

Scripture Summer School

# Jessie 2

Exile



Crisis!

Exile and Beyond



# Covenant

- The committed relationship between God and God's people
- "You will be my people and I will be your God."
- Requires
  - Faithfulness
  - Loyalty
  - Solidarity on God's part
  - Obedience on the people's part
- The law of the Mosaic covenant:
  - Love God and Love neighbour
- The promise of the Abrahamic Covenant:
  - Blessing, land and descendants



# Punishments for covenant- breaking

“And just as the Lord took delight in making you prosperous and numerous, so the Lord will take delight in bringing you to ruin and destruction; you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to possess. The Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other”

(Deuteronomy 28:63-4)



# The Exilic emphasis in the prophets

## Pre-exilic prophets (Amos, Hosea, Micah, Habakkuk, Isaiah, Jeremiah)

- Calling back to covenant faithfulness
- Warning that if they do not change their ways, exile is coming
- Pointing to hope beyond exile

## Exilic prophets (Ezekiel, 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah)

- Helping people to cope with anguish of exile
- Giving resources to hold onto their faith and identity in exile
- Encouraging and energizing them to come out of exile

## Post-exilic prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)

- Energising the people to rebuild after the Return



“The exile is the central point of biblical history, the period around which all others are oriented.”

Carr and Conway, *Sacred Texts and Imperial Contexts* (2010), 148

# The centrality of the Exile

## Jesus' Genealogy in Matthew 1

<sup>2</sup> Abraham was the father of Isaac

..... and Jesse the father of King David.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah ... and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the **deportation to Babylon**.

<sup>12</sup> And after the **deportation to Babylon**: Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel ... <sup>16</sup>... and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

<sup>17</sup> So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David **to the deportation to Babylon**, fourteen generations; and **from the deportation to Babylon** to the Messiah, fourteen generations.



# Before the Exile

Kingdom centred on  
Jerusalem

- Descendants of David on the throne
- Temple of God that Solomon built is centre of religious worship

Prophets calling the  
people back to  
covenant faithfulness

- Syncretistic worship ('Baal')
- Social injustice – small elite with widespread oppression and poverty



# Jeremiah and the Davidic kings – tearing down and building up

## Jeremiah 22: 1-5, 8-9

Thus says the LORD: Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and speak there this word,<sup>2</sup> and say: Hear the word of the LORD, O King of Judah sitting on the throne of David— you, and your servants, and your people who enter these gates.<sup>3</sup> Thus says the LORD: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place.<sup>4</sup> For if you will indeed obey this word, then through the gates of this house shall enter kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their servants, and their people.<sup>5</sup> But if you will not heed these words, I swear by myself, says the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation. ...

<sup>8</sup> And many nations will pass by this city, and all of them will say one to another, “Why has the LORD dealt in this way with that great city?”<sup>9</sup> And they will answer, “Because they abandoned the covenant of the LORD their God, and worshiped other gods and served them.”

