

The Holy Remnant

as revealed in the Old and New Testaments

Though it may seem to be a fairly rare subject, the idea of a remnant is found 540 times in the Bible! Most of the time, the remnant concept is disguised by the way the words are translated into English. In the Old Testament, *remnant* is translated by six Hebrew root words, each of which has the underlying meaning of "what is left," "what remains," "survivors," "escapees," or "the rest." The one Greek root used in the New Testament and in the Septuagint has the same meaning. The biblical writers mention at least seven different remnants. When reading a section of the Bible where a remnant is mentioned, one should be careful to determine which of these the writer is describing. It could be very important to understanding the passage correctly.

- 1) Survivors of any catastrophe (e.g., Lot survived Sodom).
- 2) A group of non-Israelite survivors (e.g., "the remnant of Edom," Amos 9:12).
- 3) Israelite survivors of the Assyrian invasion in 721-718 BC.
- 4) Jewish survivors of the Babylonian invasion in 585 BC.
- 5) The remnant of Jews who returned to Judah from Babylon.
- 6) The remainder of physical Israelites and Jews after the Great Tribulation.
- 7) The remnant of converted sons of God in the last days.

Noah and the Flood - Gen. 6:9-1; 7:1,23) This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. The LORD then said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; people and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.

Gen 45:4-8) Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.

2 Kings 19:1-4) When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his garments, covered himself with sackcloth and entered the house of the LORD. Then he sent Eliakim who was over the household with Shebna the scribe and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz. They said to him, "Thus says Hezekiah, 'This day is a day of distress, rebuke, and rejection; for children have come to birth and there is no strength to *deliver*. Perhaps the LORD your God will hear all the words of Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to reproach the living God, and will rebuke the words which the LORD your God has heard. So send up a prayer for the remnant that is here.'"

2 Kings 19:29-31) This will be the sign for you, Hezekiah: "This year you will eat what grows by itself, and the second year what springs from that. But in the third year sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit. Once more a remnant of the kingdom of Judah will take root below and bear fruit above. For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

2 Chron. 30:6) At the king's command, couriers went throughout Israel and Judah with letters from the king and from his officials, which read: "People of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, that he may return to you, the remnant left from the hands of the Assyrian kings.

2 Chron. 34:9) They went to Hilkiah the high priest and gave him the money that had been brought into the temple of God, which the Levites who were the gatekeepers had collected from the people of Manasseh, Ephraim and all the remnant of Israel and from all the people of Judah and Benjamin and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Ezra 9:7-8) From the days of our ancestors until now, our guilt has been great. Because of our sins, we and our kings and our priests have been subjected to the sword and captivity, to pillage and humiliation at the hand of foreign kings, as it is today. “But now, for a brief moment, the LORD our God has been gracious in leaving us a remnant and giving us a firm place in his sanctuary, and so our God gives light to our eyes and a little relief in our bondage. Though we are slaves, our God has not forsaken us in our bondage. He has shown us kindness in the sight of the kings of Persia: He has granted us new life to rebuild the house of our God and repair its ruins, and he has given us a wall of protection in Judah and Jerusalem.

Ezra 9:13-15) What has happened to us is a result of our evil deeds and our great guilt, and yet, our God, you have punished us less than our sins deserved and have given us a remnant like this. Shall we then break your commands again and intermarry with the peoples who commit such detestable practices? Would you not be angry enough with us to destroy us, leaving us no remnant or survivor? LORD, the God of Israel, you are righteous! We are left this day as a remnant. Here we are before you in our guilt, though because of it not one of us can stand in your presence.”

Neh. 1:1-3) The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah: In the month of Chislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.”

Tob. 13:15-16a) My soul, bless the Lord, the great King; for Jerusalem will be rebuilt as his house forever. Happy too will I be if a remnant of my offspring survives to see your glory and to give thanks to the King of heaven!

1 Mac. 3:35) Lysias was to send an army against them to crush and destroy the power of Israel and the remnant of Jerusalem and efface their memory from the place.

Sir. 47:22) But God does not withdraw his mercy, nor permit even one of his promises to fail. He does not uproot the posterity of the chosen, nor destroy the offspring of his friends. So he gave to Jacob a remnant, to David a root from his own family.

