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**REMNANTS OF FIRE IN LEALATELE SAVAII
(TOEGA O LE AFI) AS A SYMBOL OF
CONTINUITY: ELECTED BY THE GRACE OF
GOD**

A Thesis Presented to the
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by

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ABSTRACT

Samoans are unique in their own ways. They have their own sense of humour, and they also have their own ways of stigmatising people. My village people are stigmatised as *Toega o le Afi*, and it literally means 'Remnant of Fire.' It's a mark of disgrace and reproach given to our ancestors that escaped from the volcanic eruption in *Lealatele Savaii* in 1905. The common feeling in Samoa at the time with regards to this disaster is that of a curse from God and it was a wakeup call for the people of *Lealatele* to repent from their evil ways.

However, in response, this thesis attempts to establish another logical interpretation upon which the incident is to be understood and appreciated as a symbol of continuity and an act of grace of God. The thesis ventures to unravel that the volcanic eruption is an inevitable natural disaster but God worked through this to achieve another purpose. The slow progress of the lava flow is the intercession by God. It was an opportune time given to the people to flee and to take refuge somewhere. It was also an incitement to uproot and move to *Upolu*, thus as a mean of carrying and spreading the Christian faith to the main island, especially the Catholic since the Methodist and the London Missionary Society (now called Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS)) at the time are already flourished.

DECLARATION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE: THE REMNANT CONCEPT

I declare that this work has not used without due acknowledgment

any material that has been previously submitted for a degree or diploma

in another institution. I also declare that the work has not used any material,

heard or read, without proper acknowledgment of the source.

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORY OF THE REMNANTS (9-11)

Signed:

Shantae

Date:

25th Nov. 2011

God Has Always Worked with the Remnants (10-11-12)

Early History of the Remnants: Some are Chosen, Some are Remnants (1-2-3-4)

Concluding Remarks

CHAPTER THREE: LEMOTLE, THE VOLCANIC ERUPTION AND THE

REMNANTS' EXODUS TO THEIR NEW SETTLEMENT

History of Lemote Village

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Ia tumau i le Atua le viiga e faavavau.

INTRODUCTION

As I grew up in *Upolu*,¹ I often hear ridiculous remarks about our village *Leauvaa*. Our village was given the name '*Leauvaa*', literally translated as the 'crewmembers of a boat' since our people were regarded as the remnants who were fresh off the boat after a long journey from *Lealatele* in *Savaii* because of the volcanic eruption in 1905. Based on history, this major catastrophe almost wiped out the entire village of *Lealatele* in *Savaii*. Many people fled for life and sought refuge in the neighbouring villages. There were those who still remained and redeveloped in the village, but others escaped in boats and headed for the island of *Upolu*. As the escapees sailed on the sea, they sang a song with the following words:

<i>Aue! Ta fefe!</i> ,	Alas, how fearful
<i>Le Afi ua mu, mu mai i le la itu</i>	The fire burning over there
<i>Ta mata'u e, le Itu o Tane</i>	How terrifying that <i>Itu-O-Tane</i> ²
<i>Fai mai ua liu pupu</i>	Has been turned into rocks
<i>Faipule o Salafai</i>	Authorities of <i>Salafai</i> ³
<i>Soia le faafifilemu</i>	Do not be idle
<i>Ae fai ni talosaga i le mala ua tupu</i>	Pray for relief from this terrible disaster
<i>Ae aua, aua lava le faatalatu</i>	Do not refuse

¹ The two main islands of Samoa are *Upolu* and *Savaii* (one of the biggest islands in the Polynesia). The main island is *Upolu* since the capital city (*Apia*) and the International Airport (*Faleolo*) are both situated on this island.

² The island of *Savaii* is divided into provinces namely: *Faasaleleaga*, *Gagaaemauga*, *Gagaifomauga*, *Itu Asau*, *Itu Salega*, *Itu oTane*, *Palauli* and *Satupaitea*. These divisions were recently done because of the election of parliament members. However, in the Old *Savaii*, there were only two main parts of the island namely *Itu o Tane* and *Itu o Fafine*. Our old village *Lealatele* is situated on the *Itu o Tane* province (thus the name appears in the song). See note 45 on page 29.

³ The big island of *Savaii* is also known as *Salafai*.

Tali:*Na ona ou faanoa**I le mala ua i Samoa**Le afi e pogai mai lalo**O Savaii o le a to**O mea faatofotofo**Po ua lata ona salamo**Samoa loto malo***Chorus:**

How sorrowful

The disaster in Samoa

The fire below which is

Swallowing Savaii

An intimidating event

Reminding us to repent

Of our stubborn ways

The words of the song imply that the eruption was regarded by the villagers as God's judgement and it was a call for repentance for the people. However, as a descendant of the village and a student of Malua Theological College myself, I would see the incident as a blessing in disguise. I am entitled to all the benefits of the main island now because of the volcanic eruption in the past. I could see myself as a remnant chosen by grace like what Paul called the faithful Jews in the Letter to the Romans. Therefore, the thesis advocates the idea that the incident in *Lealatele* in the past was a part of the plan of God in saving a remnant for his mysterious purpose of spreading the Christian faith further to other parts of the Samoan groups.

To achieve the thesis goal, I use an 'eclectic method' in an attempt to draw out a positive meaning of the exodus from *Lealatele* in *Savaii* to *Leauvaa* in *Upolu*, the main island of the Samoan group.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter One gives a generalized view and the definitions of the word remnant. In order to understand Paul's perspective on the future of Israel as to be discussed in chapter Two, it is essential to

appreciate the Old Testament and Jewish background, for Paul's appropriation of the Old Testament and his understanding of it provides the framework of his theology. Therefore, the remnant motif in the Old Testament is exhaustively discussed in this same chapter. Chapter Two gives an exegesis of the passages concerned, Romans 9-11; employing the traditional methods of historical-critical approach and grammatical analysis in order to depict the distinctive ideas on the concept of remnant. Along with these traditional approaches are the help of social sciences approach and contextual perspectives to shed more light on other issues included by Paul in the letter to the Romans.

The third and last Chapter looks at the history of the volcanic eruption in *Lealatele Savaii* and relate the incident to the remnant concept as discussed in the first two chapters. It also gives a reflection on the significance of this incident to the repopulation and the development of the village on new soil but more importantly the significance of the exodus as the carrier of the Catholic Church and the LMS (now called the Congregational Christian Church Samoa -CCCS) from *Savaii* to *Upolu*.⁴

Finally, the Conclusion gives an overall synthesis of the study, summing up the arguments about the remnant of the volcanic eruption (*Toega o le Afi*) as a divinely elected remnant based on the grace of God for that particular purpose as mentioned above.

⁴ *Leauvaa* currently has 5 different denominations; Seventh Day Adventist (SDA), Mormon (LDA), Assembly of God (AG), Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS) and the Catholic. Catholic consists of 70% of the population, CCCS 10%, Mormon 5%, SDA 4%, Assembly of God 3% and those with no religion 8%. The dominance of the Catholic and CCCS points to the fact that

CHAPTER ONE

THE 'REMNANT' CONCEPT

The motif of remnant is one of the many important themes in the whole Bible. However, the theology associated with this concept in the New Testament required a thorough understanding of Jewish background in the Old Testament. Therefore this chapter explores the definitions as well as the theology associated with the word based on the history of the Jewish people and the traditions of the world of the Old Testament.

Old Testament Terminology

In biblical history, the idea of a remnant goes back to the book of Genesis, where it says that "only Noah was left and those that were with him in the ark" (Gen. 7:23). Nevertheless, the theme of a righteous seed left over after the violent destruction of a group of many people was a common one in the ancient Near East,⁵ and a logical inference from such destructions is a threat to humanity's existence. However, this threat was answered by the assurance of a divine salvation of a remnant. Thus Meyer defines remnant as 'what is left of a community after it undergoes a catastrophe.'⁶

these two faiths were the first to land and take roots in *Leauvaa* soil. One of the main centres of the Catholic Church in Samoa (*Fetu o le Moana*) is also situated in *Leauvaa*.

