



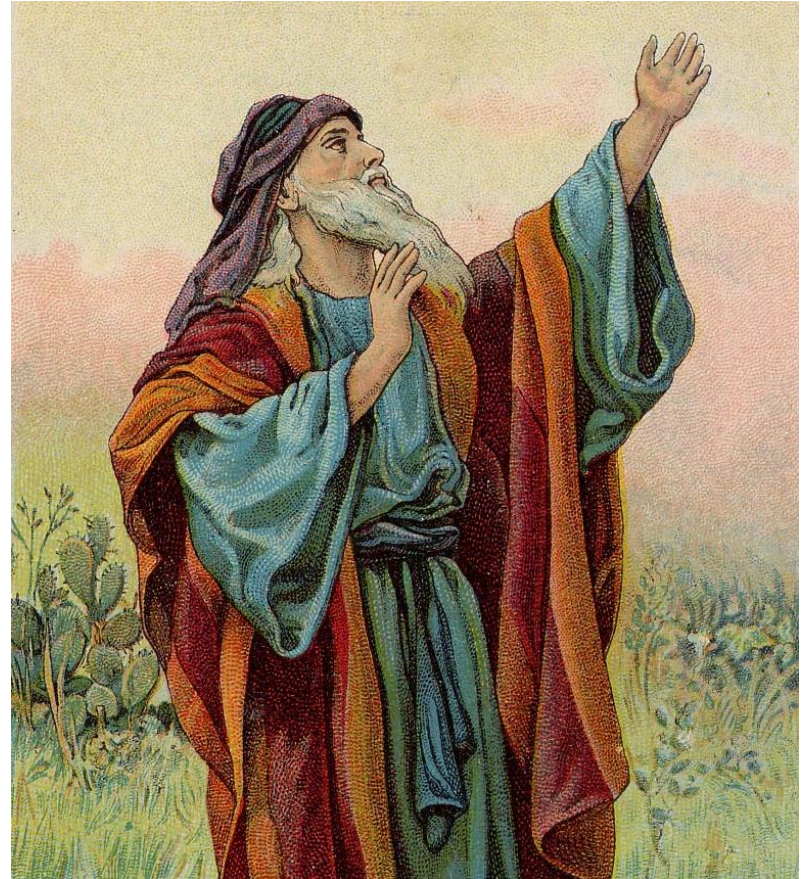
# Discovering the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures

