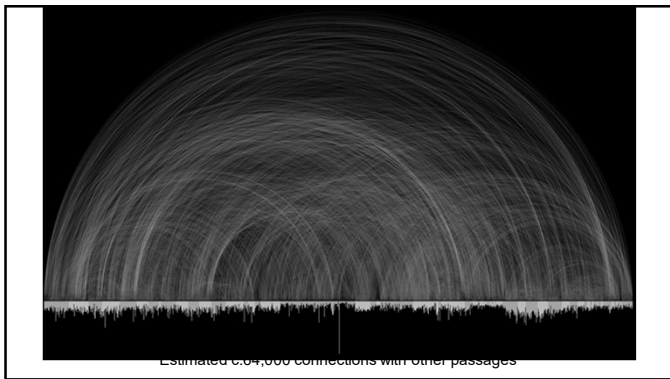


1

Studying Hebrew Narrative

- The challenge of taking the Bible on its own terms, and understanding it in the way it was written
 - It is first and foremost a multi-genre literary work set in history
 - The strange task of turning a literary work into sermons
- But what is the intent of the original writers? What are they hoping to accomplish? What is their purpose in writing?
 - Finding their shape, in this case the cycles of ancient stories that are similar, yet progressing literary work
 - At the same time, the importance of a "theological" reading, not merely history
- As a unified literary work, the importance of inter-connectedness

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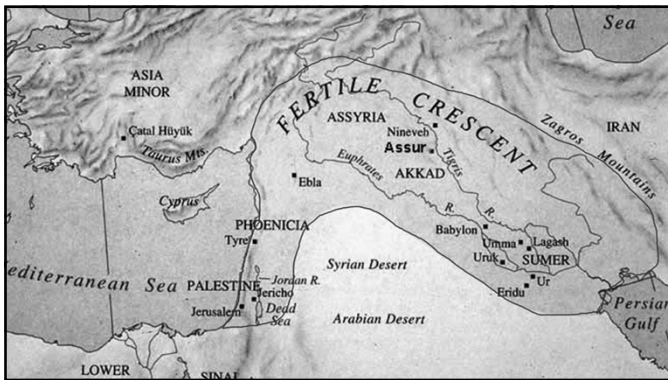


3

Introduction: The Story So Far

- Creation, Fall, Flood, Tower of Babel
- The Call of Abraham (Isaac and Jacob)
- The Twelve Tribes of Israel (Joseph)
 - The Egyptian Enslavement (the silent God)
 - The Exodus (Moses)
 - The Wilderness (a new generation)
 - The Conquest (Joshua and the Judges)
 - The Monarchy (Samuel-Saul-David)
 - The Divided Monarchy (Israel/Samaria and Judah/Jerusalem)
 - The Fall of the Northern Kingdom (to Assyria in 722 B.C.)
 - The Fall of the Southern Kingdom (to Babylon in 586 B.C.)
 - Exile (how then should we live?)

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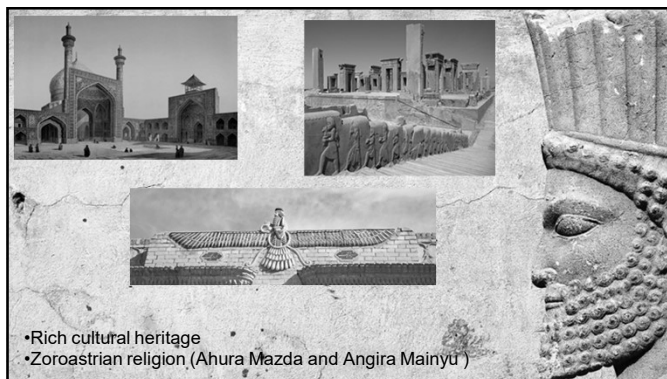
The Persian Empire: Backdrop to Ezra-Nehemiah

- Cyrus the Great (II) - story of the Shepherd
- 3rd King of Anshan (Iran), assumes throne c.559 B.C. after revolting against his grandfather and father
- Campaign against Lydia in the West then East to India (Indus Valley)
- He then sets himself against the Babylonian Empire, no small task
 - The people of the city of Babylon see him as liberator rather than conquerer
- He becomes the ruler of the "whole" world, the king of other kings, with only Egypt and Greece remaining
- Policy of returning all captured people throughout the empire back to their homelands, funding rebuilding of worship centers and encouragement of local cultures and customs
- The specific decree of 539 B.C. enables the return of the Jewish exiles to Judah

