

# Bite Size Bible Study

## More on the Good Samaritan Parable #216

By Pastor Lee

Most of us know Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, but how many of us know the background for the parable.

### The Parable of the Good Samaritan

*On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

*"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"*

*He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

*"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."*

*But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor (neah)?"*

*In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They (1) **stripped him** of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and (3) **bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine**. Then he put the man on his (4) own **donkey**, (5) brought him to an inn and **took care of him**. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. (2) '**Look after him**,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'*

*"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"*

*The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."*

*Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."*

By telling this parable, it appears that Jesus brilliantly used rabbinic technique to elevate Leviticus 19:34, the third and final verse in the Old Testament that contains the word *ve'ahavta*, a new level:

*The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.*

The Samaritan would have been the stranger and an alien among them, and Jesus shows that the stranger and alien was the neighbor that the man should love! It appears that Jesus is tying "Love your neighbor" with "love the stranger" and even "love your enemies"!

This teaching was unique to Jesus, and while he built it on rabbinic thought of his time, it goes far beyond that. Jesus began with this rich material and brought it to its pinnacle and complete the Torah.

### Background for the Good Samaritan

In 2 Chronicles 28:8-15, a scene takes place after Israel is divided into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Ahaz, the king of Judah, led the nation into terrible idolatry, even sacrificing children to idols. Because of this, the Lord let Judah be attacked and defeated by Israel. This is the first time that Israel took prisoners of the tribes of Judah.

### Ahaz King of Judah

*Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord. He followed the ways of the kings of Israel and made idols for worshiping the Baals. He burned sacrifices in the Valley of Ben Hinnom and sacrificed his children in the fire, engaging in the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree.*

<sup>5</sup> *Therefore the Lord his God delivered him into the hands of the king of Aram. The Arameans defeated him and took many of his people as prisoners and brought them to Damascus.*

*He was also given into the hands of the king of Israel, who inflicted heavy casualties on him. In one day Pekah son of Remaliah killed a hundred and twenty thousand soldiers in Judah—because Judah had forsaken the Lord, the God of their ancestors. Zikri, an Ephraimite warrior, killed Maaseiah the king's son, Azrikam the officer in charge of the palace, and Elkanah, second to the king.*

2 Chronicles 28:1-7 NIV

But the story becomes even darker.

*The men of Israel took captive from their fellow Israelites who were from Judah two hundred thousand wives, sons and daughters. They also took a great deal of plunder, which they carried back to Samaria.*

*But a prophet of the Lord named Oded was there, and he went out to meet the army when it returned to*

*Samaria. He said to them, "Because the Lord, the God of your ancestors, was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand. But you have slaughtered them in a rage that reaches to heaven. And now you intend to make the men and women of Judah and Jerusalem your slaves. But aren't you also guilty of sins against the Lord your God? Now listen to me! Send back your fellow Israelites you have taken as prisoners, for the Lord's fierce anger rests on you."*

*Then some of the leaders in Ephraim—Azariah son of Jehohanan, Berehiah son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah son of Shallum, and Amasa son of Hadlai—confronted those who were arriving from the war. "You must not bring those prisoners here," they said, "or we will be guilty before the Lord. Do you intend to add to our sin and guilt? For our guilt is already great, and his fierce anger rests on Israel." So, the soldiers gave up the prisoners and plunder in the presence of the officials and all the assembly*

2 Chronicles 28:8-14 NIV

Jesus' teaching becomes even richer when we learn of the historical actions of the Samaritan people. In the time of Jesus most of those hearing this parable would have been able to recall this historical incident. In the Jewish culture, most would have heard this story in synagogue many times in their lives.

The Israelites were on the verge of leading 200,000 Judean victims away as slaves when the prophet Oded chastised them by reminding them that God allowed them defeat Judah as a punishment for idolatry. Israel was even more guilty of worshiping idols than their brothers. If they took their own brother's captive, it would compound their guilt before the Lord! The leaders of the Israelite tribes repented of their sin and set the Judeans free.

*Then the men who were designated by name arose, took the captives, and they clothed all their (1)**naked ones** from the spoil; and they gave them clothes and sandals, (2)**fed them and gave them drink**, (3)**anointed them with oil**, (4)**led all their feeble ones on donkeys**, and (5)**brought them to Jericho**, the city of palm trees, to their brothers; then they returned to Samaria. 2 Chronicles 28:15*

Compare each number point with Jesus' reply to the expert in the law.

We rarely read of a story of such compassion between nations at war, where one binds the wounds of the other and gently restores them to freedom.

This was a remarkable moment of grace between the tribes of Israel.

These "good Samaritans" appear to be the background of Jesus' character of the Samaritan in his parable for several reasons. In the parable, Jesus mentions the town Jericho, one of the few times he ever mentions specific places in parables. The victim is stripped naked, like some of the Judeans were, and the Samaritan anoints the man and puts him on a donkey and carries him to Jericho, like was done with the Judeans. His audience easily could have recalled this story.

If Jesus had this in mind, it shows us even more brilliance packed into his parables. In this story of the ancient "good Samaritans", the point at which they repented and decided to love their enemies was exactly when they became aware of the truth of Leviticus 19:18 — that their enemies were their own brothers, and that they were sinners just like them!

They were loving their neighbors, because they realized they were alike both in humanity and sinfulness. To the audience of Jesus' parable, they would have remembered that the Samaritans actually did, at one time, do this act of great compassion for their enemies. Moreover, that they should act like these ancestral people, and love these Samaritans, who then were their worst enemies.

It is hard to overstate the depth and brilliance of Jesus in his teaching. He builds on Old Testament stories and rabbinic thought to express an idea that was unique to him, and that we should even love our enemies.

Why? Because they are human beings, made in the image of God like us, and because we are all sinners in God's sight.

Just as God loves both the just and the unjust, we who are sinners, should love other sinners because we are just as unfaithful to God's directives as they are.