

Isaiah 38-55 began with the sickness of Hezekiah.

The House of David is mortally wounded.

Babylon is coming, and the Babylonians will carry away the sons of David into Exile.

Chapters 41-48 speak of the restoration from Exile.

God promises that he will redeem Israel, his Servant.

God will raise up a great king to deliver his people.

No—not the son of David—but Cyrus, a godless pagan.

Because, as Isaiah 48 concludes, Israel, the Servant, is no better than the nations.

When Israel is restored from exile, they will be no better than before.

The Restoration will fail, because the sin of Israel has never been dealt with.

Therefore chapters 49-55 speak of the singular Servant who will redeem Servant Israel.

One man will arise to bear the sins of the many.

The LORD will lay on him the iniquity of us all.

Chapters 54-55 provide a fitting conclusion to this message.

When God reveals his promise of a suffering Servant who will deal finally with sin,
it is fitting that there should be great rejoicing!

The singular suffering Servant has accomplished salvation.

Now the servants respond to what the Servant has done.

This response takes two parts:

Chapter 54 on the enlarging of the tent of Zion

Chapter 55 on who will dwell in that tent

We'll focus on chapter 54 tonight.

There are lots of doublets and triplets—with the same word being used.

Ordinarily in Hebrew poetry, parallelism uses different words with similar meanings.

(E.g. 53:4)

“Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows”

Bearing grief and carrying sorrow are similar ideas.

Here, Isaiah uses the exact same word repeatedly:

sing...singing/children...children (54:1)

swore...sworn (54:9)

depart....removed....depart....removed (54:10)

children...children (54:13)

strife...strife (54:15)

I...created....I....created (54:16)

This changes the flow or rhythm of the passage,
which Isaiah uses to signal the conclusion of the passage.
Isaiah 40 had spoken of the comfort that was to come to Zion.
Isaiah 54-55 declares that comfort.

1. A Desolate Widow No Longer: The Bride Redeemed (v1-10)

a. The Children of the Desolate One – the Ever-Expanding City (v1-3)

*“Sing, O barren one, who did not bear;
break forth into singing and cry aloud,
you who have not been in labor!
For the children of the desolate one will be more
than the children of her who is married,” says the LORD.*
² *“Enlarge the place of your tent,
and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out;
do not hold back; lengthen your cords
and strengthen your stakes.*
³ *For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left,
and your offspring will possess the nations
and will people the desolate cities.*

Chapter 54 is the response of Zion—the wife of Yahweh (1-10) and the city of God (11-17).
Isaiah first calls “the barren one” to sing.

Zion is not named in chapters 54-55,
but the imagery is so familiar that there can be no doubt that Zion is intended.
In Isaiah 50:1-3, God spoke of the exile as a divorce.
God divorced Zion and sent her into exile.

But also in 51:2, Isaiah drew attention to “Abraham your father and Sarah who bore you”
Sarah—the barren wife—the one who was mocked by her slave, Hagar,
because she had no sons for her husband—
this Sarah is the one that Zion is supposed to remember.
What did God do for the barren Sarah?
He turned her barrenness into fertility.
Out of her emptiness came whole nations!

Now the emptiness of Zion will be filled to overflowing.
The “many” of 52:14-15, 53:11-12 are now the “many” (more) sons of the barren.

“As *many* were astonished at you”
“By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous”
“Yet he bore the sin of many”

These “many” are referred to in 54:1—“the children of the desolate one will be more
(lit. “many”) than the children of her who is married.”

The “many” for whom the Servant atones, are the many children of Zion.
 Likewise, the “offspring” of 53:10–“he shall see his offspring”
 are the offspring of Zion in 54:2–“your offspring will possess the nations.”
 In 51:20, the sons of Zion were passed out, drunk in the streets.
 But when the Servant bears the iniquities of his people,
 then the offspring of Zion will populate the City once again.
 Indeed, Zion will prove to be too small!
 She must “enlarge the place of your tent
 and let the curtains of your habitation be stretched out.”
 The borders of Zion must be extended to the left and the right,
 so that “your offspring will possess the nations
 and will people the desolate cities.”

Notice that the image of Zion here is not co-equal with Jerusalem.
 The city of God is not limited to the bounds of a physical city,
 but circumscribes the dwellings of the whole people of God.
 Isaiah speaks of a day when the city of God will expand throughout the nations.
 And to do this, he uses the image of tents.
 He has done this before.
 In Isaiah 16:5 he spoke of how a “throne will be established in steadfast love,
 and on it will sit in faithfulness in the tent of David
 one who judges and seeks justice and is swift to do righteousness.”
 Likewise in Isaiah 33:20 Zion is called “an untroubled habitation,
 an immovable tent whose stakes will never be plucked up.”

