

# About the Story

The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-35)

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## The Jericho Road

What would the listeners have understood about this parable? Well first of all they knew that the Jericho road was a dangerous road. It was a legend in the first century as being one of the most dangerous places in the world and that was because of its character. The road went 18 miles from the holy city of Jerusalem down to the city of Jericho. If you traveled that road you went down 3200 feet.

There are no houses or stores along the Jericho road; it's all wilderness and caves where robbers can hide out. There was no protection. There were no police forces in those days. So there were bands of robbers who lived in the caves. Whoever came down the road was fair game and everyone knew it.

## Priests and Levites

Priests and Levites were Judeans. Priests led worship activities in the temple in Jerusalem. Levites were temple workers. The expectation of the priest and the Levite is that they would help a fellow Judean who has been injured.

However, the law for priests and Levites was very strict in regard to their contracting uncleanness by touching a corpse. So the probable reason why the priest and the Levite passed by on the other side is not necessarily that they were indifferent or didn't care about the man, but that they were observing the law. If they contracted uncleanness from a corpse they would be disqualified from serving in the Temple.

## Samaritans

From the point-of-view of Judeans, the Samaritan was an enemy of the first order, a hated one who did not observe the law, who is regarded as unrighteous.

Samaritans were descendants of those who lived in the Northern Kingdom, which had been conquered by the Assyrians some 800 years before Jesus. The Assyrians had sent young men and women to intermarry with the people in the Northern Kingdom. Their children were regarded as half-breeds, no longer Jews, by the Judeans who lived in the Southern Kingdom.

There was a long history of conflict between Judeans and Samaritans. Not long before Jesus' day, a group of young Samaritans broke into the Temple and spread bones all over it on the day before the celebration of Passover. They had to cancel the festival for that year. Defiling the Temple was considered justification for vengeance against Samaritans. And Samaritans continued to carry out acts of violence against Judeans who traveled through Samaria.

The relationship is not unlike the current relationship of Jews and Palestinians who live on much of the same land as the Samaritans did in the middle of Israel.

## Caring for an Enemy

So it is a big surprise when a Samaritan has compassion on the Judean robbery victim and treats him with extraordinary kindness. For him to patch him up, and even take him to an inn—that was amazing enough. But to take out 2 denarii (2 days wages), and give them to an innkeeper, and THEN promise to repay whatever more he would spend—this was beyond all expectations!

Now on the one hand, this is a story about the Kingdom of God. It is a story of the extraordinary grace of the Kingdom of God. It is also about the extension of care, even to an enemy. Extending care is more important than observing the law; it's a higher law. The priest and the Levite had their priorities in the wrong place.

This story is not only about the goodness of caring for those who have been hurt, but it is also about breaking the cycle of violence and revenge that happens between people who are in conflict with each other. The only way to peace is if that cycle is broken. The only way to the Kingdom of God is if that cycle is broken.