

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* (אָנָשִׁים 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

וְהוֹתְרָת	מְכַפֵּר אֶלָּשׁוּ מִקְמָת	מְכַבֵּב	מִכְמָת
But I will leave	H1992	H376	a few of them from the sword
H3498		H4557	H2719
מִרְעָשׁ בְּ	וּמִדְּבָר	לִמְעֵן	כָּל אֶת
from the famine and from the pestilence	H7458	H1698	וִסְפֵּר וְ
		H4616	that they may declare
			H5608
תּוֹעֲבֹתָם	בְּגֹויִם	אֲשֶׁר	שָׁם
all their abominations among the heathen	H8441	H1471	בְּ אֹי
		H834	whither they come
			H8033
יְדַעַת	אֵת יְהִי	וְהִיא	
and they shall know	H3588	H589	that I am the LORD
H3045		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.