



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

The OLD TESTAMENT- Their Story is Our Story

Purifying Jerusalem

In last week's reflection, the returning Israelites rejected the Samaritans, banishing them from Jerusalem, because they had married outside the kinship lines of ancient Israel. How shocking it must have been for Ezra the Priest, arriving in the second wave of returning exiles, to discover that those very same Israelites had taken foreign daughters as their wives and "desecrated the holy race with the peoples of the land!" (Ezra 9:2) The Lord had been merciful to the Israelites by allowing a remnant to return to their holy land but the Israelites still abandoned His commandment to not intermarry. As Ezra prayed, wept and lay prostrate before the Lord, the people make an appeal to Ezra:

We have indeed betrayed our God by taking as wives foreign women of the peoples of the land. Yet even now there remains a hope for Israel. Let us therefore enter into a covenant before our God to dismiss all our foreign wives and the children born of them, in keeping with what you, my lord, advise, and those who fear the commandments of our God.

Ezra 10:2 - 3

And so they did; foreign wives and children were banished in order to purify the Israelite community. Ezra then reintroduced the Law and rekindled the people's devotion to God.

Though this is a difficult story to read and, perhaps, even more difficult to understand, the events in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe the regathering of the Israelite nation and their struggle to survive and reclaim their identity as God's chosen people. Perhaps the only way to break them from their addiction to the surrounding culture was to remove all temptations from their lives. As the Israelites re-committed themselves to the law, they restored their covenant with God, and reclaimed their identity as a people.

Perhaps we've had times in our lives when something seemingly harmless pulls us farther and farther away from God. Perhaps we don't even realize how far from God we've strayed until something jars us awake. The Israelites needed spiritual reformation and transformation to right the wrongs they had committed and to restore them in right relationship with God. What spiritual restoration or transformation is needed in our lives today to help restore us in right relationship with God?