⁵M.W. Elliot, "Remnant" in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Alexander T. Desmond and Brian S. Rosner, (Downers Grove : Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 753

⁶Lester V. Meyer, "Remnant" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (vol. 5), ed. David Noel Freedman, 'et al' (New York : ABD Doubleday, 1992), 669

The idea of a remnant also appears in the Joseph story, where Joseph becomes the saviour for the many- "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth ..." (Gen. 45:7). While the concept of remnant features occasionally in the Pentateuch, it is developed more fully in the prophetic writings⁷ as discussed in the subsequent section.

The Prophetic Use

The context of the remnant idea is often that of war and battle. It can refer to the return from a battle and thus to survival of a war (1 Kgs. 22:28; Jer. 23:3; Isa. 10:22). In Amos 7:2, the prophet cries (after his vision of locusts devouring the grass): "O Lord GOD, forgive, I beg you! How can Jacob stand? He is so small."

The cry of the prophet indicates the conviction that the defeat at the hands of their enemies is frequently a means of divine punishment for Israel. This divine punishment as echoed in Amos is also the prevalent idea throughout the whole of the Old Testament.⁸ So the nation's progressive diminution effectively means that the ethnic community becomes the 'ethical community.'⁹

The tension between the divine salvation and judgment for Israel is resolved in the sense that belonging to the 'remnant' means survival. Amos holds out this

⁷ Elliot, 757

⁸ Gleason L Archer, "Remnant" in *The New International Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. J.D. Douglas and Merrill C Tenney (Grand Rapids : Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 843

⁹ Biblical ethics are God-centred. Instead of following majority opinion or conforming to customary behaviour, the Scriptures encourage the people to start with God and his requirements (not with man and his habits) when we look for moral guidelines. If we want to discover the nature of goodness, the Bible directs us to the person of God himself. He alone is good (Mk. 10:18), and it is his will that expresses 'what is good and acceptable and perfect' (Rom. 12:2). Out in the Sinai desert, Yahweh promised Moses 'I will make all my goodness pass before you' (Ex. 33:19), and the promise was honoured with a special revelation of the Lord's character (Ex. 34:6f.). Unlike any other moral

small hope after warning that God will be like a shepherd who tears away a remnant – “Thus says the LORD: As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who live in Samaria be rescued, with the corner of a couch and part of a bed” (Amos 3:12). However, as Bauckham argued, the term may not point forward to the residue, but backwards to the ruin in which it was created and to the nation of which it was only a part.¹⁰

Isaiah 7:3 mentions the remnant of a defeated army; yet it is not the defeat of Judah but of her enemies to which the name *שְׂאֵר יִשָּׁחַב* *Shear-yashub* (literally ‘a remnant will return’) refers to here.¹¹ In contrast, Isaiah 10:20 refers to those (of the northern kingdom of Israel) who will return to Zion as ‘the remnant of Jacob’ – “On that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on the one who struck them, but will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.” However, this oracle does not necessarily exclude the possibility of an externally visible return of exiles as the expression or reward of an inward spiritual ‘return’ to God in faith or repentance.¹²

In Isaiah 10, the prophet describes judgment on Israel as a warning to Judah so that they may do better. The *Shear-yashub* oracle declares that only a few from the northern kingdom will survive to return in penitence. Micah 5: 6–8 too notes that the exilic remnant will affect the nations by being among them ‘like dew’ and ‘like a lion.’ According to Micah, the ‘remnant’ of believers trusting in the promises of God

teacher, God is utterly consistent. Cf. M. E. W. Thompson, *Situation and Theology, Old Testament Interpretations of the Syro-Ephremite War* (Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 1984), 23–28

¹⁰ R. J. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 312

¹¹ Isaiah 7:1–10 is then known as the *Shear-yashub* oracle.

¹² R. E. Clements, “Remnant” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (vol. 14), ed. G. Johannaes Botterweck, ‘et al.’ (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 266

is to be transformed from an insignificant group to one of absolute dominance in the world, disseminating its faith and ideals throughout the earth. As the dew and showers do not wait for man but come from the Lord, so the remnant will be lifted to its place of sovereignty by the power of God. As a lion, the prophet pictures the relentless force with which a lion captures its prey to indicate that the nations will not be able to withstand the burgeoning power of the remnant in the end time, with its ultimate triumph in the world. So the oracle suggests a message of confidence which McComiskey puts it as: 'in the darkness are whispers of hope.'¹³

The movement towards a more positive concept of 'remnant' continues with Jeremiah. He makes the remnant concept into a theological doctrine, employing the term יִתְּר (ytr) which simply means 'residue'¹⁴ and not yet 'saved remnant' to refer to those who remain in Jerusalem after the two deportations as distinct from the exiles in Babylon. Yet יִתְּר (ytr) does not connote an antecedent loss at the context where it is used. According to Hasel, its usage here would simply means an 'excess' or left over and it is often too substantial to be called a 'mere residue.'¹⁵ Nevertheless, the idea of continuity is to the fore. Yet Jeremiah, especially in chapter 44 can also focus on doom, by (ironically) using the term 'remnant' סְהִרִית (š'ērît) to refer to those who go astray.¹⁶

¹³ Thomas E. McComiskey, "Micah" in *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary* (vol.2), ed. Kenneth L. Barker & John Kohlenberger, (Michigan : Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 247

¹⁴ Note that the primary meaning of יִתְּר ytr is 'surplus' but Jeremiah used it to denote "something that have left behind" which often designates a single person, an army or inhabitants of a city (Jer. 39:9)

¹⁵ G. F. Hasel, "Remnant" in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (vol. 4), ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Everett E. Harrison and Roland K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 497

¹⁶ Elliot, 760

In exilic times the 'nothingness' of the remnant becomes something out of which God can create, as with Noah and his remnant. The 'remnant' is a bridge concept mediating between those of doom and salvation both semantically and in the narrative flow of Genesis. In the later prophets, judgment must precede restoration.¹⁷ For Ezekiel, the idea is that of the survival of a purified Israel; thus Ezekiel 20:38 uses 'remnant' to refer to Israel as a whole. 'Remnant' is a way of preserving the logical argumentation of judgment and a possible salvation.¹⁸ In Isaianic theology, the remnant has equally positive and negative significances, depending on the context. All that is required of the people is faith and hope in Yahweh to intervene.¹⁹ This faith cannot be separated from moral holiness with an accompanying sense of the divine presence. The comparison with the trees (Isa. 6:13—"Even if a tenth part remain in it, it will be burned again, like an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled."; cf. Job 14:7-9—"Though its root grows old in the earth, and its stump dies in the ground, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth branches like a young plant") was originally concerned with the destruction of the branches and trunks, and not with what happened to the stumps. The later writer (Job) saw that the mention of the stumps left open the possibility of survival and hope for the future. However, there must be a deportation as a sure sign of punishment before restoration can begin.²⁰

¹⁷ Daniel G. Reid "Remnant" in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, ed. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1998), 659

¹⁸ Elmer A. Martens, "Remnant" in *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 'et. al.' (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 493

¹⁹ This is how I see the incident in *Lealatele Savaii*, and this is also the conviction advocated by this thesis with regards to the remnant of fire as discussed in Chapter Three.

