

What Are “Remains”?

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“Remains” (or “remnants”) is a concept from the Writings for the New Church. It refers to the past states of goodness that we have experienced. What follows is a brief explanation both for people who are new to the New Church and wonder at the unusual use of this common word, or for people who have used the term for years, know its general meaning, but wonder where it came from.

“Remains”—perhaps better translated “remnants”—is based on a Biblical term and idea.

The major prophets (and a number of the minor ones) wrote at a time when the people of Judah were either *about to be*, or *were in the process of being*, or *had just been* carried into exile. The Babylonians conquered them and, to break their spirit and prevent them from regrouping, resettled most of the citizens of Judah in various parts of their empire. The prophets attributed this exile to Yehowah. He caused them to be carried away as a punishment for their disobedience. But the prophets also held out the promise that Yehowah would mercifully preserve a remnant of Judah. A small group of people would be saved. Then in the fulness of time Yehowah would gather them from all the countries where they had been scattered, bring them back to Canaan and rebuild the kingdom, and not only restore it to its former glory, but to a greater glory. He would give to His chastened people dominance over their enemies, peace, prosperity. This future glory is often associated with the “day of Yehowah” when He Himself would come as their deliverer and king. These ideas surrounding “the remnant” together constitute one of the great themes of the Old Testament.¹

Spiritually “remnants” refer to the good mental states that the Lord has given us to experience. He carefully preserves them in us, especially at times when we fall away from Him. The Lord uses these experiences to build His kingdom in us, and (as the case often seems) to rebuild it over time. These “remnants” feature strongly in our final states of blessing in heaven.

As with the children of Israel our life begins with a promise. The Lord creates us for heaven, for blessing. He gives us what we need to choose heaven, and leads us continually to that end. He brought Israel into their “promised land” and let them taste its fruits. The Lord gives us many tastes of heaven, beginning with our infancy, and continuing through every state of life.

The most powerful tastes are when we are infants and children. He gives us to experience innocence and peace through the presence of the highest angels. We are given to feel their complete trust in the Lord, their good will toward all, their exquisite sense of delight in letting the Lord lead them and care for them. We do experience innocence and peace in later states of life, but there is no comparison with what we experienced as infants! This is the case unless we let the Lord bring these states back. (More on this later.)

As we grow older and our Self begins to exert itself more, the highest angels are no longer able to be with us. Angels from the second heaven join us and have a role in giving us good states. These angels also leave us eventually, and in later childhood/adolescence the lowest angels are with us. Through these various angels we experience many good mental states: states of pleasure in wholesome things, pleasure in obeying, satisfaction in working and completing tasks, interest and delight in learning,

¹ The main word for “remnant” is *sheerith*. Its root idea is “to be left.” However an identical root means “to swell” and is used for “leaven.” Think of a little lump of leavened dough that is saved from a batch of bread for the next batch. From that small beginning the whole batch is leavened. This gives us an idea of the promise of the restored “remnant.”

delight in seeing truth, an affirmative attitude, joy in working and playing in harmony with other people, *etc.*

All of these states are gifts from the Lord. He saves each one of them in us. He protects them from harm, and provides that they may be stirred again and brought back to strengthen and bless us. Specifically, He works through our “remnant” states to temper and moderate our present states, to suggest better alternatives, to influence and bend our moods and thinking, to encourage, to deflect attention away from evil, *etc.* He works through our remnants when we are struggling against evil.

As we come into adulthood, we still receive such states of good and truth which are saved as remnants. The Lord never stops giving good states to us to all eternity! But we begin to take a more active role in associating angels to ourselves through our adult choices. As regeneration progresses, the Lord can work through our former remnants more and more to bring order and peace to our outer mind and life. On top of this, and because of it, He gives us countless new states of blessing! Through regeneration the “remnant” is “brought back” and “established” and actually increases in all abundance!

This process of “bringing back our remnants” happens in a certain order as we are regenerated by the Lord. First, the more recent “remnants” (implanted through the presence of lower angels) bring order into our mind and life, through the truths that we have learned and lived. In other words, those “goods” are the first to “become our own” as we consciously become aware of them and choose them. Next the “remnants” from our childhood (implanted through the presence of better angels) bring a deeper order and spirituality to our mind and life. We experience again the kind of love we felt in childhood, but now we are conscious of it and choosing it. And finally we become able to be touched by the deepest “remnants” and “make them our own.” These are the ones implanted in infancy (through the presence of the best angels). Of course, we may stop at any point in this progression, depending on our choices. After death the “remnants” we have experienced continue to come back to us as we are perfected, bringing joy and blessing.

A few places in the Prophets that speak of the remnant:

Isaiah 11
Jeremiah 31.1-9
Ezekiel 36
Micah 5
Zephaniah 3
Zechariah 8

A few key passages from the Writings for the New Church:

Arcana Coelestia 1906, 2280, 5342:1-3.