

## THE PAIN AND JOY OF THE FRAGMENTS A Devotional Meditation from

Exodus 13:1-15:26, 22:24-23:19; 34:1-26; Deuteronomy 14:22-16:17; Leviticus 19:9-10;  
Isaiah 10:20-12:6; Matthew 7:13-14, 21-23; John 6:1-14; Revelation 21:1-4

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Once I heard about a ministry called Fragments that reached out to homeless people. The inspiration for the ministry was Yeshua's miraculous Feeding of the Five Thousand. That inspiration, of course, came from the unexpectedly bountiful provision given to the hungry crowd, but not in the way we might expect. What moved the founders of that ministry was Yeshua's direction to His disciples after the meal:



The Crossing of the Red Sea, Nicolas Poussin, 1632-1634, [National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne](https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/collections/artists/poussin).

When they were filled, He  
\*said to His disciples,

“Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost.” So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.

John 6:12-13 NASB1995

“Fragments” is a good way to describe the homeless, the poor, the orphans, the widows, and all the other elements of humanity who fall outside the mainstream. They are the leftovers, the undesirables, the ones who just didn't make the cut among the beautiful people. They would be the scraps of wood littering the ground after the building of a house, or the remnants of cloth left on the floor after the sewing of a fine garment. Such leftovers have value in our estimation based on how they might be used for another meal, or pieced together to make furniture, or perhaps sewn together to make a doll for a little child. But in terms of real value, they don't add up to the worth of the thing they weren't needed to make.

Why, then, does God care so much about fragments, remnants, and leftovers? Surely He must, for our Messiah made it a point to have them all collected. On the other hand, the Torah specifies that the corners of the fields and the remnants of the vineyard were to remain unharvested so the remnants of society could glean from them.

There's a spiritual principle here that we might find very uncomfortable. It has to do with the economics of the Kingdom of Heaven. Apparently, there is some kind of sifting

process that makes entrance into the Kingdom more difficult than we might think or hope. That's one way to understand words of our Messiah such as these:

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow is the gate and difficult the way that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Matthew 7:13-14 TLV

Yeshua then goes on to say something even more disturbing:

Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord!" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in Your name, and drive out demons in Your name, and perform many miracles in Your name?" Then I will declare to them, "I never knew you. Get away from Me, you workers of lawlessness!"

Matthew 7:21-23 TLV

It seems that many who expect to be in the Kingdom won't be, and many who don't expect to be there will be. In other words, the remnants, the fragments, and the scraps have just as much chance of entering the Kingdom as the beautiful people – and the beautiful people have just as much chance of being shut out as the remnants.

With that in mind, maybe we should pay more attention to the concept of a remnant, especially in the context of this Covenant Kingdom of Israel into which we who follow Israel's Messiah-King have been adopted. God gave Isaiah some harsh words to say about that Kingdom:

Yet it will come about in that day that the remnant of Israel—those of the house of Jacob who escaped—will never again depend on the one who struck them down, but will depend upon *ADONAI*, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. A remnant will return, even the remnant of Jacob, to the Mighty God.

For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction has been decreed. Justice overflows. For a complete destruction, as decreed, will *ADONAI Elohei-Tzva'ot* [the LORD God of Hosts] make throughout the whole land.

Isaiah 10:20-23 TLV

This dire prediction comes immediately before the great Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 11. That's the passage about the Root of Jesse regathering the scattered remnant of Israel – and, we may be assured, those joined to them – and bringing them back to the Promised Land, where they will live in peace during the blessed Messianic Age which Christians call the Millennium. Since we all want to be there, we have even more reason to ask, "What is a remnant?"

That question that came up in one of the first conversations I had with an Israeli. This man related that he had once asked God that very question, "What is a remnant?" The answer he received was alarmingly straightforward: 600,000 men marched out of Egypt, but only two of them walked into the Promised Land.

That's consistent with one ancient Jewish teaching on the Exodus. It's a commentary on an ambiguous Hebrew word in Exodus 13:18, which says –

So God led the people by the roundabout way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of the land of Egypt prepared for battle.

Exodus 13:18 NRSV

The questionable phrase is “prepared for battle.” Most translations impart the meaning that Israel went out in orderly ranks carrying weapons and ready for battle, but the Hebrew is vague enough that it also can be translated, “by fifties,” or even, “in the fifth generation.” In pondering this vague language, ancient rabbis mused that it could be interpreted “one out of five.” That leads to an alarming speculation:

Four fifths of the Jewish people died during the plague of darkness so as not to give the Egyptians the satisfaction of knowing that these Israelites had not been found worthy of redemption.\*

Is this only a Jewish fable, or is there something to it? Given the record of scripture, I think we would be wise to consider it seriously. After all, the account of Noah tells us only eight people out of the entire population of the world survived the Great Flood, and the sad tale of Sodom says only three people survived that city’s cataclysmic destruction. Some might say those are Old Testament examples, and that the gracious God of the New Testament surely has a different standard. But that’s the same God Who’s Son taught that many will hear Him say, “Get away from Me, you workers of lawlessness!”

What do we do with this disturbing paradox? It’s present throughout the Gospels, of course. Yeshua plainly taught what the Exodus story demonstrates so graphically: that the way to redemption is open to everyone, but only a few find it. Those few are the remnants and fragments, even if at one point they might have been numbered with the beautiful people. They are remnants and fragments because they have walked away from everything that conventional human wisdom says is right and good. Instead of waiting for things to get back to normal, they got up out of the path of destruction and stepped toward the promise of redemption and life. They took God at His word, and in time looked back from the far shore of the Red Sea on the flotsam of what had been normal. That’s where they sang the praises of the God Who Saves, although if the Jewish sages are right, they probably sang with tears in their eyes and snags in their throats at the memory of loved ones who perished while waiting for normal to return.

This is the joy and the pain of the fragmented remnant. It’s painful beyond reckoning to leave that which we love for the promise of everlasting life in the Kingdom of Heaven, but the joy comes in the morning, when the King Himself wipes away every tear, and we sing His praises forever.

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\* Rabbeinu Bahya, Shemot 13:18:1-3, *Torah Commentary by Rabbi Bachya ben Asher*, trans. Eliyahu Munk, 1998, [https://www.sefaria.org/Rabbeinu\\_Bachya%2C\\_Shemot.13.18.1-3?ven=Torah\\_Commentary\\_by\\_Rabbi\\_Bachya\\_ben\\_Asher\\_trans\\_Eliyahu\\_Munk\\_1998.&vhe=Midrash\\_Rabbeinu\\_Bachya\\_\[ben\\_Asher\].\\_Warsaw,\\_1878&lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en](https://www.sefaria.org/Rabbeinu_Bachya%2C_Shemot.13.18.1-3?ven=Torah_Commentary_by_Rabbi_Bachya_ben_Asher_trans_Eliyahu_Munk_1998.&vhe=Midrash_Rabbeinu_Bachya_[ben_Asher]._Warsaw,_1878&lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en), (accessed April 20, 2022).