Life in the Outer Solar System

Jupiter

Big $R = 11R_{\oplus}$

Massive $M = 300\ M_{\oplus}$

$= 2.5$ x all the rest

Day about 10 Earth hours

Year about 12 Earth years

Thick Atmosphere, mostly H_2, He

But also more complex molecules

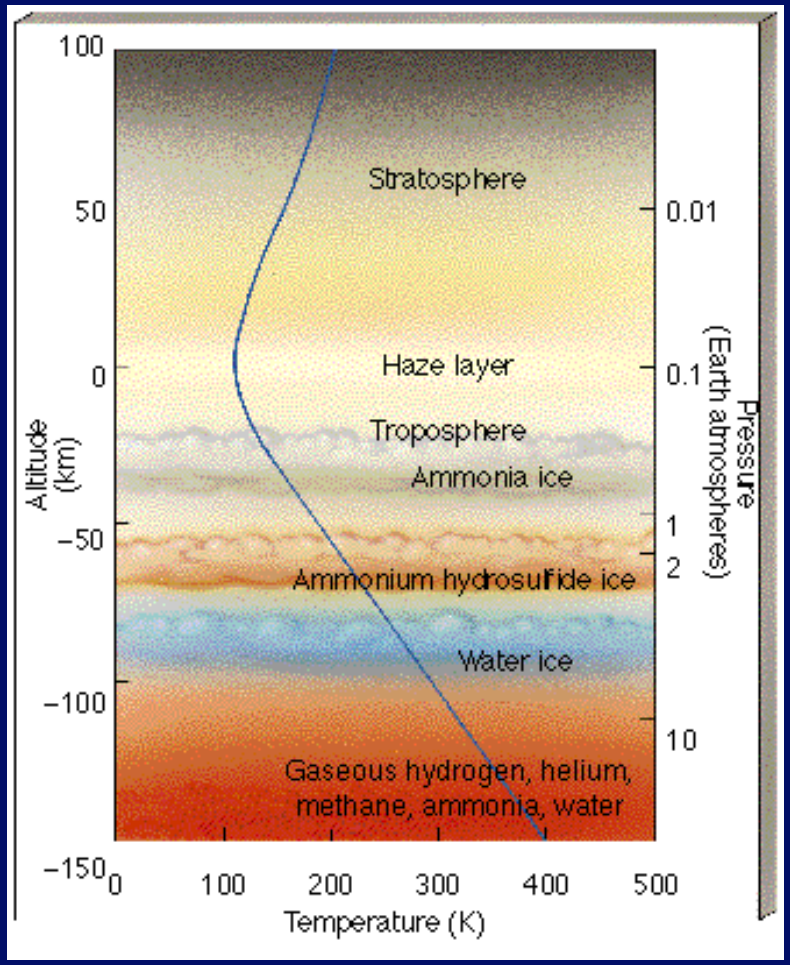
Colors, storms

Like Miller - Urey

Life in Jupiter Atmosphere?

Sagan-Salpeter, etc.

Sinkers	(Plankton)
Floaters	(Fish)
Hunters	(Fish)



Galileo Results on Jupiter

Reached Jupiter Dec. 1995 Sent probe into Jupiter's atmosphere at 100,000 mile/hour

Decelerated at 230 g Lasted for 57 min.

Found: Strong winds

Turbulence, little lightning

Surprise: Little or no H_2O

May have entered in an unusual place (fewer clouds)

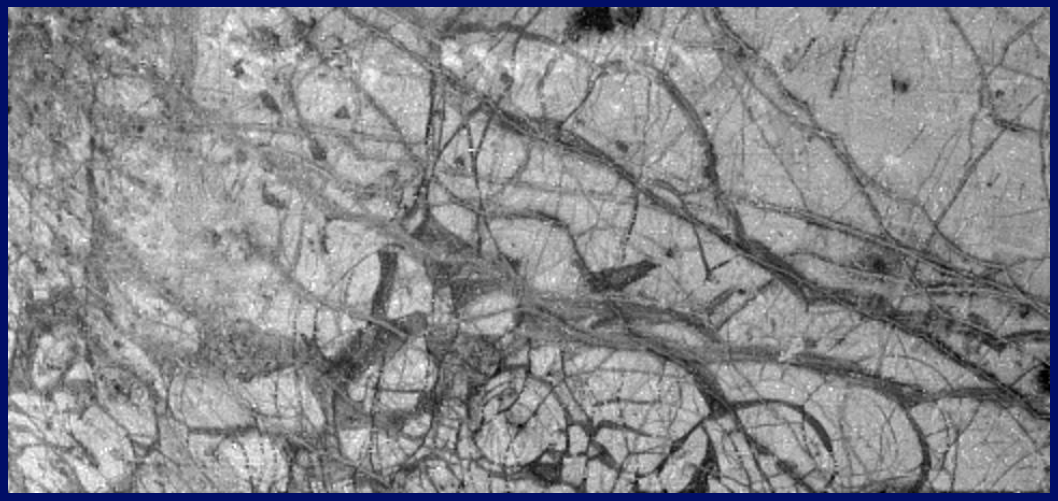
Life less likely?

Europa (Moon of Jupiter)

Surface: Fractured Ice

Subsurface Oceans?