²⁰ G. F. Hasel, *The Remnant: the History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah*, (Berrien Springs, 1972), 43

Isaiah 40–66 particularly developed the idea of a remnant of Israel as a holy group, the post-exilic ‘prophetic community.’ The existence of post-exilic survivors means that the pessimistic idea of decimation and gloom is left well behind, as the community looks to a brighter future. Even in the latest works of the Old Testament, there is no sectarian focus but rather a concern for ‘Israel’ as a whole. The remnant is no longer understood as a very small and precious group, but as a composite and imperfect nation comprising returnees from Babylon and other places, and those who stayed in Judea. Only in Zephaniah 3:12–13 is there an idea of the remnant as a purified and united community after the exile (‘the remnant of Israel; they shall do no wrong and utter no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths’). Whereas ‘remnant’ is used in Jeremiah to denote those who stayed in Jerusalem, ‘the remnant of the people’ is used in Haggai (1:12, 14; 2:2) and Zechariah (8:6, 11–12) to refer to those returning from exile.²¹

Summary and Concluding Remarks

The remnant motif in the Bible is associated with a variety of images, but the starting point of the motif is with Israel, as an ethnic people, a nation and ultimately as a symbol of the people of God. These can carry either a positive connotation, such as the “righteous remnant,” or a negative connotation, such as what remains following a judgment. The negative aspect of remnant is portrayed in exaggerated and colorful ways that convey the gravity of divine judgment.

Some of the most poignant examples are found in Isaiah which are called

²¹For this thesis, the ‘remnant of fire’ refers both to the people who fled to *Upolu* and those that stayed behind in *Savaii*.

messages of doom; for example Isa 6:11–13, 4:1, 1:8, 30:17, and 1:9. However, Isaiah's remnant idea carries with it the hope of restoration. The judgment will act as a purge that will remove impure dross and leave behind a pure residue (Isa 1:25–26). Those who have faith will survive the coming flood (Isa 28:16; 30:15). A holy seed will survive (Isa 6:13). He who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem (Isa 4:3).

The expectation of the Messiah possibly became associated with the community, the place of the presence of salvation (cf. Mic. 5:7–8 and Is. 66:19). The 'remnant' does not take the place of the Messiah but rather is to be understood as preparing for and bringing in the messianic age (cf. Mic. 5:2). However, Ezra 9:8 and 13:15 sounds the warnings that even the remnant will not be spared should they sin again. There will be no remnant of the remnant. It was the failure of Israel to live up to the ideal of the purified community and the consequently disappointed expectations about it that led to the ideal being projected onto the future Messiah, with the remnant as witnesses to him and to God's mercy.²²

These Old Testament remnant ideas play an important role in the New Testament. It helps to explain why it is that not all of Israel accepted Jesus as the awaited Messiah. Jesus himself alludes to Isaiah's vision (Isa 6:9–10) to explain why not all respond in faith to his word (Mk 4:10–13). Paul also appeals to Old Testament imagery to understand Israel's unbelief: "It is not as though the word of God had failed; for not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel" (Rom 9:6)

²² Elliot, 812

Paul consequently derives and advocates the theology of election. This theology is in important ways based on Old Testament ideas of remnant, and it is the focus of Romans 9-11 as discussed in the following chapter.

Romans chapters 9-11 have a significant place in the overall argument of the apostle Paul in the book of Romans. These chapters deal with the important issue of the apparent failure of God's Word concerning His people Israel. The passage of Scripture is permeated with the doctrine of the "Remnant of Israel" as described in various passages. The doctrine of the remnant is a key to understanding the relationship between God and His people. The present chapter of the thesis will focus mainly on a contextual and grammatical analysis of Romans 9-11 in order to provide a consistent interpretation of the different aspects of God's plan for the salvation of Israel. As a result, a brief literature review based on works from a handful of authors is consulted to illustrate the theme of a saving remnant based on God's grace for His special people.

A Brief Literature Review of Romans 9-11

In the previous chapter (Romans 8), Paul had just celebrated the triumph of God's Word and His people. He had just described the privilege given to Israel, while at the same time describing the apparent failure of the Word of God in regard to His chosen people as a nation. Barrett comments on this by saying "The introductory paragraph (verses 1-5) has diagnosed the problem. Since God has so clearly given Israel a position of unique privilege, does not Israel's defection mean

CHAPTER TWO

EXEGESIS OF 'ROMANS 9 - 11'

Romans chapters 9 – 11 have a significant place in the overall argument of the apostle Paul in the book of Romans. These chapters deal with the important issue of the apparent failure of God's Word concerning His people Israel. This passage of Scripture is permeated with the doctrine of the 'Remnant of Israel' in describing its current implications for believers as well as its eschatological implications for the nation of Israel. The present chapter of the thesis will focus mainly on a contextual and grammatical analysis of Romans 9 – 11 in order to provide a consistent interpretation of the different aspects of God's plan for the salvation of Israel. As space permits, a brief literature review based on works from a handful of authors is consulted to illustrate the theme of a saving remnant based on God's grace for His special purpose.

A Brief Literature Review of Romans 9 – 11

In the previous chapter (Romans 8), Paul had just celebrated the sovereignty, omnipotence, foreknowledge, and faithfulness of God and His Word. Then the first five verses of Romans chapter nine describes the privileges given to Israel, while at the same time describing the apparent failure of the Word of God in regard to His chosen people as a nation. Barrett comments on that by saying: "The introductory paragraph (verses 1-5) has sharpened the problem. Since God has so clearly given Israel a position of unique privilege, does not Israel's defection mean

that God's intention has broken down? The word of promise has been proved false by history. God's foreknowledge (8:29) has been shown to be in error."²³

In regards, Paul attempts to demonstrate that even though that the promise of God apparently failed in regard to the nation of Israel, the Word of God can be trusted completely. Paul, in supports of his assertion that the Word of God has not failed stated: "For (γὰρ) not all Israelites truly belong to Israel" (Rom. 9:6). For Paul, there has always been a *true* Israel within the nation of Israel as a whole.

This verse according to Godet contains Paul's first statement of the doctrine of the remnant. Godet further states that the phrase "belong to Israel" denotes all the members of the nation at a given moment, as descendants of the preceding generation. However, by the words "not all Israelites," Paul signalizes among the nation taken as a whole, a *true* Israel, the elected people or the holy remnant, which is constantly spoken of in the Old Testament, and to which alone the decree of election refers. This would simply mean that the rejection may apply to the mass of those who are of Israel without compromising the election of the true Israel."²⁴

The doctrine of the remnant means that, within the Jewish nation as a whole, there are always some who believe, and all those who believe among Israel comprise the 'remnant of Israel.' The remnant at any point of history may be large or small but there is never a time when it is non-existent. The remnant is always a part of the nation as a whole and not detached from the nation as a separate entity.

Furthermore, in the subsequent verses of chapter nine, Paul continues to show that the remnants are those elected based solely on the grace of God. Paul

²³ C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 168

²⁴ Frederic L. Godet, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1977), 346-347

emphasizes the sovereign, free choice of God in bestowing His blessings on whomever He desires. It means that not all of Abraham's seed are true descendants from the perspective of God's eternal purpose and sovereign election. As God chose Isaac from Esau, God is free in determining who will inherit the blessings He promised to Abraham. Paul stresses that it is the '*according-to-election* purpose of God' that will stand - not based on human effort but centered solely in Him who calls.²⁵

Only the Remnant Will Be Saved (Romans 9: 27)

Romans 9:27 is an important point in Paul's line of reasoning regarding the salvation of Israel because he quotes an Old Testament passage that connects salvation directly to the remnant: "And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, 'Though the number of the children of Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved.'" As regards, Morris comments with the following:

