

ISAIAH 54

A Song of Redemption

Life is tough. Anyone disagree? So often when you are experiencing obstacles and hardships as you go through life, you long for deliverance, you long for everything to be smooth and for everything to work out OK. You wonder if life will always be this difficult. When the night seems so dark and dreary you long for the “*song in the night*” (Psalm 77:6) and wonder if you will ever sing it.

The section of Isaiah that we are about to look at resounds, not just with a song, but with Hallelujah choruses of our victorious God—our God who keeps His promises, our God who is gracious to a nation that had forsaken and disappointed Him over and over again, our God who redeems not only sinners, but all of creation.

Before we go through the scripture in detail let’s take a brief overview of Isaiah chapters 54 and 55.

The Servant’s, that is Jesus’ suffering, like His mission, is now complete (Isaiah 53). Isaiah, therefore, joyously sings out in a hymn of praise. The future for Israel is assured, a new age has dawned, and God’s covenant of peace is at last in place forever (Isaiah 54:1–10). The benefits of that covenant are described in verses 11–17. Israel is encouraged in this chapter to “*break forth into joyful shouting*” and perhaps even joyful song (54:1) for her punishment was over. Now the nation could anticipate blessing and prosperity. Israel’s rejection was necessary because of sin, but it was not to last forever. These verses in the short term refer to their release from Babylonian captivity around 538 B.C., and await their complete fulfillment in the messianic kingdom which is yet to come (Isaiah 54:11–17).¹

The image in this chapter is that of Jehovah God, the faithful husband, forgiving Israel, who is the unfaithful wife, and restoring her to a place of blessing. Isaiah has used the marriage image before (Isaiah 50:1–3) and will use it again (62:4). Jeremiah also used it (Jeremiah 3:8), and it is an important theme in both Hosea (chapter 2) and Ezekiel (chapters 16 and 23). The nation was “married” to Jehovah at Mt. Sinai when the Ten Commandments were given to them, but she committed adultery by turning to other gods; and the Lord had to abandon her temporarily. However, the prophets promised that Israel would be restored when the Messiah came and established His kingdom. This restoration refers to the end times.

¹ Hughes, Robert B. ; Laney, J. Carl ; Hughes, Robert B.: Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Tyndale House Publishers, 2001 (The Tyndale Reference Library), S. 267.

Against this background, a voice cries out to those who are thirsty, urging them to come to God and be satisfied in Isaiah 55:1–5. But Isaiah makes it clear that human choice is involved here. The wicked are welcome, but they must forsake their evil ways (verses 6–7). The decision to come to God also involves submission. We must abandon the arrogance that leads us to stand in judgment of God’s ways, and submit to Him whose ways and whose thoughts are higher than ours (verses 8–9). Those who submit to that Word of God, which falls as life-giving rain from Heaven, will share in a harvest of everlasting joy (verses 10–13).² So now let’s look closer at these chapters.

Isaiah 54:1-3 NIV:

1 *“Sing, O barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband,” says the Lord.*

2 *“Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes.*

3 *For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities.*

Many Christian women over the years have read this passage and have found comfort in it. There is an inbuilt instinct or desire in most women to be a mother, to bear a child and bring it up. In biblical times it was a disgrace and considered to be a punishment from God not to have a child. And today women who, because they were single or because they were physically unable to become pregnant, may not feel disgraced in the eyes of others, but still feel sorrow because of this unfulfilled desire. Many single Christian women have also been consoled by verse 5 of this chapter, *The Lord shall be your husband*. It has often encouraged them to develop a closer relationship with God and to feel very close to Him. I’m sure the Lord placed these verses here so they could have that function for women, but there is also a much deeper meaning to be found in this passage. Isn’t it great how God can meet multitudinous needs by having several levels of meaning in much of Scripture! Primarily this passage has to do with Israel’s relationship with God and her restoration.

What kind of a restoration will it be for Israel? For one thing, it’s a restoration to joy and therefore an occasion for singing (Isaiah 54:1). Isaiah is certainly the prophet of song; he mentions *songs* and *singing* more than thirty times in his book. The immediate occasion for this joy is the nation’s deliverance from Captivity, but the ultimate fulfillment is when the Redeemer comes to Zion and the nation is born anew (59:20) in the end times.

It will also be a restoration to *fruitfulness* when the nation will increase and need more space (54:1-3). The nation had been shrunk in size because of the Babylonian invasion, but God would help them multiply again.

² Richards, Larry: *The Bible Reader's Companion*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1991, S. 440

At the end of this age, in the end times yet in the future, only a believing remnant of Jews will enter into the kingdom of God; but the Lord will enlarge the nation abundantly before that time. Israel may feel like a barren woman as she returns from the exile in Babylon, unable to have children; but she will increase in numbers to the glory of God. God will do for her what He did for Sarah and Abraham (Isaiah 49:18–21; 51:1–3). The tents will need to be enlarged, and the desolate cities will be inhabited again. This is exactly what happened during the years from the end of the Babylonian captivity to the time of Christ.