(Heated from Inside)

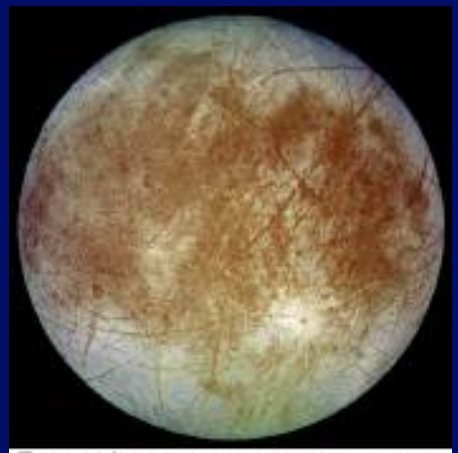


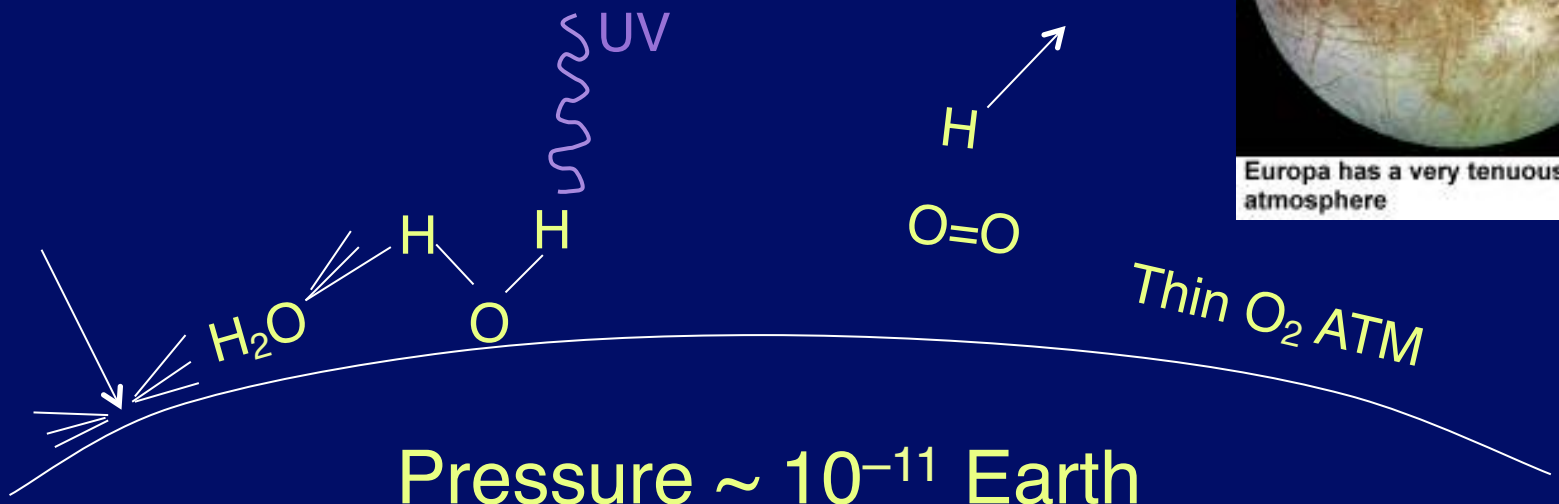
Close-up of “ice floes”