From the inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God Paul turns to passages which speak of the exclusion of all but a remnant of Israel. Most of the Jews of the day did not believe in Christ, and they might well feel that this of itself showed that Paul must be wrong. 'If Jesus were the Christ, would not the people of God accept him?' would have been their reasoning. So Paul goes on to show them from their own Scriptures that in other days this had been much the situation. The prophets speak of a remnant only as being saved, and that necessarily means that most of the Jews to whom the message was directed had failed to respond. The situation in Paul's day was typical rather than novel.²⁶

Godet remarks that the article *the* before the word remnant characterizes this remnant as a thing known; and indeed one of the most frequent notions of the Book of Isaiah is that of the holy remnant. This holy remnant survives all the

²⁵ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 371

²⁶ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 352

chastisements of Israel, and after coming through these tests and trials, they are purified and become the germ of a better future. In the context, (both of Isaiah and of the apostle), there is a contrast between the innumerable multitude which as it seemed ought to form Jehovah's people which perishes, and the poor remnant which alone remains to enjoy the salvation.²⁷ Morris concurs when he states: "As numerous as the sand by the seashore' is a proverbial expression for a very large number. In the Old Testament it is usually employed, as here, for the number of the Israelites. But a large number of Israelites does not mean that the saved will be correspondingly numerous; only the remnant will be saved. The promise of God never meant that all, or even most of the Israelites would be saved."²⁸

Regarding Paul's use of the quote from Isaiah 10:22, Mills makes the following significant points:

This passage in Isaiah (10:22) is part of a section (10:22-23) that constitutes the promise of the restoration of Israel. However, Isaiah 10:22-23 from the Septuagint version is considerably shorter than the Hebrew, and is therefore, incomplete. The phrase 'in that day' in Isaiah 10:20 is prophetic. The Rabbis of old claimed that this phrase in Isaiah, and the phrase 'in that time' in Jeremiah 50:20, speak of the time when the Messiah will come. Since 'in that day' is a phrase in Isaiah 10:20, it is clear that Romans 9:27 presents the truth that only a remnant in Israel will return to God and accept God's promised Messiah. This return of the remnant will occur at the end of the Tribulation when the nations of the world will muster their forces in the vain attempt to destroy Israel from the face of the earth (Joel 3; Zechariah 12:2-11). This stupendous event is the great moment in prophecy when Israel reaches her extremity and turns to God and accepts the Messiah whom they have pierced and rejected in ignorance (Zechariah 12:9, 10; Acts 3:17). But it is only a remnant that God pardons (Jeremiah 50:20). This saving of the remnant is what Paul states in verse 27.²⁹

Paul's clear intention is to prove that the ultimate, eschatological salvation

²⁷ Godet, 366

²⁸ Morris, 371

²⁹ Sanford C. Mills, *A Hebrew Christian Looks at Romans* (Grand Rapids: Dunham Publishing Company, 1968), 325-326.

of Israel will be according to God's sovereign choice of the elected remnant. This fact is very important when considering the interpretation of Paul's statement in Romans 11:26a that says "All Israel will be saved." Paul is making the connection between the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham and that 'chosen few' who will actually experience the promised blessings by faith.³⁰

The Failure of National Israel (9:28 – 10:16)

In this whole section, Paul gives the reason why the multitude will be excluded. In Romans 9:28-10:3 the apostle explains Israel's mistake; they pursued righteousness by their own self-effort rather than by faith. They stumbled over the stumbling stone by seeking to establish their own works-based righteousness rather than seeking righteousness in the way God established. Subsequently, in Romans 10: 4-15, Paul attempts to clearly define God's prescribed way to obtain righteousness. That is, true righteousness is not based on human obedience to a set of rules, but solely based on faith (Rom.10:6). In support, Paul cites numerous Scriptures which prove that this is the case, and he carefully outlines the sequence of steps to salvation by faith alone.

Israel's problem is introduced in 10:16 with a strong adversative expression: 'Αλλ' οὐ πάντες ("but not all have obeyed the good news"). Godet describes Israel's situation by saying: "Thus Israel, blinded by the privileges bestowed on them, sought only one thing; to preserve their monopoly, and for this end to perpetuate their law (v 4). Consequently, they have hardened themselves against the two essential features which constituted the Messianic dispensation, a

³⁰ Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans*. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1973), 226

free salvation (verses 5-11) and a salvation offered to all by universal preaching (verses 12-17).³¹ He then goes on to explain that Israel's response to God's way of salvation that was freely offered to all must be by faith.

The word ἀλλὰ (*but*), contrasts strongly what has been produced (by the fact of Jewish unbelief) with what should have been the result, that is, faith and the salvation of Israel first of all. The word πάντες (*all*) denotes the totality of those who hear the word, and the exception indicated by the οὐ πάντες, (*not all*), applies (in the context) to the mass of the Jewish people who have formed an exception to the general faith which the gospel was finding in the world. The term 'have not obeyed' reminds us of that in verse 3 'have not submitted to God's righteousness' implies that there is disobedience in not accepting what God offer. Isaiah in this passage proclaims the unbelief of the people of Israel in regard to the Messiah, giving a description of His entire appearance in His state of humiliation and pain. He knew well that such a Messiah would not answer to the ambitious views of the people, and would be rejected by them.³²

In order to avoid confusion, it is important to look at what Paul did not say. He did not say that "all Israel did not obey", but rather he said, "not all obeyed," which gives an implication that some did obey, and those are the remnant.

God Has Always Worked With The Remnant (Rom 10:17-11:6)

In the subsequent section (Rom 10:17-11:6), Paul shows that Israel is without excuse since they did indeed have an opportunity both to hear and to know of God's

³¹ Godet, 390

³² Godet, 387

salvation by faith. In Romans 11:2, he stated that "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew". The ones foreknown by God are clearly linked to the elected remnant in this section of the book. Specifically, Romans 11: 5-6 states, "So too, at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace." Godet remarks that this verse applies the case of the seven thousand (in the story of Elijah) to the present circumstances. The remnant of whom the apostle speaks about evidently denotes the small portion of the Jewish people who in Jesus time have recognized the Messiah. The term λείμμα (remnant) is related to the preceding verb κατέλιπον, (I have kept for myself).³³ Barrett also observes that it is impossible to bring out in the English translation the fact that the Greek word for remnant (λείμμα) is cognate with the verb 'to leave' (κατέλιπεν) something behind. In the translation, the word *such* is introduced in order to make the connection. However, the body of Jewish Christians who are the exceptions to the general unbelief of their race form a group analogous with the seven thousand who refused to worship Baal."³⁴ Mills provides additional comments on the parallel between the remnant in Elijah's day and in Paul's in the following paragraph:

Just as God had a faithful remnant in Elijah's time, God also had a faithful remnant in Paul's time, and we have a faithful remnant out of Israel today. God has always had a faithful remnant of true followers in Israel. There never was a time during this present dispensation, or in any other dispensation, that God has not had a faithful remnant in Israel.... This fruit, this remnant, this handful of faithful souls out of the great host of the twelve tribes, are the saved ones 'according to the election of grace.' ... It was by the grace of God that the remnant of Israel was reserved. What the apostle is implying in verse 6 is that in spite of Israel's national disobedience, stubbornness, and sinfulness, resulting in the rejection of the Messiah, God

³³ Godet, 393

³⁴ C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 213

had and still has a remnant out of this nation that He elects for Himself and by Himself.³⁵

The important truth here is that the remnant of Israel exists solely because of God's selection or choosing of these individuals, and God's election is based completely upon His sovereign grace. Barrett elaborates on this concept with the following words:

[Paul is] emphasizing his primary contention, that God's dealings with men are based not upon works but upon grace. The remnant was based on a gracious act of election (literally, according to election of grace, κατ' ἐκλογὴν χάριτος γέγονεν). The existence of a remnant - a nation within a nation - can be due only to an act of choice, and the choice must therefore have sprung from God's freedom, or grace. Thus *remnant* is a word that spells grace, as the distinction between Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, spells mercy. In itself the remnant is not better than the rest of Israel, any more than Isaac was better than Ishmael, or Jacob than Esau; but it consists of the 'vessels of mercy' (9:25), whom God chose as the vehicles of his glory.³⁶

