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You know the 4-5,000 people who came back out of captivity in Babylon could have been singing that song... I'm a child of God, yes, I am!!!

Oh, what a journey this has been! Trying to get a nation back to its homeland... Not an easy thing. What's even harder is trying to get a people who have been living in a pagan land to think godly again. Sounds a lot like America. Now we're not living in exile... We still occupy our homeland, but we are not living as a godly people and thus...we're in exile.

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The prophet has been tasked by God with the job of leading in the effort to teach the people the truth of God's word and get a group of about 4,000-5,000 people back to Israel and throughout the whole process we've seen the hand of God on their lives. Tonight's message is titled: "Seeing the Hand of God." We're going to see how that, even when it's hard, the Lord has His hand on us and will take care of us.

Now we know, as Matthew taught us last week, these entourage was making this long journey back to Israel, and they're about halfway there and they realize...we don't have any teachers. So, they had to delay until they could get some teachers, some Levites, to meet up with them. They had to have teachers to teach the Word of God.

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I thought of what Paul said to Timothy...

**2 Timothy 2:1-2**

<sup>1</sup>You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus,<sup>2</sup> and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men,<sup>[a]</sup> who will be able to teach others also. <sup>3</sup>Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

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Again...I desperately want to see another generation of young men and young women who will take the baton and run with it when it comes to teaching here. We're always needing SS teachers...we need men who are learning the Word of God so that they can help lead the church as time goes along. New Deacons...new leaders to replace us older guys one day...but, we need you to take up the mantle now...don't wait...become a student now!

So, if I'm honest, I sometimes wonder if we're raising up many teachers. If you had to be counted on to teach the Word of God, could you? I'm just asking, could you take the Bible and properly handle it?

**2 Timothy 2:15**

<sup>15</sup>Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved,<sup>[a]</sup> a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

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Most people know very little about the Bible, because they spend very little time with it. We know this to be true too...that you and I can't get to know someone well, if we never spend any time with them AND we can't get to know the Bible well (to rightly handle it) if we don't spend any time with it. You see, if I'm a basketball player and I never practice I'm not likely to shoot a high %, am I?

Can you handle the Bible? Why not? If you can read, you have no excuse. I have no seminary degree, you know that... How did I learn the Bible? Just reading it. Mom and Dad, we talked about

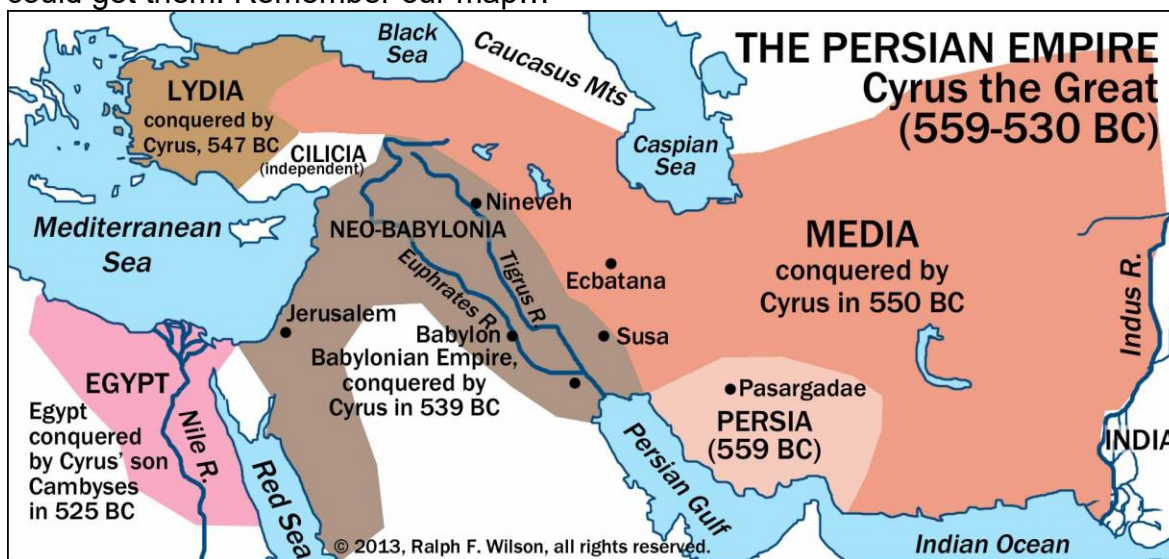
this Sunday, we've got to be teaching the Bible in our homes and that means we have to read it.