Summer 2013, Lecture 3

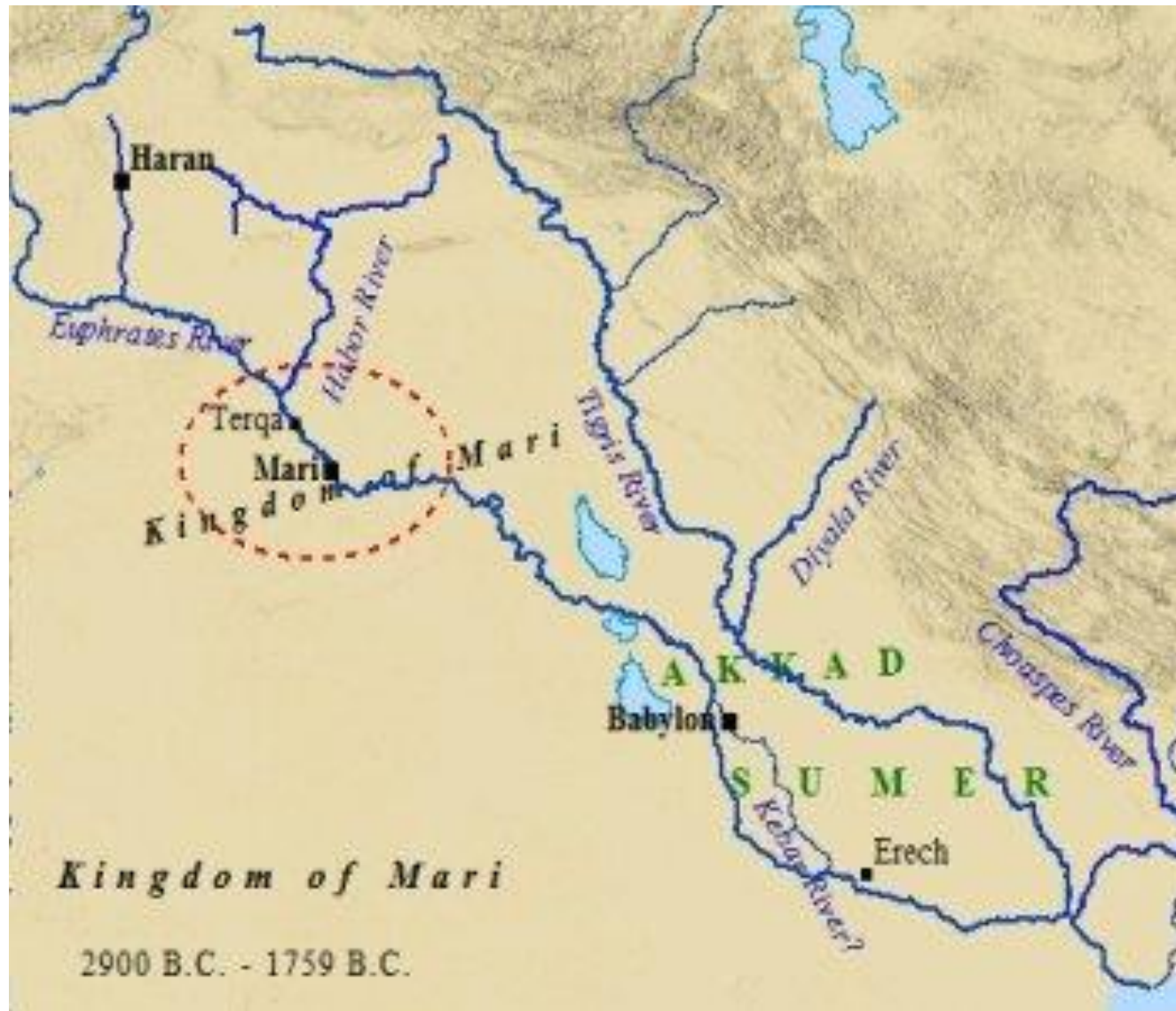
Sheldon Greaves, Ph.D.

# What is a Prophet?

- Diviner
- Messenger
- Intercessor
- “Guardian of the faith”
- Miracle worker
- Social critic



# City of Mari, 18<sup>th</sup> Century BCE



# The Archive at Mari

- Discovered by French archaeologists in the 1930s.
- More than 25,000 tablets in Akkadian were found in the Mari archives
- More than 8,000 are letters; the remainder includes administrative, economic, and judicial texts.



# Prophecy at Mari (c. 1775 BCE)

To: Zimri-Lim, King of Mari

From: Nur-Sin, Official of the King of Mari

... The *apilum* prophet of Addu, God of Halab, said to me: “Am I not Addu, God of Halab, who has raised you ... who helped you regain your father’s throne? I never ask too much of you. Respond to the appeals of your people when they experience injustice and give them a just verdict. You are to do what I ask and what I write you to do. You will obey my word and keep watch over this land continually, as well as the country...”