Mills provides an excellent summary statement that outlines the facts as Paul has presented them thus far in Romans 11:1-6. He stated that the first six verses of chapter 11 add up to the conclusion that God is not through with the Jews. He has not cast them off as a nation because there is still a faithful remnant in Israel and that there always has been and will continue to be. This remnant has been reserved by God in this age and there will be a remnant reserved by God through the Great Tribulation for the Millennial Kingdom (Jer. 50:20). This remnant has been reserved by the pure grace of God, and the salvation is a pure gift of God by His grace which he bestows through His own choosing on whoever He wills.³⁷

³⁵ Mills, 390

³⁶ Barrett, 194

³⁷ Mills, 362

God's Electing Purpose: Some are Chosen, Some are Hardened (11:7-24)

As he begins this new section, Paul asks: "What then?" to introduce the logical conclusion from the previous statements. He says that "Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened" (Rom. 11:7). This verse explains how God's electing purpose operates: some were *chosen* and the rest were *hardened*. Paul goes on in Romans 11: 8-10 to cite Scriptural testimony for this hardening, and he identifies the one who hardens as God Himself. This comes as no surprise in view of Paul's statement in Romans 9:18 that God has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. As Paul describes the failure of Israel in Romans 11: 11-12, he opens the door to a future hope for their salvation, that there will *be* a fullness or future fulfilment for Israel.³⁸

However, Paul's hope for the present was to save some of his kinsmen "Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them" (Rom 11:13-14). Cranfield comments that while Paul may have indeed expected his Gentile mission to disturb the Jewish nation as a whole, he clearly expects it to result in the conversion of only some individuals out of it. Such conversions of individual Jews, though few in number, are a precious foretoken of the salvation referred to in verse 26.³⁹ The chosen remnant of Israel in Paul's day were the ones that he desired to reach with the gospel, because he knew that some would believe in their Messiah at that time, however, it is not as if Paul would think that his efforts in his day would usher in the final eschatological

³⁸ Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans : A Socio – Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids : William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 287

³⁹ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 561

salvation of Israel. Morris effectively clarifies Paul's expectations for his own ministry as:

My own people is more literally 'my own flesh', a very unusual way of referring to Israel (though cf. 1 Cor. 10:18) but one that brings out Paul's sense of identification with his own nation. With all of his deep conviction that the Jews of his day had for the most part gone hopelessly astray, Paul never forgets that he, too, is an Israelite. His deep longing is that he might save *some* of them. *Save* is the general term for the deliverance Christ brings. It is generally used in the passive; when it occurs in the active God is usually the subject (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:21; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 3:5), and of course this is implied when the passive is used. Paul makes no exaggerated claims for himself. His aim is to save *some of them*. He looks for 'all Israel' to be saved ultimately (v. 26), but he is not claiming, as some exegetes have suggested, that he will initiate the process that brings about the End. Some take it as axiomatic that Paul expected the End during his own lifetime and that his own labours would usher in the last happenings. But there is evidence that Paul expected that he would die in due course (1 Cor. 6:14; 2 Cor. 4:14), and the present passage shows that he thought of his own work as making no more than a modest contribution. As Harrison puts it, 'The word *some* is important. It is a clear indication that he does not expect his efforts to bring about the eschatological turning of the nation to the crucified, risen Son of God, when all Israel will be saved (cf. v. 26). This belongs to the indefinite future.'⁴⁰

The end of this section (Romans 11:15-24) contains several allusions to the eschatological perspective on Israel's salvation that Paul envisioned for his people in the future. The illustration of the wild olive branches grafted in with the cultivated olive branches teaches many truths, but Paul certainly incorporates hints of the future salvation of Israel with this verse: "For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead!" (11:15). This would mean that if they do not continue in unbelief, they would also be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Morris, 409-410

⁴¹ Everett F Harrison, "Romans" in *Asbury Bible Commentary*, ed. Eugene E Carpenter and Wayne McCowen, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervans Publishing House, 1999), 742

Concluding Remarks

Paul's teaching here involves both judgment and mercy; judgment on the nation as a whole for its infidelity and wickedness, and mercy on those who are permitted to escape the judgment and form the nucleus for a fresh start under the blessing of God. That the bulk of the nation proved disobedient (both in the Old Testament days and at the opening of the gospel period) does not mean rejection of 'his people.' Paul had in mind the remnant as the passages demonstrate. The sparing of the remnant is inseparably related to the choice of the remnant. Those who had turned to Christ were only a remnant. Paul and the Jewish Christians are the remnant and this remnant carries the name and nature of Israel (11:1-10). The root and branches are perhaps to be identified, not with Israel, but rather with Christ as the one who gives life from the dead (Rom. 11:15-18). Jesus is the Messiah from Israel who links the church and Israel. The mark of remnant membership is not law-keeping but the faith. 'The Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16) is not ethnic Israel but all Israel who believes, and is thus open to the Gentiles, though based on the Jewish believers of the Old Testament and the New Testament. So a remnant is a part of mysterious wise plan of God. The matter of numbers is not crucial. What is important is the reminder that irrespective of its size, the remnant is 'chosen by grace.' The remnant is a seed which will take time to grow. It is a symbol of hope and continuity, and it is set apart for a purpose. This is also how I see my people and myself, as a member of the remnant of the volcanic eruption, chosen by grace of God for a special purpose as to be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

LEALATELE; THE VOLCANIC ERUPTION AND THE REMNANTS IN EXODUS TO THEIR NEW SETTLEMENT

Prehistory of *Lealatele* Village

Samoa has its own version of the creation story and its origin, in which the supreme ruler *Tagaloalagi*⁴² created its archipelago before 650 AD.⁴³ So as my ancestors' village of *Lealatele* through its myths and legends as they were passed along through story telling or '*faagogo*,'⁴⁴ from generation to generation. *Lealatele* is literally meant a wide and extensive land mass. The village is located on the big island of *Savaii*. It lies at the North Eastern part of the Island within the constituency of *Gagaaemauga*.⁴⁵

According to one of the oldest *matai* of our new settlement (*Leauvaa*), the first ever inhabitants of *Lealatele* was a couple named *Tapunaoa* and his wife *Tafaoata*⁴⁶ who was the daughter of *Palusele* in the village of *Maasina* (*Savaii*). They had two children, a daughter named *Sinaletaele* and their son *Tuitapu*.

⁴² Old Samoa was polytheistic. They had many gods, but their supreme god was *Tagaloalagi* who lives in the ninth heaven. See George Turner, *Samoa : A Hundred Years Ago and Long Before* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies (USP), 1884), 137

⁴³ Misilugi Tofaeono, *Malietoa of Samoa: The Crown and Title* (Petone (NZ): GP Print, 1996), 5

⁴⁴ According to Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese, *faagogo* literally means "like a *gogo* or a swan." Swans feed their offspring with fishes; in a similar manner, Samoans feed their children with words and tales. See Samoa Observer issue on Sunday, 28th August, 2011 under the title Toga and Fiti together produce a *togafiti* against Samoa.

⁴⁵ Note that *Gagaaemauga* is a new province from divisions based on parliamentary purposes. But this constituency is in *Itu o Tane* (based on old division) as mentioned in the song in the Introduction. See note 2 on page 7.

⁴⁶ *Vaifale Vito*, one of the oldest of *Leauvaa*; interviewed by author on Friday 8th July 2011

Sinaletaele married to a man named *Fitolilo* and gave birth to her two sons, *Lealatele*⁴⁷ and *Soliola* who later had children to inhabit the place.

