



# Highlights From the Book of Isaiah

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# Restoration and Hope for a Disgraced Woman (Isaiah 54:1-10)

- The text that we will be looking at this morning follows on the heels of the section we looked at *last week* which gave a description of how the servant would suffer and die for “*many*” (cf. Isaiah 53:11).
- *Today’s text* tells us about the *glorious future* awaiting Zion and her citizens which comes about as a *result* of the servant’s death.
- Zion and her citizens represent the people of God and are symbolized in this text as a disgraced “*woman*”.
- And so we see from this that the “*many*” for whom the servant suffered and died are the people of God, whom the servant will *justify* by *removing their sins*:
  - *Having suffered, [the servant] will reflect on his work, he will be satisfied when he understands what he has done. “My servant will acquit many, for he carried their sins.”* (Isaiah 53:11)

# Restoration and Hope for a Disgraced Woman (Isaiah 54:1-10)

- In these climactic verses God makes it clear again that the problem being addressed in this section is not *primarily* captivity in Babylon, but *alienation* from his presence.
- He goes on to tell us that his “unfailing love” and “his covenant of peace” are forever.
- This does not mean that Israel will no longer be subject to condemnation and punishment, as later history shows.
- What it *does* mean is that God has now *reconciled* his people *to himself*.



# Restoration and Hope for a Disgraced Woman (Isaiah 54:1-10)

- That which was necessary to satisfy the righteous anger of God at human sin has been taken care of, and so God can now proclaim that there is no longer *any* barrier to his people experiencing reconciliation to himself.
- The suffering of the servant for the sins of others described in the section we looked at last week (Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12) is the *means* by which this reconciliation was achieved.
- As a result of his work, God's people need never be separated from him again.



# Restoration and Hope for a Disgraced Woman (Isaiah 54:1-10)

- In these ten verses, God speaks to Israel using the metaphor of a disgraced woman. She is described as:
  - A Barren Woman (vv. 1-3)
  - A Widow (vv. 4-5)
  - A Divorced Woman (vv. 6-8)
- To each of these, God promises restoration and hope, and his promises are brought to a *climax* in verses 9-10.

# The Barren Woman (54:1–3)

54:1 *“Shout for joy, O barren one who has not given birth! Give a joyful shout and cry out, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one are more numerous than the children of the married woman,” says the LORD.* <sup>2</sup> *Make your tent larger, stretch your tent curtains farther out! Spare no effort, lengthen your ropes, and pound your stakes deep.* <sup>3</sup> *For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your children will conquer nations and will resettle desolate cities.*

# The Barren Woman (54:1–3)

- While it had previously been the *natural realm* that burst into joyful shouts of acclamation (cf. 44:23; 49:13), *now* those called upon to “*shout for joy*” are the people of Zion or the *covenant community*, here *personified* as a *woman*.
- The “*barren one who has not given birth*” and “*who [has] not been in labor*” are synonymous expressions to describe the woman’s *childlessness*.
- In the culture of the times a childless woman was viewed as *disgraced* (cf. 4:1; Luke 1:25).
- But her situation has now been changed, and she is told to “*shout for joy*” as she recognizes the provision that the LORD, through the Servant, has made for her.



# The Barren Woman (54:1–3)

- The LORD compares *two* different periods of Zion's life:
  - As a "*married woman*" – Zion *prior* to exile
  - As a "*desolate*" woman – Zion while *in* exile.
- He promises that Zion will be repopulated; in fact, her inhabitants (i.e. children of the "*desolate*" woman) will (eventually) be *more numerous* than before.
- Galatians 4:27 quotes Isaiah 54:1 and applies it to a future time of blessing under the new covenant when the new heavenly Jerusalem will be more densely populated than anything ever experienced in the old physical Jerusalem.
- The Babylonian exile had a *purging* effect, allowing God to bring a *believing remnant* back to Zion.
- This serves as a *picture* of the LORD bringing New Testament believers into the *heavenly* Zion.

