

Jesus approved this interpretation as correct, according to the proper interpretation of the Law: "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." The lawyer then proposed a qualifying distinction: "And who is my neighbor?" He said this because he wished to justify or vindicate himself.

Note: By asking the question, "Who is my neighbor?" the lawyer implied that the whole matter was much more complex than Jesus made it out to be. The Law says, "Love your neighbor," and Jesus said, "Love your neighbor," but the lawyer, insisting that the simple command needed interpretation, asked, "And who is my neighbor?"

In order to answer the lawyer's question, Jesus told a story, in order to illustrate the true interpretation of the Second Table of the Decalogue (which Jesus summarized by the command, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself.") The story is known familiarly to us as the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

The Story Content of the Parable (verses 30-35)

Since this story is so familiar, perhaps a comment or two on details is sufficient.

Jesus says the man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. On a map of Israel it can readily be seen that Jericho is not south of Jerusalem, but east. However, Jerusalem is located in a rock plateau, 2,630 feet above sea level; whereas Jericho is located in the Jordan Valley at the northwest corner of the Dead Sea, 820 feet below sea level. Thus the descent in altitude from Jerusalem to Jericho is 3,450 feet. It would thus seem both correct and proper to speak of going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. In addition, since Jerusalem was the capital of the nation and the center of religious worship of Israel, it became customary to speak of going up to Jerusalem and going down from Jerusalem, no matter what part of the country one was coming from or going to.

The account mentions that the Samaritan poured oil and wine on the wounded man's cuts and bruises. Oil and wine (the one soothing, the other antiseptic because of its alcoholic content) were standard ancient remedies. The physician Hippocrates (in 400 B.C.) prescribed the following treatment for ulcerated sores: "Bind with soft wool and sprinkle with wine and oil." A well-equipped traveler would probably have carried both on a journey.

The account mentions that the Samaritan gave two denarii to the innkeeper. The denarius was a coin minted by Rome. It was made of silver and was about two-thirds the