

We will begin our 15th lecture on “An Introduction to the Old Testament.” /Continuing from our last lecture, we will study Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, which are about the time period after the exile. /The period after exile refers to the time after the Israelites return from exile.

/The Israelites returned from the place of exile in three stages. /The first return happened during the 2nd year of King Cyrus of Persia after Neo-Babylonia had been taken by Persia.

/The first return from exile took place during the reign of King Cyrus in 538 BC. /The second return took place in 458 BC. /The third return took place in 444 BC.

/Ezra chapters 1 to 6 are about the first return from exile. /Zerubbabel is an important figure of the first return. /Ezra chapters 7 to 10 cover the details about the second return. Ezra is an important figure of the second return.

/The book of Nehemiah deals with the third return. If we look in the book of Nehemiah, we see Nehemiah returning as a member of the third return from exile. /Thus the books of Ezra and Nehemiah cover the details about the first, second, and third returns from exile.

/The book of Esther is about the time period between the first and second returns. /This is at around 480 BC. /So to put things in chronological order, Ezra chapters 1 to 6 come first, then the book of Esther, then Ezra chapters 7 to 10, and finally the book of Nehemiah.

/The first return took place during the time of the Persian King Cyrus. The book of Esther is about Esther, and it takes place during the time of King Ahasuerus, whose queen is Esther. /The second and third returns happened under the King Artaxerxes.

/Remembering the order of the kings, Cyrus, Ahasuerus, and Artaxerxes, is important in understanding the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. /As we keep this time frame in mind, let us see what happens during the first return from exile in Ezra chapters 1 to 6.

/First, in Ezra 1, God moves King Cyrus of Persia to issue an edict allowing the people of Judah to return to Israel. /Moved by God, King Cyrus sent God’s people back and actively assisted the rebuilding of God’s temple.

/King Cyrus’ political policies were different than those of the kings of Assyria and Neo-Babylonia. /After conquering nations, Cyrus implemented policies that allowed the conquered people to practice their religion, and he even sent the people back to their land.

/There may have been political motives, but the Bible tells us that God moved Cyrus’ heart to send the people of Judah back and to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem.

/With Sheshbazzar as Judah's leader, the people of Judah returned, and when they returned, they took with them the treasures of the temple. /These events remind us of the works of God that delivered the Israelites from Egypt.

/As God promised through the prophets, he brought the people of Judah back from exile. /Like it was when the Israelites left Egypt, God alone in his sovereignty brought them out of Persia.

/In Ezra 2, we find a list of the names of the Israelites God had saved from Persia. /God brought many people from different families and different regions back to the land of Judah.

/At that time, over 40,000 people returned to Judah from Persia, and by mentioning the names of these people, God specifically called them and restored them.

/In chapter 3, the people of Judah return from exile and build the temple. This is one of the reasons why they returned from Persia. /The people of Judah first gave worship of thanksgiving to God, and they remembered the Feast of Tabernacles.

/Then they laid the foundation for the temple. /When the foundation of the temple was laid, the people cried and rejoiced. /They wept because they were thankful. Some people who had seen the beautiful temple built by Solomon wept because of the shabbiness of this temple.

/But when the people of Judah laid the foundations for the temple, the people who weren't taken captive but remained in the area helped build the temple. /The Assyrians conquered Samaria, and in that region, foreign people came to live there. Thus these people were Samaritans, a mixed people.

/2 Kings 17 tells us that these people not only worshiped God, but they also worshiped the gods that the Assyrians brought with them. They had a mixed religion. /The people of Judah decided that they could not build God's holy temple with these people. They said they would not build the temple with these people.

/At this time, the people who could not participate in the construction of the temple complain to the Persian king, and they hinder the construction process. /For this reason, the construction of the temple was ceased until the second year of King Darius, who is Cyrus' descendant.

/Up to the time of King Darius, there were incidents leading to the disruption of the building of the temple. /In the word after Ezra 4:6, we see more instances of disturbances. /The Bible mentions interferences in building the temple during the time of King Ahasuerus and the time of King Artaxerxes.

/There is something you must remember here. /The first return from exile took place during the time of Cyrus, Esther's time was during the time of Ahasuerus, and the second and third returns happened under Artaxerxes.

