

REMNANT OF PROMISE

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What we know about God sometimes creates a tension in understanding.

For instance, we know that God is holy and is a righteous and impartial judge of sin, facts which inspire fear of the Lord. Yet we also know that God is loving and merciful and has promised to be gracious to those who turn to Him, facts which inspire hope. How do we hold those two views at once?

One Biblical theme that addresses this tension is that of the “remnant” — a fragment of people whom God sustains in mercy, during times of judgment, to become the seed of His new work, His new community.

Biblical Remnants

Consider these Scripture stories:

The flood. Because of the general wickedness of mankind, God determines to blot out all life upon the earth, except for one man, Noah, whom God identifies as righteous, and his family. Only these eight — the remnant — survive a global flood to become the progenitors of a new age and a new covenant.

Sodom and Gomorrah. The sins of these twin cities were so grievous that God chose to destroy them with fire from heaven. His servant Abraham interceded for the Sodom. He negotiated with God to spare the entire city if 50, and finally even 10, righteous persons could be found there. Unfortunately, not even 10 righteous souls could be found. Yet, before the city was obliterated, Lot (the one righteous man that could be found) and his family — the remnant — were led to safety by God’s angel.

Joseph. God sent Joseph to Egypt, by way of his brothers’ rejection and slave traders and the Pharaoh, to save lives and preserve for his family a remnant. What Joseph’s brothers intended for harm, God intended for good. In the face of great famine, God preserved a people to be the seed of another new community and another covenant under Moses.

Gideon. Against 135,000 Midianite warriors, God chose a farmer, named Gideon, to lead Israel to victory and establish peace and prosperity again in the land. But did not give Gideon the victory with 32,000 soldiers. He sent home 22,000, who were timid or afraid, leaving 10,000 to fight. But still the numbers were too large, and God told Gideon to send home all but 300 self-controlled men. These 300 — the remnant — God used to overwhelm 450 times their number and restore the peace.

Elijah. This prophet of Israel faced off against 450 false prophets of Baal. Though he stood alone against this idolatry — a remnant — God answered his 63-word prayer with fire from heaven, consuming the sacrifice until the prophets of Baal with one voice chanted, “The Lord, He is God!”

Isaiah. This prophet of Judah had much to say about the future of the remnant of God’s people, who would return to the Land from captivity in Babylon. He was so consumed with this vision, that he named his second son Shear-Jashub, which means “a remnant will return.” Those who truly leaned on the Lord did return to take root in the land and become a fruitful people.

The disciples. During His ministry on earth, Jesus chose just twelve to be with Him. These few, who stuck with Him — the remnant — became the leaders of His new community and the evangelists of His new covenant.

The pattern that emerges is this: *relapse* creates a *remnant*, who, for their very smallness, *return* to the Lord, and then He provides *restoration*.

God Works Through Remnants

The point of all this is that God works through remnants. It means nothing to Him, whether to rescue by many or by few, for He does not rely on the strength or cleverness of men to accomplish His work. He supplies everything that is needed — the tools, the strategy, the energy. All He requires of us is willing workers. The smaller the remnant — the greater the odds — the clearer it is that the Hand of God has accomplished the work. He, not the people, gets the glory.

1 Corinthians 1:26 Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you.²⁷ Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful.²⁸ God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important.²⁹ As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.

A House for God

Consider the prophecies of Haggai, who spoke for the Lord of Heaven's Armies these words: "The people are saying, 'The time has not yet come to rebuild the House of the Lord.'" God knew their hearts, their reluctance to involve themselves, and He knew what motivated them to drag their feet.

God said, "Why are you living in your comfortable houses while My House lies in ruins?"

"Consider your ways," He urged them.

Haggai 1:6 ⁶ "You have planted much but harvest little. You eat but are not satisfied. You drink but are still thirsty. You put on clothes but cannot keep warm. Your wages disappear as though you were putting them in pockets filled with holes!"

"It's the economy," we might say. "It's the war. It's the greedy corporations. It's our wasteful legislators."

But God says, "It's because of *your* ways. I blew it away. I called for a drought."

Then God said, "Yet I am with you!" This encouraged the people!

And again Haggai prophesied:

Haggai 2:3 "Does anyone remember this house—this Temple—in its former splendor? How, in comparison, does it look to you now? It must seem like nothing at all!⁴ But now the Lord says (to the leaders): 'Be strong, be strong. Be strong, all you people still left in the land (the remnant). And now get to work, for I am with you,' says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.⁵ 'My Spirit remains among you, just as I promised when you came out of Egypt. So do not be afraid.'

⁶ *“For this is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies says: ‘In just a little while I will again shake the heavens and the earth, the oceans and the dry land. ⁷ I will shake all the nations, and the treasures of all the nations will be brought to this Temple. I will fill this place with glory,’ says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. ⁸ ‘The silver is mine, and the gold is mine,’ says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. ⁹ ‘The future glory of this Temple will be greater than its past glory,’ says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. ‘And in this place I will bring peace. I, the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, have spoken!’”*

This is what God can do with a remnant! If we will hear and believe and return to Him with our whole hearts and get to work, He will overcome our adversaries, who say it cannot be, and He will bless the works of our hands!

Unshakable Remnant

Do not be afraid of the shaking. This is how God separates the chaff from the grain. The writer to the Hebrews confirms this:

Hebrews 12:26 Now he makes another promise: *“Once again I will shake not only the earth but the heavens also.”* ²⁷ *This means that all of creation will be shaken and removed, so that only unshakable things will remain.*

²⁸ *Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshipping him with holy fear and awe. ²⁹ For our God is a devouring fire.*

This is how God calls a remnant. He shakes until only what will not shake loose remains. Then He goes to work to give the victory. Trinity Community Church, God’s purpose for you has not changed!

Romans 12:1 And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. ² Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

It is time to renew your commitment to follow Christ, not with lip service, but with your whole heart. You want to see — you need to see! — a change in your circumstance. God wants to see a change *in your heart*. He wants to see you really trust Him. He wants to see your faith in action.

If you follow your fears, they’ll take you home, out of the action in disgrace and defeat.

If you don’t allow the Holy Spirit to control your selfish impulses, you’ll be turned back to defeat again and again.

If you think that your comfort is the sign of God’s satisfaction with you, then you don’t understand God at all. He’s measuring what it will take to turn your heart away from Him to self-reliance again. This is not a time for drawing back, but for pressing in!

Worship God in spirit and truth! Offer yourself as a sacrifice to Him. Give Him your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Don’t be a passive Christian. *Follow Jesus Christ on purpose!*

What we will be in the end, if we take God at His word, will be far more glorious than what we once were. And the glory will all be His. All the silver and gold we could need belongs to him; God does not have recessions!

His hand is not shortened that He cannot save us. His ear is not deafened that He cannot hear us. But perhaps our voice of faith has grown silent.

It is time to pursue the Lord. It is time to call upon His name. It is time to learn to put Him first, ahead of ourselves.

Let us worship Him with everything we are and everything we have. We are a remnant of promise!