

## A Story of Redemption and the Invitation to Salvation A Brief Exposition of Isaiah Fifty-Four

### The Announcement of Renewed Relationship

What joy, what good news! Isaiah fifty-four is the announcement of renewed relationship. The Covenant God, YHWH, would now renew His relationship with His bride, His people. They were no longer to be barren as a wife without child, but instead bear fruit (Is. 54:1), therefore, with great joy they were to sing and rejoice (cf. Is. 12:5; Is. 26:1; Is. 35:10; Is. 45:10-11). Although they certainly did not know it at the time, the Gentile Church was to come forth from the womb of her mother Israel. This was the promise of a restoration of relationship just as a wife was restored to her husband after a period of rejection.

### They Were to Prepare

Because of this announcement of restoration the Hebrew people were to prepare. They were to make room for this expansion of blessing. They were to “enlarge the place of their tent (Is. 54:4)”, because God was going to expand their area of influence and reach. The tent must be strong, fortified with longer cords and strengthened stakes.

This enlarging of the tent points to the multiplication of children. The once barren would now bear children, and therefore, more room would be needed. YHWH was going to multiply them. The fruit of the spiritual womb would come forth. The people of the return, the remnant, would now bear fruit for the kingdom.

*It is interesting to note that in keeping with the bridal theme, the prophet uses the analogy of the tent to explain the preparation for expansion. This is because in the culture of that time, it was the women that were responsible for setting up the tent in the camp, while the men fulfilled other responsibilities.*

YHWH tells His people that they were not to “hold back (Is. 54:2)”, they were not to be tentative, cautious, or uncertain, rather, they were to move ahead in this process of preparation.

### The Reason

The Lord God then gives them the reason for this period of preparation. “You will”, YHWH tells them through His prophet, “Spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities (Is. 54:3)”.

### They Were Not to Allow Past Experiences Immobilize Them

Because of the lack of fruitfulness just as a barren woman, the Hebrew people would feel shame (e.g. Gen. 30:1; 1 Sam. 1:10). Isaiah looked forward here, to the time of not only their captivity by the Babylonians, but also their return. This people, God’s bride, would be restored to their Husband after their rejection. God would use His instrument, Cyrus, to declare their release.

Isaiah 44:28 (NLT)

<sup>28</sup> When I say of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd,' he will certainly do as I say. He will command, 'Rebuild Jerusalem'; he will say, 'Restore the Temple.' "

The New Bible Dictionary says of this...

Cyrus would be God's 'Messiah'-deliverer and an instrument of the divine plan (Is. 45:1).<sup>1</sup>

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of October, 539 BC, the Persians along with Gobryas (Cyrus the Great's general) conquered the unconquerable city of Babylon by diverting the river Euphrates and entering by night under the spiked gates.

The Lord had spoken of this through the mouth of His prophet over one hundred years before in Is. 44:27

Isaiah 44:27 (NLT)

<sup>27</sup> When I speak to the rivers and say, 'Dry up!' they will be dry.

Seventeen days later Cyrus II, the great grandson of Cyrus the first, amongst great jubilation entered the city to take possession of the throne.

It was to be during the reign of this pagan king that Israel would be released to return to the land of their forefathers after seventy years of captivity. The prophetic words of Isaiah in Is. 44:28 would be fulfilled.

Josephus, the Jewish historian would write in his work "Jewish Antiquities", concerning Isaiah's prophecy and king Cyrus...

2. (5) This was known to Cyrus by his reading the book which Isaiah left behind him of his prophecies; for this prophet said that God had spoken thus to him in a secret vision:—"My will is, that Cyrus, whom I have appointed to be king over many and great nations, send back my people to their own land, and build my temple." (6) This was foretold by Isaiah one hundred and forty years before the temple was demolished. Accordingly, when Cyrus read this, and admired the divine power, an earnest desire and ambition seized upon him to fulfill what was so written; so he called for the most eminent Jews that were in Babylon, and said to them, that he gave them leave to go back to their own country, and to rebuild their city Jerusalem, and the temple of God, (7) for that he would be their assistant, and that he would write to the rulers and governors that were in the neighborhood of their country of Judea, that they should contribute to them gold and silver for the building of the temple, and, beside that, beasts for their sacrifices.<sup>2</sup>

Josephus tells us that this event, foretold in the writings of Isaiah, came into existence some one hundred and forty years before the temple was demolished, and the Jewish people were taken by the Babylonians into a captivity that was to last seventy years.

We might attempt to dismiss this, as some have by saying that because Cyrus read the book of Isaiah, he responded and released the Jews. However, we need to take into account that the prophet spoke of the king by name. He declared that Cyrus was to be His shepherd and command the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Is. 44:28).

