

What Is the Remnant?

Gary North

My investment newsletter is called *Remnant Review*. People ask me from time to time: ‘What does ‘Remnant’ mean?’ **This** is not an easy question to answer in a few words.

I got the name from Rev. Edmund **Opitz**, who was a member of the Senior Staff of the Foundation **for** Economic Education (FEE), located in **Irvington-on-Hudson**, New York, about 25 miles north of New York City. In his spare time, he had put together a small group of ministers who were interested in attending **informal** meetings devoted to a discussion of the relationship between religion and the free society. He called his organization “The Remnant.”

Rev. **Opitz** got the name from a 1937 essay by Albert J. Neck. He was a great **fan** of Neck, and he had started another small organization called the **Nockean** Society.

I was hired as a member of FEE’s Senior Staff in the fall of 1971. There I discussed the original concept of the Remnant with Rev. **Opitz**. I was impressed by the understanding that Neck had possessed. Though neither a Christian nor a Jew, Neck had grasped a neglected aspect of the prophet’s job in ancient Israel: *serving as a shining beacon to the unseen Remnant*.

There were times when a prophet went into the highways and byways of the land, preaching the law of God and the *negative sanctions* which would inevitably come *if* the people, **especially** their leaders, continued to ignore God by ignoring His statutes. God told him that they would not listen, but he was told to preach anyway.

There were other **times** when the prophet kept to himself, waiting for **faithful** people to seek him out. The prophet was not always “on the road.” He was not always involved in direct confrontation with the rulers and the people.

Both aspects of the prophet’s job must be acknowledged: confrontation as well as **garden-tending**. There are times when a prophet must “go public.” There are other times when he stays in the shadows and does his **work** quietly. The prophet must know the times and seasons.

Every faithful person is to some degree a prophet. He has a particular view of God, man, law, and time which he honors in his **life**. He has a message **for** others. But his commitment to this view of life need not be public all of the time. He is supposed to prove to himself and to those under his lawful authority that these principles are not only true; they also work in the real **world**. He is to **work** hard to develop these basic principles through his obedience. He is not only a preacher of the word; he must also be a doer.

The righteous person’s accomplishments should be visible. “By their fruits ye shall know them,” Jesus said of all men. A good tree will bear good fruit. So, as time goes by, others will start asking the prophet about himself. He must be ready to give them principled answers.

Investors live in a **world** of *political envy*. There are envious people who love to tear down **successful** people, not to gain their wealth, but only to see to it that no one has anything extra. Thus, I decided early to honor this rule: “**Keep** your principles visible and **your** wealth out of sight.” I recommend this rule to every Remnant member. Our good fruit that others see are our works of charity and service, not our wealth.

Second rule: during the crises that God will eventually bring **to** morally rebellious societies, leadership by the Remnant becomes possible. Righteous leadership requires three things: *principles, capital, and courage*. Be prepared.

When I decided to go into the newsletter business in 1974, a little over a year after I had left FEE, **I** asked Rev. **Opitz** **for** permission to use the name. He agreed. My vision **for** the letter was specific: to encourage readers **to** learn about the free society. **With** knowledge and wealth comes responsibility **Z** *invite* my *subscribe to become part of the Remnant*. Not **all** of them do, but some do. **They** are preparing **for** leadership on the far side of the crisis.

In the next pages, I have reprinted Neck’s essay and my own **essay** on Jeremiah. They will introduce you to the concept of the Remnant.

Isaiah's Jo

Albert Jay Neck

Albert Jay Neck (1870-1945) was editor of *The Freeman* (1920-1924) and author of *Jefferson, Our Enemy The State*, and many other books and articles on the philosophy of government and human freedom. "Isaiah's Job" is extracted from Chapter 13 of his book, *Free Speech and Rain Language*, copyright 1937 by Albert Jay Neck. This book, now out of print, was published by William Morrow & Company, New York, and this extract is reprinted with their permission.

This essay for many years has been distributed by the Foundation for Economic Education, which publishes the modern magazine called *The Freeman*.

One evening last autumn I sat long hours with a European acquaintance while he expounded a politico-economic doctrine which seemed sound as a nut and in which I could find no defect. At the end, he said with great earnestness: "I have a mission to the masses. I feel that I am called to get the ear of the people. I shall devote the rest of my life to spreading my doctrine far and wide among the populace. What do you think?"

