Retailers of carpet, linoleum and cloth call the unused and unwanted scraps of these materials "remnants." Stores will often advertise sales of these leftovers, and a smart shopper can get variously sized rectangles of these materials for himself for a song.

The Bible also has its remnants. Though it may seem to be a fairly rare subject, the idea of a remnant is found 540 times in the Bible! Most of the time, the remnant concept is disguised by the way the words are translated into English. In the Old Testament, remnant is translated by six Hebrew root words, each of which has the underlying meaning of "what is left," "what remains," "survivors," "escapees," or "the rest." The one Greek root used in the New Testament and in the Septuagint has the same meaning.

The biblical writers mention at least seven different remnants:

1) Survivors of any catastrophe (e.g., Lot survived Sodom).
2) A group of non-Israelite survivors (e.g., "the remnant of Edom," Amos 9:12).
3) Israelite survivors of the Assyrian invasion in 721-718 BC.
4) Jewish survivors of the Babylonian invasion in 585 BC.
5) The remnant of Jews who returned to Judah from Babylon.
6) The remainder of physical Israelites and Jews after the Great Tribulation.
7) The remnant of converted sons of God in the last days.

When reading a section of the Bible where a remnant is mentioned, one should be careful to determine which of these the writer is describing. It could be very important to understanding the passage correctly.

The Spiritual Remnant

This article will focus on just one of the remnants—the one that applies to Christians, the spiritual remnant. This is a small group of God-fearing people who survive the persecutions inspired by Satan in the near future. Those who prevail are promised wonderful blessings and rewards for their faithfulness.

In Romans 11:1-4, Paul recounts Elijah's complaint and God's subsequent response found in I Kings 19:11-18. From this exchange, the apostle concludes that a remnant still exists, "a remnant according to the election of grace" (verse 5). This spiritual remnant is what several New Testament writers term "the elect," those who have been called and chosen by God through grace. These "elect" have received what Israel did not: spiritual redemption, salvation, a relationship with God and so forth.

It is interesting to speculate on the figure of 7,000 mentioned in both I Kings 19:18 and Romans 11:4. Amos 5:3 and Isaiah 6:13 show very clearly that the remnant of physical Israel will be about one-tenth, a tithe, a literal decimation of Israel. The nation's population totaled about 2 1/2 million at the time of the Exodus from Egypt. Six hundred years later during Elijah's ministry, her population must have been similar or even higher. Today, the nations of modern Israel have a combined population in
excess of 470 million, so the remnant of physical Israel at the end time may be over 47 million people!

But how big is the remnant of spiritual Israel, the church of God? If we assume that the figure of 7,000 is one-tenth of the whole like the remnant of physical Israel, then the original number of spiritual Israelites is 70,000. If we combined the membership lists of all the churches of God, could we not produce a list well over 100,000? Does this mean that God does not consider many "members" to be part of His elect? Or could it mean that the spiritual remnant is even smaller than one-tenth?

The prophecy in Ezekiel 5:1-5, which is explained in verse 12, seems to confirm that Israel is tithed, but what about the pinch of hair bound in the edge of the garment? It is an even smaller fraction of the whole—an almost insignificant number. More intriguing is that nothing further is mentioned of them. They are a small remnant of people in Israel—possibly the spiritual remnant—who are protected in God's hip pocket. If these hairs do represent the spiritual remnant, then it is a very small number indeed.

Knowing the current spiritual state of the church, we can understand how this could be so. II Thessalonians 2:1-3 shows that before Christ's return there will be a falling away, an apostasy, from truth. Satan the Devil will have engineered the disintegration of the church.

Revelation 12:7-17 gives us a play-by-play of end-time events centered on the spiritual remnant. Satan, enraged that he has been cast down to earth, will seek to persecute the elect, but God protects this small group from Satan for three and a half years. Since he cannot destroy the faithful remnant, the Devil turns to persecute the spiritually weak Christians left unprotected during the Great Tribulation. Who comprises the faithful, protected remnant, and where are they protected?

In Isaiah 33:14, "the sinners in Zion" pose a question: "Who can survive the coming persecution?" God supplies the answer in verse 15—the righteous will survive it—and in verse 16, He explains where He will protect them—in a mountainous fortress where they are supplied food and drink. Verse 17 may indicate that the King, Jesus Christ, will teach them in the place of safety.

It is interesting to note that the letters to the Thyatira, Sardis and Philadelphia churches in Revelation 2 and 3 mention a remnant: "the rest in Thyatira" (2:24); "a few names even in Sardis" (3:4); and implied in the direct promise, "I also will keep you from the hour of trial" (3:10). Laodicea, though, must go through the fire (3:18-19).

**Where Are We Now?**

Where are we now in prophecy? We seem to be at the point spoken of in Daniel 12:7:

Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.
In the larger context of end-time events, "the holy people" refers to God's chosen nation, Israel. The church, however, can also be alluded to here in antitype: Peter calls the church "a holy nation, His own special people" (I Peter 2:9). Both of these groups, Israel and the church, seem to be in the process of having their power "completely shattered."

This expression in the Hebrew has the primary meaning of "broken in pieces," "scattered" or "dispersed by force." It can mean something akin to "explode." When an object explodes, its pieces fly apart, and it can no longer do what it was made to do. The individual pieces are powerless to accomplish what the whole object did. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

This must be part of the meaning of the verse because the word power is really the Hebrew word for "hand." The hand symbolizes a person's ability to do work, to accomplish, to act. The translators have taken it to mean the more abstract "might" or "power," but they could have rendered it as "ability," "strength" or "effectiveness."

If this is so, we can expect the church's ability to do an effective work to decline still further because our power is not yet completely shattered. That is why it is so important that we make use of the abilities still left to us: to prepare ourselves for God's Kingdom. As an encouraging Jewish proverb reminds us, "When God shuts a door, He opens a window." We can take other avenues in the meantime while the road ahead is blocked for doing a public Work.

Now is the time to do as the apostle Peter recommends in II Peter 1:10-11:

Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

And by so doing, we can do everything in our power to be a part of God's spiritual remnant.