

ISAIAH

Chapter 54

The Eternal Covenant of Peace

“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. 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. 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. 9 **“This is like the days of Noah 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. 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. 11 **“O afflicted one, storm-tossed and not comforted, behold, I will set your stones in antimony, and lay your foundations with sapphires. 12 I will make your pinnacles of agate, your gates of carbuncles, and all your wall of precious stones. 13 All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your children. 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. 15 If anyone stirs up strife, it is not from me; whoever stirs up strife with you shall fall because of you. 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. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD and their vindication from me, declares the LORD.”**

Ch 54 The Servant’s sacrifice of atonement (ch 53) opened the way for sons and daughters of Adam to become “servants of the LORD” (54:17). Redeemed, forgiven, and accounted righteous by virtue of the Servant’s sacrifice for their sins, they are designated “His offspring” (53:10). They partake of His life when they are “born again ... through the living and abiding word of God” (1Pt 1:23). Members of the same family, they form a community composed of “the nations” (Is 54:3). Ch 54 is a call to believe in the rebirth of Israel so that through Israel “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gn 12:3). (TLSB)

54:1-3 Giving birth to several children after once being barren is cause for rejoicing (cf Gn 16:1, 4-5; 30:22-24; 1 Sm 1:2, 5-6, 11; Lk 1:24-25). Just as from Sarah’s barren womb the Lord built a great nation, that out numbered the descendants of Hagar, so the offspring of the Servant will be many. The nation will again occupy the land as during the conquest of Joshua. (TLSB)

54:1† This verse is applied by Paul to the covenant of promise, representing “the Jerusalem that is above” (Gal 4:26–27). (CSB)

barren one.† In the Near East, barrenness was considered a disgrace. (CSB)

As Sarah, childless until age 90, did not expect to give birth to an heir, so there was no prospect, according to human reason, for Jerusalem to become alive with citizens. (TLSB)

the desolate one will be more.† The servant's offspring, spiritual Israel, will consist of all the families of the earth (Ge 12:3). (CSB)

her who is married. See God's "divorce" with the Northern Kingdom (Is 50:1) and His renewed relationship with His people (54:4–8). (TLSB)

54:2 *Enlarge the place of your tent.* The descendants will overflow the boundaries of their native land. (TLSB)

lengthen your cords. Cords held up tents, which could be spread more broadly to encompass more space. (TLSB)

You heard a similar expression above and had the same comparison in Is. 49:20: "Make room for me, the place is too narrow for me." So he says here: "Your place is so small, and you are so few, that you could be contained in a small house. But I say to you, 'Your people and your tent will be expanded into all the world.'" These are the walls of the church. This is an allegory taken from setting up tabernacles, as it is written about Abraham, Isaac, etc., and their setting up tabernacles. Today we would speak of the construction of a house. Summary: It is as if He were saying: "My church, make your building so broad that your habitation will be advanced into all the world. Do not be led astray by appearances, by the great number of enemies and by the small number of your people." (Luther)

54:3 *possess nations.* By a spiritual inheritance, not a bodily one, for we reign by the Word. Where the Word is preached, there we reign. So we, too, reign everywhere, even among the papists who are jealous of our text to a lesser degree. This is an effective sign that Christ reigns. (Luther)

Not by political or military subjugation, but by a conquest of people's hearts and minds (cf 49:7; 66:23; Gn 22:17–18; Mt 5:5). Luther: "We reign by the Word. Where the Word is preached, there we reign" (AE 17:235). (TLSB)

desolate cities – Your people will be so numerous that they will inherit even those cities in which formerly there was nothing." Thus the kingdoms, increasing bodily, will dwell in deserts and bramble bushes. (Luther)

54:4 *shame of your youth.* Probably the period of slavery in Egypt. Cf. Jer 31:19; Eze 16:60. (CSB)

The humiliation of Egyptian slavery when Israel first became a nation (cf Jsh 5:9) (TLSB)

reproach of your widowhood. Probably referring to the exile, when Israel was alone, like a widow (vv. 6–7). (CSB)

The Babylonian exile was her widowhood, since she, now mature, bore the reproach of a childless woman (cf Gn 30:1; 1Sm 1:5). (TLSB)

54:5 *husband.* God is compared to a husband and Israel to His wife. Though He had deserted her for a time because of her unfaithfulness, He gathers her again with great compassion. (v 7). Cf 1:21–31; 62:4–5; Ezk 16; 23; Hos 2:7–23; Rv 21:9. There will never be a time when she will have to bear the reproach for being a childless widow, for her husband, who is also her Maker, will care for her with compassion and everlasting love. (TLSB)

Holy One of Israel ... Redeemer. Here you see our betrothed, as if He were saying: “You seem forsaken, but I will give you an outstanding husband.” Behold the consolation for our barrenness, that we shall have a spouse who shall be able to multiply Himself. This, however, takes place through the Word. So our God, who was once called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is now called the God of the whole earth. This is the consolation, that we shall have another lover in the place of our forsakenness. Blessed is he who can bear this barrenness and shameful virginity, when in his own Gospel he seems entirely forsaken, and yet must believe that in that shame he has a supreme Spouse, and that the Gospel will be spread. (Luther)