Galileo - Jupiter's Moons

http://www.jpl.nasa.gov/galileo/index.html

Europa has a (THIN!) atmosphere





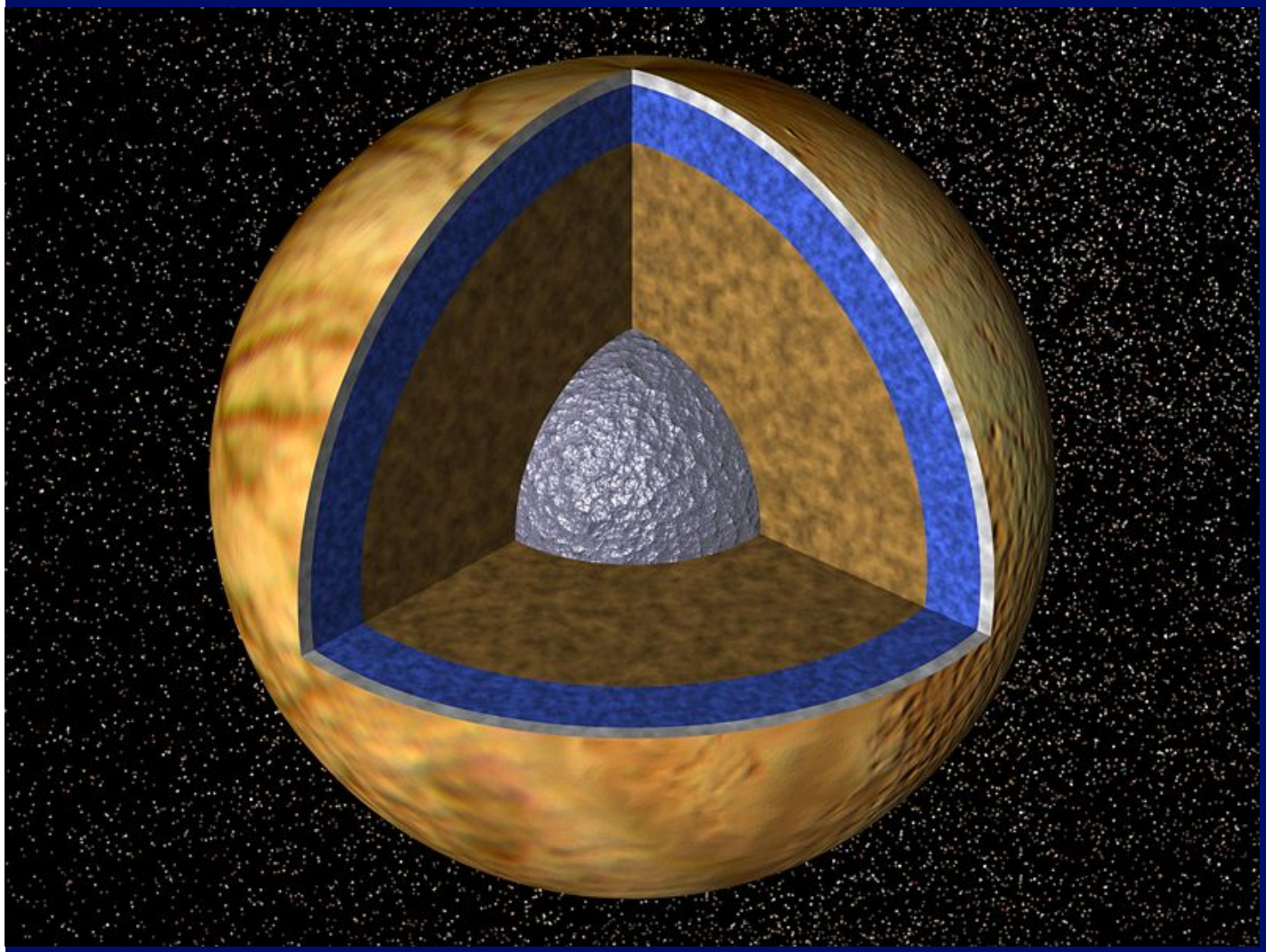
Pressure ~ 10^{-11} Earth

More evidence for resurfacing along cracks by

"ice geysers" ⟶ fluid ice or liquid water

Organic molecules on Callisto & Ganymede, maybe Europa?

Model of Europa's Interior



Ice crust may be 10-30 km thick.
Ocean may be 90 km deep.

Future Missions

- Juno, launched in 2011, arrive 2016
  - Will go into polar orbit, map gravity field
  - Determine if Jupiter has a rocky core
- Jupiter Icy Moon Explorer (JUICE)
  - ESA Selected in 2012
  - Launch 2022, arrive 2030
  - Ganymede, Callisto, Europa orbiter
  - Look for evidence of organic molecules

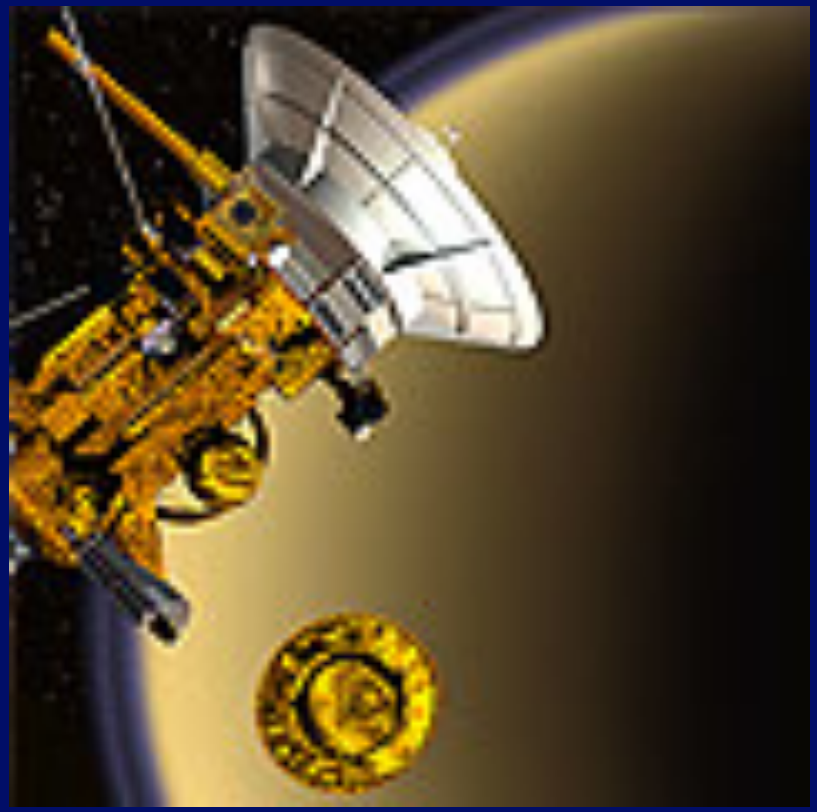
Saturn

- Big (9.4 $R_{\oplus}$)
- Massive (95 $M_{\oplus}$)
- Year 29.5 earth years
- Day 0.43 earth days
- Composition similar to Jupiter

Titan

- Moon of Saturn
- Diameter ~0.4 Earth
- Atmospheric Pressure = 1.5 × Earth
- 85% Nitrogen BUT
- Cold (~90 K)
- Subsurface water ocean?
- Reducing atmosphere
- Haze
- Lab for prebiotic chemistry