An embarrassing question in any case, and doubly so under the circumstances, because my acquaintance is a very learned man, one of the three or four really first-class minds that Europe produced in his generation; and naturally I, as one of the unlearned, was inclined to regard his lightest word with reverence amounting to awe....

I referred him to the story of the prophet Isaiah.... I shall paraphrase the story in our common speech since it has to be pieced out from various sources....

The prophet's career began at the end of King Uzziah's reign, say about 740 B.C. This

reign was uncommonly long, almost half a century, and apparently prosperous. It was one of those prosperous reigns, however-like the reign of Marcus Aurelius at Rome, or the administration of Eubulus at Athens, or of Mr. Coolidge at Washington—where at the end the prosperity suddenly peters out and things go by the board with a resounding crash.

In the year of Uzziah's death, the Lord commissioned the prophet to go out and warn the people of the wrath to come. "Tell them what a worthless lot they are," He said. Well them what is wrong, and why, and what is going to happen unless they have a change of heart and straighten up. Don't mince matters. Make it clear that they are positively down to their last chance. Give it to them good and strong and keep on giving it to them. I suppose perhaps I ought to tell you," He added, "that it won't do any good. The official class and their intelligentsia will turn up their noses at you, and the masses will not even listen. They will all keep on in their own ways until they carry everything down to destruction, and you will probably be lucky if you get out with your life."

Isaiah had been very willing to take on the job-in fact, he had asked for it—but the prospect put a new face on the situation. It raised the obvious question: Why, if all that were so-If the enterprise were to be a failure from the start—was there any sense in starting it?

"Ah," the Lord said, "you do not get the point. There is a Remnant there that you know nothing about. They are obscure, unorganized, inarticulate, each one rubbing along as best he can. They need to be encouraged and braced up because when everything has gone completely to the dogs, they are the ones who will come back and build up a new society; and meanwhile, your preaching will reassure them and keep them hanging on. Your job is to take care of the Remnant, so be off now and set about it....

What do we mean by the masses, and what by the Remnant? As the word *masses* is commonly used, it suggests agglomerations of poor and **underprivileged** people, laboring people, proletarians. But it means nothing like that; it means simply the majority. The mass-man is one who has neither the **force** of intellect to apprehend the principles issuing in what we know as the humane life, nor the **force** of character to adhere to those principles steadily and strictly as laws of conduct; and because such people make up the great, the overwhelming majority of **man-kind**, they are called collectively *the masses*. *The* line of differentiation between the masses and the Remnant is set invariably by quality, not **by circumstance**. The Remnant are those who by force of intellect are able to apprehend these principles, and by force of character are able, at least measurably, to cleave to them. The masses are those who are unable to do either.

The picture which Isaiah presents of the Judean masses is most **unfavorable**. In his view, the mass-man—be he high or be he lowly, rich or poor, prince or pauper—gets off very badly. He appears as not only weak-minded and weak-willed, but as by consequence knavish, arrogant, grasping, dissipated, unprincipled, unscrupulous. . . .

As things now stand, Isaiah's job seems rather to go begging. Everyone with a message nowadays is, like my venerable European friend, eager to take it to the masses. His first, last, and only thought is of mass-acceptance and **mass-**approval. His great care is to put his doctrine in such shape as will capture the masses attention and interest. . . .

The main trouble with this [mass-main approach] is its reaction upon the mission itself. It necessitates an opportunist sophistication of one's **doctrine**, which profoundly alters its character and reduces it to a mere placebo. If, say, **you** are a preacher, you wish to attract as large a congregation as you can, which means an appeal to the masses; and this, in turn, means adapting the terms of your message to the order of intellect and character that the masses exhibit. If **you** are an educator, say with a college on your hands, you wish to get as many students as

possible, and you whittle down **your** requirements accordingly. If a writer, **you** aim at getting many readers; if a **publisher**, many purchasers; if a philosopher, many disciples; if a **reformer**, many converts; if a musician, many auditors; and so on. But as we see on all **sides**, in the realization of these several desires the prophetic message is so heavily adulterated with **trivialities**, in every instance, that its effect on the masses is merely to harden them in their sins. **Meanwhile**, the Remnant, aware of this adulteration and of the desires that prompt it, turn their backs on the prophet and will have nothing to do with him or his message.