# Prophecy at Mari, continued...

To: Zimri-Lim, King of Mari

From: Shibtu, Queen of the King of Mari

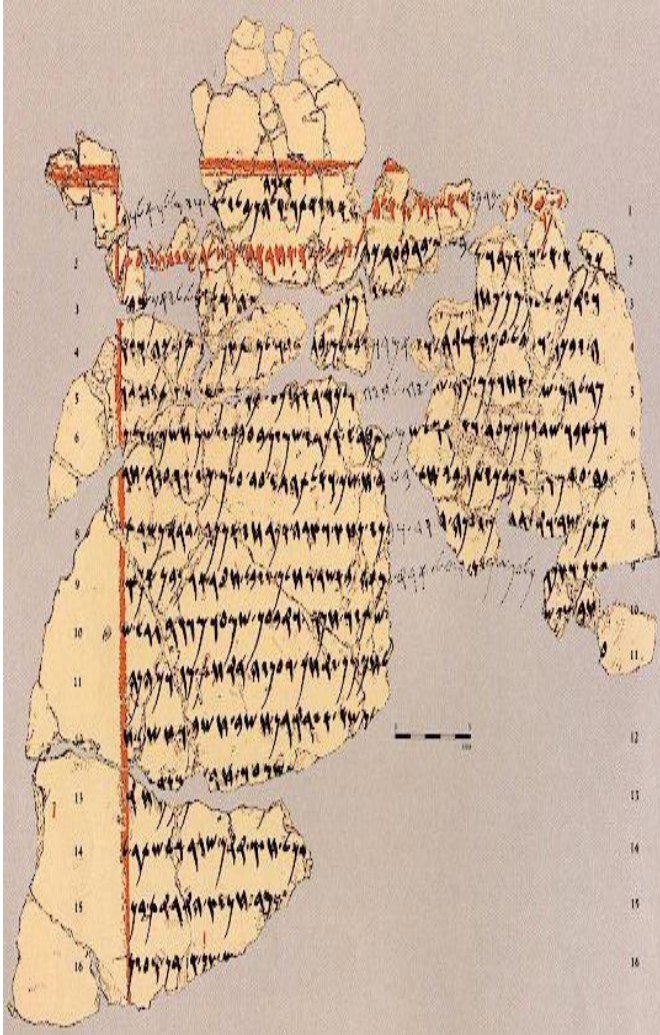
My lord: ... On the third day of the festival, the Prophet Shelibum fell into an ecstatic trance in the temple of the Goddess Annunitum, who said, “Oh King Zimri-Lim, you will be tested by a revolt. Take special precautions. Surround yourself only with your most beloved and trustworthy officials. Let them stand continuous watch over you. Do not go out alone! I will hand over to you those who will test your rule.”

# Balaam ben Peor

- Non-Israelite prophet/magician
- Hired to curse incoming Israelite tribes
- God compelled him to bless them instead
- See Numbers 22-24



# Deir 'alla Inscription



Aramaic inscription from at Deir-Alla, Jordan, not far from the "plains of Moab" where the Bible mentions Balaam, dated to roughly 750-700 BCE.



# Balaam's Prophecy

- 1 Scroll of [Ba]laam [son of Beo]r, the man seeing the gods; behold, the gods came to him at night, and [spoke to] him
- 2 according to these words, and they said to [Balaa]m son of Beor thus: "The last flame has appeared; a fire for judgment has appeared."
- 3 And Balaam arose in the morning,[2 ] days, [...] [ ], and cou[ld not eat], and he wept
- 4 abundantly.

# Extispicy/Hepatoscopy

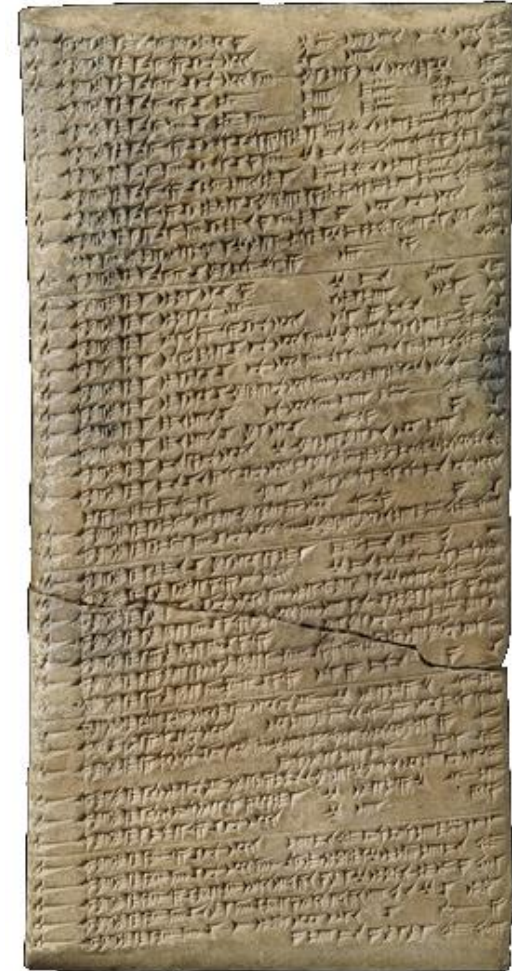
“My Lord has written to me previously concerning the detention of the caravan destined for Qatanim. I have been detaining these men for five days (now), and they have used up their lambs in making extispicies. Let me lord send instructions (as follows): let not these men be detained; Let them go. The men are distressed.”



