

Isaiah 49:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?

Analysis

Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been? Zion's amazed questions express wonder at unexpected restoration. The series of rhetorical questions—Who begot? Who raised? Where were they?—conveys incredulous joy. Personified Jerusalem recalls her barren, bereaved state: "lost my children" (childless through death/exile), "desolate" (galmudah, גַּלְמוּדָה, stripped of husband and children), "captive" (in bondage), "removing to and fro" (surah, סוּרָה, wandering, unstable).

The contrast between past desolation and present abundance creates theological testimony to divine faithfulness. The question "Who hath begotten me these?" acknowledges that restoration exceeds natural explanation—this is miraculous, divine intervention. The phrase "I was left alone" (ani levadi, אֲנִי לְבַדִּי) emphasizes utter isolation, making the subsequent multitude even more remarkable.

From a Reformed perspective, this models appropriate response to grace—wonder and questioning how such blessing came to the undeserving. The barren becoming fruitful is a recurring biblical theme: Sarah, Rachel, Hannah, Elizabeth—all testify that God grants children when naturally impossible. Spiritually, this represents the church's astonishment at salvation by grace alone. Ephesians 2:11-13 captures

this: "ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." The elect marvel that God chose them from "before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4).

Historical Context

The language of barrenness and wandering connects to Israel's exodus and wilderness experience. The original generation that left Egypt died in the wilderness; yet God raised up a new generation to inherit the land (Numbers 14:29-31). Similarly, the exilic generation largely perished, but God raised up returnees and converts.

The shock expressed here anticipates the gentile inclusion that scandalized Jewish Christians. Acts 10-11 records Peter's astonishment that God granted Gentiles the same Spirit, and the Jerusalem council's debate (Acts 15) over this unprecedented expansion. Paul's mission created "children" from unexpected places—uncircumcised, unclean by Jewish standards—yet fully adopted into God's family. The church's predominantly Gentile composition would have seemed impossible to Isaiah's original audience, yet precisely fulfills this prophecy.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. When have you experienced God's blessing exceeding your natural expectations?
2. How does remembering your spiritual desolation before Christ increase thanksgiving for salvation?
3. What aspects of God's redemptive work in your life still evoke wonder and amazement?

Interlinear Text

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|-------------------------|---|-----------------|-------------------------|--------|-------|------|
| וְאָמַרְתָּ | בְּלִבְּךָ | מִי | יֵלֵד | אֶלֶּה | אֶת־ | לִי |
| Then shalt thou say | in thine heart | H4310 | Who hath begotten | H0 | H853 | H428 |
| H559 | H3824 | | H3205 | | | |
| וְאֲנִי | שָׁכֹחַ | הֵאֱלָמוֹד | הַגֵּל־הַ | | | |
| H589 | me these seeing I have lost my children | and am desolate | a captive | | | |
| | H7921 | H1565 | H1540 | | | |
| וְסוֹכָה | וְאֵלֶּה | מִי | גִּיד־ל | יְהִי | אֲנִי | |
| and removing to and fro | H428 | H4310 | and who hath brought up | H2005 | H589 | |
| H5493 | | | H1431 | | | |
| נִשְׁאַרְתִּי | לְבַד־ | אֶלֶּה | אֵיפֹה | הֵם: | | |
| these Behold I was left | H905 | H428 | alone these where | H1992 | | |
| H7604 | | | H375 | | | |