Is. 1:9) Unless the Lord of hosts had left us a scanty remnant, we had become as Sodom, we should be like Gomorrah.

Is. 10:20-22) On that day the remnant of Israel, the survivors of Jacob, will no longer rely on him who struck them down but will truly rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel. *A remnant will return*, a remnant of Jacob will return to the Mighty God. Though your people be like the sand by the sea, Israel, only a remnant will return. Destruction has been decreed, overwhelming and righteous.

Is. 11:11) On that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the Mediterranean.

Is. 11:16) There will be a highway for the remnant of his people that is left from Assyria, as there was for Israel when they came up from Egypt.

Is. 28:5) In that day the LORD Almighty will be a glorious crown, a beautiful wreath for the remnant of his people.

Is. 37:4) It may be that the LORD your God will hear the words of the field commander, whom his master, the king of Assyria, has sent to ridicule the living God, and that he will rebuke him for the words the LORD your God has heard. Send up a prayer for the remnant that is here.”

Is. 37:32) For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant, and out of Mount Zion, survivors. The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this.

Jer. 6:9) This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Let them glean the remnant of Israel as thoroughly as a vine; pass your hand over the branches again, like one gathering grapes.”

Jer.23:1-3 Messianic Reign) Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!” declares the Lord. Therefore, this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: “Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done,” declares the LORD. “I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number.

Jer. 24:8) But like the bad figs, which are so bad they cannot be eaten,’ says the LORD, ‘so will I deal with Zedekiah king of Judah, his officials and the remnant of Jerusalem, whether they remain in this land or live in Egypt.

Jer. 31-7-8a) This is what the LORD says: “Sing with joy for Jacob; shout for the foremost of the nations. Make your praises heard, and say, ‘LORD, save your people, the remnant of Israel.’ See, I will bring them from the land of the north and gather them from the ends of the earth.

Jer. 40:11,15; 41:10,16 – these mentions of the remnant of Judah all come from pagan kings referring to God’s people.

Jer. 42:1-3) Then all the army officers, including Johanan son of Kareah and Jezaniah son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the least to the greatest approached Jeremiah the prophet and said to him, “Please hear our petition and pray for us to the LORD your God for all this remnant. For as you now see, though we were once many, now only a few are left. Pray that the LORD your God will tell us where we should go and what we should do.”

Jer. 42:19) Remnant of Judah, the LORD has told you, ‘Do not go to Egypt.’ Be sure of this: I warn you today.

Jer. 43:5; 44:7,12,13,28 – these passages have God referring to his people as the remnant of Judah.

Jer. 50:20) In those days, at that time, declares the LORD, “search will be made for Israel’s guilt, but there will be none, and for the sins of Judah, but none will be found, for I will forgive the remnant I preserve.

Joel 3:5) Then everyone shall be rescued who call on the name of the Lord; for on Mount Zion there shall be a remnant, as the Lord has said, and in Jerusalem survivors whom the Lord shall call.

Amos 5:15) Hate evil and love good; and let justice prevail at the gate; then it may be that the Lord, the god of hosts, will have pity on the remnant of Joseph.

Micah 2:12) I will gather you, O Jacob, each and every one, I will assemble all the remnant of Israel; I will group them like a flock in the fold, like a herd in the midst of its corral; they shall not be thrown into panic by men.

The People to be Restored - Micah 4:6-7) On that day, declares the LORD, I will gather the lame; I will assemble the exiles and those I have brought to grief. I will make the lame my remnant, those driven away a strong nation. The Lord will rule over them in Mount Zion from that day and forever.

Restoration through the Messiah - Micah 5:6-7) The remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the LORD, like showers on the grass, which do not wait for anyone or depend on man. The remnant of Jacob will be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep, which mauls and mangles as it goes, and no one can rescue.

Micah 7:18) Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.

The Day of the Lord: A Day of Judgment - Zephaniah 2:7 & 9) The coast shall belong to the remnant of Judah, by the sea they shall pasture. Therefore, as surely as I live,” declares the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, “surely Moab will become like Sodom, the Ammonites like Gomorrah—a place of weeds and salt pits, a wasteland forever. The remnant of my people will plunder them; the survivors of my nation will inherit their land.”