Sheep's liver in clay. 14.6 cm across.  
Old Babylonian, circa 1900-1600 BC.  
Provenance: likely Sippar in modern  
southern Iraq. British Museum.

# Birth Omens

- “If a woman of the palace gives birth to a deaf child—the possessions of the king will be lost.”
- “If a woman of the palace gives birth, and (the child) has six fingers on its left hand, the prince will plunder the land of his enemy.”
- “If a woman is pregnant, and her foetus cries—the land will experience misfortune.”



# Another “Birth Omen”: Gen. 25

22 And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of the LORD. 23 And the LORD said to her, Two nations are in your womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from your bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.

# Necromancy

- The punishment for consulting a necromancer in Leviticus is the “*karet*” (כרת) penalty (“to be cut off”).
- Lev. 20:27 also cites death by stoning for practitioners of necromancy.
- The classic instance is when Saul uses a necromancer to consult the shade of the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 28:3–25)



# Israel's Prophets: The Big Issues

- Emerged first as a reaction against syncretism
- Continued as a reaction against the influence of the political state/monarchy
- Again as a reaction against social and economic forces that threatened a just society
- Yet again in response to the rise of outside empires and the decline and loss of national independence

# “Seer” vs. “Prophet”: I Sam. 9:

9. (Formerly in Israel, if someone went to inquire of God, they would say, "Come, let us go to the seer," because the prophet of today used to be called a seer.)

# The Former Prophets

- Joshua
  - Deborah
  - Elijah
  - Elisha
  - Samuel
- Time of the Conquest, “Reign of the Judges”
  - ≈ 1,200 – 1,000 BCE
  - Israel was a loose tribal confederation
  - “There was no king in Israel, and every man did what was right in his eyes.”



# Deborah: Prophetess

- Specifically described as a “prophetess” (Judges 4)
- Led a successful counterattack against the forces of Jabin king of Canaan and his military commander Sisera

12 ‘Awake, awake, Deborah!  
Awake, awake, utter a song!  
Arise, Barak, lead away your captives,  
O son of Abinoam.  
13 Then down marched the remnant of  
the noble;  
the people of the Lord marched down  
for him against the mighty.  
14 From Ephraim they set out into the  
valley,  
following you, Benjamin, with your kin;  
from Machir marched down the  
commanders,  
and from Zebulun those who bear the  
marshal’s staff...

– Song of Deborah, Judges 5:2-31

# Ecstatic Prophets

- A kind of “divine possession” taken as a sign of God’s action
- Often accompanied by music
- Included dancing, oracles, irrational behavior
- “...the spirit of the Lord will possess you, and you will be in a prophetic frenzy along with them and be turned into a different person.”

He also stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Therefore they say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

– I Samuel 19:24

# Samuel and the Monarchy

- Samuel replaces Eli, who has grown feeble, Samuel's sons are corrupt
- Philistine Crisis; people ask for "a king like other nations."
- Samuel selected Saul to be king
- Although his protégé, Samuel becomes Saul's harshest critic

6 But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, 'Give us a king to govern us.' Samuel prayed to the Lord, 7 and the Lord said to Samuel, 'Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; **for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.**

– 1 Sam. 8

# A King or, “You Asked for It”

9 Now then, listen to their voice; only—you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.’

10 So Samuel reported all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. 11 He said, **‘These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you:** he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; 12 and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plough his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots.’

# “Full Disclosure,” continued...

13 He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. 15 He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. 16 He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. 17 He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. 18 **And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day.**

# Court Prophet: Nathan

- Prophet during the reign of King David
- Declared the Davidic covenant:
  - Royal dynasty
  - Will last forever
- Called out David on his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah

# David and Bathsheba

- David sees Bathsheba bathing
- Sends for her and sleeps with her
- She sends word that she's pregnant
- When a cover-up fails, David arranges the death of her husband
- The affair leads to the moral decay of David's reign.