/If we look at the chronological order of the kings of Persia, Cyrus comes first, /then Ahasuerus comes second, which is during the time of Esther, /and finally, Artaxerxes comes third, which is during the times of Ezra and Nehemiah.

/The construction of the temple did not go forward until the second year of Darius. During what time period was Darius king? /Darius was king before King Ahasuerus. /Until the second year of Darius, the building of the temple was interrupted.

/However, during the time of King Darius, the reconstruction of the temple happened. /At around 520 BC, the 2nd temple was reconstructed. /Thus if we talk about the incidents that hindered the rebuilding of the temple, we have to see what happened during the time between Cyrus and Darius.

/The word from 4:6 that talks about the hindrance to the temple building is about the incidents that occurred during the time of Ahasuerus and the time of Artaxerxes. /But these incidents that occurred were not hindrances to the building of the temple.

/They are events that hindered the reconstruction of the city walls during Nehemiah's time. /The book of Ezra talks about the things that disrupted the reconstruction of the temple during the time of King Darius, but it also talks about the things that hindered the reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem.

/We need to realize something important here. /Ezra and Nehemiah regard the temple in the same light as the walls of Jerusalem. /We will later discover that the temple and the city walls are equally important, and that the walls of Jerusalem are a part of the temple of Jerusalem.

/The temple that was destroyed during Solomon's time must be reconstructed. /In the way God restored the people of South Judah, the temple that was destroyed must be rebuilt on the place it once stood.

/The reason is the temple symbolizes the presence of God. /In chapter 5, God, despite the interferences to the construction of the temple, shows that he is working again. /God, through the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, starts a movement of the word, and he encourages the leader of the time, Zerubbabel.

/Zerubbabel, the governor who received God's word of encouragement through the prophets, actively participates in the building of the 2nd temple. /Here again, we see forces that interrupt the rebuilding of the temple.

/These forces write to Darius, who is king at that time, requesting that he stop the building of the temple. /Hearing this appeal, King Darius conducted an investigation. He

found that it was written in the law of the kingdom of Persia that the construction of the temple must not be disrupted.

/King Darius, like King Cyrus, actively provides economic assistance for the building of the temple. /Thus the temple was built.

/Ezra 6:14 reads, / “And the elders of the Jews built and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. They finished their building by decree of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia;”

/This is saying that because of Haggai and Zechariah’s movement of the word, the temple was built. /We see another important point here. It says that they completed the building by decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes.

/We saw this in chapter 4. Now, the temple is completed during the time of King Darius. / However, it says that the building was finished by decree of Artaxerxes, but this time period had nothing to do with the temple. /The walls of Jerusalem were completed during the time of King Artaxerxes.

/What does this mean? /It means that the idea of the temple of Jerusalem is expanded to include the walls of Jerusalem. /For this reason, we must look at the reconstruction of the walls later during Nehemiah’s time.

/The people have a ceremony to dedicate the temple before God, they remember the Passover, and they congratulate the rebuilding of the temple. /Now, the second group of exiles returns. In Ezra 7, we learn that Ezra returns with the captives in 458 BC.

/Ezra is Aaron’s descendant. /He is a priest, someone who is familiar with the law of God. /We see Ezra’s return during the second return, and this took place during the 7th year of King Artaxerxes.

/To offer treasures for the temple of God, Ezra brings such items to Jerusalem. /We learn an important feature about Ezra who returns during the second return.

/7:9 says, “For the good hand of his God was on him.” /Only because of God’s help, Ezra and the Levites returned from exile. They endured many difficult situations, but with God’s help, they arrive safely in Jerusalem.

/Ezra 8:31 reads, /“Then we departed from the river Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was on us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way.”

/The verse says, “The hand of our God was on us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way.” /God was with the people of Judah during

the first and second returns from Persia, and he helped them and kept them safe, much like the way he helped the people when they exited Egypt.

/In Ezra 9, we find another story happening. /The Israelites who have returned from exile married with the people of the region. /During the construction of the 2nd temple, the mixed foreign people asked to participate in the building project. However, the people of Judah denied their request.

