

Ezekiel 12:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But I will leave a few men of them from the sword, from the famine, and from the pestilence; that they may declare all their abominations among the heathen whither they come; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

Analysis

God announces: 'But I will leave a few men of them from the sword, from the famine, and from the pestilence; that they may declare all their abominations among the heathen whither they come; and they shall know that I am the LORD.' God preserves a remnant through judgment not for their merit but for testimonial purposes. The few who survive will declare Israel's abominations among the nations, serving as witnesses to why judgment came.

This remnant theology is crucial—even in comprehensive judgment, God preserves some. The Hebrew *anshe mispar* (אַנְשֵׁי מִסְפָּר, 'men of number/few') emphasizes the smallness of the surviving group. Their purpose is confessional—declaring (admitting) the abominations that brought judgment. This honest acknowledgment before pagans vindicates God's righteousness and explains exile as just, not arbitrary.

From a Reformed perspective, this illustrates that God's electing grace ensures a remnant survives every judgment (Romans 9:27-29, 11:1-5). The remnant serves God's purposes—testifying to His justice and eventually becoming the nucleus for restoration. God never completely destroys but always preserves a seed through which His covenant continues.

Historical Context

The preserved remnant did indeed testify among the nations. Exiled communities in Babylon maintained their identity and explained their exile as divine judgment for covenant violation. Books like Lamentations and penitential Psalms (74, 79, 137) show this self-critical testimony. Later, Daniel and companions in Babylon testified to God's sovereignty even while acknowledging national sin (Daniel 9:4-19).

This honest self-assessment before pagans was countercultural—defeated peoples typically blamed their gods' weakness or enemy gods' strength. Israel's testimony that Yahweh judged them for sin was unique, maintaining that their God was sovereign even in their defeat. This witness preserved monotheistic faith and attracted some Gentiles (Ruth, Rahab precedents; later God-fearers in Acts).

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the remnant's testimonial purpose challenge individualistic faith that ignores corporate witness?
2. What does honest acknowledgment of sin before unbelievers teach about authentic gospel witness?
3. In what ways does God's preservation of a remnant through judgment demonstrate His covenant faithfulness?

Interlinear Text

וְהוֹתַרְתִּי י	מֵהֶם	אֲנִי י	מִסֶּפֶּר ר	מִחֶ רַב	
But I will leave			a few	of them from the sword	
H3498	H1992	H376	H4557	H2719	
מִכָּעַ ב	וּמִדַּ בָּר	לִמַּ עַן	יִסְפְּרוּ ו	אֶת	כָּל
from the famine	and from the pestilence		that they may declare		
H7458	H1698	H4616	H5608	H853	H3605
תוֹעֲבֹתֶיהָ מ	בְּגוֹיִם	אֲשֶׁר	כָּ אֵו	שָׁ מ	
all their abominations	among the heathen		whither they come		
H8441	H1471	H834	H935	H8033	
וְיָדְעוּ ו	כִּי	אֲנִי י	יְהוָה:		
and they shall know			that I am the LORD		
H3045	H3588	H589	H3068		

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 1:9 (References Lord): Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.

Jeremiah 4:27 (References Lord): For thus hath the LORD said, The whole land shall be desolate; yet will I not make a full end.