

cultural context

CHALLENGE AND RETORT:

- Traditional culture would have the rabbi (teacher) seated. Students would stand as sign of respect to respond with an answer. To stand and directly question the rabbi in the form of a 'test' would be interpreted as sign of great disrespect.
- Similarly, whilst answering questions with a question was a common teaching strategy of rabbis, in an honour and shame society asking a question to which the answer was well known was yet another challenge and a test of the teacher's honour.
- Asking about what is needed to achieve an inheritance would have been seen as unusual. An inheritance was a gift freely given due being born into a family. Other than apart from remaining loyal to the family, very little else was required.
- Neighbours in first-century Palestine were either other law-abiding Jews or, at the very least, other residents in the town or village (a fact well known to the lawyer).
- There was a deep long-standing antagonism between Jews and Samaritans. The Jews considered Samaritans as descendants of Gentile tribes who had been brought into Palestine to take their places when they were in captivity. The mere suggestion in the story that the Samaritan was good would have provoked some surprise and offence.

SETTING FOR THE STORY:

- The road from Jerusalem to Jericho is about 33km, gradually downhill, but still quite rough and undulating, through a wilderness region.
- It would have been extremely unwise for travellers carrying valuables to travel by themselves in Palestine, especially through the wilderness area of Judea. It was possibly indicative of the social isolation of the Samaritan that he was travelling solo in that part of Palestine where Samaritans were not only unwelcome but also physically at risk.
- The violence done to the traveller is overt; he was totally stripped (a source of great humiliation and shame), beaten and left for dead.

REACTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS:

- Priests were of a hereditary guild (an elite class) and were often wealthy. Many lived in Jericho and travelled to the Temple for two-week assignments.
- If the traveller was dead and the priest had touched him, the priest could have become 'ceremonially defiled', which meant he would have had to return to Jerusalem and undergo a week of ceremonial purification. He would have been unable to undertake other important duties such as distributing money to the poor.
- Levites worked in the Temple as assistants to the priests. Once the priest had set the example (especially with respect to ritual purity), a Levite would have been hesitant to upstage the priest and go against the priest's interpretation of the Law.
- While administering first aid, the Samaritan was risking his life: firstly, by remaining in an isolated spot within view of the robber, and subsequently by entering into the strongly Jewish town of Jericho.
- By paying for the upkeep of the injured man (and promising to make up any outstanding amounts), the Samaritan would have ensured the destitute traveller would not be sold into slavery for an inability to pay his debts.

SCRIPTURAL CONTEXT:

- The two parts of Jesus' summary of the law are drawn directly from the Old Testament. The command to 'love your neighbour' appears in Lev 19:18, whilst the invitation to 'love God' is cited in Deut 6:5.

Related Cultural Sources: *Samaritans (2.5) and Sadducees and Levites (2.2)*