

91 Sebaste

Names (also known as)

Samaria, Sebastia, Sebastiya, Sebastiyeh, Sebastos, Sebustiyeh, Shamir, Shomeron, Shomron, “house of Khomry”

Etymology

Samaria means “the watchtower” which is fitting as the city was built on a hill with a commanding view of the surrounding area. Sebaste is the Greek form of the name Augustus and Herod named it after Caesar.

Location/Description

Sebaste is located in the heart of the mountains of Samaria, 6 miles northwest of Shechem and 30 miles north of Jerusalem.



Scriptural references

Samaria appears 124 times in Scripture, at times referring to the city itself (1 Kings 16:28), the nation of Israel (1 Kings 13:32), or a Roman province (John 4:5-9). After centuries of pagan worship and idolatry we read in Acts the arrival of the gospel message and it brought much joy to the people as they finally had a hope that their dumb idols could never provide (Acts 8:5-8). Many were baptized and received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:12-17), and now await, as we do, for the coming of Christ.

Famous characters

Omri
Ahab
Jehu
Philip the evangelist
Peter and John
Simon the sorcerer

Brief history

When the northern kingdom of Israel split from Judah it had a series of capital cities. It went from Shechem to Tirzah, and then to Samaria where it stayed for the duration of the kingdom. Omri purchased the hill located in the tribal allotment of Manasseh from a man named Shemer for 2 talents of silver (1 Kings 16:24-28). He subsequently named it after the original, calling it Samaria or Shomoron. The new city was built on an ideal location with fairly steep slopes on each side and had a commanding presence over the surrounding area. It was constantly besieged during the reigns of the kings of Israel (1 Kings 20:1-21, 28-34, 2 Kings 6; 17:5-6), and again by the Hasmonean Kings sometimes winning, or if not, resisting the siege for a long time.



Ahab built a temple to Baal here that was later destroyed by Jehu; although remnants of it and Omri’s palace have been found by archaeologists. They also found a rich cache of ivory that is believed to be where Ahab built his ivory house (1 Kings 22:39) for Jezebel.

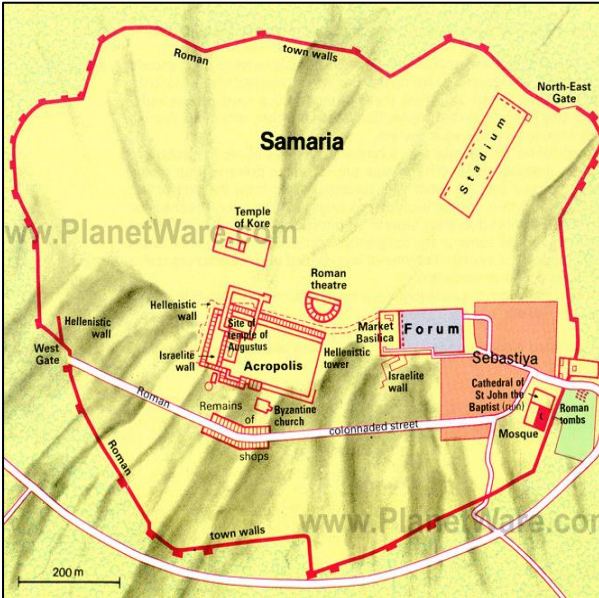
After its destruction by the Assyrians it was settled by other nations (2 Kings 17:24) who intermingled with remaining Israelites and rebuilt much of the city. During the time of the Persians the city again regained importance

and was heavily refortified only to be taken by John Hyrcanus in 108 BC after a 1 year siege. The Romans then gave the city to Herod the Great who, as he did with many other cities, built a number of grand buildings and temples many of which are being excavated today.

Sources:

- Bibleplaces.com
- Wikipedia.com
- Smiths Bible Dictionary
- Frommer’s guide to Israel

(Compiler – Dan Leadbetter)



He also renamed the city Sebaste after Caesar Augustus (Sebaste is a Greek form of Augustus). After this the city deteriorated until in 1867 it had a population of only 400 Muslims.

Church lore claimed that the head of John the Baptist was buried in Sebaste and there is an early church dedicated to him there. Samaria was a perpetual seat of false worship from Baal to Caesar, to Kore, to the alleged relic of John the Baptist’s head. God tells us to have no other Gods before him and that there is but one true God who rules in heaven and earth. When we put our trust in the gods of men we will become just like Samaria, a ruined city and a testament to the waywardness of man.

