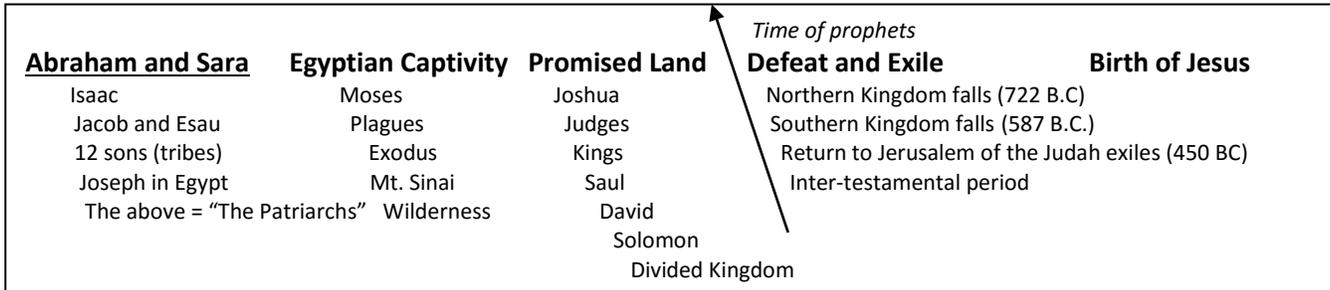


**The True Story of the Whole World**  
**A time of Crisis. (True Story, pp 84-106)**  
**“Prophets and Exile”**  
**Isaiah 6, 40; Jeremiah 7, 29-31**



*The prophets (Isaiah – Malachi) encompass a broad swath of the timeline, and of the pages of the Bible. I (Pastor Tim) find the introductions in The Message to be a helpful orientation to each prophetic book.*

**In a nutshell.....**

On the “Heilsgeschichte” (Salvation History) timeline, the prophets are portrayed as the conscience ‘above’ the fallen and corrupted states of Israel and Judah. The prophets remind God’s people of covenant expectations, boldly state when those expectations have been violated by the people, proclaim God’s judgment as a consequence of these sins, and offer hope beyond the coming judgment. The prophetic words are delivered before, during, and after the Exile in Babylon. Ultimately, guided by Ezra and Nehemiah, the exiles from Judah returned, but as an occupied province. They were left longing for a Messiah who would save them.

**Sound familiar?**

1. *He has told you, o man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8)*
2. *Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. (Isaiah 40:1)*
3. *How desolate lies the city....after affliction and harsh labor, Judah has gone into exile. (Lamentations 1:1, 3)*
4. *Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel, God with us (Isaiah 7:14)*
5. *They shall beat their sword into plowshares (Micah 4:3)*
6. *This is the [new]covenant I will make with the house of Israel....I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. (Jeremiah 31:33)*

**Main Themes of “Prophets and Exiles”**

1. The prophets are the constant ‘faithful critics’ during the time of the kings and through the exile. Their concerns have to do with the abandoning of the covenant way of life, including injustice and idolatry. *The struggle between prophecy and kinship, between spiritual goals and political aims, characterizes the history of Israel until the exile. (True Story....., p 71)*
  2. The prophets almost always stand outside of the organized religious establishment, often experiencing the antagonism of those in power.
  3. The Exile in Babylon is a time of despair and questioning. What has happened to the promises of our Almighty God? (cf Psalm 137)
  4. Even during the times of defeat and exile, the prophets can affirm Yahweh as the ‘God of all the nations’. Israel’s defeats reflect consequences for disobedience, not the weakness of their God. *In exile Israel learns that its God is far more than his earthly ‘house,’ far greater than the nation itself. God is truly the Lord of the nations, the Lord of all creation.*
  5. *The Old Testament prophets bear ample witness to God’s patience with his people and to God’s repeated efforts to call them back to faithfulness within the covenant. True Story, p. 86)*
  6. Although Cyrus King of Persia allows Ezra and Nehemiah to lead the exiles back to Judah, politically and religiously Israel remains under the dominion of other empires. Their intense expectation and hope was for “The Kingdom of God”, and they await a Messiah that will lead them into this hoped-for future. This time of ‘waiting’ is usually called the inter-testamental period. True Story, pp 95-106, offers an excellent succinct summary of this ‘invisible’, yet important interlude in the drama.
- NOTE:** *The prophetic books are organized not chronologically, but [generally] by size....largest to smallest. Consult a commentary for the context of each prophet. Also note that Elijah and Elisha had major prophetic ministries during the time of the kings, but the record of them is not in a separate book. See Kings and Chronicles for their stories and ministries.*

**Other Biblical references**

- Matthew 5:12
- Matthew 7:12
- Matthew 22:40
- Mark 8:28
- Luke 6:23
- Luke 13:34
- I Corinthians 14:29
- Ephesians 4:11
- Revelation 10:7

### Considering the Prophets

1. What do you make of the fact that the prophets are usually not 'insiders', but stand outside of the religious and political establishment? From where do they derive their authority?
2. How would you have felt if you had been hearing from Hosea? Jeremiah? Micah?...and others? How credible would they have seemed?
3. Do you notice any general themes in the prophetic writings?
4. Is there anything in these texts you had never noted before? Why do you think it stood out to you this time?
5. How does the action in these passages fit into God's salvation plan?
4. During this period, how do those in power react to prophetic critique? (Jeremiah 26 offers a dramatic example!)
5. What do you think it was like for God's people to spend decades in exile in Babylon? Psalm 137:9 is vivid and exceptionally raw. Contrast this to Jeremiah's counsel to the exiles (Jeremiah 29:4-9). What conclusions do you draw?
6. Jeremiah 7:1-11 is a powerful critique of religion which has become complacent with the status quo, and actually support injustice. How might these words apply to North American Christians today?

### Considering the Exile

*The True Story..... offers these three questions at the end of the intertestamental section, prior to the coming of Jesus. (p. 106).*

1. *In the time between the testaments, many Israelites either 'sold out' to the surrounding pagan culture or reacted against it in hatred, withdrawing and isolating themselves. How are these two dangers still present in the Church?*
2. *What attitude should [Anabaptist] Christians have toward the (predominately pagan) cultures in which they live? How does Jesus' example show us the way?*
3. *We have seen what a powerful force hope was in the inter-testamental period. Where does modern Western culture place its hope for the future? What is the basis of our hope?*