# The Prophetic Call Pattern

- Unexpected, comes out of nowhere
- Frequently comes in a vision, sometimes of the Heavenly Court
- Prophet expresses inadequacy
- God addresses the inadequacy, gives the prophet their commission/message





# The Vision of Isaiah (ch. 6)

1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. 2 Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew.



# Vision of Isaiah, continued...

And I said: 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!'

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: 'Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.'



# Elijah the Tishbite: Defender of Yahwism

- Famous contest with the prophets of Baal
- Numerous miracles on behalf of the poor widow who hosted him
- King Ahab accepts Baal worship
- Became a pattern for future prophets



# Elisha

- Chosen successor of Elijah Prophet during the Monarchy
- Raised the son of a Shummanite woman from the dead and other miracles
- Well-known for unleashing two she-bears on a group of youths who were taunting him.

23 He went up from there to Bethel; and while he was going up on the way, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, saying, 'Go away, bald head! Go away, bald head!' 24 When he turned round and saw them, he cursed them in the name of the Lord. Then two she-bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the boys.



**So, I hear you  
called Elisha a  
bald head...**

# Elisha and Naaman

- Healed Naaman in a very “unmagical” way
- Elisha’s servant was punished for doing what a magician would do.



# Elisha and Naaman, cont. (2 Kgs. 5:9-12)

So Naaman came with his horses and chariot and stood at the entrance to the house of Elisha. Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, “Go and wash seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be returned and cleansed.”

But Naaman became angry and went away and said to himself, “Surely he could have come out, and stood and called on the name of the Lord his God, and waved his hand over the infected area, and taken away the leprosy. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?” So he turned and went away in a rage.

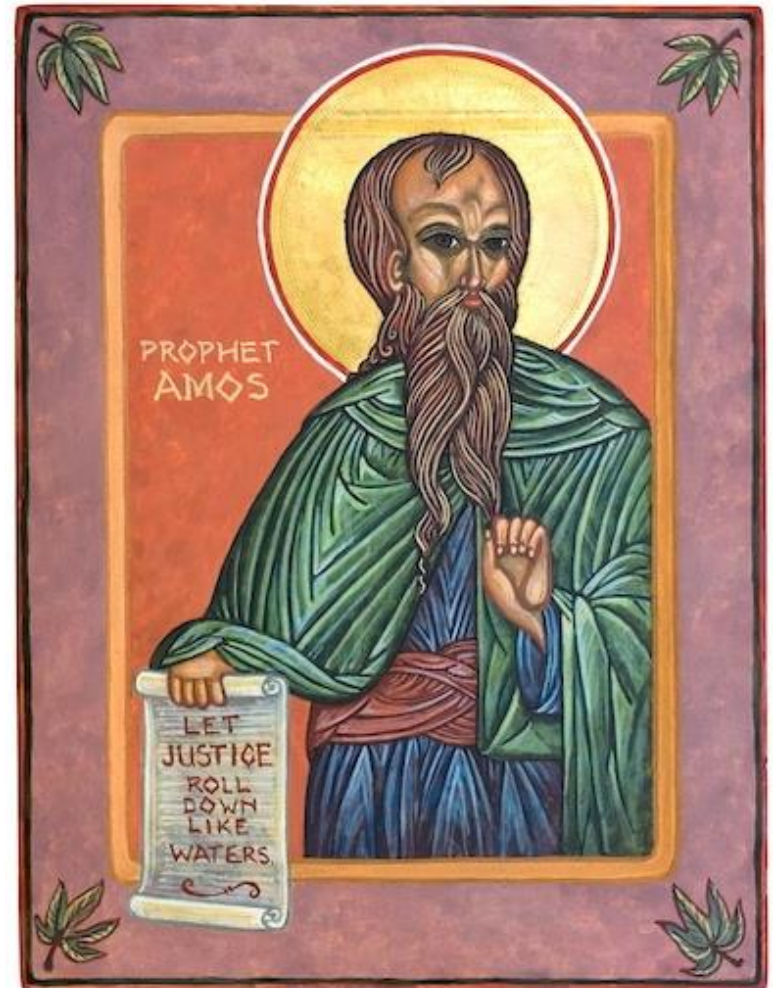
# Later Prophets

- We are no longer limited to stories about the prophets and start to hear their words
- The emphasis of prophecy starts to shift from the royal court to Israel in general
- Larger concern with social justice, especially as a part of the Covenant
- Later became highly engaged in foreign policy
- Competed with “official” prophets



