



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

The OLD TESTAMENT - Their Story is Our Story

The Israelites when Jesus was born

In the 300+ years before Jesus was born, the Israelites survived a lot of upheaval. The Persians, Alexander the Great, and then the Greeks all had a turn ruling the Israelites with varying degrees of persecution, the worst being the Greeks. After the Jewish uprising and the Chanukah miracles, there was a short period of peace. The Samaritans were banished from Judea because they had intermarried with the pagan people around them and were no longer pure. They became the enemy of the Jews. Then came the Romans, who were far worse at persecuting the Jews than any of the others.

Rome placed Herod the Great, a Jew, in the position of king and he was to keep the Jews in line and maintain peace in the region, though Herod did have to be obedient to Rome as well. He was the king at the time of Jesus's birth. The high priest, an important official in the Jewish community, was often a member of one of the leading political families and thus was a puppet of Rome as well. The Sanhedrin, a senate of 70 members presided over by the high priests, also had power over some aspects of Jewish life.

There were other religious political groups as well. The Sadducees were allies of the high priests and Rome. They were conservative and the party of the privileged. They did not want independence from Rome as that would threaten their power and influence.

The Pharisees were more liberal and saw Roman rule as the divine punishment for Israel's unfaithfulness to God. They did not want rebellion, but looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. They were strong advocates of education and the rededication of the Jews to the covenant.

These religious and political groups often disagreed with each other and there was tremendous tension in the land. Rome was trying to keep peace and stability so that it could collect its taxes for the comfort of the citizens of Rome. The Jews were trying to practice their culture and religion and keep their covenant with God while not arising too much suspicion from Rome. Some of the Jews were willing to make compromises to Rome in order to be comfortable. Jesus often disagreed with these compromises.

The rest of the population were poor peasants. They obeyed the strict and cruel Roman rulers or were killed. They paid heavy taxes to the Roman government. These impoverished Jews were required to follow the religious laws as well, or be outcast from their community. They were required to pay more taxes to the temple. It is no wonder that they looked forward to a Messiah who would free them from all of this poverty and pain, this being pulled in one direction and then another. Jesus was born into this poor community and grew up there. He understood and loved the poor with real human compassion. It is no wonder that He disagreed with the Pharisees and other leaders both political and religious.

How is Jesus's life in this very controversial time an example for our lives in our controversial time?