The Narrow Gate – Mt. 7:13-14) Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

The Narrow Door; Salvation and Rejection – Lk. 13:22-24) Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, “Lord, will only a few people be saved?” He said to them. Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough.

Acts 15:16-18) After this I will return, and rebuild the fallen hut of David; from its ruins I shall rebuild it and raise it up again, so that the rest of humanity (the remnant of mankind) may seek out the Lord, even all the Gentiles on whom my name is invoked. Thus says the Lord who accomplishes these things known from of old.

Witness of the Prophets - Rm. 9:25-28) As he says in Hosea: “I will call them ‘my people’ who are not my people; and I will call her ‘my loved one’ who is not my loved one,” and “In the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘children of the living God.’” Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant will be saved. For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality.”

The Remnant of Israel - Rm. 11:1-6) I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don’t you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: “Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me”? And what was God’s answer to him? “I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

Rev. 12:17) Then the dragon became angry with the woman and went off to waged war against the rest of her offspring (the remnant of her seed), those who keep God’s commandments and bear witness to Jesus

What Does Remnant Mean? The Lexham Bible Dictionary defines the word remnant: A portion of people left after a disaster, especially a disaster identified with divine judgment. Especially in the Prophets, this term describes those who remain faithful to God despite suffering and who ultimately experience restoration. One of the things to note about this word is that it can have both a positive and negative connotation. In the negative sense, a remnant can be the people left after God has executed judgment. However, most often in the Bible the remnant is seen in a positive light. These are the ones who carry hope of restoration or a return to God or godly ways. The first example of a remnant in the Bible happens in Genesis with Noah and his family. What you see hear is that combination of despair and hope that is represented by the remnant. The despair is a result of the judgment of God upon the earth, but the hope comes because Noah and his family were left. The word remnant does not appear here but this is an example of what remnant means in the Bible. God took Noah and his family and rescued them, and he then used them to reset and repopulate the earth.

Why Does God Preserve a Remnant? You might wonder why does God preserve a remnant? The answer is simple it is because God chooses to fulfill his purpose in the earth through ordinary men and women like you and me. Because he desires to fulfill his plan in this manner, he seeks out and preserves a people who are ready and willing to follow him regardless of the direction that everyone else is going. These people who make up the remnant are instrumental in preserving God's character, God's purpose, and God's will in the earth. Therefore, those who make up the remnant represent hope along with the promise and possibility of restoration.

What Does Remnant Mean: Another Use of the Word. Another great example of what the word remnant means in the Bible is seen in the life of Joseph. Consider these verses. Notice again that out of a disaster, Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery and the eventual famine in Egypt, God's used that to preserve a remnant. Who knows what would have happened had Joseph not been in Egypt during the famine? So again you see the remnant though they are the ones left, they are also the reason for the hope of restoration.

Remnant and Israel. As I mentioned earlier, many times in the Bible when it talks about a remnant it is used in relationship to the people of Israel. Through various trials and tribulations in the Old Testament God consistently had a remnant of people in Israel whose hearts were fully committed to him. This remnant in Israel was important because it was through the nation of Israel that Jesus would come. Also, it was through the nation of Israel that God's word and God's law was passed down and preserved in the earth. There were always a people who would reflect God's character in the earth and in the Old Testament this was the nation of Israel. Regardless of how sinful and rebellious the nations of Israel and Judah became; God always had a group within this group, who would remain faithful to him. (see 1 Kings 19:15-18 above)

What Does Remnant Mean in the New Testament? The beautiful thing about God's plan and the reality of the remnant is that his desire will be accomplished despite everything that we see happening. God's purpose for Israel remains and God's purpose for humanity still remains. Here is a New Testament reference to the remnant and Israel.

The Remnant and You. One of the things we must be aware of is that if you are in Christ, you are part of the present day remnant. Jesus calls you salt and one of the functions of salt is to preserve, which is what the remnant does. We are called to preserve God's standard in the earth regardless of what we see happening in our society. We are also here to represent the hope of restoration and salvation in the earth. Though it can get tempting when you see what is happening around you, don't get discouraged. Keep shining light, being salt and being the remnant that God needs in the earth. While we know everyone won't come to Christ, let's be the difference that God desires so we can bring restoration to as many as possible. I leave you with this scripture even though it does not specifically talk about being the remnant it sums up our responsibility.