

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, גַּלְמֻדָּה, stripped of husband and children), "captive" (in bondage), "removing to and fro" (surah, סֻרָּה, 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, אָנָּי לְבָדִי) 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

Psalm 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

א	לֹה	אֶת	לִ	לִ	רְתִי	בְּלֵבְבָבְךָ	מִ	מִלְדָּת	אֶת	לֹה
Then	shalt	thou	say	in	thine	heart	H4310	Who	hath	begotten
H559				H3824				H3205		H853
										H428
תְּאַתִּי	שְׁכֹלֶת	ה	אֶל	הַ	וְגַלְמֹדֶת	ה	אֶל	הַ	וְגַלְמֹדֶת	ה
H589	me	these	seeing	I	have	lost	my	children	and	am
									desolate	desolate
	H7921						H1565			H1540
אֶתְכִּי	יְסֹעַת	ה	לְ	לְ	גַּדְעָן	לְ	לְ	לְ	לְ	אֶתְכִּי
and	removing	to	and	from	H428	H4310	and	who	hath	brought
H5493							H1431			H2005
										H589
בְּנֵשָׁא	רְתִי	לְבָדְךָ	אֵלֶּה	אֵלֶּה	אִפְּנֵי	הַמִּן				
these	Behold	I	was	left	H905	H428	alone	these	where	H1992
H7604							H375			

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