Poetic parallels exist with God being identified as husband and Redeemer in lines 1 and 3, and “LORD of hosts” and “God of the whole earth” in lines 2 and 4. (TLSB)

54:6–7 *wife... cast off.* Israel’s experience in exile (see 49:14; 50:1 and note; 62:4). (CSB)

The anger and judgment are but for a moment (cf Ps 30:5), just as in 61:2 “the day of vengeance” is compared to “the year of the LORD’s favor.” God’s alien work of judgment gives way to His proper work of salvation; He is “slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love” (Ex 34:6; cf Ps 145:8; Jl 2:13; Jnh 4:2). *brief moment.* The wrath she deserved will be shortened. As the Lord kept His oath not to send another flood to destroy the earth (Gn 9:8–17), so His steadfast love will not fail to put into effect the “covenant of peace” mediated by the Servant (vv 9–10; cf 42:6; 49:8). (TLSB)

54:7–8, 10 *compassion.* See 14:1; 49:10, 13; 51:3. (CSB)

His love is deeper, wider, higher, and longer than anyone had a right to hope. What greater love can there be than God sending His one and only Son to redeem the world. (PBC)

54:7 *brief moment.* The Babylonian exile was relatively brief. (CSB)

54:8 *overflowing anger.* Momentary outburst of anger rather than an endless outpouring of wrath, the full wages of sin. (TLSB)

hid my face. God’s anger was like the thunderclouds briefly hiding the sun. (TLSB)

everlasting love. A most excellent comparison. The moment of tribulation and wrath is a small one, but the mercy is everlasting and perpetual. Yes, learn how to make this globe. The forsakenness is the center, but the mercy is the endless orb. (Luther)

Redeemer. It is not the prophet who is speaking, but God is speaking. (Luther)

54:9–10 The umbrella of this “covenant of peace” is extended to non-Israelites. The Lord’s call to all nations is a recurring theme throughout Is (e.g., 2:1–5; 11:10; 40:5; 42:6; 49:6; 53:12; 60:1–3). (TLSB)

54:9 *days of Noah.* The flood was a reversal of creation, destroying human and animal life, covering the plants and mountains, so that the earth returned to the watery chaos that existed before the second day of creation. Noah becomes, as it were, another Adam. (TLSB)

no more. After the flood, the Lord made an everlasting covenant with Noah and his descendants (Gn 9:9–11). (TLSB)

There the prophet supports that very beautiful promise by citing an example. So bare rules must always be supported by the addition of illustrations. Therefore he sets forth the example of Noah, to whom God had promised mercy based on this covenant. Believe me, after the flood Noah was a hundred times more scared, because the burnt person is afraid of the fire. So Noah feared a new flood every time he saw a heavy rain, and therefore the covenant and the sign of the rainbow were necessary. So He says here, “I left you as in a flood. You have become so downhearted that you nearly despair in every tribulation, and therefore you must be comforted. Remember that illustration. Even if thunder and rain came, Noah might think a new flood was on its way. So your conscience in trial must not lose faith in trials, but hope in Me.” Thus every trial is like a flood and destruction, forsakenness and wrath in our thinking, but to the believer it is only a point and a moment. “That forsakenness of yours must be to Me *like the days of Noah.*” (Luther)

not to be angry. Here He adds a promise and an oath, and thus commends to the Hebrews the truth of God which is sealed by promises and oaths, *that I will not be angry with you.* Here He is speaking properly of wrath, as if to say, “I swear to you that wrath is not wrath in My presence, but rather your trial, so that you may learn to believe and trust what is not apparent.” Otherwise, if we had everything in full view, nobody would learn to believe and cling to the Word and believe things that do not appear (Heb. 11:1). The world goes its way prosperously and by what appears and gets along without difficulty. But to “believe the experienced master, one who has experienced trial and forsakenness, is something that can quickly be preached but not assimilated. Therefore he says, “It is not wrath and threatening as far as the Word and God are concerned but only as far as our conscience is concerned, and it is a most agitated rage, because our spirit does not find consolation for itself but is always afraid.” (Luther)

54:10 *mountains ... depart.* Cf. 51:6; Ps 46:2; 102:26–27. (CSB)

Unlike the world, God’s promises are permanent (cf 51:6; Ps 89:33–34; Mt 24:35). (TLSB)

The prophet piles up words. Here he says *who has compassion on you* just as above he says *your Redeemer*. It is a difficult task to lift up a terrified conscience. It is elusive as oil slipping away between the hands. Therefore he provides consolation by way of contrast. “You are disturbed and weak, but the mountains stand firmly. Let Me turn the matter around: I will strengthen you like mountains, and I will shake up the mountains, your opponents, the extremely hard tyrants and sects.” Thus He consoles us by means of a striking contrast, as if to say, “I will turn the matter around. Those who are strong must tremble, and the trembling I will make firm.” (Luther)

steadfast love ... covenant of peace. † The universal covenant of peace with God, mediated by the servant. Cf. Jer 33:20–21; for the language see Nu 25:11–13. (CSB)

Promised to Noah (Gn 8:20–9:17). (TLSB)

