



Power of the Prophets: from Moses to Jesus

Week 6

Second Isaiah and Israel's Life-after-Death



Simplified Old Testament Timeline

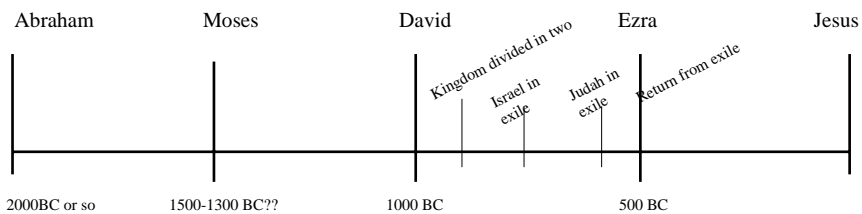
Birth

Life . . . Life . . . Life

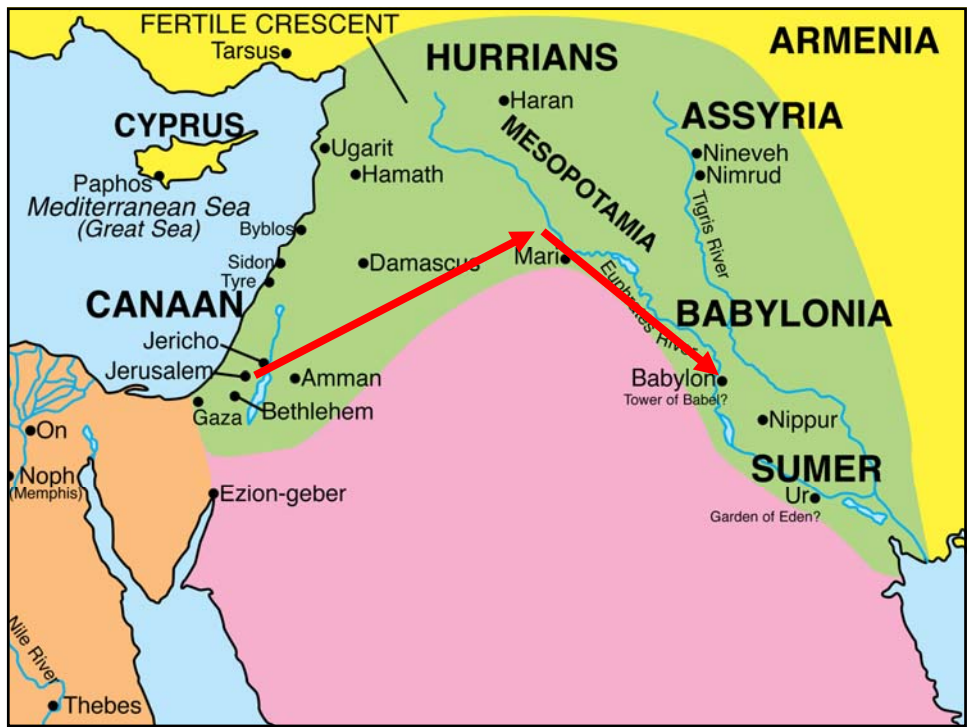
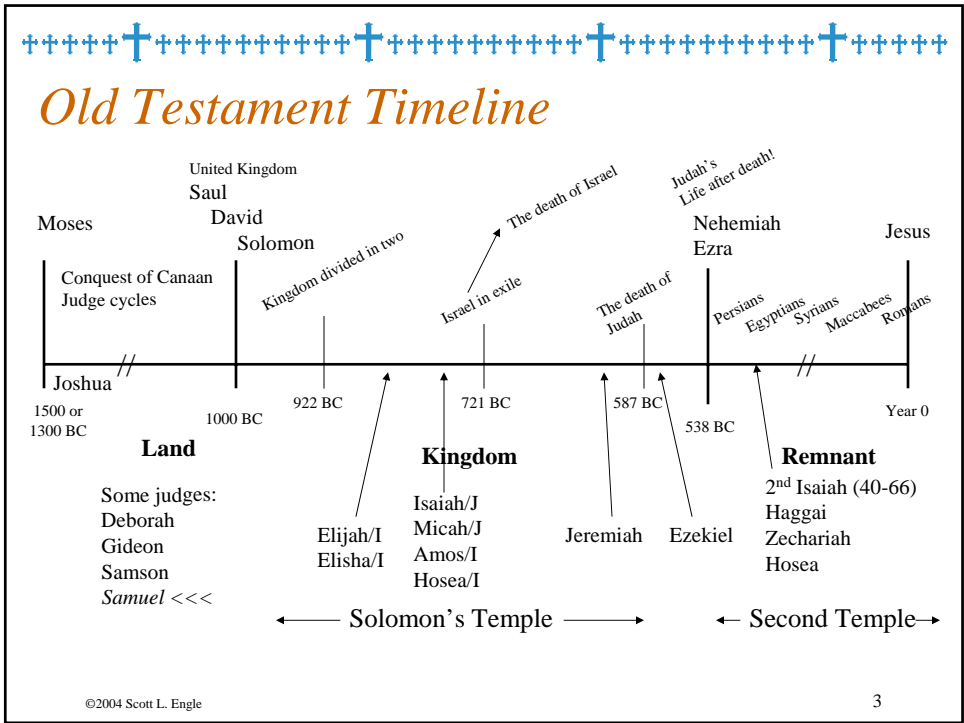
Death