## Jeremiah 23:1-6

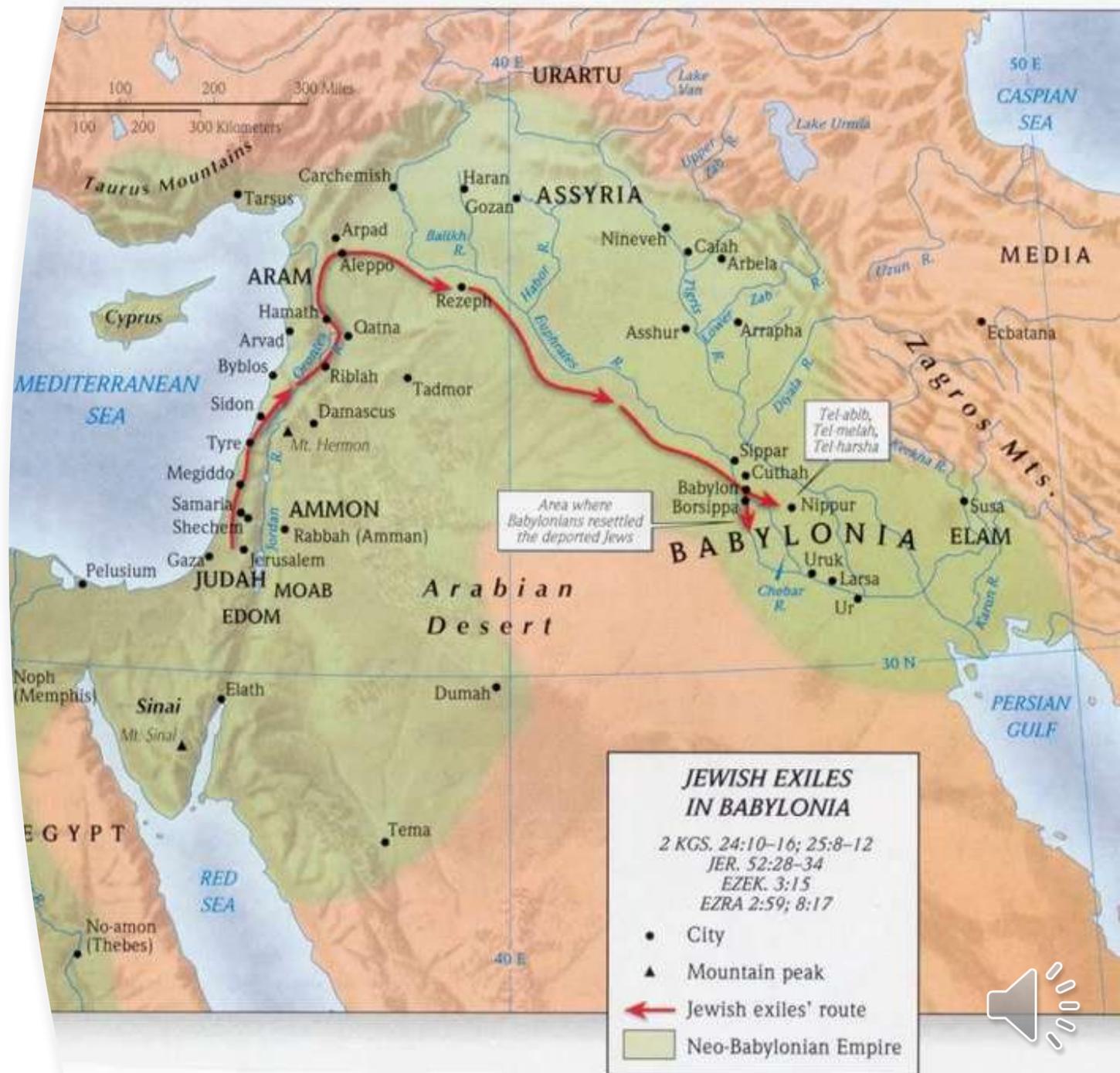
Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD.<sup>2</sup> Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD.<sup>3</sup> Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.<sup>4</sup> I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the LORD.

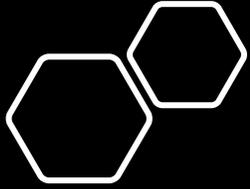
<sup>5</sup> The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.<sup>6</sup> In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: “The LORD is our righteousness.”



# The Exile

- Last days of Jerusalem – 2 Kings 24-25
- Falls to the Babylonians in 586 BCE
  - Jerusalem destroyed
  - Davidic king deposed
  - Temple destroyed
  - People carried into exile
  - Resettled in deserted areas of Babylonia
- The experience of going into exile:
  - Book of Lamentations (5 laments over Jerusalem)





# The Experience of Exile

- Not enslaved, but not allowed to return home
- Babylon becomes the new 'Egypt'
- Babylon takes on mythic qualities as 'arch evil' in the Bible e.g. Book of Revelation
- Psalms of Exile
  - Psalm 137
    - "By the rivers of Babylon"
    - "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"
  - Psalm 44
    - "You have made us like sheep for slaughter, and have scattered us among the nations."
    - "... yet we have not forgotten you or been false to your covenant."
    - Cry to God to keep God's part of the covenant.
- Note the complexity of experience



# Theological Crisis

“The Zion that Judah thought was invulnerable was destroyed. Its leadership was scattered, its monarchy out of power. Many exiles seem to have doubted whether Yahweh would still care about them anymore, sinful as they were.” Carr and Conway p 163

- Exile in Babylon becomes the new ‘Egypt’
- Crisis in Zion theology
  - Temple gone,
  - Davidic king gone
- Crisis in identity as People of God
  - Loss of land – ultimate sanction of the covenant activated
  - Was the covenant forever broken?

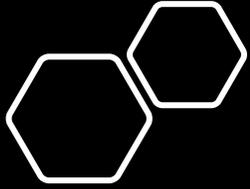




# Ezekiel's Throne- Chariot Vision

- Ezekiel 1
  - Ezekiel is in exile
  - The glory of God on a throne with wheels
  - Coming the same route that the exiles had taken
- God is joining God's people in Exile





