

# EXCURSUS ON THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF BABYLON



Nineveh•

Calah•

**Assyria**

Asshur•

Gasur•

Terqa•

Mari•

**Mari**

Mesopotamia

Sumeria

**Accad**

Babylon•

Nippur•

Isin•

Erech•

Ur•

**Babylonia**

Susa•

**Elam**

# Ancient Babylon

- ◆ Babel
- ◆ Sargon I of Akkad (c. 2400 BC)
- ◆ Time of Abraham (b. 2160 BC): ruled by Ur
- ◆ Time of Egyptian exile: First (“Old”) Babylonian Empire (Amorite)  
→ Hammurabi (1792 -1750 BC)
- ◆ Elam sacked Ur in 1750 BC; then were conquered by Kassites in 1570 BC (~ from the area around Ur) and they ruled ~5 centuries (to ~ 1200 BC) → “rump” Babylonian Kingdom
- ◆ Neo-Assyrian Empire (911 – 609 BC)

# Middle Babylonian “Rump” Kingdom

- ◆ Isin dynasty began to rule about 1172 BC
  - ❖ most famous king of this dynasty, in fact of this era, was Nebuchadnezzar I, who firmly re-established rule of the city of Babylon
    - carried on a successful expedition into Elam as well as into Amurru where he fought against the Hittites
    - in contest for supremacy with Assyria, Assyria triumphed and Neb I was forced to retreat to Babylon
    - his successors failed to withstand the Assyrians, especially under Tiglath-pileser I, and were allowed to rule only as vassals

# Neo-Babylonian Empire

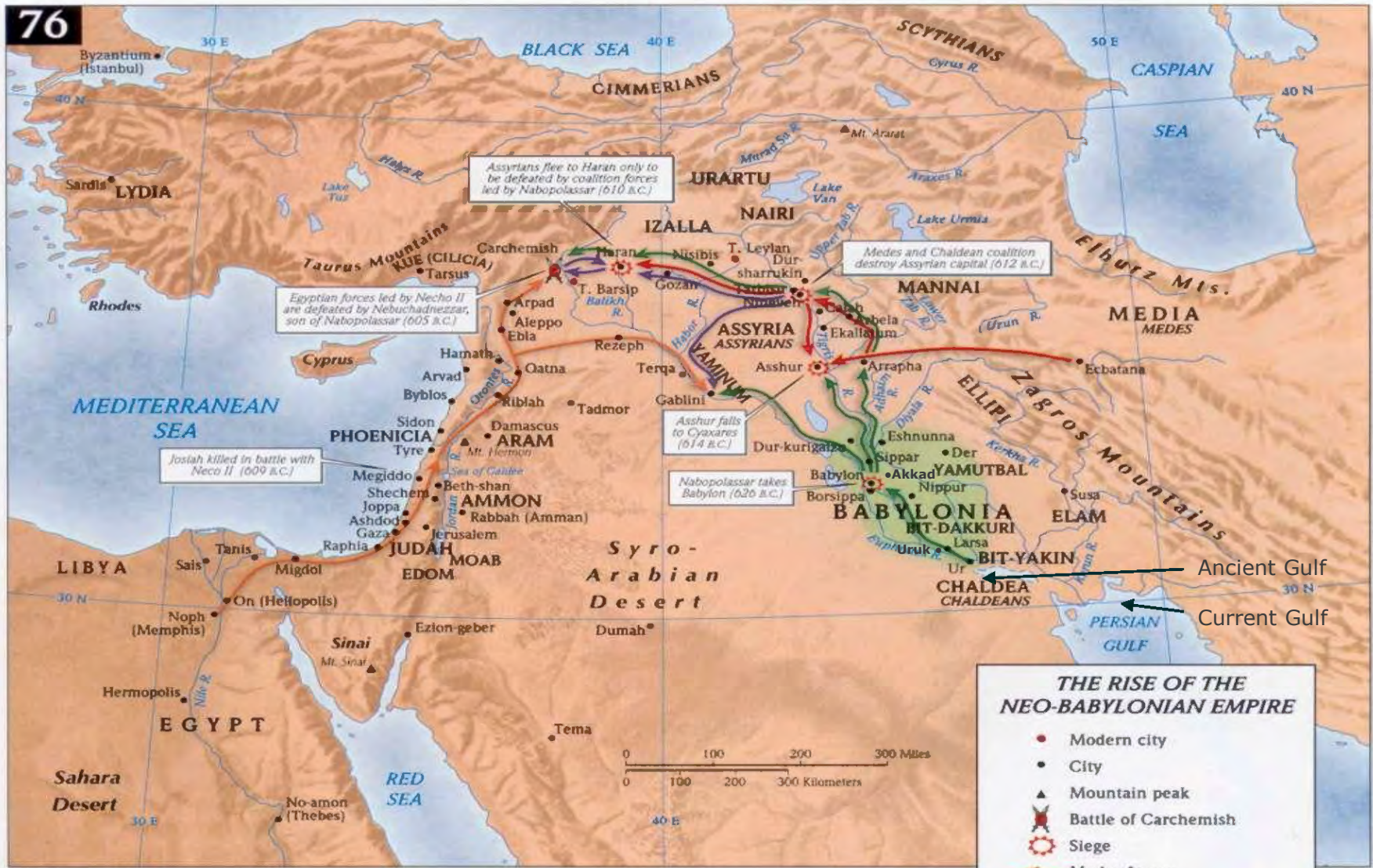
- ◆ During the time of Sennacherib, Merodach-baladan the Chaldean challenged Assyria's supremacy over Babylonia
  - three times M-b gained possession of Babylon, and twice had himself proclaimed king (722 to 710 BC, and from 703 to 702 BC)
  - for thirty years he plotted against Assyria
  - inscriptions concerning him furnish an interesting commentary on the sending of the embassy, in 704 BC, to Hezekiah (2 Ki 20.12; Isa 39.1), in order to induce him to revolt against Assyria
  - Sennacherib, in 690 BC, endeavored to obliterate Babylon from the map