***Lealatele* before Christianity and Colonial Power**

Prior to the introduction of Christianity and Colonial authority, *Lealatele* was well structured with the Samoan culture and traditions. Its land was subdivided into five major units called '*pitonuu*.'⁴⁸ They were known as *Samalaeulu*, *Patamea*, *Sataputu*, *Toapaipai* and *Salago*.⁴⁹ The village was well progressed under the leadership of its paramount chiefs⁵⁰ *Tuala* and *Sala*, assisted by the orators *Tevaga* and *Vaifale*.

The high chiefs had the sole authority of the land and its people giving the responsibility to the orators to monitor the village in peace and harmony. There are *tupua* and *malaefono* in the village. The *tupua* is called *Gafoaga*,⁵¹ where orators *Tevaga* and *Vaifale* have their own gatherings and meetings to discuss the village affairs and order punishment to the lawbreakers. *Malaefono* is a meeting place predominantly for the high chiefs and it is called *Malaeola*.⁵² The high chiefs would have the final say to some serious matter or make approval of important matters that

⁴⁷ The village is then named after this guy.

⁴⁸ *Pitonuu* literally means part of a village.

⁴⁹ These same names are maintained nowadays for the *pitonuu* of *Leauvaa* in *Upolu*.

⁵⁰ According to Malama Meleisea, the term *matai* comes from *mata i ai*, which has the connotation of being set apart or consecrated. When a person is bestowed with a *matai* title by the extended family, he or she would be responsible for the well being of the family. Chiefs are of two types, the *alii* are the paramount chiefs and the *tulafale* (orators) are the talking chiefs or the mouthpiece of the *alii* and they are to serve the *alii*. See Malama Meleisea, *The Making of Modern Samoa: Traditional Authority and Colonial Administration in the Modern History of Samoa* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies (USP), 1987), 7-8

⁵¹ According to *Vaifale Suliasi*, who resides in the place nowadays, *Gafoaga* means severe punishment or even death for someone who disobeys the village rules.

⁵² *Malaeola* contains two words *malae* (field) and *ola* (life). It is a refuge for the sinners to for their wrongdoings to be forgiven.

had been proposed by the orators and the rest of the *matais*. Thus people of *Lealatele* although lived in a huge land mass had lived in a confined and restricted pure Samoan culture and traditions.

Lealatele and the Christian Faith

On the 25th of August 1845, a French ship called 'Star of the Sea', (translated as *Fetu o le Moana*) arrived at *Falealupo*.⁵³ It was led by the two French priests; father⁵⁴ Gilbert Roudaire, Theodore Violette and brother Jacques Peloux.⁵⁵ The crew was accompanied by Samoa catechists Kosetatimo (Constantine) and *Ioakimo* (Joachim) with their wives as interpreters.⁵⁶ They had sailed from Wallis-Futuna, taking thirteen days to cover the two hundred miles,⁵⁷ unfortunately they could not land at *Falealupo* due to strong London Missionary Society (LMS) opposition since *Malietao*, the national ruler of the Samoan archipelago at the time and its people made an announcement not to accept the Catholic Faith. Appalling weather conditions at the time caused them to drift along the current and ended up at *Safune*, where they stepped on shore for the first time.⁵⁸ They pierced the metal to the ground and invoked the help of God and Virgin Mary⁵⁹ however, they were also

⁵³ *Falealupo* is the most western village on the island of Savaii. *Falealupo* was regarded as the last place on earth to see the sun every day. See also Tuala Telea, *A Blessing in Disguise* (Apia: Samoa Printing Ltd, 2008), 1

⁵⁴ I am using 'father' here to refer to the Catholic priests as to distinguish it from 'Father' our God.

⁵⁵ Telea, 1

⁵⁶ Featunai Liuaana. 'Samoa Tulai: Ecclesiastical and Political Free of Samoas Independence, 1900-1962' (Australian National University: PhD Thesis 2001), 15

⁵⁷ Rev. Fr Joseph Heslin, *History of the Catholic Church in Samoa, 1845-1995* (Apia: Samoa Printing, 1995), 24

⁵⁸ Fuimaono F Tupua, *The Findings of the Big Canoe* (Apia: Samoa Observer Co.Ltd, 1996), 74

⁵⁹ Heslin, 24

rejected, thus found themselves walking across land heading towards the village of *Lealatele*.

Most of the chiefs of *Lealatele* at the time were not attached to the Protestant mission and the spread of LMS throughout Samoa because of the existence of the *Sio Vili* cult.⁶⁰ This was an opportune time for the Catholic because one of their crew, a Samoan catechist Joakimo was the son of one of the paramount chiefs of *Lealatele* named *Tuala Taetafe*. Joakimo seized this precious opportunity to give the gospel to his people and he was overwhelmed by the reception they had in *Lealatele*.⁶¹

With great relief and tears of joy, the Roman Catholic faith was duly accepted and were officially welcomed at *Tuala Taetafe*'s residence called '*Tavatele*' on the 15th of September, 1845.⁶² The inception of such prestigious and memorable event placed another new chapter in the History of Samoa. The priests baptised more than hundred members of *Tuala*'s family before moving out to the village. Christianity in terms of the Catholics had planted its seed upon the rocky soil of *Lealatele*, and that very special day was called '*O le Taeao na i Malaeola ma Gafoaga*'⁶³ – The Dawn of Christianity in the village of *Lealatele*.

⁶⁰ Before the arrival of the London Missionary Society missionaries to Samoa (1830), a *Sio Vili* cult was formed and founded by a man named *Sio Vili*. He travelled to Tonga on a whaler in the mid 1820s and then continued to Tahiti where he had been in contact with Tahitian forms of worship. Upon returning to Samoa, *Sio Vili* began making prophecies and telling strange stories about someone called Jesus. He formed a cult where many Samoan people believed and followed him. It became widespread throughout the island which foreshadowed the arrival of Christianity. See also K. R. Howe, *Where the Waves Fall* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin Australia Pty. Ltd, 1984), 235

⁶¹ Tupua, 74

⁶² Telea, 4

⁶³ Telea, 4

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⁶¹ Tupua, 74

⁶² Telea, 4

⁶³ Telea, 4

Nevertheless, *Tuala*'s acceptance of the Catholic faith led to criticisms from many people who then gave him a sarcastic title '*Talipope*' or receiver of the Pope.⁶⁴ Despite the many criticisms, *Tuala Taetafe* remained steadfast and unmoved and he gladly witnessed the first ever *Lotu Pope* (church of the Pope) mass being conducted on Samoan soil in his own village.⁶⁵ Eventually, his residence name was changed from *Tavatele* (big kava tree) to *Maota Sa* (holy residence), as an honour because of his faith.

Another paramount chief named *Sala Manuele* viewed Catholicism as being *Tuala Taetafes* religion; he therefore introduced and advocated LMS teachings to the villagers in 1855 and then became the founder of LMS faith in *Lealatele*. In comparison, only a few people attached to the LMS where as the majority were loyal to the Catholic faith. After all, these were the only two prominent faiths in *Lealatele* before the eruption.⁶⁶

The Volcanic Eruption of *Matavanu*

After 60 years since the arrival of the Catholic Faith, a first ever series of volcanic eruption took place from time to time. By this time, most of the elders and forefathers had passed away. When *Tuala Taetafe* (the founder of the Catholic faith in *Lealatele*) passed away, one of the descendants of the *Tuala* clan named *Tuala Silivelio* succeeded him. The Catholic Church progresses well in the village

⁶⁴ Liuaana, 16

⁶⁵ Liuaana, 16

⁶⁶ Telea, 7

resulting in new faces and new developments on the ministry work under the leadership of father Estibal and father Gavet.⁶⁷

The most horrible and devastating eruption took place on the 4th of August 1905 at *Matavanu*. The site stood only 120 metres above sea level and located about 4 hours walk inland from the village.⁶⁸ In the night of the explosion, people were not really alarmed by the eruption (since they never learned about volcanic eruption) but they were more curious of such extraordinary fire lighting up the sky; thus the name *Toega o le Afi* (remnants of fire) originates.