# The Exilic Community

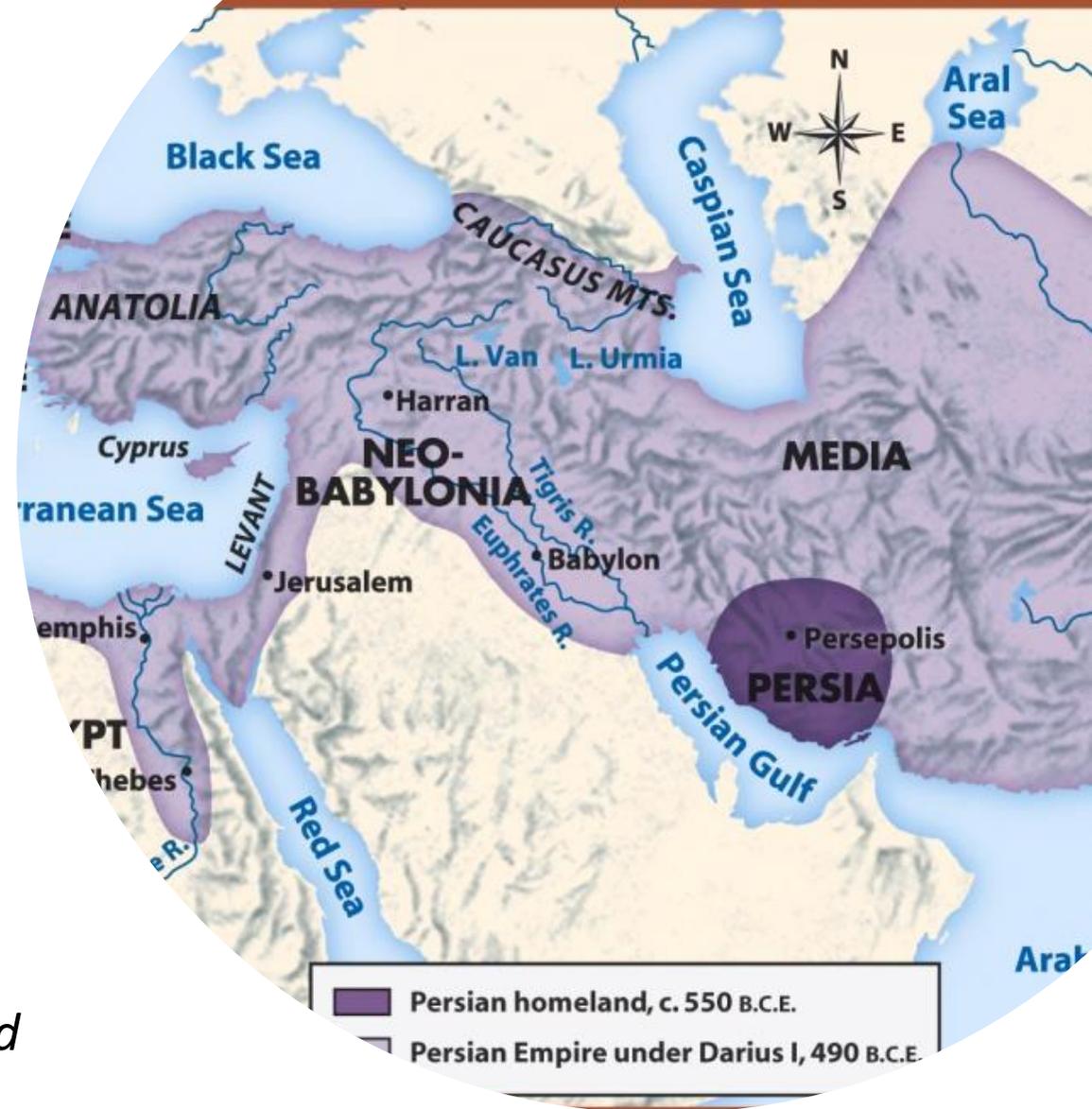
Seek ways to preserve communal identity in a hostile cultural environment

- Family and clan-based identity (instead of political / national)
- Emphasis on religious practices that don't need a temple
  - e.g. circumcision and Sabbath
- Synagogues?
- Sacred texts
  - Most exiles are from the Jerusalem elite, so (re)write their traditions



# The Persian Empire

- Persians defeat the Babylonians 539BC
  - Persia = modern day Iran
  - Babylonia = modern day Iraq
- Persians had a very different approach
  - No policy of exile
  - Allowed communities exiled by Babylonians to return
  - Support the returnee communities to rebuild in exchange for loyalty
  - *People of Judah return to Jerusalem and Judah and rebuild community life (The Return 538 BC)*
- A psalm of Return - Psalm 126



# The Prophetic Response

- Prophets invite people to live in God's reality, to see through the illusions.
  - Those illusions may be that everything is fine, that the world can keep on going as is.
  - Or it can be that everything is lost, that God has deserted us, that there is no reason to hope.
- The Prophets challenge both complacency and despair.
  - Pre-exilic complacency
    - Prophets 'tear down' the easy beliefs that God is on our side, not as the free God of the covenant but a parochial, patriotic God who will support us, right or wrong.
  - Exilic despair:
    - The prophets also help people to find God in the chaos and the devastation of exile. They say that we can go there and live through it because God goes with us.
    - The prophets energize people to keep trusting in God



To think about ....

What about 'exile'  
resonates with our  
own experience?