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<sup>1</sup> Wiseman, D. J. (1996). Cyrus. In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, & J. I. Packer (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed., p. 250). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>2</sup> Josephus, F., & Whiston, W. (1987). *The works of Josephus: complete and unabridged*. Peabody: Hendrickson.

It was due to this future event, that like a bride, the people spoken of in Isaiah fifty-four, a generation yet to come, were not to limit themselves by thoughts of the rejection and captivity in Babylon. Rather, they were to be jubilant, preparing for the dawn of a new day. The day of their husband's favor. It is now that YHWH declares to His covenant people "fear not", "be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced (Is. 54:4). These people were to forget the shame of their youth. This memory and the reproach of their widowhood would no longer be remembered (Is. 54:4).

### How Could this Be Possible?

It was because God Himself, the one that created them, was their Husband. He was the "Lord of Hosts (ESV)", The "Lord of heaven's armies (NLT)" The phrase, "the Lord of Hosts" "is one of Isaiah's, as well as the other prophets', favorite descriptions of God. It expresses the absolute control of the earth that Jacob envisioned in his dream (Gen. 28:12-15).<sup>3</sup> This is that one which had accomplished all that He had spoken. This, their covenant God, who was also the God of the "whole earth", it was Him that was also their "redeemer". He had accomplished this by the power of His great majesty.

They were as the wife that, when in her youth, had been unfaithful to her husband, and hence, had been rejected. Yet now, with great compassion they had been restored to relationship. It was as if this rejection had been only a "brief moment (Is. 54:7) ", and then, their Redeemer God, with "great compassion" had again gathered them to Himself.

This Hebrew word גדול *gā-dōl*, translated "great" in the ESV, has the sense of "*remarkable or out of the ordinary in degree, magnitude, or effect*". This is the compassion that YHWH had for them. It was in combination with "everlasting love (Is. 54:8) that this compassion had come forth. Although, in His "overflowing anger" He had hidden His face, in this love, which is characterized as being "everlasting"; an enduring love, He had restored them.

### They Could Trust Him

It was because of this great proof, which they had seen in their redemption from captivity that they now could have confidence in the promise of the restoration of relationship that their Covenant God had now set before them. Using as example from their history, God continues by telling them that their situation was like that of Noah's day, in which He had promised that man of God.

Isaiah 54:9 (NLT)

<sup>9</sup> "Just as I swore in the time of Noah that I would never again let a flood cover the earth, so now I swear that I will never again be angry and punish you.

YHWH tells them that His promise will stand. They were to think of the great mountains and hills of God's majestic creation. Even if those were to depart or be removed, never would His "steadfast (loyal love)" depart, nor His "covenant of peace (cf. Ezek. 34:25-31)" be removed

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<sup>3</sup> John N. Oswalt; The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66; © 1998 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; P. 419

from them (Is. 54:10). God's covenant with His people implies that He will protect them as a husband does His wife.<sup>4</sup>

## Their Condition and His Adornment

His people are like a bride that has been “storm-tossed” and “afflicted (Is. 54:11)” due to the consequences of her adultery. Further, they are like a city that has been besieged by a great enemy and then razed. Surely, to them, this brought to mind the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army. Nevertheless, now they will be a city adorned (Is. 54:11-12).

The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament states of this...

The word here translated “sapphire” is generally considered to be lapis lazuli, a beautiful blue stone that was highly valued in the ancient world. The procession way to the famous Ishtar gate in Babylon was lined with intricate patterns with the background made by blue glazed bricks that gave the appearance of lapis. In a work referred to as the Uruk Prophecy, it is said that a future king will build the gates of Uruk of lapis lazuli.<sup>5</sup>

Continuing...

The description of the approach in verse 11 leads to discussion of the gateway. The word translated “battlements” is actually “suns” and most likely refers to the round, burnished shields used as crenellations along the top of the towers that flanked the gate. These are visible along the entire wall in Sennacherib's portrayal of the fortifications at Lachish (see also Ps 84:11 for the association of sun and shield). NIV's “ruby” is a guess here, and others support jasper. The word is used only here and in Ezekiel 27:16, where it is listed among exports from Aram. Red burnished copper was popular for gates and would be plausible for these sunlike shields. The stonework of the gate area features some sort of sparkling stone. The word translated “walls” is a technical term for low walls that lined the inside passage of the gateway (see Ezek. 40:12). They are described here as being made of “desirable stone”—high-quality stonework, perhaps with mosaics.<sup>6</sup>

As she, the bride, had been storm-tossed and afflicted, now she would be adorned just as the city of her captors. It was YHWH's promise that their offspring would be taught directly by Him (Is. 54:13; cf. Is. 50:4-5).

Jesus alluded to this verse in John 6:45, where he declared...

