



Who Is My Neighbor?

in the context of scripture

by Tim Kelley

Last time we discussed the concept of *Love* in the context of the Hebrew thought in which the Bible was written. In that study we found that love is a verb that means *to give and provide*. In our analysis of Mark 12:30-31 and its source scriptures (Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18), we found that in regards to the people of Israel, the primary way to show love to another is to help him in his Torah walk, after all *the love of God is to keep His commandments* (1 John 5:2-3).

Since we know what the biblical meaning of love is, and since we know we are to love our neighbor, it would be understandable to ask the question “who is my neighbor?”

It’s my purpose in this teaching to continue with that question and see if the Bible gives any more information that would help us define the term neighbor, at least in regards to *loving your neighbor as yourself*.

Here’s what we’ll be covering –

- The Hebrew concept of neighbor
- The Greek words
- Yeshua’s example

Many people misunderstand the love and neighbor in the scripture simply because they fail to research what the terms mean from a Hebraic background. If Yeshua (Jesus) only spoke the words of His Father¹, and if the only recorded words of The Father (except for a few scattered in the Gospels) are found in the Tnakh (the Old Testament), then it would stand to reason that if we want to understand the words of Yeshua, we’ll need to see what those words meant at the time they were spoken. Thus, we have to go to the Tnakh.

the Shachane -

In the Tnakh, there are two words that are usually translated neighbor. One – *shachane* – is a rather broad term, and the other – *rea* – is more precise. Let’s look at both of them.

Shachane (שָׁכַן – Strong’s 7934) comes from the root word *shakan* (שָׁכַן - Strong’s 7931) which means to settle down or abide. To understand *shachane*, we must first understand *shakan*. The first place *shakan* is used in scripture is in Genesis 3:24 where YHVH placed Cherubim at the entrance to the Garden of Eden –

^{NKJ} **Genesis 3:24** So He drove out the man; and He placed (*shakan*) cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

In this case, *shakan* means *stationed or made to abide*. This is where the cherubim lived, their abode for the foreseeable future – probably till the flood. If their purpose was to keep humans from entering the Garden, then it would stand to reason that there were, or at least were going to be, people living in the vicinity of the Garden. If that were the case, the cherubim would be neighbors to those people.

Later, YHVH dwelt in a sanctuary in the midst of Israel –

^{ESV} **Exodus 25:8** And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell (*shakan*) in their midst.

¹ John 14:10

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In this instance, the YHVH was going to be a neighbor to Israel, living within their camp.

Shakan is used 129 times in scripture, and in practically every case it's in the context of God dwelling with Israel or Israel dwelling in the land. But there are exceptions, the most notable being Esau and his descendants who would be dwelling among the Israelites –

^{NKJ} **Genesis 16:12** He shall be a wild man; His hand shall be against every man, And every man's hand against him. And he shall dwell (*shakan*) in the presence of all his brethren."

As we know, Esau is the father of the Amalekites, arch enemies of Israel. Yet they were going to dwell among the Israelites. So, in the context of the scripture, *shakan* - to dwell - almost always applies to Israelites, yet there are times when it applies to non-Israelites and to people(s) who may not be friendly to the Israelites.

Shachane, on the other hand is a even more broad. The first time we see it used is when the Israelites are told to spoil their Egyptian neighbors –

^{ESV} **Exodus 3:22** but each woman shall ask of her neighbor (*shachane*), and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians."

You'll notice that they were to request the items of gold and silver from those who lived in their home. Even though they were not Israelites, apparently some Egyptians lived in the Israelite's homes. That's pretty close! Why were Egyptians living with the Israelites? Maybe as a result of the plagues they had come to believe in Israel's God and were taking refuge there – after all, there was light in the homes of the Israelites. If indeed there were some Egyptians living with the Israelites, we might assume they were still living there at the Passover, which is where we see the word *shachane* the second time.

^{ESV} **Exodus 12:4** And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor (*shachane*) shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb.

So in these cases, the *shachane* is someone close to the Israelites, but not necessarily an Israelite . . . and may or may not share the same view as the Israelites.

