



Walking in the *Foot Prints* of Jesus A Discipleship Journey

The OLD TESTAMENT- Their Story is Our Story The Exile

We have seen in the past few weeks' reflections, God, speaking through the prophets, implored the Israelites to abandon their idolatry of foreign gods and addiction to pagan cultural ways and turn back to God. After Solomon's death, the nation of Israel divided into the Northern and Southern states. Each struggled, under corrupt kings, in their fidelity to the Lord; their rulers worshipped other gods, allowed pagan worship in the Temple, made alliances with their neighboring countries, and ignored the widows and the poor. In other words, Israel ignored God's law and, thus, risked losing God's blessing.

Over and over again the prophets tried to warn them. Some listened and repented, but most did not. Eventually the divided nation of Israel fell – first the Northern Kingdom to the Assyrians, then the Southern Kingdom to the Babylonians. Disaster had fallen upon God's Chosen People - Jerusalem burned, the Temple was torn down to its very foundation, and anyone with any power or importance was exiled.

As you can imagine, this was a time of deep sadness, of mourning and despair. Had God abandoned them, the Israelites asked? Who could they blame for their misfortune? Who is this God who would allow this to happen? Would they ever be allowed to become a nation again?

To say that these events were a pivotal point in the history of the Israelite nation would be an understatement. The Exile changed everything: they lost their land, they lost their independence; and, most importantly, the Temple was destroyed. Their very identity as God's chosen people was called into question.

The Israelites live in exile for 70 years, during which the prophet Jeremiah encourages them to take wives, build houses, plant gardens, and take advantage of their situation. He tells them the Exile was God's punishment, but they were to learn from this and maintain hope for the coming redemption.

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose hope is in the Lord.
Jeremiah 17:7

We, too, have just experienced our own form of exile, living under the restrictions of Covid 19. Like the Israelites, this has been a time of change, uncertainty and loss, but also a time of reflection and re-assessment. How have we changed as a result of this past year? What have we learned about ourselves, our families, or our world? What has surprised us? Is there anything we wish to hold on to as we emerge from this season of our lives? Of what might we be invited to let go? Where has God made God-self known to us through this time? What might God be inviting us into as we move forward?

The Israelites spent their 70 years in exile examining who they were as a people and how they could reclaim their identity and inheritance as God's Chosen People. Perhaps we too can take this opportunity to examine who we are as disciples, as God's beloved children, as God's chosen ones.

