

## The Good Samaritan

By Kenneth Parrish

Given the animosity Jews had for Samaritans, the story Jesus told was likely to be offensive to some in his day. But those of spiritual inclination and who recognized his authority would willingly receive it. The subject of the good Samaritan has been in my thoughts for several days now, so I believe it is time that I put those thoughts to paper.

In review, please read the following story Jesus told about the good Samaritan found in Luke 10:30-35 ...

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“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him up, and went off, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, but when he saw the injured man he passed by on the other side. So too a Levite, when he came up to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan who was traveling came to where the injured man was, and when he saw him, he felt compassion for him. He went up to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever else you spend, I will repay you when I come back this way.’”

When we, the modern reader, hear the term ‘good Samaritan,’ someone who does good is automatically thought of. One of the definitions the dictionary has for Samaritan is “a person who voluntarily offers help or sympathy in times of trouble.” In the days of Jesus however, this was not the case. A Samaritan was someone who came from Samaria.

To learn more about Samaria, let us look a little into the history of that region. Jacob had twelve sons, whose descendants became the twelve tribes. Joseph, Jacob’s favorite son, was despised by his brothers (Gen. 37:3-4), who tried to do away with him. However God intervened and preserved Joseph’s life, and even used Joseph to preserve the lives of the entire clan. Jacob gave Joseph a blessing in which he called him a “fruitful bough by a well” (Gen 49:22). This blessing was fulfilled, as the territory allotted to the tribes of Joseph’s two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, was the fertile land that eventually became Samaria.

Later, however, Israel divided into two kingdoms: Israel to the north and Judah to the south. Israel, the northern kingdom, established its capital first at Shechem and later at the hilltop city of Samaria. The southern kingdom established its capital at Jerusalem.

In 722 B.C. Assyria conquered Israel and took most of its people into captivity. The invaders then brought in Gentile colonists “from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim” (2 Kings 17:24) to resettle the land. With these new settlers came their own pagan idols. The remaining Jews began to worship these idols alongside the God of Israel (2 Kings 17:29-41), while intermarriages also began to take place (Ezra 9:1-10; Neh. 13:23-28).

Meanwhile, in 600 B.C. the southern kingdom of Judah fell to Babylon. Its people were also carried off into captivity, however, 70 years later, about 43,000 were permitted to return and rebuild Jerusalem. The Samaritans -- formerly the northern kingdom -- vigorously opposed the repatriation and tried to undermine the attempt to reestablish the nation. The full-blooded, monotheistic Jews detested the mixed marriages and worship practices of their northern cousins, so walls of bitterness were erected on both sides and did nothing but harden for the next 550 years. In the second century B.C. the Samaritans helped the Syrians in their wars against the Jews and in 128 B.C. the Jewish high priest retaliated and burned the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim. Needless to say, the Jews and the Samaritans were not on the best of terms.

Jesus told the story of the good Samaritan in answer to a question given to him by a Jewish lawyer (Luke 10:25-29).

Now an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus, saying, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? How do you understand it?” The expert answered, “***Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.***” Jesus said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.” But the expert, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In the hierarchy of Jewish values of the day, priests and Levites were at the top while Samaritans and Gentiles were at the bottom. One only then can imagine the shock, or even horror, on the faces of the Jewish people listening when they realized that the hero of Jesus’ tale was a Samaritan. After all, the Samaritans were of a lower class than they were, not to mention the enemy. It was a surprise to them all exactly who a neighbor may be.

To put this scenario in more modern aspects; suppose an American was injured and laying beside the road and a member of the Taliban came by to help. The possibility of something like this happening is almost the same as it was for a Samaritan helping out a Jewish person 2000 years ago. But the story is the same – the enemy is the neighbor.

In Mat 5:43-44, Jesus tells us...

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor’ and ‘hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you,...”

Jesus dealt many times with the Samaritans during His ministry here on earth, as did His disciples (Luke 17:16; John 4; Acts 8:25), and each time they were treated as neighbors.

In modern times, we can also ask the question “And who is my neighbor?” Whether it’s the Taliban or Nazis or Samaritans or the KKK -- they are all our neighbors. Whether they are stealing from us or discriminating against us – they are all our neighbors.

According to Jesus’ word, we are to pray for them. This does not mean that they should not be brought to justice. If they have done something wrong, then justice should be served. However, we can still pray for them; pray that they find Jesus and let Him into their hearts. By doing this, the good Samaritan may be found in us all.