# Amos

- The first of the “Classical Prophets”
- Prophet in Northern Israel
- Wrote just prior to the rise of Assyria
- Castigates moral failings at every level of society
- Preaches against both idolatry and social injustice
- Very influential on later prophets, esp. Isaiah



# Amos: Social Critic (Ch. 2)

6 Thus says the Lord:

...I will not revoke the punishment;  
because they sell the righteous for silver,  
and the needy for a pair of sandals—

7 they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of  
the earth,

and push the afflicted out of the way;  
father and son go in to the same girl,  
so that my holy name is profaned;

8 ... and in the house of their God they drink  
wine bought with fines they imposed.

# Amos: Social Critic, continued...

4:1; Hear this word, you cows of Bashan  
who are on Mount Samaria,  
who oppress the poor, who crush the needy,  
who say to their husbands, 'Bring something  
to drink!'

# Amos: God Will Not Deliver Israel

5:18 Alas for you who desire the **day of the Lord!**

Why do you want the day of the Lord?

It is darkness, not light;

19 as if someone fled from a lion,

and was met by a bear;

or went into the house and rested a hand against  
the wall,

and was bitten by a snake.

20 Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light,  
and gloom with no brightness in it?

# God Won't "Deliver" Israel, cont...

Amos 3:12; Thus says the Lord:

As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who live in Samaria be rescued...