# Neo-Babylonian Empire

- ◆ Nabopolassar
  - the last viceroy over Babylon appointed by Assyria
  - a Chaldean by origin, from Uruk (Erech)
    - ◆ most famous for its great king Gilgamesh and the epic tale of his quest for immortality
    - ◆ considered the first true city in the world
    - ◆ the origin of writing
    - ◆ the first example of architectural work in stone and the building of great stone structures, e.g., the origin of the ziggurat

# Neo-Babylonian Empire

- ◆ Nabopolassar
  - Decisively pushed the Assyrians out of Babylonia after nearly 10 years of fighting, founding a new dynasty in 626 BC
  - Succeeded by his son, Nebuchadnezzar II, in 604 BC



Assyrians flee to Haran only to be defeated by coalition forces led by Nabopolassar (610 B.C.)

Egyptian forces led by Necho II are defeated by Nebuchadnezzar, son of Nabopolassar (605 B.C.)

Jostah killed in battle with Neco II (609 B.C.)

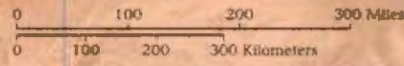
Medes and Chaldean coalition destroy Assyrian capital (612 B.C.)

Asshur falls to Cyaxares (614 B.C.)

Nabopolassar takes Babylon (626 B.C.)

**THE RISE OF THE NEO-BABYLONIAN EMPIRE**

- Modern city
- City
- ▲ Mountain peak
- ⊗ Battle of Carchemish
- ⊗ Siege
- Medes forces
- Chaldean forces
- Assyrian forces
- Egyptian forces
- Neo-Babylonian influence



Ancient Gulf  
Current Gulf

# The Exile and Return



# Nebuchadnezzar II (605 – 562 BC)

- ◆ Captives of Judah taken mainly to area near Babylon
- ◆ Military expansion

By the rivers of  
Babylon, There  
we sat down  
and wept, When  
we remembered  
Zion. (Ps 137.1)