Isaiah, on the other hand, worked under no such disabilities. He preached to the masses only in the sense that he preached publicly. **Anyone** who liked might listen; anyone who liked might pass by. He knew that the Remnant **would** listen. . . .

The Remnant want only the best you have, whatever that may be. Give them that, and they are satisfied; you have nothing more to worry about. . . .

In a sense, nevertheless, as I have said, it is not a rewarding job. . . . A prophet of the Remnant will not grow purse-proud on the financial returns from his work, nor is it likely that he will get any great renown out of it. Isaiah's case was exceptional to this second rule, and there are others—but not many.

It may be thought, then, that while taking care of the Remnant is no doubt a good job, it is not an especially interesting job because, it is as a rule so poorly paid. **I** have my doubts about this. There are other compensations to be got out of a job besides money and notoriety and some of them seem substantial enough to be attractive. Many jobs which do not pay well are yet profoundly interesting, as, **for** instance, the job of the research student in the sciences is said to be; and the job of looking after the Remnant seems to me, as I have surveyed it for many years from my seat in the grandstand, to be as interesting as any that can be **found** in the world.

What chiefly **makes** it so, I think, is that in any given society the Remnant are always so

largely an unknown quantity. You do not know, and will never know, more than two things about them. You can be sure of those—dead sure, as our phrase is—but you will never be able to make even a respectable guess at anything else. You do not know, and will never know, who the Remnant are, nor where they are, nor how many of them there are, nor what they are doing or will do. Two things you know, and no more: first, that they exist; second, that they will find you. Except **for these** two certainties, working **for** the Remnant means working in impenetrable darkness; and this, I should say, is just the condition calculated most effectively to pique the interest of any prophet who is properly gifted with the imagination, insight, and intellectual curiosity necessary to a successful pursuit of his trade.

The fascination—as well as the **despair**—of the historian, as he **looks** back upon Isaiah's Jewry, upon Plato's Athens, or upon Rome of the **Antonines**, is the hope of discovering and laying bare the "substratum of right-thinking and **well-doing**" which he knows must have existed somewhere in those societies because no kind of collective life can possibly go on without it. He finds tantalizing intimations of it here and there in many places, as in the Greek Anthology, in the scrapbook of Anus Genius, in the poems of Ausonius, and in the brief and touching tribute, *Bene Merenti*, bestowed upon the unknown occupants of Roman tombs. But these are vague and fragmentary; they lead him nowhere in his search **for** some kind of measure of this substratum, but merely testify to what he already knew a priori—that the substratum did somewhere exist. Where it was, how substantial it was, what its power of self-assertion and resistance was—of **all** this they tell him nothing.

Similarly, when the historian of two thousand years hence, or two hundred years, looks over the available testimony to the quality of our civilization and tries to get any kind of clear, competent evidence concerning the substratum of right-thinking and **well-doing** which he knows must have been here, he will have a devil of a time **finding** it. When he has assembled all he can get and has made even a minimum allow-

ance **for** speciousness, vagueness, and confusion of motive, he will sadly acknowledge that his net result is simply nothing. A Remnant were here, building a substratum like coral insects; so much he knows, but he will find nothing to put him on the track of who and where and how many they were and what their work was like.

Concerning all this, too, the prophet of the present knows precisely as much and as little as the historian of the future; and that, I repeat, is what makes his job seem to me so **profoundly** interesting. One of the most suggestive episodes recounted in the Bible is that of a prophet's attempt—the only attempt of the kind on record, I **believe—to** count up the Remnant. Elijah had fled from persecution into the desert, where the Lord presently overhauled him and asked what he was doing so **far** away from his job.

He said that he was running away, not because he was a **coward**, but because all the Remnant had been killed off except himself. He had got away only by the skin of his teeth, and, he being now all the Remnant there was, if he were killed the True Faith **would** go flat. The Lord replied that he need not **worry** about that, **for** even without him the True Faith could probably manage to squeeze along somehow if it had to; "and as for your figures on the Remnant," He said, "I don't mind telling you that there are seven thousand of them back there in Israel whom it seems **you** have not heard of, but you may take My word **for** it that there they are."