/It is especially wrong for them to marry the foreign women. /The reason is when the people of Israel and Judah marry these foreign women, they end up serving foreign gods, which leads to destruction and exile.

/But Ezra 9 mentions that during Ezra's time, many leaders married the foreign women. /Ezra, who hears of this, goes before God and prays a prayer of repentance.

/Ezra tears his garment and cloak and pulls hair from his head and beard as he wails and repents. /Ezra talks about the sin that caused the people of Judah to go into exile and return.

/He is saying that the Judah was taken away because of its many sins, but because of the grace of God, they were able to return. /9:8 says that the LORD showed them grace and granted them a little reviving.

/God allowed the people of Judah to return, but Judah was a little restored, not completely restored. /Their political reality had not gotten better, for they still lived as slaves to Persia.

/Therefore the people who have returned must stop mixing with the foreign people, but they must get their minds straight and live holy lives. /Finishing his prayer of repentance, Ezra gathers the people and points out their sin, teaching them how they should act.

/The men promise to separate themselves from their foreign wives, and Ezra orders them to sign a certificate. /From 10:17, the people who married foreign women separate from them, and we see a list of names of those who promise to live holy lives before God.

/In this way, Israel intermarried with foreign women and accepted their gods in its corruption. It is for this reason they were taken into exile. Now, they have returned from exile. However, the people once again sin against God.

/God delivered them from exile because he is faithful. However, the people of Judah who returned live in unbelief and sin. /The lesson here is that man's salvation comes only from the complete help and grace of God.

/Thus Jesus, who is from the line of David, comes to this earth to save us.

/We will now look at the word of Nehemiah. /The book of Nehemiah is about the third return from exile that happens through Nehemiah. /Before the third return happens, God reminds Nehemiah of the walls of Jerusalem that were destroyed.

/Nehemiah, who discovers his calling through prayer, asks the king to send him to Israel as governor. /The first and second returns of the exiles happened because of God's help. God also helped with the third return.

/God listened to Nehemiah's prayer and made the king listen to Nehemiah's request. /The king appoints Nehemiah as governor of Judah, and he allows Nehemiah and his armies to return to the land of Judah. /Nehemiah, who arrives in Jerusalem as governor, immediately begins rebuilding the walls.

/Nehemiah convinces and encourages the people to build the walls. /However, there are forces that interfere with the building of the walls. /Sanballat, who is governor of another region, Tobiah, and other foreign people interrupt the construction of the walls. 2:19.

/Despite these things, if we look at the word from Nehemiah 3, the high priest and the people divided the work and carried on with the building of the walls of Jerusalem. /Sanballat, who had been laughing at the people of Judah, becomes anxious when he sees them building the walls.

/Wanting to remove Nehemiah from his position as governor, Sanballat threatens Nehemiah and tries to kill him. /However, God removes the threat and protects Nehemiah. /But Nehemiah's difficulties did not just come from the outside.

/Nehemiah 5 tells us that due to economic difficulties, complaints arose from the inside. /At this time, Nehemiah gives up his rights and helps the poor.

/When this happens, the people become one again to continue the building of the walls. /Again, Sanballat and Tobiah try everything they can to remove Nehemiah. /However, God works so that the walls are completed in 52 days.

/In Nehemiah 7, after the walls are built, we find a list of people who are to live in Jerusalem. /When the temple and the walls are built, Nehemiah, Ezra, and the people gather at the gate of Jerusalem.

/They gathered to hear the word of God. They also gathered to remember the Feast of Tabernacles. /When the people heard the word of God, they cried and were moved. /The Levites also fasted and prayed in repentance.

/It was a difficult time for the people, but they make a covenant saying they will only serve God. /In chapter 10, we see the list of people who say they will believe in God with all their hearts and serve him.

/After this covenant, Nehemiah visits Persia. /While he is there, people like Tobiah live in the temple, and many people become corrupt. /The people forget the Sabbath, and they do not pay tithes that help the Levites. Worship in the temple does not properly take place.

/As it was during Ezra's time, many people intermarry with foreign women and have children. /As these unfortunate events happen, Nehemiah leaves everything to God as he prays.

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/This concludes our 15th lecture on "An Introduction to the Old Testament." /Thank you.