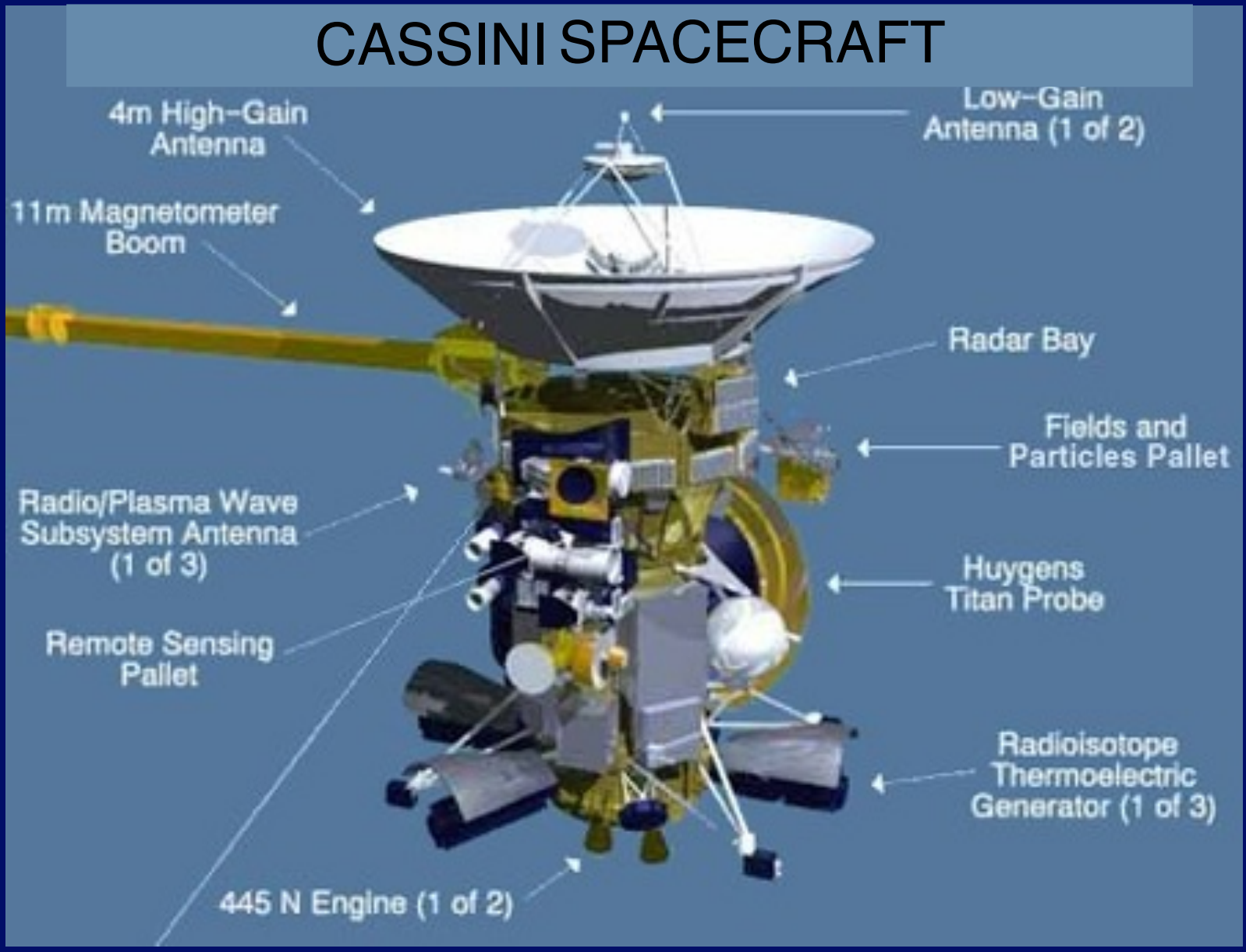
The Cassini-Huygens Mission



- Launched 10/13/97
- Arrived Saturn 7/2004
- Cassini studies
  - Saturn
  - Moons
- Huygens
  - Dropped onto Titan
  - Study atmosphere
  - Surface

http://saturn.jpl.nasa.gov/

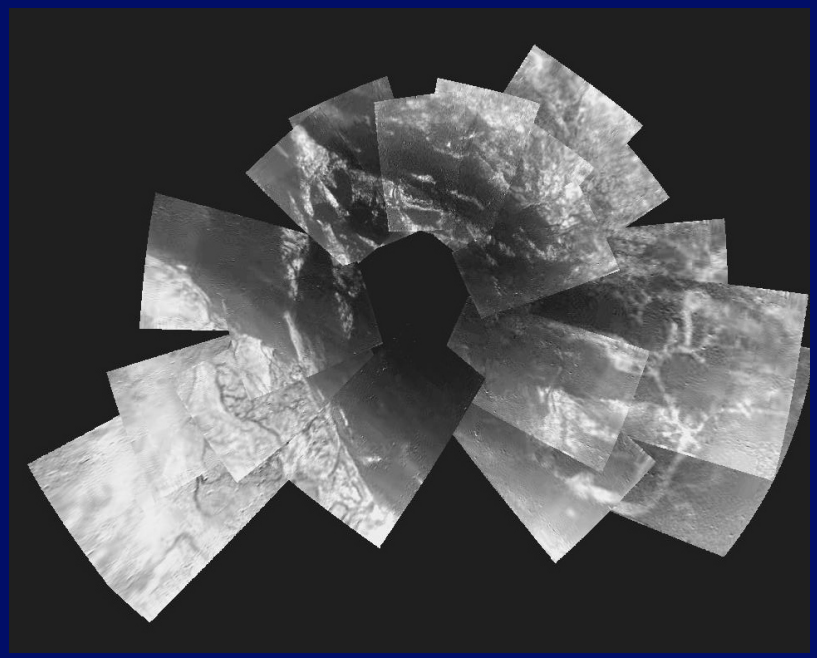
CASSINI SPACECRAFT



Huygens Probe

- Released from Cassini
- Slowed by heat shield
- Parachute deployed
- Soft landing
- Sampled gases in atm.
- Results:
  - High winds
  - 430 km/hr at 120 km