John 6:45 (ESV)

<sup>45</sup> It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me

Here we see that the result of this teaching that comes directly from God Himself is that they come to Christ. This direct line of teaching, then, can be seen manifested ultimately in the salvation of those that respond.

## The City of Peace

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<sup>4</sup> Grogan, Geoffrey W. “Isaiah.” In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelin. Vol. 6. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986.

<sup>5</sup> Matthews, V. H., Chavalas, M. W., & Walton, J. H. (2000). *The IVP Bible background commentary: Old Testament* (electronic ed., Is 54:11). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

This dwelling place now, this city, will be known for the righteousness of its inhabitants, and because of this righteousness, peace will be upon them and their descendants. Righteousness can be understood as God's holy standard of what is right, meaning, what reflects His nature and character. [This righteousness and peace will be the attributes and environment of Jerusalem](#), whose name means "city of peace". [Truly peace can only ultimately be the result of a righteousness which is found in a relationship with the Covenant God, who is the establisher of all that exists.](#)

Whereas, in the past, because of their rebellion, God had brought corrective discipline into their lives and families, now, based upon this covenant of peace, if they were to experience strife, it would not be from Him (Is 54:15), though in the past God had done so (see Is. 10:5-12). This phrase translated "if anyone stirs up strife" in the ESV, means to attack someone "physically or psychologically". In it is contained the idea of "gathering together for the purpose of attack". Yet, with this attack will come the perpetrator's fall. This is because of the moral character of the inhabitants of the city of peace.

The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary of the Old Testament has this to say...

[Both the thought and action of Jerusalem will be righteousness then, and it will thereby acquire strength<sup>7</sup>](#)

Continuing...

[With this reciprocal influence of its moral character and imparted glory, it can, and is to keep far away from all thought of oppression and terror; for, through divine grace and a corresponding divine nature, it has nothing to fear<sup>8</sup>](#)

## **There is an Aspect of Invincibility**

This Jerusalem, city of peace, will be now unconquerable because of the righteousness of those that dwell there. Though, previously, the former Jerusalem had been destroyed by its enemies because of the unrighteousness of its people, now, this future Jerusalem will stand. It is God Himself, Isaiah tells us, which had created these destructive powers such as the nations, who in the past come against them (Is. 54:16). What God is telling His people here is simply this, since it is Him that has brought forth these destructive powers they are ultimately in His control. Granting, weapons may be formed against them, whether of a physical, moral, or spiritual nature. Nevertheless, no weapon formed against them will "succeed (Is. 54:17)" This word translated succeed here, is from Hebrew word which can be, in this case, simply understood to mean "[to reach its desired goal](#)". These weapons could come in a wide variety of forms, even verbal assaults ("and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment" Is. 54:17). This invincibility from all forms of attack is the result of a righteousness that bears the image of God Himself. This is a righteousness, against which no form of assault, nor any weapon can be successful.

## **Because of This**

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<sup>7</sup> Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Vol. 7, p. 530). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

Because, Isaiah encouraged, these people now had the opportunity of a restored relationship with God, they should be filled with an abundant joy; a joy that is imbued with the expectation of the fulfillment of the promises of God. They had been invited to a new reality, and given a new opportunity. This was an occasion filled with increase.

The bride again was welcome into the Husband's home; the adultery had been forgiven by a God filled with "great compassion".

This was so sure a word because by the time those for which this prophecy had been written, had the opportunity to read it, they already knew of Cyrus and his issuing the decree of release, although it had been spoken of by the prophet over a century before.

## The Great Invitation

Just upon the heels of the verses we have been discussing the Covenant God declares through the mouth of His prophet...

Isaiah 55:1 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

With this, and the following verses, the great invitation to salvation is once more proclaimed. It is seen in a food that completely satisfies, and a drink that eternally quenches thirst. They are encouraged to sup for free rather than waste their personal resources of that which leaves them empty; to work to spend their wages on that which does not fill them—that which is temporary—that which has not lasting result, no eternal value.

YHWH then admonishes them to "listen diligently" and "to eat what is good". They were to "incline" their ear and come to Him; they were to "hear" that their soul may live. The result of their obedience would be that God would strike an "everlasting covenant" with them (Is. 55:3). As God's love is "everlasting (Is. 54:8)" so is His covenant toward those He calls to Himself.

What is in view here, is not a covenant of land, or possessions, or material goods, although these things sometimes God lovingly gives. The focus is the very salvation of their souls.

## The Body of Christ and the Providence of God

None of us can possibly know, and therefore, only speculate, the extent to which Isaiah, or for that matter any Old Testament prophet understood what they received from God. Did they know for example that the things that they spoke were many times meant to telescope into future ages? This is something that we can never possibly know for sure, or at least until the time when we have the opportunity to ask them in eternity. We do know this. Many of them certainly had a sense that there was a day coming that they longed for, although never obtained.