Please carve out the time to do it. Even if your children are young...you can do this for 5-10 minutes. We have to be intentional. Remember, if Satan can't make us bad, he'll make us busy! So, think about it dad. When will you sit down and read the Bible this week to your family? Right now, schedule it in your brain!

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Ezra knew he needed teachers for the people and so, he held up the massive caravan in Ahava until he could get them. Remember our map...



Again, we don't know exactly where Ahava was located, but scholars tell us it was situated on the Euphrates River, at a distance of about 80 miles from Babylon, toward the northwest. So that would be somewhere in that dark-brown part, called: Neo-Babylonia. But, nonetheless, this was a long, 800-mile trip with men, women, children and all their stuff. Talk about a move (Tim). 😊

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So, Ezra finally gets his teachers and he's ready to move out again... But, before he does, he's got to separate out all of the silver and gold that's going to go into the Temple. Remember how much they were carrying with them? Matthew told us. 650 talents of silver equated to just shy of 25 TONS of silver (or about \$13.5 million dollars in our money today). They had silver vessels worth 200 talents, and another 100 talents of gold, which equated to another almost 4 TONS, which was worth close to \$176.4 million dollars. And then the 20, gold bowls were worth another \$558,000. Add it all up and that's over \$190 MILLION worth of precious metals. You say, "Ezra better trust that much money to some reliable people!" He does: the priests...

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### **Ezra 8:24-36**

<sup>24</sup> Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests: Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their kinsmen with them. <sup>25</sup> And I weighed out to them the silver and the gold and the vessels, the offering for the house of our God that the king and his counselors and his lords and all Israel there present had offered. <sup>26</sup> I weighed out into their hand 650 talents<sup>[d]</sup> of silver, and silver vessels worth 200 talents,<sup>[e]</sup> and 100 talents of gold, <sup>27</sup> 20 bowls of gold worth 1,000 darics,<sup>[f]</sup> and two vessels of fine bright bronze as precious as gold. <sup>28</sup> And I said to them, "You are holy to the Lord, and the vessels are holy, and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the Lord, the God of your fathers. <sup>29</sup> Guard them and keep them until you weigh them before the chief priests and the Levites and the heads of fathers' houses in Israel at Jerusalem, within the chambers of the house of the Lord." <sup>30</sup> So the priests and the Levites took over the weight of the silver and the gold and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem, to the house of our God. <sup>31</sup> 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. <sup>32</sup> We came to Jerusalem, and there we remained three days. <sup>33</sup> On the fourth day, within the house of our God, the silver and the gold and the vessels were weighed into the hands of Meremoth the priest, son of Uriah, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas, and with them were the Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui. <sup>34</sup> The whole was counted and weighed, and the weight of everything was recorded. <sup>35</sup> At that time those who had come from captivity, the returned exiles, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel, twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and as a sin offering twelve male goats. All this was a burnt offering to the Lord. <sup>36</sup> They also delivered the king's commissions to the king's satraps<sup>[g]</sup> and to the governors of the province Beyond the River, and they aided the people and the house of God.

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What a journey...they had been 800+ miles to get to Ahava and now they're pulling out to go the rest of the way. WE all know how that is...going on a long trip...maybe a vacation or to see family members and you have a stopover or two. Boy, it sure is nice, once you get there, isn't it? But, think about these people. They're not going on vacation...they're going home...to homeland that many have never seen. The nation has been in exile in Babylon for 70 years and now for these 4-5,000 people, they're going home! Kind of reminds me of when the nation came out of Egypt...that was from the south...this is from the east. And remember, they no security force. Remember verse 22:

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### **Ezra 8:22**

For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him.

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And the hand of the Lord was on them. And now they've got to finish the journey, but before they do...they have to commit the responsibility of all this money (via gold and silver for the Temple) to honorable men...and Ezra chose the priests. That ought to be good...because they're to be the most spiritual ones of the bunch...they're the preachers of the bunch... Shouldn't we be able to trust our pastors? Yes...they are to be above reproach! Ezra trusted the priests, and that's vs 28 and 29...