This was a rare case as far as volcanic eruption occurred in other parts of the world. *Matavanu* itself as it poured out of the crater spread slowly, so slow than any one could imagine and gradually rolled its way downhill.⁶⁹ The molten lava piled up in successive layers, filled up every crevice and underground channels as it moved slowly. It was an incredible disaster as it took two years to flow downhill before the molten lava hit the village and destroyed everything. From 1905 to 1908 the lava continued to flow strongly into the sea covering a huge area of the lagoon and across the reef side.⁷⁰

Father Estibal wrote what he saw as stated: "After the retreat, I returned to *Lealatele* on a rough sea. The lava was flowing into the sea and take a turn and

⁶⁷ Heslin, 56

⁶⁸ Telea, 15

⁶⁹ Telea, 15

⁷⁰ Tempest Anderson, 'The Volcano of Matavanu in Savaii', *The Quarterly Journal of Geological Society*, vol. 66, Nov 1910: 630

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⁶⁸ Telea, 15

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⁷⁰ Tempest Anderson, 'The Volcano of Matavanu in Savaii', *The Quarterly Journal of Geological Society*, vol. 66, Nov 1910: 630

approaching each village of *Lealatele* along the way. The flow was about six hundred metres wide with a depth of about five metres.⁷¹

A Methodist missionary Rev. E. G. Neil who was at *Lealatele* at the time commented that the depth of the flow varied from ten to four hundred feet, covering forty square miles of the countryside.⁷² One of the most striking features of such a horrible event was the outward flows of lava to the sea, extended about nine miles away from land onto the reef.⁷³

Destructive nature of the Lava and its impact

The lava flow in its worst conditions caused clouds of steam with smokes of ashes as seen from miles. The sulphur fumes were also formed and the fluidity of its molten state with high temperatures had burnt up the land of *Lealatele* and all its belongings. These poisonous sulphur fumes, discharged from the crater together with the molten lava was carried and blown about by the sea waves which cleared the green vegetation into a bare, rocky site.⁷⁴ The native houses made of thatched roofs were thrown down and buried in various degrees. Even the Catholic church building being located at the centre of the village at *Sataputu* area was entirely buried under forty feet. The only part which remained visible until today was the tower. Farms and plantation such as coconuts, cocoa and tobacco were all covered with solidified lava except the grave of a young postulant nun which was spared by

⁷¹ Heslin, 57

⁷² Malama Meleisea, *Lagaga* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, USP, 1987), 121

⁷³ Anderson, 631

⁷⁴ Meleisea, *Lagaga*, 121

the flow.⁷⁵ The grave is still existed with the lava field surrounding it.⁷⁶ Fortunately, the whole village of *Lealatele* was not destroyed, and the most eastern part (closer to the sea) called *Solomea* was spared from the devastation.

The Exodus in Deliberation

As the majority of the land of *Lealatele* laid in ruins, the elders and the high chiefs found it difficult to make appropriate decisions. In regards, an advice from father Estibal who looked after the parish at the time is quoted here:

So I took a decision to prepare to move to *Solomea*, where people had prepared provisionally in case of a catastrophe. The two boys *Etuale* and *Ioane* were willing to dismantle the Church properties and took them to *Solomea*.⁷⁷

This coastal area *Solomea* marked the end of *Lealatele* and served as a boundary with the neighbouring village of *Pu'apu'a*. The place itself, though located near the shore consisted of dense vegetation with a preserved forest. Nowadays, it becomes one of the beautiful sites for visitors because of its unique and very fine black sand on shore. The black sand of course come from deposits of the lava field being eroded for a century, now piled up in successive layers at *Solomea*.⁷⁸

On the 14th day of September 1906, the movement began and father Estibal gathered the people for a final mass to farewell their native land *Lealatele*.⁷⁹ Apart from their families and personal belongings, special attachments of the church were

⁷⁵ Meleisea, *Lagaga*, 122

⁷⁶ Meleisea, *Lagaga*, 122

⁷⁷ Heslin, 57

⁷⁸ *Solomea* is now owned by one of the high chiefs *Sala Sale*, who made a successful business of Bricks and foundation, out of the black sand.

removed. A moveable altar, stained glass windows, the church bells, the crucifix and a large stone statue of St Michael were all carried along the way to *Solomea*.

After a year or so, although a lot had been done for their settlement, most of the high chiefs were dissatisfied with the overcrowding of the place. *Tuala Silivelio*, the successor of *Tuala Taetafe* proposed in the village meeting to move on to another better place. That is, to get out of sight from *Lealatele* in order to relieve their agony from losing their land, their belongings and even their heartfelt religion.⁸⁰ Unfortunately most of the villages at the time turned down the proposal as they were more concerned about losing their identity. They refused to move out to some unknown place, heading to nowhere and become stigmatized figures around the island.

Other Driving Forces

Dr. Wilhelm Solf was appointed governor of German Samoa after raising the German flag on the 1st of March 1900.⁸¹ This was held at *Mulinuu* Peninsula where government representatives of America and Britain were present, aiming to present a full German Administration to govern the Samoan people and cater for their welfare.⁸² Many people believed that the *Lealatele* crisis impose great influences upon this movement. When Solf toured the islands of *Upolu* and *Savaii* in 1900, he realised just how much the missionaries had affected the lives of the people.⁸³ So as Solf's administrative purposes, he and his German officials taught

⁷⁹ Telea, 27

⁸⁰ Telea, 23

⁸¹ Meleisea, *The Making of the Modern Samoa*, 47

⁸² Liuaana, 36

⁸³ Liuaana, 44

and trained Samoan people to become helpful informers, interpreters and mediators for his administration.⁸⁴ He also tended to employ the local farmers into agricultural enterprises such as growing coconuts and cocoa for export. But this was how *Tuala Silivelio* became involved and got interested in colonial matters. He became the village mayor (*pulemu*) of *Lealatele*, and was included in Solf's native administration.⁸⁵ He spoke fluently in German language and got used to travel to and fro from his village to Apia for government matters. With this involvement in government matters, *Tuala Silivelio* assured his village of his intentions to move across islands to find new lands in *Upolu* since the German officials uphold freehold lands especially for such rare cases as *Lealatele*.⁸⁶

All in all, the final decision had been made and the minority were eager to move where as the majority of the village people decided to stay. *Silivelio*, still the prominent figure of the crisis pointed out that, since most of the high chiefs decided to move out and uprooted, they still upheld the authorities and rights of the Land. Their identity as people of *Lealatele* for years to come still take rooted undoubtedly. Nowadays, *Lealatele* in Savaii is called '*mu o tulafale*' (village of the orators), while in *Leauvaa* (in Upolu Island), is called '*mu o Alii*' (village of the high chiefs).

The Remnants on the Move

On April 8th in 1907, the remnant departed *Solomea* and their native land to carry on with their journey. Just like the exilic community of Israel, the high chiefs *Tuala* and *Sala* with their families, and a few orators with the other villagers were on

⁸⁴ Liuaana, 44

⁸⁵ Meleisea, *Making of the Modern Samoa*, 54

⁸⁶ Telea, 24

the move. They had faith and determination to do so, carrying their babies and young ones. They also had the courage to carry along the churches important statues, the crucifix and the altar. Personally, I cannot imagine how my grandfather walked and struggled for survival among this group.