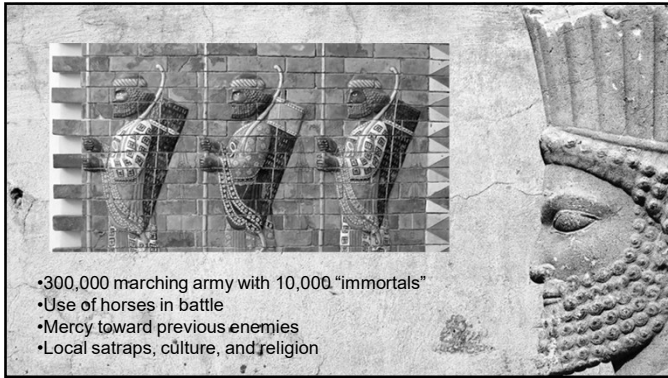
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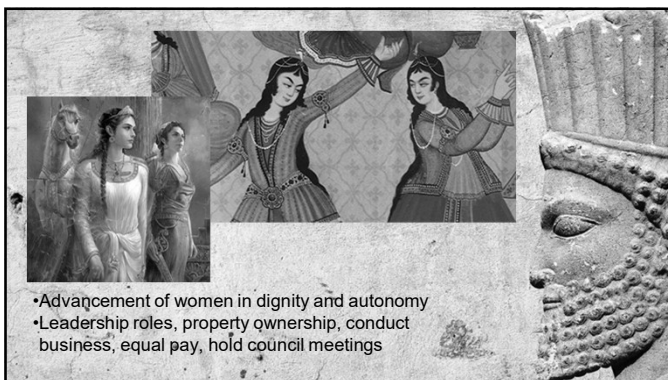
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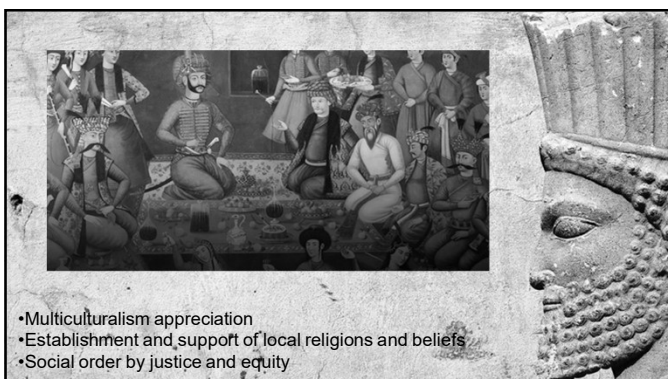
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12

A Prophetic Fulfillment: Isaiah and Jeremiah

- **Ezra 1:1**
 - Despite the fact that Israel's exile is due to her own sin, God shows Himself as the Promise Keeper as revealed in the prophets
- **Jeremiah 25:11ff** *This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste.*
- **Isaiah 44:28** *...who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose'; saying of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'*
- The "Prophetic Package of Promises" (1) return to the land (2) re-establishment of worship (3) obedience to the Law of God (4) coming of the nations to join (5) enthronement and rule of David King over all the nations who will to him

13

The Book(s) of Ezra-Nehemiah

- Originally considered one book by the Jews, later divided by Origen and Jerome
- **Four Persian leaders:** Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes (Ahasuerus of Esther), and Artaxerxes
- **Three major periods:** 1st (c.538 B.C.) and 2nd (c.458 B.C.) returns of exiles, work of Nehemiah (c.445 B.C.)
- **Three major leaders, projects, and trouble**
 - Ezra 1-7: Zerubbabel and the Temple
 - Ezra 8-10: Ezra and the Law
 - Nehemiah 1-13: Nehemiah and the Wall
- **One major question:** as these are written and told in reflection, what are the lessons the Jewish people are to learn?
 - **For us:** How does it contribute to the Big Story of the coming of Jesus Christ to fulfill the promises of God? It is the last stretch of Jewish history before Jesus
- **Authorship:** combination of official documents (decree of Cyrus, lists of people and items, genealogies), personal memoirs (the "I" passages), and theological history

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Ezra-Nehemiah: The Series

- Prologue: Setting the Stage
- Episode 1: Zerubbabel and the Temple
 - Episode 2: Ezra and the Law
 - Episode 3: Nehemiah and the Wall
 - Episode 4: The Great Letdown
 - Postlude: Now What?

15

Concluding Thoughts

- The LORD as the Covenant Promise keeper
- The LORD's sovereign movement of a human sovereign
 - The "mixed" effects of God's work (both Jews and other nations are re-established)
- The possible influence of Hebrew (and later Christian) thought due to their experience in Persia (i.e. Isaiah 45:7/1John1:5)
- The likelihood that the Magi were from Persia, and are a fulfillment of the coming of the nations
- Which of the "prophetic promise package" are fulfilled, what are left unfulfilled, and what is the solution?