### **Ezra 8:28-29**

<sup>28</sup> And I said to them, "You are holy to the Lord, and the vessels are holy, and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the Lord, the God of your fathers. <sup>29</sup> Guard them and keep them until you weigh them before the chief priests and the Levites and the heads of fathers' houses in Israel at Jerusalem, within the chambers of the house of the Lord."

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Now it's interesting, these 12 men represented the twelve tribes of Israel, but even more, these men represented the Lord...and they would give an accounting when they arrive to Jerusalem. And you know church family, that's exactly what we'll do one day. One day, God's people will give an accounting in regards to what we've done on this hard, difficult journey. We're headed to our heavenly Jerusalem, and the Lord has committed His treasures and resources to us.

The question is: how are we using His resources? Living for the dot or the line? You see, the only difference in our journey is that in our journey, God expects us to invest and increase the treasure, not just guard it. So, are you doing that? (We've talked about this in 1 Corinthians study...will we give Him crumbs from the loaf of bread...keeping most of it for ourselves...or trust Him with a good chunk of it?)

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Well, this entourage started their trek again...through the wilderness headed to Jerusalem and it was a long, hard, arduous journey. They had to wonder if they would be robbed or killed? Would they make it. It made wonder if they sang as they went? They did that you know. They would sing the Psalms. I wonder if they sang the 121<sup>st</sup> Psalm... **Would you turn there with me?** I love this Psalm.

As you are turning, let me tell you this...it's interesting...it's a tradition to this day among the Jews to place a copy of Psalm 121 in the labor and delivery room asking God for mercy for an easy labor. And sometimes they'll even place a copy in their children's baby carrier or car seat to ask for protection from the child.

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#### **Psalm 121:1-8**

<sup>1</sup> I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? <sup>2</sup> My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. <sup>3</sup> He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. <sup>4</sup> Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. <sup>5</sup> The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your right hand. <sup>6</sup> The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. <sup>7</sup> The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. <sup>8</sup> The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

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Brothers and sisters, the Lord will keep you...He will protect you and care for you. He sees you and me right now...He's numbered the hairs on our head...He is working all things for our good...even the hard things.

Because this was a hard trip for these folks...they had left Babylon on the first day of the first month (7:9), stopped in Ahava for three days (8:15) and then left on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of the month (8:31) arriving in Jerusalem on the first day of the FIFTH month. That's four months of traveling and carrying all of that gold and silver, and yet they weren't robbed or harmed! Why? Because the Lord was with them...the hand of God was upon them! Hallelujah!!! And one day we'll know that feeling in heaven!

And so, now it's time to account for the silver and the gold.

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#### **Ezra 8:30-32**

<sup>30</sup> So the priests and the Levites took over the weight of the silver and the gold and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem, to the house of our God. <sup>31</sup> 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. <sup>32</sup> We came to Jerusalem, and there we remained three days.

They made it and they rested for three days...and folks, sometimes after a long hard journey...the most spiritual thing we can do is rest. And then they counted it all...

**Ezra 8:34**

<sup>34</sup> The whole was counted and weighed, and the weight of everything was recorded.

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They made sure the Persian governors, called satraps, overseeing the land got their money from the king (the commissions)...

**Ezra 8:36**

<sup>36</sup> They also delivered the king's commissions to the king's satraps<sup>[a]</sup> and to the governors of the province Beyond the River, and they aided the people and the house of God.

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That's render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's. That's why we pay our taxes (it's tax season you know). ☺ But, remember the blessing of the Persian rulers...God was showing favor on His people through pagans. It's amazing to watch the Lord work for His people through pagans, like Pharaoh! God can do anything with anyone! Nothing is too hard for Him! Even if you are in a tough situation right now...maybe you have a pagan you work for or have to deal with...or a situation that looks hopeless...oh...the Lord can do anything EVEN with your situation!

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So, all is well...they made it and all is accounted for! What a joy! Hallelujah! And church family, that reminds me that what the Lord starts, He finishes!

**Philippians 1:6**

<sup>6</sup> And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

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What is the good work? Salvation... He's going to get us to heaven...He guaranteed it with His own blood and His own resurrection and He guaranteed it to the 7 churches in the book of the Revelation. I want to show you something powerful. **Turn to the book of Revelation. Go to chapter 2.** I want you to see how Jesus speaks to each of these 7 churches. Look at chapter 2, verse 7, what Jesus said to the church at Ephesus...and notice the word: Conquer, which is "nikao" in the Greek, which Nike uses and it means "overcomes," or "victor." It's crossing the finish line...