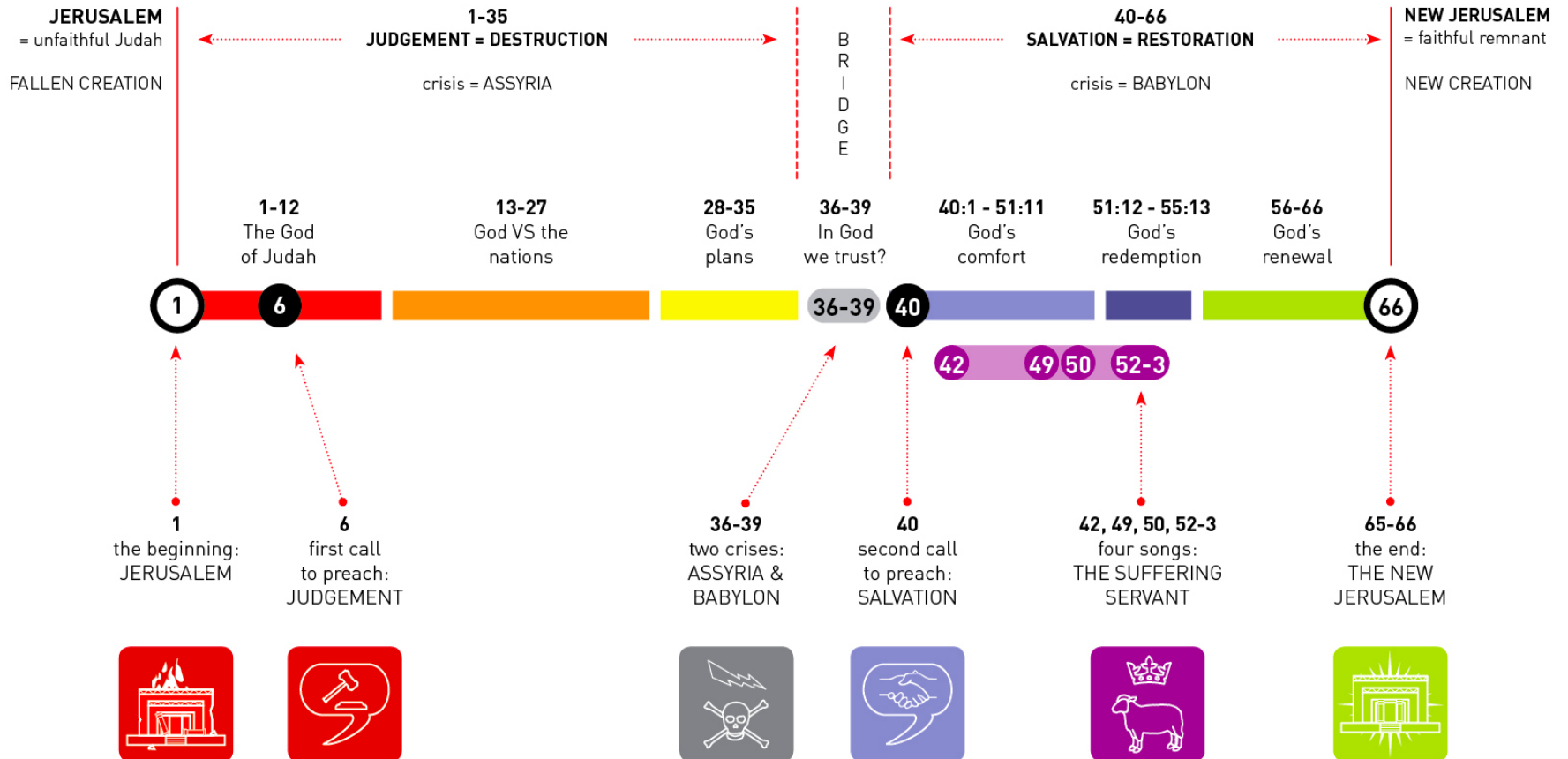
# Isaiah

- Highly literate, came from society's elite
- Thoroughly urban prophet
- Crisis of the Assyrian invasion, siege of Jerusalem
- Largest prophetic book (66 chapters)
- OT book most frequently quoted by the NT, after Psalms



# ISAIAH OVERVIEW

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# Isaiah: Social Justice

- Criticism aimed squarely at the social and political elite
- Care of the disadvantaged more important than religious rituals

Isaiah 1:11 What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?

says the Lord;

I have **had enough** of burnt-offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts;

**I do not delight** in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.



# Isaiah's Indictment, continued...

12 When you come to appear before me,  
who asked this from your hand?

Trample my courts no more;

13 bringing offerings is futile;

incense is an **abomination** to me.

New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation—

**I cannot endure** solemn assemblies with iniquity.

14 Your new moons and your appointed festivals

**my soul hates;**

they have become a burden to me,

I am weary of bearing them.

# Isaiah's Indictment, continued...

16 Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;  
remove the evil of your doings  
from before my eyes;

cease to do evil,

17 learn to do good;

**seek justice,**

**rescue the oppressed,**

**defend the orphan,**

**plead for the widow.**

# Major Theme: Trust in Yahweh

- Trust in God, and nothing else
- Sin leads to destruction
- Destruction is almost, but not quite total
- A righteous remnant will remain, God will restore what was lost



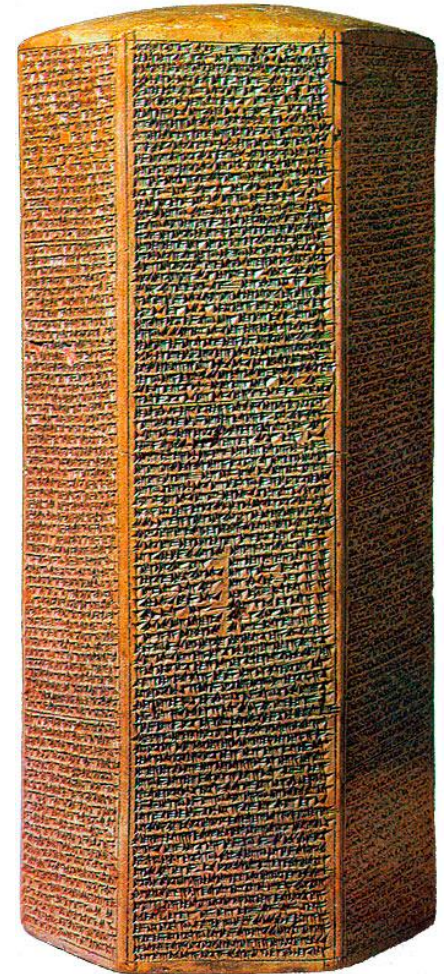
# The Assyrian Crisis

- Assyria had already destroyed the northern Kingdom of Israel
- King Hezekiah, against Isaiah's advice, elected to rebel against Assyria
- Everything except Jerusalem was reduced or destroyed
- Jerusalem was miraculously spared by a plague on the besieging army
- Judah became an Assyrian vassal state



