

Compare, contrast, and comment on the interpretations of "neighbor" found in the *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (below)

with the sections "Love of One's Neighbor: A Moral Norm" and "A Choice of Neighbors" in *Living Issues In Ethics* <http://www.philosophy-religion.org/living/6.pdf> (pp. 120-124) as well as *What Does It Mean To Love God, Neighbor, And Oneself? Are The Three Loves Identical?* <http://www.philosophy-religion.org/reflections/pdfs/Sermon25A-2008.pdf> .

## Neighbor

A neighbor in Israelite society is well described in Lev 19:16-18 Lev 19:16 Lev 19:17 Lev 19:18 (part of which is cited in the Synoptics; Matt 22:39 Matt 22:39 ; Mark 12:31 Mark 12:31 ; Luke 10:27 Luke 10:27 ): “You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor. . . You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Here neighbor includes “your people” and “your kin.” For an Israelite, all Israelites are neighbor.

Thus, a neighbor is a member of the Israelite ingroup or we-group. Ingroup refers to an exclusive circle of people with a common purpose, interests, or attitudes, especially one that produces feelings of camaraderie, exclusivity, community, and solidarity. In Israel this ingroup consisted of those covenanted to the God of Israel, the people of the God of Israel, characterized by common blood, common land, common language, common way of life, and common worship. This is the widest circle of all Israel.

However, in daily living this wide ingroup was more constricted and focused on people in narrower circles consisting of extended family, village mates, city section mates, city mates, and the like. The boundaries of one’s ingroup expanded and contracted largely in terms of who constituted the outgroup. For all Israel, foreigners were outgroup; for Galileans, the people of Judea and Perea as well as Samaria were outgroup; for the people of Nazareth, other villages and towns were outgroup. As a rule, then, neighbor describes persons who live in proximity and interact in terms of their mutual attachments and entitlements.

The fact of physical proximity is interpreted as involving some sense of self and extended self, some sense of being part of a neighborhood that involves a sort of network of people who provide one another with a sense of mutual belonging and mutual assistance. What binds neighbors in this sense are bonds of generalized reciprocity, that is, doing favors for one another in open-ended interactions. Neighbors acted like fictive kin. This is quite different from the neighborhood market where vendors and residents are bound by balanced reciprocity: take and pay here and now. But should the vendor provide open credit, the relationship develops into one of closer attachment, realized by generalized reciprocity. The network of interacting neighbors reaches a social boundary at which people on the other side might be general neighbors (e.g., the house of Israel), but because they do not regularly interact, they are regional non-neighbors, an outgroup. As a rule, local neighbors have no sense of obligation to these fellow ethnic people on the other side. Hence, while they are not enemies, they are like traveling vendors, treated by the norms of balanced reciprocity. And at a third social level is the realm of enemies, people who must be fended off and who have no entitlements of either balanced or generalized reciprocity. These are rightfully treated with negative reciprocity: take and give nothing in return.

The rule to love one’s neighbor has the same quality as the “thou shalt nots” of the TEN COMMANDMENTS. The purpose is to maintain societal harmony and prevent conflict among the ingroup. Neighbors and conflict are a sort of contradiction (see Matt 5:43-44 Matt 5:43 Matt 5:44). Reconciliation is required for neighborhood stability and peace and confidence in interaction (emphasized in Matt 5:23-26; 18:15-22 Matt 5:23 Matt 5:24 Matt 5:25 Matt 5:26 Matt 18:15 Matt 18:16 Matt 18:17 Matt 18:18 Matt 18:19 Matt 18:20 Matt 18:21 Matt 18:22; see Luke 17:3-4 Luke 17:3 Luke 17:4). Hence Page 247 the great value of village peacemakers, veritable sons of God (as in Matt 5:9 Matt 5:9 ).

The difficulty in antiquity was to consider people beyond the outermost rim of the ingroup as anything other than enemy, as a different species, as not belonging to the ethnocentric human race constituted of self and one's neighbors. The question of "who is my neighbor" was therefore one of significance, especially for the scribal class. Villagers knew who their neighbors were. The scribal class asked the theoretical question of how far the boundaries of neighborhood extended (as in Luke 10:29 Luke 10:29 ).

The parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37 Luke 10:30 Luke 10:31 Luke 10:32 Luke 10:33 Luke 10:34 Luke 10:35 Luke 10:36 Luke 10:37 extends the neighborhood boundary to those original Israelites, the, regardless of their subsequent genealogical confusion. While Pharisees and their program of "no mixture" tended to exclude many in Israel, Jesus' vision of a forthcoming Israelite theocracy included as many as possible. Old Israel (Samaria) and newer Israel (Judea) are bound by the mutual obligations and entitlements of neighborly obligations.

In sum, to understand neighbor one might imagine three concentric social rings: the center ring includes people obliged by mutual generalized reciprocity, one's local, everyday neighbors. The next ring includes people obliged by balanced obligations, tit for tat, here referring to the house of Israel. A third ring, left unbounded on the outside, consisted of people to whom one is not bound at all.

The feat of subsequent human development during the Enlightenment was to imagine that all human beings might be neighbors, hence to include all humans within this innermost ring of generalized reciprocity. But as the period of globalization and continual aggression begun in the 20th cent. has demonstrated, this vision has not succeeded. Instead there is a new arrangement of an innermost ring consisting of persons of extreme wealth, with the rest of humankind in the balanced and negative reciprocity rings.

**Bibliography:** Benedict R. Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983); Bruce J. Malina. *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology* (1986).

**BRUCE J. MALINA**