At that time, probably the population of Israel could not have been too much more than a million or so; and a Remnant of seven thousand out of a million is a highly encouraging percentage **for** any prophet. **With** seven thousand of the boys on his side, there was no great reason for Elijah to feel lonesome; and incidentally, that **would** be something **for** the modern prophet of the Remnant to think of when he has a touch of the blues. But the main point is that if Elijah the Prophet could not make a closer guess on the number of the Remnant than he made when he missed it by seven thousand, anyone else who tackled the problem **would** only waste his time.

The other certainty which the prophet of the Remnant may always have is that the Remnant will find him. He may rely on that with absolute assurance. They will find him without his doing anything about it; in fact, if he tries to do anything about it, he is pretty sure to put them off. He does not need to advertise **for** them nor resort to any schemes of publicity to get their attention. If he is a preacher or a public speaker, **for** example, he may be quite indifferent to going on show at receptions, getting his picture printed in the newspapers, or furnishing autobiographical material **for** publication on the side of "human interest." If a writer, he need not make a point of attending any pink teas, autographing books at wholesale, or entering into any specious freemasonry with reviewers.

All this and much more of the same order lies in the regular and necessary routine laid down **for** the prophet of the masses. It is, and it must be, part of the great general technique of getting the mass-man's ear-or as our vigorous and excellent publicist, Mr. H. L. Mencken, puts it, the technique of **boob-bumping**. The prophet of the Remnant is not bound to this technique. He may be quite sure that the Remnant will make their own way to him without any adventitious aids; and not only so, but if they find him employing such aids, as I said, it is ten to one that they will smell a rat in them and will sheer off.

The certainty that the Remnant will find him, however, leaves the prophet as much in the dark as ever, as helpless as ever in the matter of **putting** any estimate of any kind upon the **Remnant**; **for**, as appears in the case of Elijah, he remains ignorant of who they are that have found him or where they are or how many. They do not write in and tell him about it, after the manner of those who admire the **vedettes** of Hollywood, nor yet do they seek him out and attach themselves to his person. They are not that kind. They take his message much as drivers take the directions on a roadside signboard -that is, with very little thought about the sign-board, beyond being gratefully glad that it happened to be there, but with very serious thought about the directions.

This impersonal attitude of the Remnant **wonderfully enhances** the interest of the imaginative prophet's job. Once in a **while**, just about often enough to keep his intellectual curiosity in good working order, he will quite accidentally come upon some distinct reflection of his own message in an unsuspected quarter. This enables him to entertain himself in his leisure moments with agreeable speculations about the course his message may have taken in reaching that particular quarter, and about what came of it after it got there. Most interesting of all are those instances, if one could only run them down (but one may always speculate about them), where, the recipient himself **no longer** knows where nor when nor from whom he got the message-or even where, as sometimes happens, he has **forgotten** that he got it anywhere and imagines that it is all a self-sprung idea of his own.

Such instances as these are probably not infrequent, for, without presuming to enroll ourselves among the Remnant, we can **all** no doubt remember having **found** ourselves suddenly under the influence of an idea, the source of which we cannot possibly identify. "It came to us afterward," as we say; that is, we are aware of it only after it has shot up full-grown in our minds, leaving us quite ignorant of how and when and by what agency it was planted there and left to germinate. It seems highly probable that the prophet's message often takes some such course with the Remnant.

If, for example, you are a writer or a speaker or a preacher, you put **forth** an idea which **lodges** in the *Unbewusstsein* of a casual member of the Remnant and sticks **fast** there. For some time it is inert; then it begins to fret and fester until presently it invades the man's conscious mind and, as one might say, **corrupts** it. Meanwhile, he has quite **forgotten** how he came by the idea in the first instance, and even perhaps thinks he has invented it; and in those circumstances, the most interesting thing of all is that you never know what the pressure of that idea will make him do.

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Jeremiah's Job

Gary North

This essay was first published in *The Freeman* (March, 1978).