Life
after
death

Resurrection!



This is a simplified timeline – all the dates are approximate!





The Exile – going to Babylon

- ❖ The book of Lamentations is a searing book of poetry on the unspeakable suffering of Judah's death and the exile. *1:1-3*
- ❖ Tens of thousands of Jews went into exile in Babylonia. Some headed for Egypt, including Jeremiah. All these communities were the forerunners of the Diaspora.
 - Those who went to Babylon fared better than those left behind! (see Jeremiah 29:4-7)
- ❖ Only the poorest were left in Jerusalem. There was no effort to rebuild the city or the temple.
- ❖ The book of Daniel is set during the exile in Babylonia. He confronts Nebuchanezzar who tries to get Daniel and his friends to abandon God now that they are no longer in Judah.



In Exile – living in Babylon

- ❖ The exiles from Judah were a distinct, tiny, minority living in a vast and powerful culture far different from their own. They lived among people who believed in a pantheon of powerful gods. The Jews had three choices:
 - Acceptance of the foreign culture
 - Defiance
 - Accommodation – incorporating aspects of Babylonian culture and religion into their own
- ❖ It is surprising that the religion of Yahweh survived at all! But "Second Isaiah" points the way ahead – God has not abandoned his people.



Second Isaiah

- ❖ Beginning in Chapter 40, Isaiah speaks no more of the Assyrians, but of the Persians. Judah is in exile. King Cyrus of Persia, by name, is on the horizon.
- ❖ Most scholars, including many 'conservatives' believe that this prophet was writing in 550-540BC – while in exile in Babylonia.
 - If so, these are powerful words of hope and commitment to God written in the midst of profound suffering, loss, and temptation.
- ❖ "2nd" Isaiah launches an offensive against those who would abandon Yahweh or accommodate the foreign gods.
 - Yahweh *can* do something and *intends* to!
 - *Isaiah 40:21-23, 27-28*



Themes in Second Isaiah

- ❖ God has raised up Cyrus to put an end to the Babylonians
 - *Isaiah 41:2-3*
- ❖ God is doing this because the exile, the time of punishment, is over. Israel's sins have been forgiven.
 - *40:1-2; 42:18-20; 54:7-8 ; 61:1-2*
 - **KEY!!!** *It is easy to see why the Jews might think this at the time, but as things turn out, they will begin to question whether the exile ever really ended!!*
 - *See Luke 4:16-30* Jesus reads from the scroll of Isaiah. His fellow Jews in Nazareth are still awaiting the fulfillment of the promises brought by "2nd" Isaiah.



Themes in 2nd Isaiah (cont.)

- ❖ Yahweh can do all this because he is the only God!
 - Isaiah 44:24; 45:18; 44:6-8
- ❖ Yahweh will lead the people home and Jerusalem will be rebuilt in splendor
 - 48:20-21; 43:16-19; 51:9-11; 43:5-7; 54:11-12
- ❖ The nations will bow to Israel, the chosen of God
 - 47:10 (spoken to Babylon); 43:3-4; 49:22-23
- ❖ All this is so that Yahweh may be glorified
 - 42:10-12; 43:20-21
- ❖ The Servant Songs
 - What does servitude and suffering have to do with any of this? *Isaiah 53*



The Rise of Cyrus

- ❖ In the mid-sixth century the Babylonian empire collapsed. King Cyrus of Persia entered the imperial city of Babylon in 539BC. It is a long story, but Cyrus was seen as a liberator by the people of Babylon!
- ❖ Being a “liberator” rather than a tyrant and deporter of peoples, in 538BC, Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Judah and Jerusalem. For the Jews, God had raised up Cyrus, anointed him, to restore God’s people to their land. (see Ezra 1:2-4 & 6:3-5)
- ❖ Though Cyrus allowed them to return to Judah, this did NOT mean that Judah was independent. They remained a conquered people, though Cyrus would allow them to rebuild the city walls and the temple – at least after a fashion.