In Israel a barren woman was disgraced, for children aided in family chores and helped the parents in their old age. Fertility on every level was a sign of God's blessing. For example, when Hannah was not able to have children she was devastated, but when the Lord allowed her to have a son she sang for joy (1 Samuel 1:1-2:10). Israel was like a woman who had no children and was therefore in a continual state of mourning. But by God's sovereignty and grace He will enable her to have many children. So she will break into song and shout for joy. Jerusalem, once desolate and mourning (Lamentations 1:1-5), will be revitalized and filled with people. The reference in verse 2 to "*Enlarge the place of your tent,*" is a reference to Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, who lived a nomadic life, living in tents. This image of expanding the tent calls to mind the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 15:5: "*And God took him outside and said, 'Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.'*" The tiny community of Jews who decided to return from Babylon will expand and one day will fill the Promised Land to overflowing.³ Because of God's Suffering Servant, Jesus (Isaiah 53), those who have been empty without God and have fallen short morally, will know joy.

Isaiah 54:4-6 NAS:

4 "*Fear not, for you will not be put to shame; And do not feel humiliated, for you will not be disgraced; But you will forget the shame of your youth, And the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more.*

5 "*For your husband is your Maker, Whose name is the Lord of hosts; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, Who is called the God of all the earth.*

6 "*For the Lord has called you, Like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, Even like a wife of one's youth when she is rejected," Says your God.*

God is going to re-gather Israel the way a good man would take back his wife. The nation need have no fear⁴ of disgrace, for she will no longer be desolate and helpless like a widow. God, like a forgiving husband,⁵ will take back Israel, His wife. He is the LORD Almighty, the Holy One of Israel, her Redeemer.

³ Richards, Larry: The Bible Reader's Companion. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1991, S. 440.

⁴ Isaiah 41:10, 14; 43:5; 44:2, 8.

⁵ Jer. 3:14; 31:32; Hosea 2:16.

Isaiah 54:7-10 NAS:

7 “For a brief moment I forsook you, But with great compassion I will gather you.

8 “In an outburst of anger I hid My face from you for a moment, But with everlasting loving kindness I will have compassion on you,” Says the Lord your Redeemer.

9 “For this is like the days of Noah to Me, When I swore that the waters of Noah Would not flood the earth again; So I have sworn that I will not be angry with you Nor will I rebuke you.

10 “For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake, But My loving kindness will not be removed from you, And My covenant of peace will not be shaken,” Says the Lord who has compassion on you.

The husband/wife analogy is frequently used to portray God’s relationship with Israel. Israel is the unfaithful wife who runs off after pagan lovers, false gods (Hosea). In anger, God is forced to abandon her, but only for a time (Jeremiah 31:31–34). God is both faithful and compassionate. He will restore His people to their special relationship with Him.

The Hebrew word used here for “*compassion*” is “*raham*,” a term that means “*to love deeply*.” The verb is used 47 times in the O.T., and 35 of these speak of God’s love for human beings. The verses where this powerful word communicates God’s special love can be found in the following passages: Ex. 33:19; Deut. 13:17; 30:3; 2 Kings 13:23; Ps. 102:13; 103:13; 116:5; Isa. 13:18; 27:11; 30:18; 49:10, 13; 54:7, 10; 60:10; Jer. 12:15; 13:14; 31:20; 33:26; Lam. 3:32; Ezek. 39:25; Hos. 1:6–7; 2:23; 14:3; Micah 7:19; Zech. 10:6.⁶

The expression, “*Covenant of peace*,” is also found in Ezekiel 34:25–31. It is linked with the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31–34, for its benefits become possible only after the Messiah forgives the sins of God’s people and makes them righteous. Some of the benefits overlap: God will Himself teach His people, and they will be established in righteousness (Jeremiah 31:31–34). Yet the focus of this covenant is on security. God throws a protective covering over His people so that they will be safe. While this is an eschatological, that is “*end times*,” covenant for Israel, it has present application for you and me. God’s protective covering has been thrown over those of us who have accepted Christ as Savior now.

According to Ephesians 1:14, the Holy Spirit is Himself “*a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession*.” Because we’re God’s own we are safe and secure by the power of the Holy Spirit within us.

⁶ Richards, Larry: The Bible Reader's Companion. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1991, S. 440.