Of course the image of the tent recalls the wilderness wandering after the Exodus.
 Every year Israel celebrated that through the Feast of Booths,
 when all Israel lived in tents for a week.
 The Feast of Booths reminded Israel of how God had provided for them in the wilderness
 but also reminded them that they were temporary sojourners in the land–
 that their true home was a city built without human hands–
 a tent whose builder is God.

In this context, then, you can see that in all of this,
 Zion has done nothing to produce these children.
 She was not in labor in 54:1.
 She did nothing to remove her own disgrace in 54:4.
 It is the singular Servant who brings forth offspring through his suffering.
 He is the one who bears our griefs and carries our sorrows.
 Zion is called to rejoice and to spread abroad,
 but salvation is wholly the work of God and his Servant.

b. Your Maker Is Your Husband – Everlasting Compassion (v4-8)

⁴ *“Fear not, for you will not be ashamed;
 be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced;*

*for you will forget the shame of your youth,
and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more.*

The second call is for Zion to “fear not.”

The shame and reproach of the past is gone.

Particularly note “the reproach of your widowhood.”

How is Zion a “widow”?

Some might see a subtle reference to the death of Christ here,
but I am not so inclined.

Because this is a past reference to the Exile.

God had divorced Zion.

She had been put away and disgraced through her own wicked acts.
Here “widowhood” means “divorcee.”

A similar use is found in 2 Samuel 20:3,

where David returns to Jerusalem after the rebellion and death of Absalom.

David had left ten concubines in Jerusalem to keep the house –

but Absalom had slept with them openly –

as a sign of his rebellion (sleeping with his father’s concubines).

When David returned, he did not go into the concubines whom Absalom had slept with,
but they lived in “widowhood” –

not because their husband was dead (David was quite alive, thank you!) –
but because they were “divorced”

(the law forbade a man to go into a woman who had slept with his father,
so it was improper for David to take them back –
and since David was the king,

it was impossible for any of these women to marry another,
because the king was the “father” of his country –

and you are not supposed to sleep with your father’s wife...)

Here in Isaiah, this use of ‘widow’ highlights the basic idea of the widow in Hebrew –
one who is desolate.

And a divorcee is desolate!

(Read 54:5-8)

⁵ *For your Maker is your husband,
the LORD of hosts is his name;
and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,
the God of the whole earth he is called.*

⁶ *For the LORD has called you
like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit,*

*like a wife of youth when she is cast off,
says your God.*

⁷ *For a brief moment I deserted you,
but with great compassion I will gather you.*

⁸ *In overflowing anger for a moment
I hid my face from you,
but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,”
says the LORD, your Redeemer.*

Think about these images:

“Your Maker is your husband”
You are “like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit” –
“like a wife of youth when she is cast off...”

The “wife of youth” refers to one’s first marriage.
The prophets often refer to Zion as God’s bride.

But what does it mean “For a brief moment I deserted you”?
Did God desert his people?

We need to remember all that Isaiah has said so far!
Israel’s rebellion – their persistent turning away from the LORD!

And so *yes*, “in my overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you” –
yes, for a moment I deserted you –
because God is holy – and he cannot allow sin and rebellion to flourish!

And therefore he allows Jerusalem’s sin to result in Jerusalem’s misery.
He casts them off so that they can taste the true flavor of their rebellion.

But that is not where the story ends!

Do you see the great compassion of our God?
Remember all that Isaiah has said about Zion and her children!
They have provoked him over and over with their idolatry and rebellion,
and yet he speaks tenderly to Zion.
He loves her “with everlasting love” that cannot be destroyed–
even by her own spiteful behavior toward him!

Indeed, God says that:

c. Like the Waters of Noah – the Permanence of God’s Covenant (v9-10)

⁹ *“This is like the days of Noah^[a] to me:
as I swore that the waters of Noah*

*should no more go over the earth,
so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you,
and will not rebuke you.*

Indeed, God says that this is “like the waters of Noah”
(some translations say “the days of Noah” because the only difference between
“the waters of” and “the days of” is in the vowel pointing!
But since Isaiah is using so many doubled words,
I think “waters of” is best in both cases)
Remember the waters of Noah?
I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth,
Even so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you.

Think about what God did in the Flood.
God brought judgment against humanity for their sin and wickedness –
yet saved Noah and his family through the waters of judgment.
And after the flood, God made a covenant – he swore an oath –
that he would never again destroy the earth by water.

So now, God promises that he will never again exile his people!
He will never again be angry with his people!

Of course – remember what we saw last time from Isaiah 53!
The promise – never again – is connected to the *singular suffering servant*.
When the singular suffering servant bears the sin and the shame of God’s people,
then God will never again forsake his people.

How firm are God’s promises?