Watch this...the church at Ephesus...

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**Revelation 2:7**

<sup>7</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'

Go to chapter 2:11, the church at Smyrna:

### **Revelation 2:11**

<sup>11</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.'

To the church at Pergamum:

### **Revelation 2:17**

<sup>17</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.'

What is the "new name?" We simply don't know right now...but, ONE DAY we will...and we'll be the only one that'll know. "No one knows except the one who receives it."

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What is the white stone? Did you know there was an ancient Roman custom of awarding white stones to the victors of athletic games? The winner of a contest was awarded a white stone with his name inscribed on it. This served as his "ticket" to a special awards banquet. So, some say that what Jesus is saying here might allude to the fact that He will keep His promise to us...of awarding the overcomer with entrance to the victory celebration in heaven at the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb and Marriage Supper to follow.

As a side note, let me say this about this NEW NAME. We've seen this throughout Scripture. When God gave a new name to someone that represented the new revelation given to that person of God and His character...the name was a reward. Each new name was tied to a new revelation and a new relationship with God. Jacob became Israel. Abram to Abraham. Simon became Peter. You see, I believe in heaven, we will see revealed our new relationship as the "bride of Christ," and our relationship will be as children to the Father and we'll be rewarded a new name as part of that new relationship in heaven.

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See this book:



That's a book by Oswald Sanders, "Spiritual Maturity."

Well, to the church at Thyatira...

**Revelation 2:26**

<sup>26</sup> The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations.

To the church at Sardis:

**Revelation 3:5**

<sup>5</sup> The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.

To the church at Philadelphia:

**Revelation 3:12**

<sup>12</sup> The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.

The church at Laodicea:

**Revelation 3:21**

<sup>21</sup> The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

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Let me emphasize the point: Jesus is going to get us home! We're going to cross that line...we're going to finish...



Jesus will get us across that finish line! NIKAO. And so, it was the Lord God who got those exiles from Babylon home to Jerusalem, under the direction and leadership of Ezra. And so, now it's time to celebrate!

**Ezra 8:35**

<sup>35</sup> At that time those who had come from captivity, the returned exiles, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel, twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and as a sin offering twelve male goats. All this was a burnt offering to the Lord.

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Can you imagine as they are all gathered at the altar at the Temple to worship God! What a time of celebration! Makes me think of that reunion in heaven when we will one day be around the altar of God and Jesus!

Now, did you catch how many bulls and goats were offered? 12. That 12 is for the 12 tribes of Israel. Listen...there was only a remnant (4-5,000 at the most who came in this second wave and maybe in total around 50,000 that were already there), but think about all those who had come out of Egypt...scholars say there could have been 2 ½ to 3 million people. A remnant. We see that throughout Scripture, don't we? God doesn't use a majority...ever...he uses the few...the remnant!

Just like Noah. He and his family were the remnant saved out of the millions on the earth before the flood (Genesis 6). Remember Sodom and Gomorrah...who made it out? Only Lot and his two daughters survived the destruction (Genesis 19). Remember Elijah. Remember when he despaired that he was the only one left in Israel who had not bowed down to Baal, but God assured him that He had reserved a remnant of 7,000 "whose knees had not bowed down to Baal" (1 Kings 19).

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And church, Jesus makes it abundantly clear that only a remnant is going to make it to heaven...

**Matthew 7:13-14**

<sup>13</sup> "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy<sup>[a]</sup> that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. <sup>14</sup> For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

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The few is the "remnant." Aren't you glad that you're part of the remnant! Those folks in Jerusalem were worshipping in their homeland, at their Temple for the first time in their lives. Oh, how Ezra's heart must have been absolutely overwhelmed with joy! Do you think that the tears might have been flowing? I sure do!



Church family, if you are a follower of Christ, then you are His...and you will overcome NIKAO, and He is going to give you a new name as you come into the Promised Land...why? Because the hand of God is on us!

**Who the Son sets free  
Oh is free indeed  
I'm a child of God, yes, I am  
In my Father's house  
There's a place for me  
I'm a child of God, yes, I am**

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**We win church! We overcome...we conquer, because the hand of God is on us!**

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