# The Babylonian Period

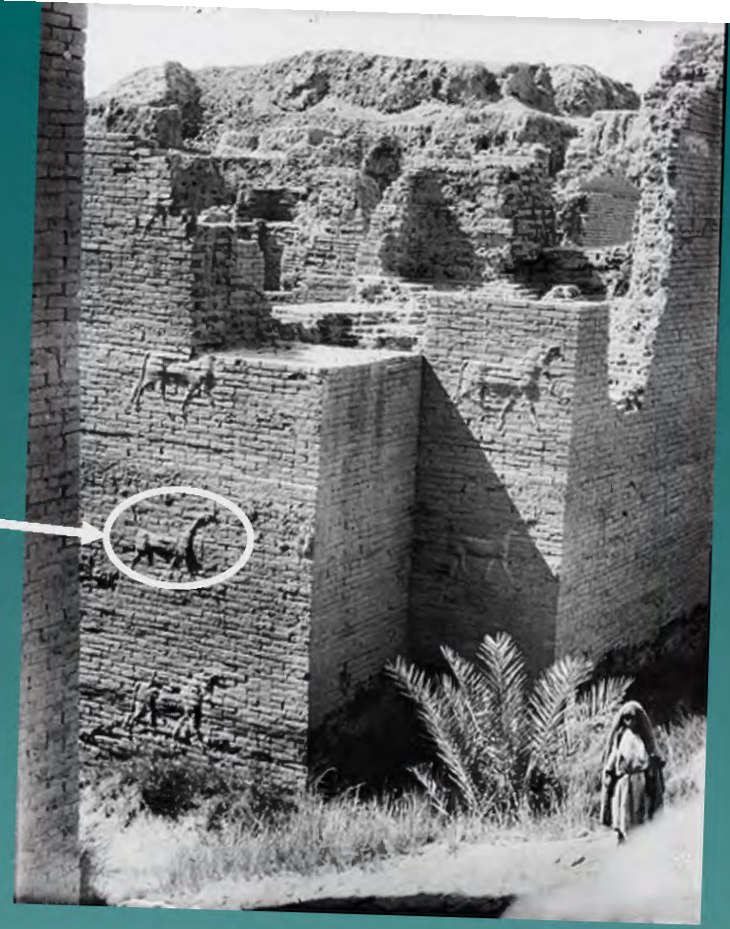
## 66 years

### Building

- ◆ enameled bricks; figures in bas relief
- ◆ intricate system of fortifications; temples and palaces; streets and canals
- ◆ rebuilt Grand Ziggurat; restored Great Temple of Marduk
- ◆ famous gate of Ishtar leading into the city's main street
- ◆ hanging gardens
  - built in terraces to resemble mountains for his Median queen to depict her native mountains



Artist's Rendering



Archeological Recovery

# Ishtar Gate



# Famous Hanging Gardens (artist's dreamed up depiction)

# The Babylonian Period

Successors of Nebuchadnezzar (only 23 years total)

1. Amel-Marduk (Evil-Merodach) (562 – 560 BC)
  - released Jehoiachin (Jeconiah, Coniah)
  - assassinated by his brother-in-law, Neriglissar
2. Neriglissar (Nergal-sharezer of Jeremiah 39.3, 13) (560 – 556 BC)
  - pushed past Taurus Mountains in area of South “Asia Minor”
3. Labashi-Marduk (son of Neriglissar) (556 BC)
  - Assassinated after just a few months by a group of courtiers including Nabonidus

# 4. Nabonidus (556-539)

- ◆ Aramean nobleman from Haran
- ◆ Of the priestly line of the moon god, Nanna (Sin), whom he promoted
- ◆ Absent for prolonged time also for military campaigns against Cilicia and Syria
- ◆ Left Babylon in hands of Belshazzar, his son



# Life During Exile

## Judah as a province of Babylon

- ◆ Ruled by a governor
- ◆ Established new capital of province at Mizpah
- ◆ Murdered by Ishmael, a member of the royal family
- ◆ Johanan, Judean military leader, consulted Jeremiah
  - ❖ Jeremiah counseled the people to remain in Judah; Johanan refused to follow the advice
- ◆ Exile to Egypt (Jeremiah forced to go with them)

# Life During Exile

- ◆ Exiles set up eventually at Elephantine in Egypt
- ◆ Probably the source of God-fearers such as the Ethiopian eunuch



Famous Elephantine papyri that date to end of 4th century BC and agree with biblical accounts



Meanwhile, back in Babylon

# Life in Exile

## Daniel

- ◆ attained honor during Nebuchadnezzar's reign after interpreting his dream → chief of the "wise men"
- ◆ influential under Amel-Marduk (perhaps seeking and winning the release of Jehoiachin)
- ◆ by time of Belshazzar (and Nabonidus) he was not as highly placed, for Belshazzar had to be reminded about him (Daniel 5.10ff)
- ◆ influential even under Cyrus (Darius; 6.1, 2)
- ◆ Daniel's prayer re 70 years (9.1-19)

# Which 70 Years?

- ◆ 70 years = one life span
- ◆ 70 years from 605 BC (first deportation) to 535 BC ( 4 years after Daniel's prayer and Cyrus's defeat of Babylonians)
- ◆ 70 years from destruction of Temple in 586 BC until the rebuilding of Second Temple, completed in 516 BC

# Life in Babylon

- ◆ Institutions maintained (elders, priests, prophets)
- ◆ From this time, it is common to speak of “Jewish” history and refer to the people as “Jews”
- ◆ Unlike Assyria, Babylon did not re-populate conquered territories with conquered peoples from other parts of the empire

# Life in Babylon

- ◆ Developed significant commercial activity
- ◆ Main settlement in very fertile area on Chebar River
- ◆ Significant Jewish presence until well into the Medieval Period
- ◆ Yet it was still chastisement

