23:30 we saw that the word **ההוא** in the MT is given as **ההיא** in the SP. According to Emanuel Tov, “The writing of **הוא**...is always corrected to **היא** in (several named Qumran scrolls in the Samaritan group)...These phenomena are described here as “corrections” of (the MT in the SP group).”<sup>17</sup> If the SP is “correcting” the MT, then the SP version must be later. We can take that only as a hint, though, since Tov identifies a

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<sup>15</sup> Schorch. A Critical *editio maior*. p 9

<sup>16</sup> Schorch. A Critical *editio maior*. p 13

<sup>17</sup> Tov, E. Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible. p 84

Qumran text of a Leviticus verse that seems to contradict that conclusion. A second hint at the SP as the later of the two texts is the addition of the **ועשיתם** provision in the marked verse requiring the observance of Passover. Those two issues support the suggestion that the SP, as we have it now, is later than the MT. Neither proves the case, however.

One thing we can conclude with confidence is this: the fact that there are so many changes in (and nearby) the SP text of the verses that include the marker phrase tells us that those texts were given close scribal attention. If the Samaritan scribes had wanted to change the marker phrases, or to delete them, they could have done so.

#### Conclusion

- 1) The text of the Samaritan Pentateuch contains the marker phrase in every place where it appears in the Masoretic Text, in exactly the same form as it appears in the Masoretic Text.
- 2) Samaritan scribes could have edited the phrase, presumably at any time, and certainly after the break between the two communities, but they did not.
- 3) The stringency added in the SP text of Exodus 12:17 suggests that the SP text was edited after the MT.
- 4) The spelling difference in Lev 23:30 is another hint that the SP was edited after the MT.
- 5) The question of the timing of the marker phrase's inclusion in the SP cannot be conclusively determined by reference to the text itself. We will argue elsewhere, based on historical events, that the phrase made its way into the SP from a version of an existing text that became the MT; a text that was adopted by the Samaritans as the basis for the re-creation of their version of the Pentateuch.

The conclusion that the SP developed from an early version of the Pentateuch “current in Palestine in the Second Temple period” is not new.<sup>18</sup> What has been lacking, according to Anderson and Giles, is “...a convincing theory of common origins.”<sup>19</sup> In the study that this analysis supports, we present a theory of the common origins of the MT and the SP in which the presence of the marker phrase in SP is an important indicator of timing.

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<sup>18</sup> Crawford, Sidnie W. *Rewriting Scripture*. *Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature*. Flint, Abegg, and Garcia Martinez, eds. Eerdmans. Grand Rapids. 2008. Kindle Edition. Loc 289

<sup>19</sup> Anderson, R. T. and Giles, T. *The Samaritan Pentateuch: An Introduction to its Origin, History, and Significance for Bible Studies*. Society of Biblical Literature. Atlanta. 2012. p 59