Titan Surface 10km up



- Mosaic of images
- Taken during descent
- Clearly shows features

Photo: ESA

Titan

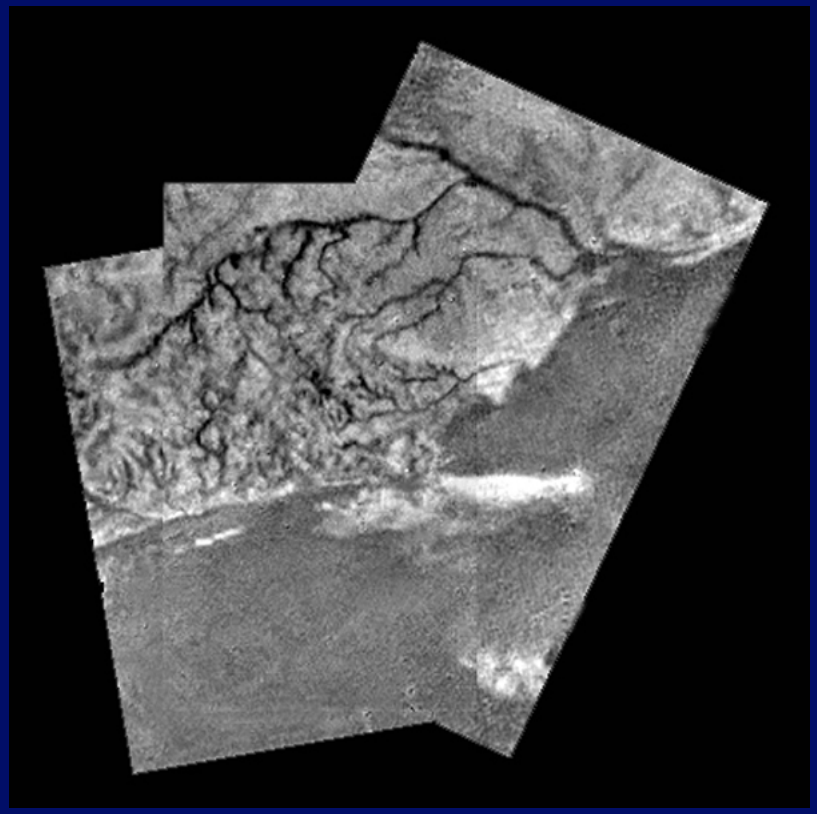
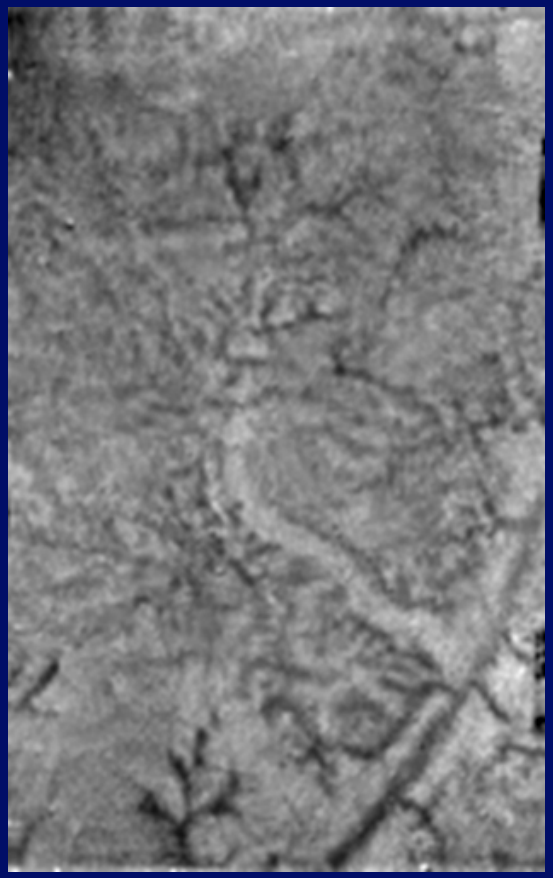


Photo: ESA

- River channel
- Coastline
- Liquid is present
- Methane (CH_4)

Water Rift and Methane Springs?



- Straight feature:
- Water ice extruded?
- Stubby channels:
- Methane springs?

Lakes at northern latitudes

- Radar mapping of northern latitudes (2006)
- Strong evidence for liquid lakes
- And big cloud of ethane (C_2H_6)
- Ethane raining (or snowing) into lakes