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Sooner or later, those who are interested in the philosophy of liberty run across Albert J. Neck's essay, "Isaiah's Job." **Taking** as an example **two** Old Testament prophets, Isaiah and Elijah, Neck makes at least **two** important points. First, until society seems to be disintegrating around our ears, not many people are going to listen to a critic who comes in the name of principled action. The **masses** want to get all the benefits of principled action, but they also want to continue to **follow** their unprincipled ways. They want the fruits but not the roots of morality. **Therefore** they refuse to listen to prophets. Second, Neck pointed out, the prophet Elijah was convinced that he was the last of the **faithful**, or what Neck calls the Remnant. Not so, God told the prophet; He had kept **seven** thousand others from the rot of the day.

Elijah had no idea that there were this many **faithful** people left. He had not seen any of them. He had heard no reports of them. Yet here was God, telling him that they were out there. Thus, Neck concludes, it does no good to count heads. The people whose heads are available for counting are not the ones **you** ought to be interested in. Whether or not people listen is irrelevant; the important thing is that the prophet makes the message clear and consistent. He is not **to water** down the truth **for** the sake of mass appeal.

Neck's essay helps those of us who are used to the idea that we should measure our success by the number of people we convince. We are "scalp-hunters," when we ought to be prophets. The prophets were not supposed to give the message out in order to win lots of public support. On the contrary, they were supposed to

give the message **for** the sake of truth. They were asked to witness to a generation which would not respond to the message. The truth is therefore its own justification. Those who were supposed to hear, namely, the Remnant, would **get** the message, one way or the other. They were the people who counted. Lesson: the **people** who count can't be counted. Not by prophets, **anyway**.

The main problem I have with Neck's essay is that he excluded another very important prophet. That prophet was Jeremiah. He lived about 125 years after Isaiah, and God gave him virtually the same message. He was told to go to the highest leaders in the land, to the average man in the street, and to **everyone** in between, and proclaim the message. He was **to tell** them that they were **in** violation of basic moral law in everything they did, and that if they did not turn away from their **false beliefs** and wicked practices, they would see their society totally **devastated**. In this respect, Jeremiah's task was not fundamentally different from Isaiah's.

Nevertheless, there were some differences. Jeremiah also wrote (or dictated) a book. He was not content to preach an unpleasant message to skeptical and hostile people. He wanted to record the results of their unwillingness to listen. His thoughts are preserved in the saddest book in the **Bible**, the Book of Lamentations. Though he knew in advance that the masses would reject his message, he also knew that there **would** be great suffering in Judah because of their **stiffnecked** response. Furthermore, the Remnant would pay the same price in the short run. They, too, would be carried off into captivity. They, too, **would** lose their possessions and die in a **foreign** land. They would not be protected from disaster just because they happened to be decent people who were not immersed in the practices of their day. He wrote these words in response to the coming of the predicted judgment: "Mine eye **runneth**

down with rivers of **water for** the destruction of the daughter of my people” (Lam. 3:48). He knew that their punishment was well deserved, yet he was also a part of them. The destruction was so great that not a glimmer of hope appears in the whole book.

What are we to conclude? That everything is hopeless? That no one will listen, ever, to the truth? That every society will eventually be ripe **for** judgment, and that this collapse will allow no one to escape? Is it useless, historically speaking, to serve in the Remnant? Are we **forever** to be ground down in the millstones of history?

One key incident in Jeremiah’s life gives us the answer. It appears in the thirty-second chapter of Jeremiah, a much-neglected passage. The Babylonians (**Chaldeans**) had besieged Jerusalem. **There** was little doubt in anyone’s mind that the city would fall to the invaders. God told Jeremiah that in the midst of this crisis, his cousin **would** approach him and make him an offer. He **would** offer Jeremiah the right, as a relative, to buy a particular field which was in the cousin’s side of the **family**. Sure enough, the cousin arrived with just this offer. The cousin was “playing it smart.” He was selling a field that was about to fall into the hands of the enemy, and in exchange he would be given silver, a highly liquid, easily concealed, transportable **form** of capital—an international currency. Not bad for him, since all he **would** be giving up would be a piece of ground that the enemy **would** probably take over anyway.