They moved from *Solomea* to the next district called *Faasaleleaga* and spent more than nine months there. They were anxiously awaiting the confirmation from the German officials in *Upolu* for a settlement. The hospitality by the people and various villages of *Faasaleleaga* District were marvellous. Some of the group got married on the way and decided to stay with their loved ones, but for the authorities, they became even stronger to continue.⁸⁷

The Voyage across the Ocean

Finally on May 1908, the remnants of *Lealatele* were on board crossing the ocean to their new destination. They travelled by long boats (*fautasi*) and canoes. Some of them made up strong rafts as carriers for their belongings. As they sailed, they sang their old chants and traditional songs in remembrance of this historic event.⁸⁸

When they arrived at *Tuamasaga* District,⁸⁹ the village of *Tuanai* and *Afega* had extended the warm hospitality in a traditional *ava* ceremony as usual. Then the remnants were distributed among each family for a temporary stay, awaiting their

⁸⁷ Telea, 46

⁸⁸ Refer to the song in the Introduction on page 7

⁸⁹ *Upolu* island is divided into 4 major districts namely *Atua*, *Aana*, *Tuamasaga* and *Aiga ile Tai*. The 4 major districts were originated from the pedigree of *Piliaau*, who appointed his 4 sons, *Tua*, *Saga*, *Ana* and *Tolufale* to reside at various land masses of *Upolu* island. See also Dr Augustin Kramer, *The Samoa Islands*, vol1 (Auckland: Pasifika Press, 1994), 27

new land. *Tuala Silivelio* was still being trusted by the people through their final negotiation with the German Officials. Finally a land of about eight hundred acres was granted by Solf and his German officials for the remnants of *Lealatele* as their own.⁹⁰ The land is located in the midst of the *Tuamasaga* District and lies between the village of *Tuanai* and *Levi Saleimoa*.

The remnants became foreigners to their new lands. They were used to be teased and the people of the *Tuamasaga* District made up fancy names as mocking gestures such as *Toega o le Afi* (the remains of fire), *seevae pulu* (shoes made of coconut husks to protect their feet from the hot lava, and *taulua popo* (a pair of coconuts tied together that were used as rafts to swim all the way from Savaii to their new land).

Division of the Land

Upon receiving the land, the high chiefs decided to divide it only among those who made the journey and definitely, there was no reserve for families who stayed behind in Savaii. The land was divided equally with about ten fathoms for each family. Twenty fathoms was put aside for the village cemetery⁹¹ and another ten fathoms each was given to the Roman Catholic and LMS to build the churches. In the backyard, fifty fathoms was laid aside for farming pigs while the rest of the land was subdivided to each family for their plantations.

⁹⁰ Telea. 32

⁹¹ Existing nowadays in the village of *Leauvaa* is the cemetery for the ancestors who travelled from Savaii, and all the high chiefs who came across were buried there.

Fresh off the Boat

Every *matai* and their family members were on the move for clearing their new claimed lands. Everyone was in hard labour with all sorts of development. The new settlement was given the name '*Leauvaa*,' a name for a crew who were fresh off the boat after a long journey from *Lealatele*. *Leauvaa* village and its developments reflect the old community in *Lealatele*. It is the continuity of culture and traditions from the old to the new. The basic stratified structure where *Tuala* and *Sala* became the paramount chiefs with their orators, *Tevaga* and *Vaifale* is still maintained. The main meeting places or the *Tupua* and *Malaefono*, so called *Malaeola* ma *Gafoaga* were re-established in this new settlement. Even the *pitomui* as was in *Lealatele* is now being reallocated with their usual names upon the new land mass. Another important feature of this movement were the Catholic Church sculpture, the bell, the altar and the crucifix that had been carried along the journey. These are still existed as precious monuments inside the Roman Catholic Church in *Leauvaa*. These monuments continued to remind the village of the great sacrifices and their true faith in God in times of troubles.

Every now and then, whenever that old church bell rings from the tower at *Leauvaa*, it reignites the fire and the volcano in the memory of those remnants that crossed the sea. However, as I always say to myself, who knows but that is all part of the ultimate plan of God.

CONCLUSION

When we take a look at the Bible in its entirety, we can glean much from history and apply it not only to the events of yesterday, but also to the events of today and tomorrow. God's Word explains that He is the same yesterday and today, and that there is nothing new under the sun. God foretold of the times that we live in and He has told us of what is to come. In the Letter to the Corinthians (1Cor.1:27-28), God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are. This means that God uses the nonexistent or those who seem to the world to be nonentities to accomplish his mysterious plan.

All throughout the ages, He has used only a remnant of people to accomplish all of His mighty plans. A remnant as vividly defined and explained in the first two chapters is something that is leftover, a residue, or war plunders and loots. To the eyes of the world, they are good for nothing. However, with our God, the opposite becomes the truth; as working with the things that the world dismisses is the Almighty's way of displaying power and bringing glory to Himself.

In the book of the beginnings, the book of Genesis, we see that God uses the smallest of portions to keep a faithful people who love Him, dwelling upon the earth. We are told that among the many men of earth, only Noah found favor with God. And because humankind had become so corrupt, God destroyed the earth with the great flood, reserving Noah and his family to repopulate the earth. And this pattern of saving for Himself remnants continues throughout the Old Testament. The book

of Isaiah tells us that because the Israelites were a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, and corrupt children, their God was provoked to anger. God's judgment reigned hard on this chosen nation: "Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers" (Isaiah 1:7). But, amidst the destruction and chaos, there remained a small party of left-overs; a people reserved to carry on the Name of our Lord: "Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah" (Isaiah 1:9).

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul gives the church in Rome an explanation about the seemingly failure of the plan of God through His people Israel. God's promises as in the Old Testament had never failed because there is a remnant chosen by the grace of God to fulfill those promises. One thing for certain is that Israel as called by God for His purpose has failed, however not all Israel are included. There is a minority of Jews who are faithful to God by showing loyalty to Christ and those are part of the remnant. So the remnant as Paul referred to are both the Jews who are no longer live by works of the law and the Gentiles with their penitent hearts. They have faith in the gospel and are saved from condemnation and God's judgment. The remnant chosen by grace became the surviving portion of Jewish and Roman Christians which showed that God has not abandoned his people. Hence, such community continues to re-establish the covenantal relationship with God, so as to enhance salvation for all of humanity. So the plan of salvation is still in the process.

In light of *Toega o le Afi* (remnants of fire or remnants of *Lealatele*), there are parallels between these people (both the ones who left for *Upolu* and those who decided to stay behind in *Savaii*) and the remnants of Israel. These people were selected by the grace of God for His purpose in spite of the worse consequences of the volcanic eruption. Restoration comes after judgement since the volcanic eruption is seen as a judgement. There is purge after a fire, so the remnants are pure gold after the test (cf. Rev. 3:18). Definitely, some were being uprooted and replanted on new soil and continued to revive their faith until now and some are keeping the faith in *Lealatele*. More importantly (for those who migrated to *Upolu*), they had been set aside by God to accomplish the godly mission of the last days. As a vehicle of carrying the Christian faith both Catholic and the CCCS from *Savaii* to *Upolu* during their exodus, they were taking part in the great plan of God for salvation of the whole humanity. *Leauvaa* is now one the landmarks of the Catholic faith here in Samoa because of the incident as discussed. The remnants were all fragile clay jars carrying the indestructible treasure of the gospel like what Paul said about the worthlessness of the ministers of the Word in the letter to the Corinthians (cf, 2Cor 4:7) and they were also part of the Great Commission as Jesus Christ commanded all disciples to do. Therefore, as a descendant of this group of the remnants who fled for safety after the disaster, I am proud to be labeled and stigmatized as a "*Toega o le Afi*" because I am sure enough that I am a part of the ultimate plan of God for salvation of Samoa. So to God be the glory now and ever more.

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