# The Barren Woman (54:1–3)

- In order to accommodate all her future children, Zion is encouraged to “*make [her] tent larger*”.
- Women in the Ancient Near East were typically responsible for erecting and maintaining the family tent.
- Zion is to generously and substantially **expand** her tent: “*stretch your tent curtains farther out! Spare no effort, lengthen your ropes, and pound your stakes deep.*”
- The command to “*spread out to the right and to the left*” is reminiscent of the covenant promise of numerical growth and territorial expansion given to Jacob:
  - *[The LORD speaking to Jacob said:] Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west, east, north, and south.* (Gen 28:14a).
- But Zion will need to act **in faith** since she is **barren** at the time that she **receives** this promise.

# The Barren Woman (54:1–3)

- The phrase “*your children will conquer nations*” is reminiscent of Mose’s description of the divine promise of the land to Israel:
  - *Listen, Israel: Today you are about to cross the Jordan so you can dispossess the nations there, people greater and stronger than you who live in large cities with extremely high fortifications.* (Deut 9:1)
- But it also has **messianic** overtones which **internationalizes** the picture **beyond** the bounds of Palestine:
  - *I will give you the nations as your inheritance* (Ps 2:8)
- So these “*resettled desolate cities*” find their **initial** fulfillment in those cities in the land of Israel awaiting the return of the exiles.
- This then serves as a **picture** of the ruins of the failed and condemned cities of the **world** (cf. 24:10–13) that will be redeemed by the Lord in the new **heavenly** Zion.



# The Widow (54:4-5)

*54:4 Don't be afraid, for you will not be put to shame. Don't be intimidated, for you will not be humiliated. You will forget about the shame you experienced in your youth; you will no longer remember [the disgrace of your widowhood].<sup>5</sup> For your husband is the one who made you—the LORD of Heaven's Armies is his name. He is your [Redeemer], the Holy One of Israel. He is called "God of the entire earth."*

# The Widow (54:4-5)

- The figure of speech employed to describe the people of God changes from that of a *woman* who is *childless* to that of a *wife* who has been *widowed*, but the theme remains the same.
- Because of the legacy of the Servant, the prospects for the people of God have changed and they should reappraise their outlook accordingly.
- “*Don’t be afraid*” (cf. 41:10) encourages them to recognize that their abject circumstances are now a thing of the *past*, and they are to look forward with confidence because they have now been *reconciled* with their God.

# The Widow (54:4-5)

- She will forget the shame of her youth (i.e. her sinful past) and the “*disgrace of [her] widowhood*” that in this context probably refers to the Babylonian exile.
- Zion will be so blessed that she will forget the humiliation of those earlier times.
- The LORD, “*the one who made [her]*”, will be her “*husband*”.
- The expressions “*Maker*”, “*husband*”, “*Redeemer*” and “*the Holy One of Israel*” – all used in this section – are *familiar terms* used for Israel’s God in *earlier* chapters.
- These names reflect his special relationship with Israel.
- Their God is “*God of the entire earth*” and can therefore be trusted to deliver on his promises.



# The Divorced Woman (54:6-8)

*54:6 “Indeed, the LORD will call you back like a wife who has been abandoned and suffers from depression, like a young wife when she has been rejected,” says your God. <sup>7</sup> “For a short time I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will gather you. <sup>8</sup> In a burst of anger I rejected you momentarily, but with lasting devotion I will have compassion on you,” says your [Redeemer], the LORD.*

# The Divorced Woman (54:6-8)

- The LORD calling Israel back to himself in her distress, is poignantly portrayed here as a rejected, deserted young wife.
- The rejection of a “*young wife*” at the age when she is most desirable is particularly heartbreaking.
- The LORD admits that he “*rejected*” the nation for a “*short time*” (i.e. during the Babylonian exile).

# The Divorced Woman (54:6-8)

- Yet he will demonstrate the magnitude of his “*great compassion*” for them by taking the initiative to “*gather*” them back.
- Verse 8 likens God’s momentary rejection to a brief outburst of anger that will be followed by “*lasting devotion*” and “*compassion*” – the kind that only God can demonstrate.
- Graciously gathering up a chastened Israel in his arms, he reminds her that he is her “*Redeemer*”.