¹⁰ *For the mountains may depart
and the hills be removed,
but my steadfast love shall not depart from you,
and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,”
says the LORD, who has compassion on you.*

Zion had broken the marriage covenant.
The adulterous, idolatrous bride had scorned her Husband/her Maker.
But God says that his covenant of peace shall not be removed.
He will deliver his bride at whatever cost to himself.

The LORD has compassion on his people!

2. No Weapon Fashioned against You: The Glorious City Restored (v11-17)

Chapter 54 concludes with God's comfort to his city (11-17).

Isaiah 40 began "Comfort, comfort"

And while Isaiah 52-53 promises that the comfort *will* come,
it is still in the future.

And so Yahweh speaks to the "afflicted one, storm-tossed, and *not comforted*."

a. The Beauty and Righteousness of God's City (v11-15)

¹¹ "O *afflicted one, storm-tossed and not comforted*,

There are two sections to this comfort, each beginning, "behold"

*behold, I will set your stones in antimony,
and lay your foundations with sapphires.*^[b]

¹² *I will make your pinnacles of agate,*^[c]
your gates of carbuncles,^[d]
and all your wall of precious stones.

Verses 11-12 declares the beauty of the city of God.

The glory of Zion is in the craftsmanship of Yahweh.

He is the master craftsman who reveals his skill in this ornate city.

Think of the heavenly Jerusalem that John sees in Revelation –
the bride of the Lamb!

God is going to make his city – his bride – beautiful!

And he is skilled in word as well as in hand.

While his hand builds the city,
his word teaches the children of the city.

¹³ *All your children shall be taught by the LORD,
and great shall be the peace of your children.*

Solomon had built a temple, taught wisdom, and given Israel peace.

Yahweh here declares that he is the true King.

He is the one who builds his holy city – teaches his people wisdom –
and grants to his children peace.

He will establish Zion in righteousness.

*¹⁴ In righteousness you shall be established;
you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear;
and from terror, for it shall not come near you.*

Zion is protected.

Revelation 12 speaks of this – as the woman who is protected from the dragon.
The heavenly Jerusalem will be safe from all oppression and fear.

Your mother is safe!

The heavenly Jerusalem is protected from all assaults.

Sure, the devil still makes a mess of things on earth –
but he cannot attack the heavenly city.

What does that mean for us?

We are children of the heavenly Jerusalem –
and so we know that our home city – our true home – is safe.

We endure trials here – sure!

But we can live as citizens of the heavenly city – with *confidence* –
because we know that our city will endure!

The cities of man will come and go –
but the city of God will endure forever.

And so God also assures us:

*¹⁵ If anyone stirs up strife,
it is not from me;
whoever stirs up strife with you
shall fall because of you.*

Notice how God says this.

Don't be afraid of the strife around you.

The people who stir up strife with you *shall fall because of you*.

Because you are citizens of the heavenly city!

You are my people.

Verses 16-17 then explains why:

b. The Smith, the Ravager, and the Heritage of the Servants (v16-17)

¹⁶ *Behold, I have created the smith
who blows the fire of coals
and produces a weapon for its purpose.
I have also created the ravager to destroy;*
¹⁷ *no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed,
and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment.*

God is the one who created the smith.

The very craft that humans use to forge weapons
is given by God – indeed, is simply human imitation of God the Maker.

For that matter, “I have also created the ravager to destroy.”
Both the one who makes the weapons and the one who uses the weapons
are created by God and are under his sovereign will.

Therefore, *no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed.*
After all, they have to use God’s world to attack God’s people.

The word translated “succeed” is the same word that Isaiah used in 53:10 –
“the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.”

The Singular Suffering Servant will prosper – he will succeed!
But no weapon fashioned against you will succeed!

This is why you can have confidence in the face of the attacks of the world!
They were created by God – and they can only use the things that God made!
They are using borrowed capital!

But Jesus – the Singular Suffering Servant –
he will prosper – and therefore those who trust in him will prosper with him!

And God also says,
you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment.

The people of God learn wisdom from the Word of their God,
and therefore they will turn aside every tongue that speaks against them.

The sword of the Spirit (the Word of God) will foil every attack.

And
*This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD
and their vindication^[e] from me, declares the LORD.”*

Notice the plural.

All through Isaiah 41-52 the focus was on Servant Israel (singular).
In the entire section (38-55) This is the *only* reference to “servants” (plural).
The singular Servant has accomplished his task,
he has received his inheritance, which he now shares with the servants.

Because Jesus has done what we could not do for ourselves –
because he was pierced for our transgressions (53:5),
because he bore our griefs (53:4),
therefore we receive the inheritance of the Singular Servant –
the one who “divides a portion with the many” (53:12).

This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD –
this is *their vindication* (or their righteousness) *from me*.

Our righteousness does not come from ourselves.
Our righteousness comes from the LORD –
because Jesus is the singular suffering servant who – by his knowledge –
makes the many to be accounted righteous (53:11).