Another reason for confidence in verses 7-10 is the dependable promise of God. God had to show His anger at Israel's sin; but now the punishment was over and the Jews were returning to Jerusalem. "*With great compassion I will gather you,*" He promised. "*with everlasting loving kindness I will have compassion on you.*"

Whenever we rebel against God and refuse to listen to His warnings, He must punish us; but He does it in love (Hebrews 12:1-11). Our Father cannot permit His children to sin and get away with it. But the purpose of His chastening is to bring us to repentance and enable us to produce "*the peaceable fruit of righteousness*" (Hebrews 12:11). When God punishes His disobedient children, He may *hurt* them; but He never harms them. It is always for our good and His glory. God will keep His promises to His people Israel. They can depend on His love, His covenant, and His mercy.

After the Flood, in Noah's day, in which God executed His anger against the world's sin, He promised never again to destroy the earth in the same way (Genesis 9:11). Similarly God promised that the day is coming when He will never punish Israel again. Such statements indicate that Isaiah was speaking here of the millennial kingdom rather than the return from the Babylonian Captivity, for the nation has suffered God's anger many times since the return from exile around 538 B.C. Even if the world could be punished again as in the Flood, God's love and compassion would never cease. The covenant of peace, also mentioned in Ezekiel 34:25; 37:26, refers to this promise which God had just made. God will give His people lasting peace.⁷

Isaiah 54:11, 12 NAS:

11 "O afflicted one, storm-tossed, and not comforted, Behold, I will set your stones in antimony,⁸ And your foundations I will lay in sapphires.

12 "Moreover, I will make your battlements of rubies, And your gates of crystal, And your entire wall of precious stones.

Jerusalem, the afflicted city, had been through many troubles, called storms, and no one had comforted her.⁹ However, God will build up the city with stones made of precious gems, symbolic of His care and esteem for the value of the city.¹⁰

Isaiah 54:13, 14 NAS:

13 "All your sons will be taught of the Lord; And the well-being of your sons will be great.

14 "In righteousness you will be established; You will be far from

⁷ Isa. 9:7; 32:17-18; 54:13; 55:12; 66:12; Jer. 30:10; 33:6, 9; 46:27

⁸ A trivalent and pentavalent metalloid element that is commonly metallic silvery white, crystalline, and brittle and that is used esp. in alloys, semiconductors, and flame-retardant substances.

⁹ Lam. 1:2, 9, 15-17, 21.

¹⁰ Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 1:1110.

oppression, for you will not fear; And from terror, for it will not come near you.

Israelites always considered the training of their children a high priority. Many wanted them to be true to the Lord and not guided by the pagan world around them. In the Millennium, the children will be taught by the Lord Himself and will enjoy His peace (verse 10). Righteousness will prevail¹¹ and Jerusalemites will no longer fear for the Lord will protect her from tyranny.¹²

Isaiah 54:15-17 NAS:

15 “If anyone fiercely assails you it will not be from Me. Whoever assails you will fall because of you.

16 “Behold, I Myself have created the smith who blows the fire of coals And brings out a weapon for its work; And I have created the destroyer to ruin.

17 “No weapon that is formed against you will prosper; And every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, And their vindication is from Me,” declares the Lord.

In the millennial kingdom no nation will be allowed to defeat Israel because God has so decreed. Nations rise and fall on the basis of His word. In the past He allowed the destroyer, Babylon, to overcome His people, but this will never again occur.

Peace and safety are the heritage of those who trust in the LORD.

Not only will the captives be set free and the nation restored, but also the city of Jerusalem will be rebuilt (Isaiah 54:11–17). If the language here seems difficult to understand, keep in mind that the prophet sees both an immediate fulfillment at the end of the Babylonian captivity, and an ultimate fulfillment in the end times (Revelation 21:18–21). The remnant rebuilt the temple and the city under the leadership of Zerubbabel the governor, Joshua the high priest, Ezra the scribe, Nehemiah the wall-builder, and the Prophets Haggai and Zechariah. But **the restored Jerusalem** will be nothing like what Isaiah describes here. For that beautiful city, we must wait till the return of Jesus and the establishment of His kingdom. **Then every citizen of Jerusalem will know the Lord (Isaiah 54:13), and the city will be free from terror and war (verse 14).**

Jesus quoted the first part of verse 13 in John 6:45. When you read the context, beginning at verse 34, you see that Jesus was speaking about people coming to the Father. “*All that the Father gives Me will come to Me*” (verse 37, NKJV) means that people come to Him because they are “*taught of God,*” and the Spirit draws them through the Word. Personal

¹¹ Isaiah 33:5; 46:13; 58:8; 62:1-2.

¹² Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of The Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 1:1110

evangelism won't be needed in the New Jerusalem, for all the citizens will know the Lord.¹³

¹³ Wiersbe, Warren W.: Be Comforted. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1992 (An Old Testament Study), S. Is 54:1