Lakes and Islands

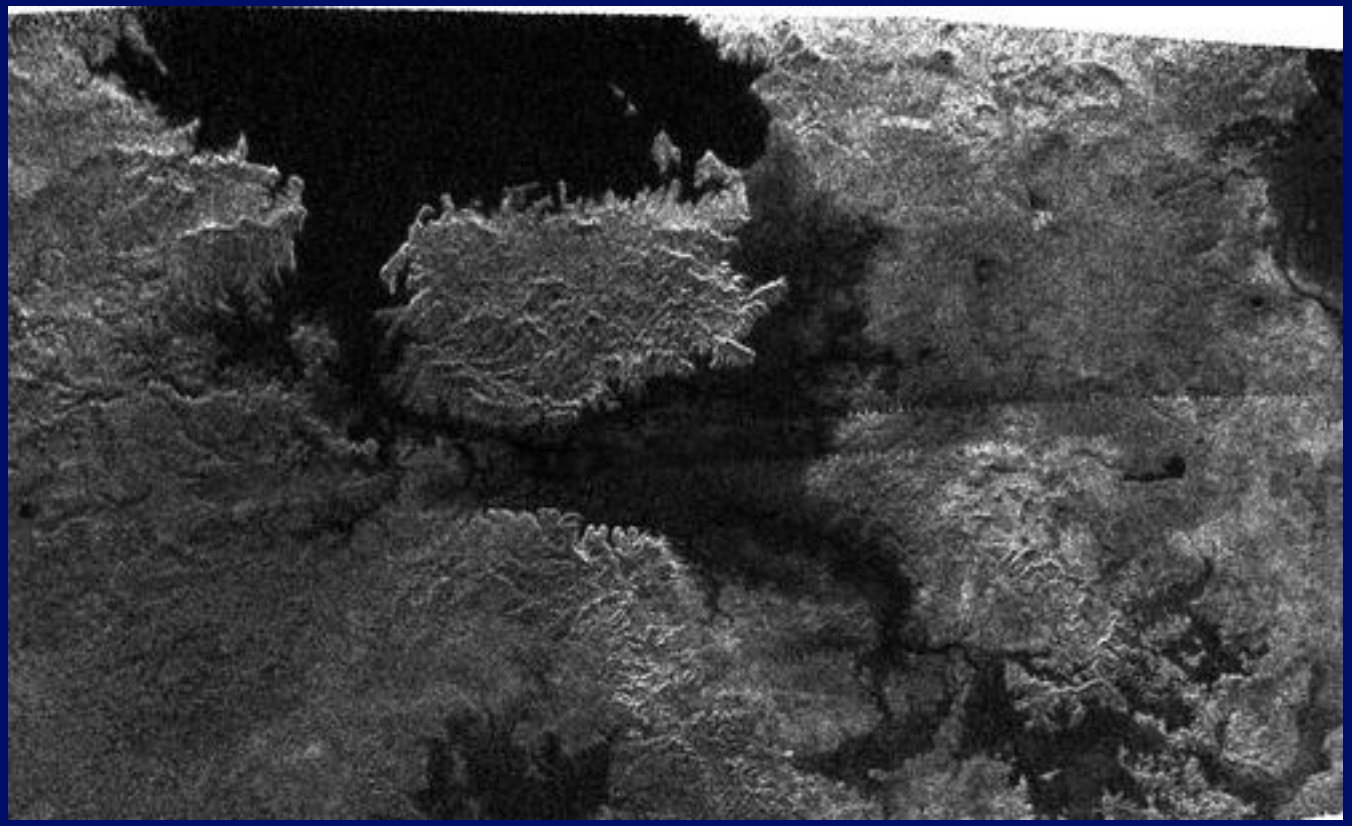


Image from Feb. 2007: based on radar.
Large lake and island (size of Big Island, Hawaii)
And smaller lakes

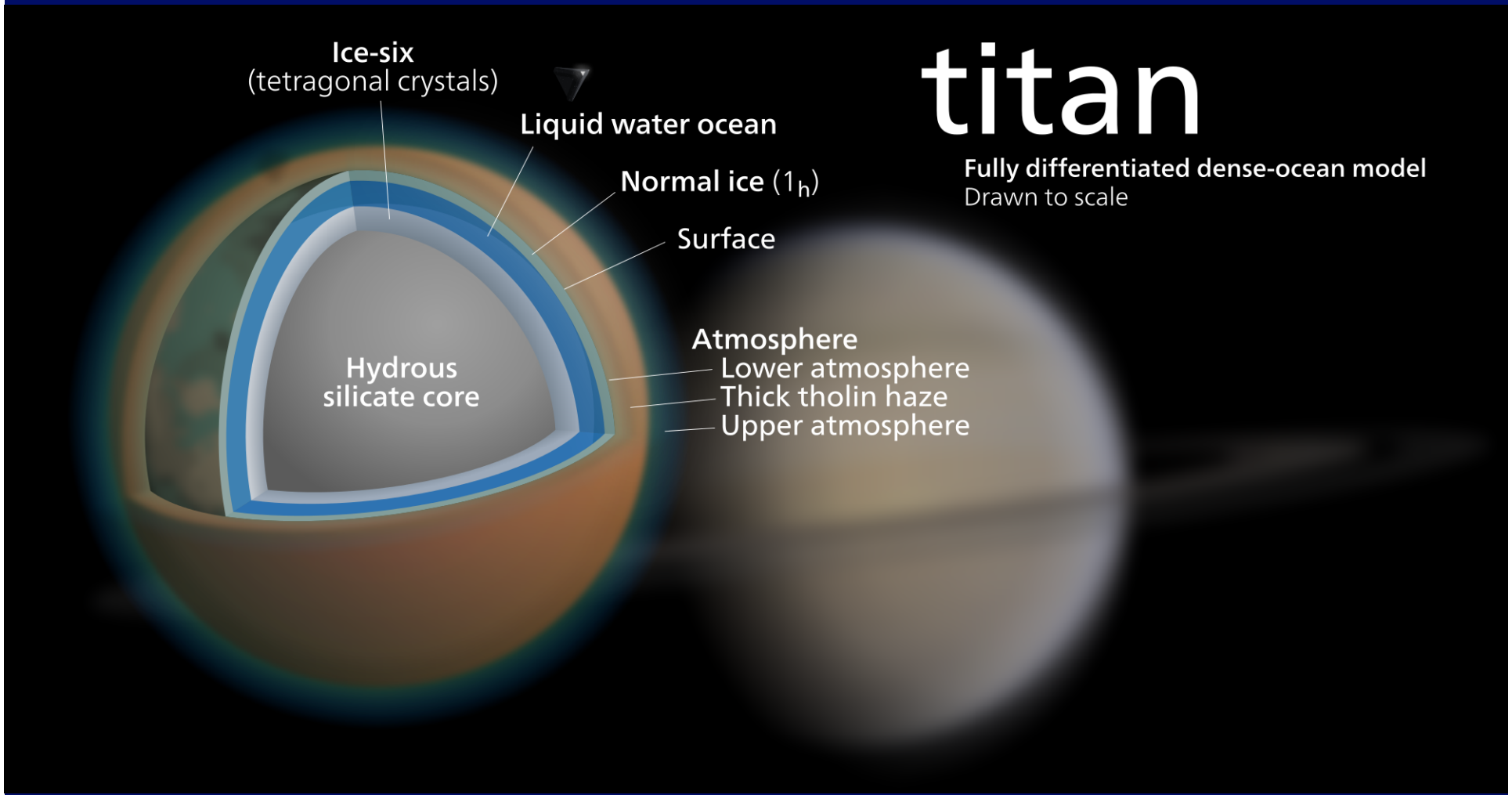
From the surface of Titan

- First view of surface
- “Rocks” of water ice
  - Pebble size (15 cm)
- Surface yielding
- Mixture of ices
  - Water
  - hydrocarbons

More Titan Results

- Hints of ammonia (NH_3)/water (H_2O) ocean
  - About 200 km under surface
  - Outgassing of NH_3 may supply N_2 atm.
- Mapping by radar reveals many lakes and seas of hydrocarbons
  - Seasonal changes in size, depth of a lake
  - Total hydrocarbons on surface about 100 times total oil and gas reserves on Earth