What were God’s instructions to Jeremiah? Buy the field. So Jeremiah took his silver, and witnesses, **and balances (honest n’ y)**, ~~and they~~ made the transaction. Then Jeremiah instructed **Baruch**, a scribe, to record the evidence. (It may be that Jeremiah was illiterate, as were most men of his day.) **Baruch** was told by Jeremiah to put the evidences of the sale into an earthen vessel **for** long-term storage. “For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land” (Jer. 32:15).

God explained His purposes at the end of the chapter. **Yes**, the city **would** fall. **Yes**, the people **would** go into captivity. **Yes**, their sins had

brought this upon them. But this is not the end of the story. “Behold I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely: And they will be my people, and I will be their God” (Jer. 32:37-38). It doesn’t stop there, either: “Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I **have** promised them. And fields shall be bought in the land, whereof ye say, It is desolate. without man or beast; it is given into the hand of the **Chaldeans**” (Jer. 32:42-43).

What was God’s message to Jeremiah? There is hope **for** the long run for those who are **faithful** to His message. There will eventually come a day when truth will out, when law will reign supreme, when men will buy and sell, when contracts will be honored. “Men shall buy fields **for** money, and subscribe evidences, and seal them, and take witnesses in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, and in the cities of the mountains, and in the cities of the valleys and in the cities of the south: **for** I will cause their captivity to return, saith the Lord” (Jer. 32:44). In other words, business will return because the law of God will be understood and honored.

God had told them that they **would** be in captivity for seventy years. It would be long enough to make certain that Jeremiah **would** not be coming back **to** claim his field. Yet there was hope nonetheless. The prophet is not to imagine that all good things will come in his own day. He ~~is not to be a short-term optimist.~~ **He is not** to conclude that his words will turn everything around, making him the hero of the hour. He is told to look at the long run, to preach in the short run, and to go about his normal business. Plan **for** the future. Buy and sell. Continue to speak out when times are opportune. Tell anyone who will listen of the coming judgment, but remind them also that **all** is not lost **forever** just because everything seems to be lost today.

The prophet’s job is to be honest. He must face the laws of reality. If bad principles lead to bad actions, then bad **consequences** will surely

follow. These laws of reality cannot be underestimated. In fact, it is the prophet's task to reaffirm their validity by his message. He pulls no **punches**. Things are not "fairly bad" if morality is ignored or laughed at. Things are terrible, and people should understand this.

Still, there is hope. Men can change their minds. The prophet knows that in "good" times, rebellious people usually don't change their minds. In fact, that most reluctant of prophets, Jonah, was so startled when the city of Nineveh **repented** that he pouted that the promised judgment never came, making him look like an idiot—an attitude which God reproached. But in the days of Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, the pragmatists of Israel were not about to turn back to the moral laws which had provided their prosperity. It **would** take seven decades of captivity to bring them, or rather their children and grandchildren, back to the truth.

Invest long-term, God told Jeremiah. Invest as if all is not lost. Invest as if your message, eventually, will bear **fruit**. Invest in the **face** of despair, when everyone is running scared. **Invest for** the benefit of your children and grandchildren. Invest as if everything doesn't depend on

the prophet, since prophets, being men, are not omniscient or omnipotent. **Invest** as if moral law will one day be respected. Keep plugging away, even if you yourself will never live to see the people return to their senses and return to their land. Don't **minimize** the extent of the destruction. Don't rejoice at the plight of your enemies. Don't despair at the **fact** that the Remnant is caught in the whirlpool of destruction. Shed tears if you must, but most important, keep records. Plan for the future. Never give an inch.

A prophet is no **Pollyanna**, no Dr. Pangloss. He **faces** reality. Reality is his calling in **life**. **To** tell people things are terrible when they think everything is fine, and to offer hope when they think everything is lost.

His job is to tell the truth, "whatever the cost" and not let short-term considerations blur his vision. The Remnant is out there. The Remnant will survive. Eventually, the Remnant will become the masses, since truth will out. But until that day, **for** which **all** prophets should rejoice, despite the **fact** that few will see its dawning, the prophet must do his best to understand reality and present it the most effective way he knows how. That is Jeremiah's job.

Additional copies of this report are available **for** \$5.00 **for** 20 copies. Send a check to Remnant Review, P. O. Box 84906, Phoenix, AZ 85071. Ask **for: What Is the Remnant?**