

Literal and Spiritual Senses of Scripture: The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37)

Step 1: With the members of your group, read the following explanations:

- A scholar of the law was someone who was an expert in the Mosaic Law and in interpreting tradition. This person is probably a member of the group known as scribes, a group that is affiliated with the Pharisees.
- In the time of Jesus, a priest was someone who offered sacrifices in the Temple on behalf of the people of God.
- A Levite is someone from the tribe of Levi. The Levites were given the responsibility of overseeing the tabernacle and the Temple. The tribe of Levi, then, is the priestly class.
- A Samaritan is a person from the territory of Samaria, which is located between Judea and Galilee. The Jews and Samaritans were deeply divided over religious and ethnic differences. For this reason, in the time of Jesus, Samaritans were despised and treated with disdain.
- The robbers, as well as the priest and Levite, assume that the victim of this robbery is dead or nearly dead.
- The fact that the victim is dead or nearly dead raises questions for both the priest and Levite regarding adherence to purity laws:

Touching a dead body made a person impure for seven days; the person had to bathe ritually, with water mixed with the ashes of a red heifer, to become clean again. If an impure person touched another object, it too became unclean, and could transmit uncleanness to anyone who touched it (see Nm 19:11–22). Priests followed especially strict purity laws: they were allowed to come near the bodies of close relatives only, and the high priest was forbidden to come into contact with any corpse at all, even his father or mother (see Lv 21:1–12). (*Essential Guide to Biblical Life and Times*, pages 42–43).

This passage, then, raises several important questions about observance of the Law:

- Can someone who is not Jewish, and therefore not observant of Jewish Law, (i.e., a Samaritan) inherit eternal life?
- Can someone who is Jewish and supposedly observant of the purity laws, but does not observe the greatest Law (see verse 27), inherit eternal life?
- Is it more important to be a member of God's Chosen People or to act with mercy toward those most in need?



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Step 2: Read aloud with your group Luke 10:25–37.

Step 3: Discuss the following questions with your group. Each group member should take notes on the other group members' responses.

- How does this information change your understanding of the story?
- In what way does this information expand, amplify, or deepen your understanding of the text?
- Why is it important to have this kind of information about a Scriptural text before or as we read it? What impact can this have on our understanding of Scripture?

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