

Parables - Short Stories by Jesus - Week Two- The Good Samaritan

Who were the Samaritans and why the animosity?

Samaria was the capital of the Northern Kingdom (Israel). It was formerly called Shekum. This is the area where Jacob's daughter, Dinah, was raped. (Jerusalem was the capital of the Southern Kingdom - called Judah.)

During the reign of King Ahez, (8th century B.C.E.) the Northern Kingdom attacked the Southern Kingdom, killing many and taking a large number of people - women, children and some men, along with a large booty. A prophet in Israel told the leaders that they had angered God and should return the people to Judah. (2 Chron. 28: 8-15)

Later, Assyria conquered Samaria (722 B.C.E.) and exiled those in the Northern Kingdom along with those in the Southern Kingdom, which they had conquered earlier. The Northern Kingdom is now called Samaria and is a mix of Jews from the North and the South.

When the Babylonian exiled Jews returned to Jerusalem the Samaritans showed hostility toward them. Also, when the Southern nation tried to overthrow Antichus IV Epiphanes (Greek) in 165 B.C.E., the Samaritans did not help them.

Samaritans worshiped on Mt. Gerizim and the Jerusalem Jews worshiped on Mt. Zion. The Samaritans only accepted their interpretation of Torah (Pentateuch - first five books of OT).

Read Luke 10: 25-37 A look at the characters:

"the lawyer" Note that "when a parable is directed at an individual, that person is about to come to an unwelcome realization." The lawyer is appearing to ask who his neighbor is, but in reality he's asking who's not my neighbor? (Who do I not need to love? Framed by this situation, Jesus begins the parable.

Jewish order of society was Priests - Levites - Israelites. Those three - everyone fell into one or the other. Priest and Levite was inherited position.

"The Man" - he's robbed of his integrity, his possessions, his dignity and his health. We don't know, but assume the man in the ditch is a Jew.

"The priest" - we often have heard through teaching and preaching that the reason the priest did not stop was to avoid becoming impure, Two sections of OT refer to this area of Jewish Law. Leviticus 21 and Numbers 19. Numbers 19 states that those who come in direct contact with a dead body must purify themselves with water on the third and seventh day. If they don't purify themselves they will defile the tabernacle. Levine points out that that there is nothing impure about touching one who is half-dead. The priest didn't know if the man was alive or dead. He was bound by law to check it out. (Priests also served a "medical" function. If he couldn't touch him if dead for fear of impurity, he should have at least covered him and then sought out someone to help bury him. Torah calls for corpses to be interred.

"the Levite" In purity laws the distinction remains in play even today. For instance, a priest is to remain outside the cemetery gates unless the dead is a direct descendant. The Levite and others can go in. (Note: Samaritans were also bound by these impurity laws.)

In this parable the Priest and the Levite are going away from Jerusalem - away from the temple, clearly

not in danger of desecrating the temple. By law, both men should have helped the man.

The Babylonia Talmud (Jerusalem Talmud) states: "As long as there are no other people to look after the burial of a corpse, the duty is incumbent on the Jew that passes by without exception to perform the burial." (Nazir, 43b, Nazir 5ba)

Levine states that the writer of Luke isn't concerned about purity laws in this parable - this issue was raised by Christians.

The "Samaritan" - the shocking third character! An enemy.

it's possible these men were afraid. . .and so, the first question that the Priest and Levite asked was "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?" But then the Samaritan came by and he revised the question. "If I don't stop to help this man, what will happen to him?"

The real question when we ask "who is my neighbor" is "who isn't my neighbor"? We could ask it this way - "Who doesn't deserve my love? Who in need can I ignore? Who can I hate?"