But *shachane* is not always used this way. In some cases, the *shachane* can be the enemy of Israel, such as in the case of Amorites. If you recall, the Amorites would not allow the Israelites pass through their territory, thus Moses and the Israelites destroyed them². In this passage we see that *shachane* is the Hebrew term used to describe the relationship between the Amorites and the peoples around them . . . their neighbors.

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 1:7** Turn and take your journey, and go to the hill country of the Amorites and to all their neighbors (*shachane*) in the Arabah, in the hill country and in the lowland and in the Negeb and by the seacoast, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.

There are other passages, especially in the Psalms, where *shachane* refers to people who are Israel's neighbors, though not necessarily their friends. Thus, we can see that a *shachane* is someone who may or may not dwell among the Israelites, and who may or may not be a friend to Israel.

the Ger -

² Numbers 21:21

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At this point, let's interject the understanding of the *ger* (גר – Strong's 1616), the word that's often translated *stranger*. It comes from a root word meaning to *sojourn* as when Abraham *sojourned* in Egypt during a drought. In regards to Israel, there were two types of *ger*, the first being the one who simply dwelt in the land along with you and didn't cause any problems. This was the type of *ger* Abraham was in Egypt – he just lived there and didn't cause problems. This type of *ger* is what's spoken of in passages such as those that allow the Israelite to treat the stranger differently than another Israelite, for example, eating something that died of itself³ –

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 14:21** "You shall not eat anything that has died naturally. You may give it to the sojourner who is within your towns, that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner. For you are a people holy to the LORD your God . . .

The other type of *ger* is the one who, though not born an Israelite, wanted to become like an Israelite.⁴ This is what we find in the Exodus 12 passage about the Passover -

^{NKJ} **Exodus 12:48** "And when a stranger (*ger*) dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it.

In this case, the *ger* became an *ezech* (עֲזֵיכּ – Strong's 249), as one born in the land – in other words, he became for all practical purposes an Israelite. The *ger* / *ezech* is what's being spoken of in the 'love the stranger' passages in the Torah⁵. For instance -

^{NKJ} **Leviticus 19:34** "The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

You'll notice that YHVH did not tell Israel to love all the strangers as themselves, just the ones that had become *ezech*. In effect, YHVH is telling the Israelites to treat the believing *ger* as if he were an Israelite himself.

the Rea -

Getting back to the understanding of neighbor, there's another word for neighbor that's used in the Tnakh and that word is *rea* (רֵעַ – Strong's 7453) which pictographically means *the head you can see*. We talked about this word last time⁶, but as a refresher - it comes from the root word *ra-ah* which is often translated *shepherd*. We all know what a shepherd is, he's someone the sheep know and trust. The Egyptian women, referred to as *shachane* earlier, are also called a *rea* in the following passage –

^{ESV} **Exodus 11:2** Speak now in the hearing of the people, that they ask, every man of his neighbor (*rea*) and every woman of her neighbor (*re'uwth*), for silver and gold jewelry."

Thus, a *shachane* can also be a *rea* if they are a close neighbor . . . and as we saw earlier, some of these Egyptian women were probably living in the homes of the Israelites.

The *rea* is a friend, someone who walks with you and understands you. Of the 38 times we find the word *friend* in the Tnakh, all but five of them come from the word *rea*. The other times,

³ Notice that in Lev. 17:15 a *ger* is not allowed to eat something that dies naturally. This is because in this case, the *ger* is coupled with the Israelites . . . he's an *ezech*.

⁴ In Judaism, he's called a *ger toshav* (Strong's 8453)

⁵ The other passage, Deut. 10:19, is a reiteration of the Leviticus passage and thus implies that the *ger* is as one born among you – an *ezech*.

⁶ See "Love Your Neighbor"

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friend comes from the word *ahava* – love. In addition, practically every time we see the Hebrew word *rea*, it's either directly related to an Israelite, or is found in a prophecy about Israel.