54:11–12 A figurative description of restored Jerusalem, echoed in the description of the new Jerusalem in Rev 21:10, 18–21. (CSB)

54:11 *afflicted.* † Jerusalem (TLSB)

storm-tossed. The Lord issued promises of His enduring compassion for His people to encourage them. So often God’s people find themselves confronted with troubles and trials. But believers walk by faith and not by sight. (PBC)

turquoise. Perhaps a bluish-green stone. It was used in Solomon’s temple (1Ch 29:2). (CSB)

Mineral used by jewelers or master masons to garnish stones. The Hebrew word is the same word used for mascara or eye paint in 2 Kings 9:30 and Jer. 4:30; it could refer to the black mortar used to showcase beautiful stones in a wall. (TLSB)

sapphires. Cf. the “pavement made of sapphire” (a blue stone) in Ex 24:10 (see also Eze 1:26; 10:1). (CSB)

With reference to precious stones, the Lord promises that He will build for Israel a lavish and secure new city (cf Heb 11:16; Rv 21–22). (TLSB)

The description of the city may remind us of the one John saw in a vision on the Isle of Patmos (Revelation 21:9-27). The turquoise, sapphires, rubies, sparkling jewels, and precious stone all communicate the incredible beauty and priceless value of the city that God has prepared for those who love Him. (PBC)

54:12 *pinnacles of agate*. Parapets on the top of walls. (CSB)

Even tall buildings are bejeweled. (TLSB)

wall, Cf. 26:1. (CSB)

Rubies or crystal. (TLSB)

These are the encircling walls of the city. Sumptuous as it may seem, precious stones are used for plain city walls, for in this picture there is nothing plain. (Leupold)

54:13 Jesus quotes this verse to characterize those who become His disciples. On the new discipleship. Luther: “All the wisdoms of the world speak of things that are evident. Contrary to reason, Christianity teaches concerning things that are not evident, and therefore reason collapses and is offended. Therefore all who adhered to this teaching were taught not by their own powers but by way of a gift from heaven... Since the church is on earth, there is need of the Word. The spoken Word is needed to produce and to keep children. (TLSB)

taught by the LORD.† See the words of Jesus in Jn 6:45. Cf. Jer 31:34. (CSB)

By the Spirit of God. Both must be there. Mother church bears her children through the Word [1Co 4:15; Gal 4:19; 1Co 3:6].... Everywhere in Scripture the Word and its teachers are commended. The children of the church have to hear by means of the Word and come to faith through the work of God. The Word is from the mother [the Church], the Spirit from the Father. The voice gathers us into the church, and the Spirit unites us with God. Thus a son of the church hears the Word and is a disciple of God” (AE 17:243–44). (TLSB)

This passage has been treated most universally. Christ cites it, John 6:45: “And they shall be taught by God.” All Christians have been taught by God, because reason cannot discover Christian doctrine, yea, having found it, cannot grasp it; yea, reason persecutes it, because it does not speak of things that are evident but rather there seems to be nonsense here. All the wisdoms of the world speak of things that are evident. Contrary to reason, Christianity teaches concerning things that are not evident, and therefore reason collapses and is offended. (Luther)

54:14 *oppression... not fear*. Cf. 14:4; 33:18–19. (CSB)

There will be nothing to frighten you. The fears and terrors of the ungodly ought not trouble you but edify you, and they will not draw near to you. (Luther)

54:15 *fall*. Suffer defeat. (TLSB)

54:16 *smith ... produces a weapon*. Each person who builds something designed to destroy is dependent on the Creator for each new heartbeat. Cf 10:5, 12 for God's use and control of godless powers as "the rod" of His anger. (TLSB)

created a smith. God raised up nations such as Assyria and Babylonia to punish Israel. (CSB)

As the Lord used Assyria in the eighth century BC, so He would use Babylon in the sixth century BC. Israel is not completely destroyed; a remnant always remains (cf 28:5). (TLSB)

54:17 *confute every tongue*. Just as no legitimate charges could be brought against the servant of 50:8–9. (CSB)

As no one can challenge the Servant of 50:8–9, so here none can refute His people. (TLSB)

heritage. Reputation. (TLSB)

servants of the LORD. After ch. 53 the singular "servant" no longer occurs in Isaiah. The "servants" (see 63:17; 65:8–9, 13–15; 66:14) are true believers—both Jew and Gentile (see 56:6–8)—who are faithful to the Lord. They are in a sense the "offspring" of the servant. (CSB)

vindication. God dismisses all who would accuse His people (Rm 8:33–34). (TLSB)

Ch 54 Although the Lord cast off Israel because of their sin, they will henceforth enjoy His vindication and everlasting love. As it was in the days of Noah, a flood of judgment awaits those who do not turn from their sins of shame and disgrace. But just as the Lord faithfully gathered Noah's family to safety on the ark, so will the Lord gather those whom He has redeemed in Jesus. Because of our Lord's great compassion, He will never desert us. • Heavenly Father, let the mighty mountains and hills of this world always remind us of Your steadfast love for us. Enlarge our faith in You, especially when we face affliction. Amen. (TLSB)