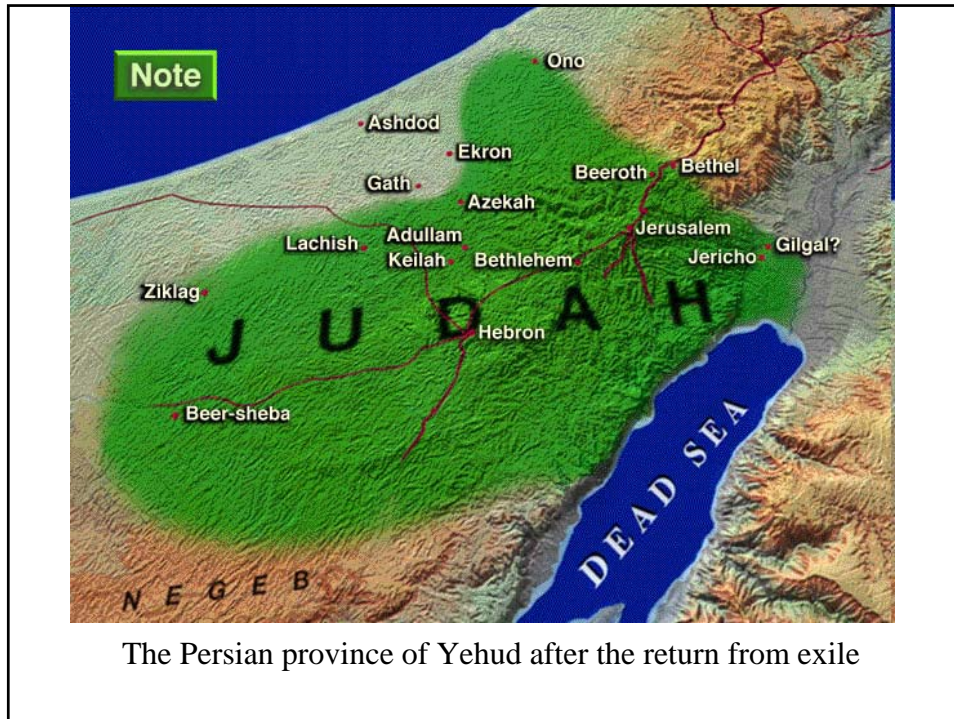
The “yellow” is the Persian Empire at its height! It was later conquered by Alexander the Great, setting the stage for the Greco-Roman world of Jesus’ day centuries later.



The “Cyrus Cylinder”



This proclaims Cyrus as the liberator of Babylon! He boasts that he allowed ‘disgraced peoples’ to return home.



The Return from Exile Begins

- ❖ The journey home would have been a difficult 1000 miles.
 - According to Ezra/Nehemiah, more than 42,000 returned to Judah.
- ❖ Many Jews stayed in Babylon and built a substantial Jewish community. The book of Esther is set in the Jewish community that stayed in Persia.
- ❖ Sheshbazzar, a son of Judah's last king, was the first provincial governor of Judah.
- ❖ Zerubbabel, another son of the last Judah king, was the 2nd governor and led the people to complete the rebuilding of the temple.
 - Haggai and Zechariah spurred the people on to the rebuilding. It would give the Jews a center for their religion. The temple was dedicated in 515BC.



Ezra and Nehemiah

- ❖ Ezra, a scribe 'skilled in the law of Moses,' arrived in perhaps 458BC.
 - He called the people back to the covenant and led them in their confession and recommitment. (see Nehemiah 8-10)
- ❖ Nehemiah returned in 445BC, appointed as governor by the King of Persia. He found the city still in ruins and set about the rebuilding of the city walls.
 - He also instituted measures to relieve the burden on the poor: he abolished usury and lowered the taxes.
- ❖ Ezra and Nehemiah saved the Jews from extinction, preserving them as a people and a religion.
 - But the threat of assimilation by others would only get worse under Alexander the Great and the Greeks – about 100 years after Nehemiah. The Greek influence would dominate the entire region for centuries.



“Post-Exilic” Prophets

- ❖ Haggai & Zechariah
 - Both preached in Jerusalem in about 520BC. They both urged the people to rebuild the temple.
 - *Haggai 1:1-15* – if you're going to rebuild your own houses, then rebuild God's! Also, *Zechariah 6:9-14*
- ❖ Malachi
 - We know almost nothing about Malachi, perhaps even his name. Malachi means "my messenger."
 - Worked somewhere between the dedication of the new temple and the arrival of Ezra.
 - Things have not gone well. Worship is careless and spiritual matters are neglected *3:8-12*.
 - Malachi predicted judgment on the unfaithful and deliverance for those who stayed true and kept the covenant. *3:16-4:4*
 - Malachi closes with a promise of an Elijah-like figure who will bring the day of judgment. *4:5-6*