The Author to the Hebrews tells us...

Hebrews 11:39–40 (ESV)

<sup>39</sup> And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, <sup>40</sup> since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Of course the “all these” of the above passage is speaking of the biblical characters mentioned above in the same chapter. There is a divine timing to all events in human history. By nature, the very definition of the providence of God declares this, if indeed, we do believe in providence.

The NBD has this to say about the notion of providence

Providence is normally defined in Christian theology as the unceasing activity of the Creator whereby, in overflowing bounty and goodwill (Ps. 145:9 *cf.* Mt. 5:45–48), he upholds his creatures in ordered existence (Acts 17:28; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3), guides and governs all events, circumstances and free acts of angels and men (*cf.* Ps. 107; Jb. 1:12; 2:6; Gn. 45:5–8), and directs everything to its appointed goal, for his own glory (*cf.* Eph. 1:9–12).<sup>9</sup>

The idea of providence contains within it the understanding that God interacts with us in history to bring forth His purposes, all the while sustaining all things that exist in such a way that they continue until the time of the new heavens and the new earth (Is. 65:17; *cf.* Is. 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:13).

## The Timing of God

This timing of God that we are speaking of, through His providence, hinged completely upon one key event that was to come, the incarnation of Christ.

Galatians 4:4–5 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup> But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

This is why those that came before could not “be made perfect (Heb. 11:40)” The Greek word translated “perfect” here is *teleioō*, which has the sense of “to be or become in a perfect or consummate state with respect to a specific attribute”. What, we might ask, is that attribute to which *teleioō* is referring in Heb.11:40? I would suggest that the attribute is the righteousness of Christ which was imputed to us when the Holy Spirit brought us into vital union with Jesus. It was at the time of this event that we became a “new creation (2 Cor. 5:17)”, we had been made righteous.

Of course it’s true that the faithful of Hebrews, chapter eleven lived before atonement had been secured for them. Christ had not yet gone to the cross. However, God being a just and loving God did not leave them out. He made a provision for those that went before, some of which were mentioned in chapter eleven. What was the provision? They were to inherit the promise as well. They were kept in Abraham’s bosom until the time that they also might be brought to completion. And this we will all see together at the coming of Christ and the general resurrection of the saints of God.

In Galatians, chapter four, verse four, the Apostle Paul had spoken of the perfect timing of God as seen in the incarnation event. A little later in the same chapter Paul quoted verse one, of Isaiah, chapter fifty-four.

Galatians 4:21–27 (ESV)

<sup>21</sup> Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? <sup>22</sup> For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. <sup>23</sup> But the son of the

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<sup>9</sup> Packer, J. I. (1996). Providence. In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed., p. 979). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. <sup>24</sup> Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. <sup>25</sup> Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. <sup>26</sup> But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. <sup>27</sup> For it is written, “Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.”

Using an allegory of contrast, Paul here compares a people under law to a people under grace. It will be the people under grace, the offspring of the ones once barren that will multiply greatly, bearing fruit for the kingdom and the glory of God.

## The City of God—a Bride Adorned

Although the prophet Isaiah may not have known to what extent the words of His prophecy reached, still displayed in chapter fifty-four are God’s intentions for the consummation of His purpose.

YHWH had told His people, through the prophet that although they were storm-tossed He would set their stones with precious jewels (Is. 54:11-12).

As we have mentioned, Isaiah fifty-four is replete with allusions to a husband—bride relationship; a living relationship between a personal God and the people that He loves.

In the book of Revelation, chapter twenty-one, John speaks of the new heaven and the new earth. Telling us that “I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more (Rev. 21:1).

Continuing in verse two John then tells us...

Revelation 21:2 (ESV)

<sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, *prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

Did you hear that? The New Jerusalem, that which I believe is by prophetic extension, spoken of in Isaiah, chapter fifty-four, here descends from heaven and is described by John as being “*prepared as a bride for her husband*”

In ancient Israel a bride was adorned in specific ways. She was veiled (Song. 4:1; Song. 4:3; Song. 6:7) until the marriage was consummated. Moreover, the bride was adorned with jewels (Is. 61:10; Jer. 2:32) and she was dressed in a splendid embroidered robe of multiple colors. This is what Revelation, chapter twenty-one, verse two is alluding to. The New Jerusalem is the figure of a bride adorned just as the figure we have in Isaiah, chapter fifty-four, verses eleven through twelve.

This is the picture we have, a picture of a people redeemed, brought into union with Christ and with each other. A picture of a people that displays the adornment of the bride, which displays the glory of God

Ephesians 3:8–11 (ESV)



<sup>8</sup> To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, <sup>10</sup> so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. <sup>11</sup> This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord

And...

Revelation 22:17 (ESV)

<sup>17</sup> The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

**Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!**