Whereas a *shachane* is someone who often dwells among the Israelites, a *rea* is most often an Israelite – someone of the same belief system - someone you can call a friend. This is clearly expressed in the *New Covenant* passages of Jeremiah –

^{ESV} **Jeremiah 31:34** And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor (*rea*) and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

As shown last time, the *neighbor* in the '*love your neighbor*' passage is a *rea*, not a *shachane*, and since a *rea* is almost always an Israelite as well as someone who is of the same belief system, the passage probably does not apply to those who are casual acquaintance or someone who opposes your beliefs.

This is further substantiated by looking at the Greek words used to quote the '*love your neighbor*' passage in the New Testament.

the Plesion {*play-see-on*} -

According to the Septuagint, the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *rea* is *plesion* (Strong's 4139). It comes from the Greek word *pelas* which means *near*, and thus carries the understanding of someone who is near to you. According to Strong's Concordance, the primary meaning is "*a neighbor, a friend, any other person, and where two are concerned, the other (thy fellow man, thy neighbor), according to the Jews, any member of the Hebrew race and commonwealth*"

Every place we see *plesion* in the New Testament, it is either quoting a passage in the Tnakh where the Hebrew word *rea* is used, or it's referring to a member of the household of faith. It never refers to someone who is outside the community of Israel.

There are five other passages that use a derivative of the word *neighbor* (neighbors), but does not use the Greek word *plesion*, but in each case, the neighbor is also a friend, and in the context of the passage, an Israelite.

So let's return to the '*love your neighbor*' passages of the New Testament. In the Gospels this event is repeated twice, Matthew 22:34 and Mark 12:30, and a similar event is recorded in Luke 10:25. Since it was recorded three times, it's obvious that Yeshua's remarks in regard to loving one's neighbor made a tremendous impact on His disciples. In all three passages the idea of loving God is tied to loving one's neighbor which would indicate that Yeshua wanted them to realize that unless they love their neighbor, they in fact, cannot love God. Though each passage get's the point across about loving God and neighbor, Luke records a comment that is not a part of the other two accounts, namely the question "who is my neighbor". Let's read Luke's account -

^{ESV} **Luke 10:25-29** And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" ²⁷ And he answered, "You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself." ²⁸ And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." ²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

You are probably aware that this is the '*Good Samaritan*' passage. It comes immediately after Yeshua sends the seventy disciples out throughout Samaria and the northern regions of Israel.

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When the disciples returned they were filled with joy because they saw that while on their mission, even the demons were subject to them. Yeshua encouraged them to remain humble then blessed them saying –

^{ESV} **Luke 10:23-24** "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! ²⁴ For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

What is it that the prophets desired to see, but did not? What had they foretold that had yet to come to pass? As we know, all the prophets, beginning with Moses and continuing all the way through Malachi, prophesied of the repentance of the northern and southern tribes of Israel and the re-unification of the Israelite kingdom. This is the most repeated prophecy of the Bible, and the purpose for the advent of Messiah Yeshua. What Yeshua was telling His disciples was that they were witnessing the beginning of the fulfillment of these prophecies.

Now notice the very next passage. It begins "v'hinneh!", or in English - "and behold". Because the Hebrew would always connect thoughts with the word "and", this is an indication that what happens next is very important and is tied to the previous thought. Yeshua was saying that the Good Samaritan parable is linked to prophecies of the restoration of Israel. Let's read the parable and note some interesting points –

Luke 10:30-35 ³⁰ Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to **Jericho**, and he fell among robbers, who **stripped him** and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ He went to him and bound up his wounds, **pouring on oil** and wine. Then he **set him on his own animal** and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'

So let's analyze the parable.

First – the man was going from Jerusalem to Jericho. Yeshua rarely used city names in His parables, but in this one, he listed two – Jerusalem and Jericho. Since the Jewish people lived mostly in the southern areas of Israel, and since he was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, it's likely Yeshua was indicating the man was of the tribe of Judah.

Second - The man was attacked by robbers and stripped bare. The robbers could have been Jewish, Samaritans, or maybe even the Romans. A priest and a Levite, probably both having come from the area of northern Israel both passed him by.

Third – A Samaritan stopped and helped him, even anointing his wounds with oil.

Finally - The Samaritan put him on his own donkey and took him to the inn.