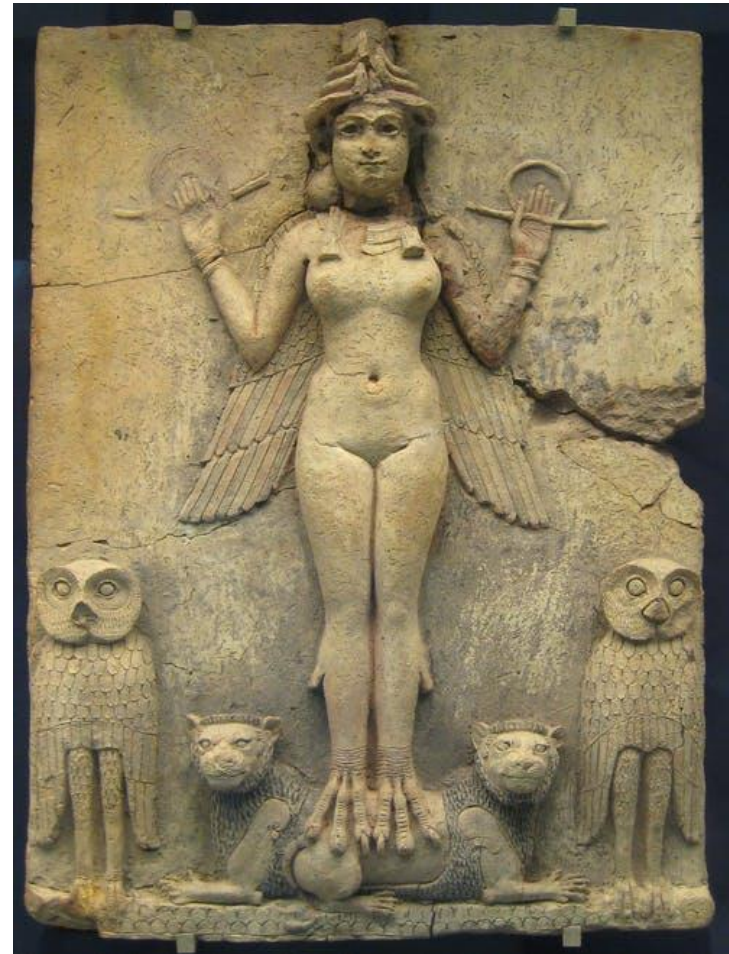
# The Annals of Sennacherib

As for Hezekiah the Judahite, who did not submit to my yoke: forty-six of his strong, walled cities, as well as the small towns in their area, which were without number, by leveling with battering-rams and by bringing up seige-engines... I besieged and took them. 200,150 people, great and small, male and female, horses, mules, asses, ... I counted as spoil. **(Hezekiah) himself, like a caged bird I shut up in Jerusalem, his royal city.**



# Against Idolatry

- Israelite prophets did mock the use of images as objects of worship, claiming that they were mere pieces of wood or metal
- Mesopotamian idol crafting ritually denied the role of humans in shaping these images.



# The Craftsman of Idols (Isa. 44:15-17)

He also makes a god and worships it; he makes it a carved image and bows down before it. Half of it he burns in the fire; over this half he eats meat, he roasts a roast, and is satisfied. He also warms himself and says, “Aha! I am warm, I have seen the fire.” Yet the rest of it he makes into a god, his carved image. He bows down before it and worships; he also prays to it and says, “Save me, for you are my god.

# Jeremiah

- Last of the “Classical Prophets”
- Saw the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon
- A prophet during the Babylonian Exile
- Provides a picture of his emotional reactions and sense of despair.