Model of Titan Interior



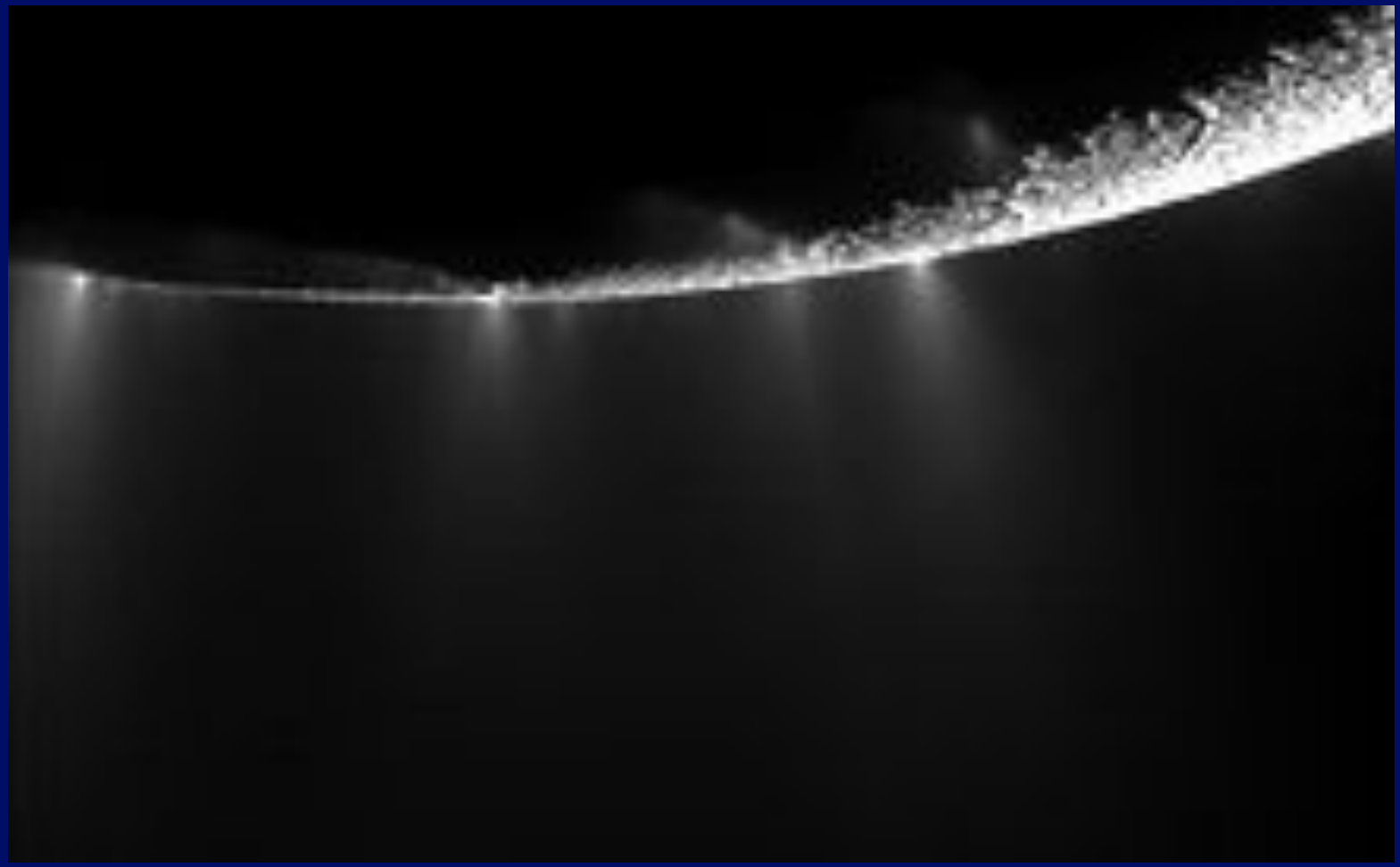
Possible Site for Life

- Miller-Urey type experiments with Titan atm:
  - Formed amino acids and nucleotide bases
- Methane-based life?
- Metabolize with H_2 and C_2H_2, produce CH_4
- Parallel to O_2 and glucose, produce CO_2
- Also, could produce atmospheric nitrogen

Enceladus

- Moon of Saturn
- Very shiny
- Part of surface old (craters)
- Part is new, with cracks
- Cassini saw ice geysers (2006)
- Subsurface liquid water
- Source of heat unclear

Geysers on Enceladus



How to search for life

Have to decide what test indicates life
Hard to anticipate conditions (recall Viking results)
What about finding "protolife"?