Taking this parable at face value, we conclude that this hated Samaritan was more of a neighbor to the man than his Jewish counterparts, but is there more to the story?

It's important to realize that the Samaritans claimed to be Israelites, the descendants of Jacob. When Yeshua met the Samaritan woman at the well, she made that claim and Yeshua did not correct her. History indicates that the Samaritans were, more than likely, descendants of some of the northern tribe Israelites who had escaped the Assyrians and had returned to the land or had avoided capture. If this is the case, the 'good Samaritan' was under the same covenant as the Jew who had been robbed as well as the lawyer to whom Yeshua was telling the parable.

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Another point of background is that the man who asked the question “who is my neighbor” being a lawyer was probably quite knowledgeable in the Torah and, we might assume, the entire Tnakh. This fellow probably had a good recall of the history of Israel and had probably studied many of the stories that may have had an impact on the first century understanding of the Torah. One of those stories may have been that found in the 28th chapter of 2 Chronicles.

The Bible shows that after the death of Solomon the kingdom was divided and both nations – Israel and Judah – fell into deep idolatry. Shortly before the removal of the northern tribes by Assyria, Ahaz was king in Judah and Pekah was King in Israel.⁷ The 2 Chronicles passage shows that Ahaz was a very wicked king and followed the pagan ways of the Israelite kings. What’s more, he sacrificed his children to the pagan gods. Thus YHVH sent Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel to punish him. The Syrians attacked Judah and carried away “a great multitude”, then Israel attacked, killing 120,000 Jewish soldiers in one day, and then took captive 200,000 women and children with the intent of making slaves of them even though that would have been contrary to the Torah injunction that forbids Israelites taking slaves of their Israelite brothers.

Before reaching Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, a prophet met the soldiers and told them that what they were doing was not good and that they should return the Jewish captives. The soldiers relented and released the captives as well as the spoil. The narrative continues –

ESV² 2 Chronicles 28:15 And the men who have been mentioned by name rose and took the captives, and with the spoil they **clothed all who were naked** among them. They clothed them, gave them sandals, provided them with food and drink, and **anointed them**, and **carrying all the feeble among them on donkeys**, they **brought them to their kinsfolk at Jericho**, the city of palm trees. Then they returned to Samaria.

By the way, the prophet’s name was *Oded* (עֹדֵד – Strong’s 5752)⁸, a name that means *restorer*.

Do you see the striking resemblance between this story and the parable of the Good Samaritan? Could Yeshua have been telling the lawyer, who I would assume was proficient not only in Torah but also in Jewish oral law, that his neighbors were his long-hated brothers, the descendants of Jacob from the northern kingdom and that they should give up their long-standing hatred of the Samaritans? Did Yeshua have this prophecy in mind?

ESV² Isaiah 11:11-13 ¹¹ In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people . . . ¹² He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah . . . ¹³ The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, and those who harass Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not harass Ephraim.

Israel and Judah are neighbors. They are related to YHVH through a covenant that applies to them alone⁹, and they are brothers. They are the *rea* of the Tnakh and the *plesion* of the New Testament, and as such, their love of God will be shown in how they love each other. I believe that Yeshua’s ‘love your neighbor’ teaching was given to help Judah accept her Israelite brother so that the restoration spoken of by all the prophets could begin.

One final thought –

⁷ Approx. 725 BCE

⁸ From *uwd* טוּב - Strong’s 4749 – to return, repeat, go about, do again

⁹ As we clearly teach throughout our ministry and clearly on our web site – www.amiyisrael.org – anyone who attaches himself to the God of Israel, His Torah, and His Messiah, by definition becomes Israelites in the eyes of YHVH, the God of Israel, and become part of the covenant God made with Abraham.

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You and I don't know who YHVH is calling at this time, who is an Israelite (either genetically or spiritually) and who is not. Thus someone you may think is not your spiritual brother may well be. Therefore it's important to avoid treating anyone in such a way that might cause you embarrassment at a later time. We should be as the writer of Hebrews admonishes –

^{ESV} **Hebrews 13:1** Let brotherly love continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Shalom Aleichem