National Academy report - how to search for life

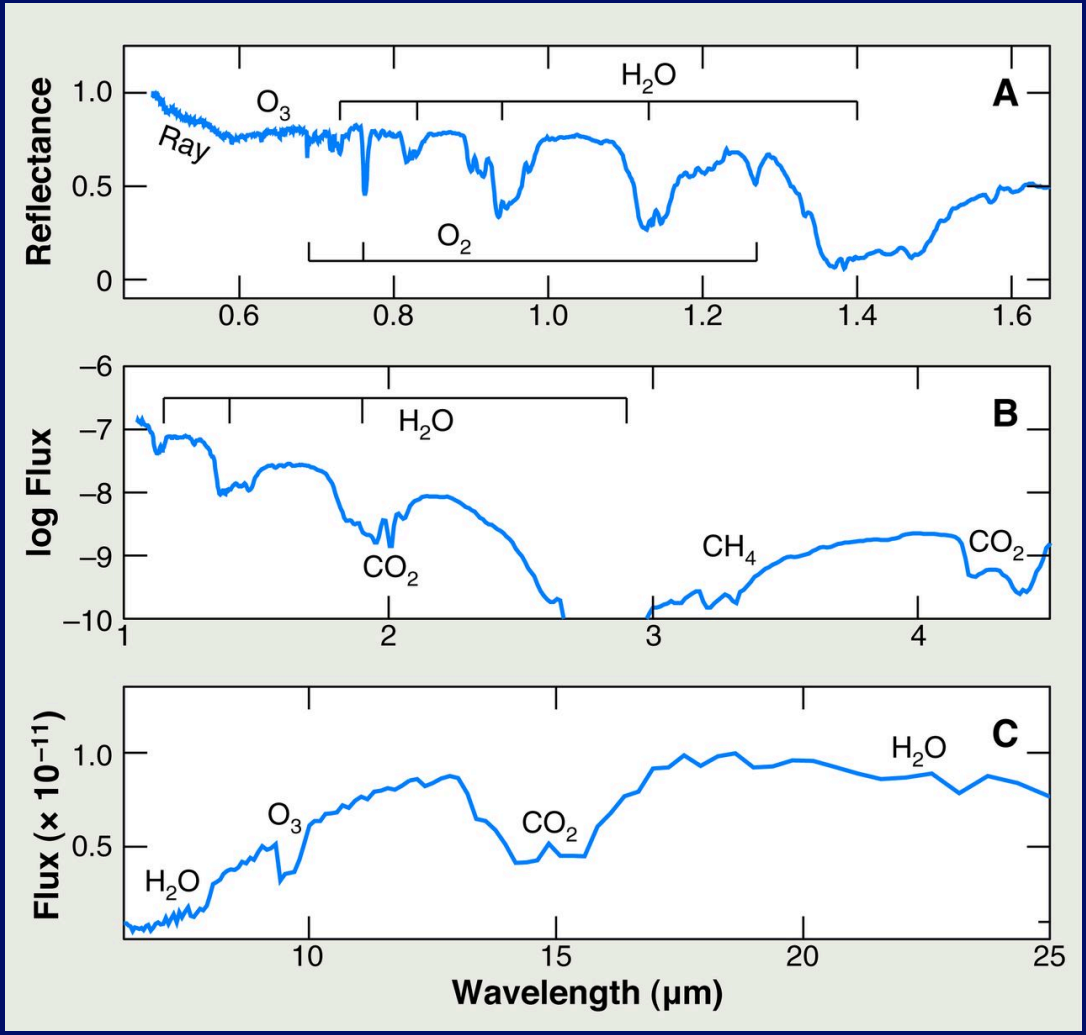
1. Delivery by comets, meteorites e.g. Mars meteorites
2. Sample return - Mars possible
3. Experiments by landers -
   Viking on Mars, …
   Future: Europa probe and return?
   Titan?
   Issues of contamination

4. Biomarkers
   Presence of both O_2 and CH_4 in Earth atmosphere indicative of life
   How convincing?

Detecting Life

- Suppose we find a planet in habitable zone
- Can we find out if it actually HAS life?
- Radio signals from intelligent life
- But microbes more likely
- “Biosignatures”: gases in the atmosphere that are characteristic of life
  - e.g., Oxygen AND methane

Fig. 3 Earth as an exoplanet, via observed disk-integrated spectra.(A) Visible-wavelength spectrum from Earthshine measurements plotted as normalized reflectance (67).



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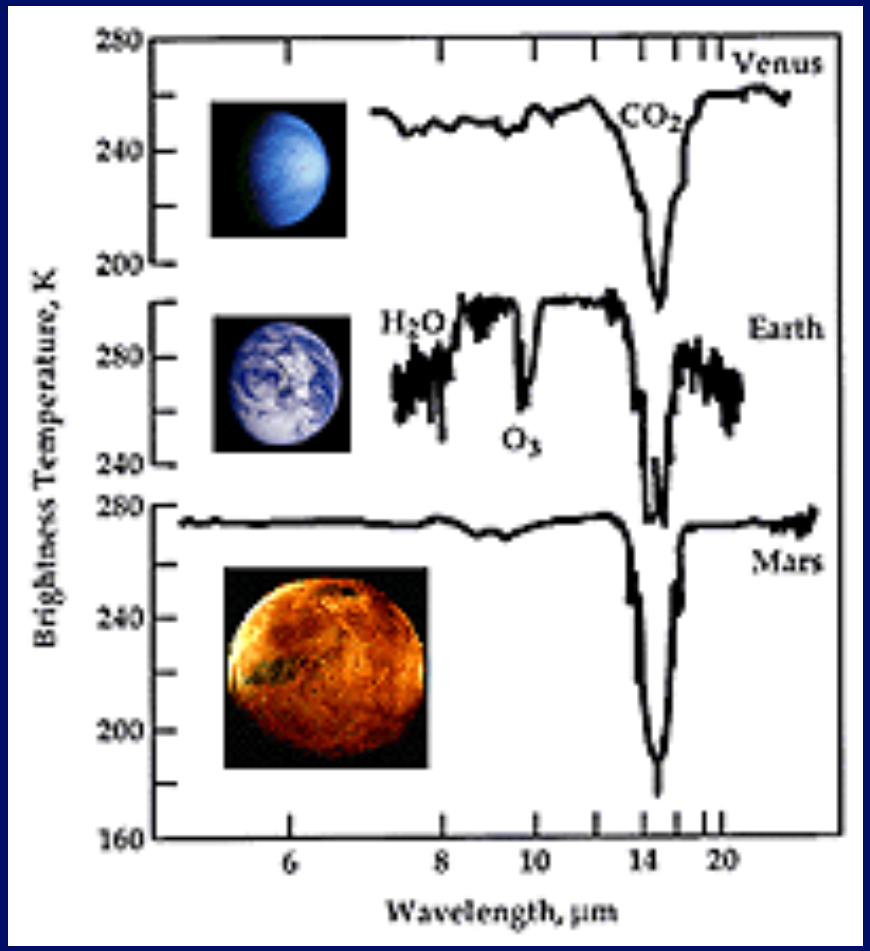
Spectroscopy of atmosphere: simulation



Could be detected with future large space telescope, but very difficult

Need specialized capabilities

Summary

- Moons of outer planets may extend HZ
  - Subsurface water oceans
  - Methane as solvent (Titan)
  - Closer in giant planets in other systems could have habitable moons
- Searching for life in solar system
  - Planning phase
- Searching for biosignatures
  - Planning phase