# Promised Restoration and Hope (54:9-10)

54:9 *“As far as I am concerned, this is like in Noah’s time, when I vowed that the waters of Noah’s flood would never again cover the earth. In the same way I have vowed that I will not be angry at you or shout at you.<sup>10</sup> Even if the mountains are removed and the hills displaced, my devotion will not be removed from you, nor will my covenant of [peace] be displaced,” says the LORD, the one who has compassion on you.*

# Restoration and Hope (54:9-10)

- The LORD, seeking to reassure Israel that he will not abandon her again, gives **two** reasons why he can be trusted.
- **First**, he equates the oath he makes here with the one he made to Noah when he promised that he would **never again** flood the earth.
- In the same way he will **never again** be angry with Israel.
- The days of Noah were a time like the exile when people were subjected to severe punishment from the LORD.
- The “**vow**”, one of the most compelling means of confirming the truthfulness of a statement, was meant to unequivocally assure them that their punishment was now finished.

# Restoration and Hope (54:9-10)

- *Second*, God can be trusted because he gives his word not to revoke his “*covenant of peace*”.
- Even though the “*mountains*”, an image of stability and permanence, may be “*removed*” and “*displaced*”, neither God’s unfailing love, nor will his “*covenant of peace*” with Israel be removed.
- This covenant corresponds to the “*covenant of peace*” in Ezekiel 37:26 and the “*new covenant*” in Jeremiah 31:31–34.
- God’s “*devotion*” (*ḥeṣed*) and “*compassion*” (*rāḥam*) are the ultimate benefits of this “*covenant of peace*”.

The Apostle Paul's Use of  
Isaiah 54:1  
in Galatians 4:27



Isaiah 54:1 *Shout for joy, O barren one who has not given birth! Give a joyful shout and cry out, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one are more numerous than the children of the married woman," says the LORD. (NET)*

Galatians 4:27 *For it is written: "Rejoice, O barren woman who does not bear children; break forth and shout, you who have no birth pains, because the children of the desolate woman are more numerous than those of the woman who has a husband." (NET)*

# Rejoice O Barren Woman

- The Apostle Paul's citation of Isaiah 54:1 (in Galatians 4:27) is in a section of the book (Galatians 4:21-31) where Paul, as a part of his defense of his Law-Free gospel, draws a **contrast** between the **two** families of Abraham:
  - The **natural** family who is **enslaved** to the Law
  - The **supernatural** family who is **free** from the Law
- Paul begins drawing this contrast by giving a brief synopsis of the historical Genesis account:
  - *For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. But one, the son by the slave woman, was born by natural descent, while the other, the son by the free woman, was born through the promise.* (Gal 4:22-23)

# Rejoice O Barren Woman

- So, from the Genesis account, Paul makes *two* observations about the two families of Abraham as illustrated by these two sons:
- Abraham's two sons were different in *origin*:
  - Ishmael was born of a *slave* woman
  - Isaac was born of a *free* woman
- Abraham's two sons were different in the *circumstances of their birth*:
  - Ishmael was “*by natural descent*”: there was no miracle involved in his birth
  - Isaac was “*was born through the promise*” – that is, the birth God had promised came about through miraculous intervention (cf. Romans 9:8)

# Rejoice O Barren Woman

- Paul then goes on to draw an “*allegory*” or secondary understanding from the Genesis account:
- *These things may be treated as an **allegory**, for these [two] women represent two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai bearing children for slavery; this is Hagar. Now Hagar represents Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to **the present Jerusalem**, for she is in slavery with her children. But **the Jerusalem above** is free, and she is our mother. (Gal 4:24-26)*
- In this section Paul draws a contrast between:
  - Two Women
  - Two Covenants
  - Two Cities
  - Two Sets of Children



# Rejoice O Barren Woman

- Two Women:
  - Hagar
  - Sarah (not named, but is *clearly* implied)
- Two Covenants:
  - The Old Covenant made at “*Mount Sinai*” (cf. 2Cor 3:6-14; Hebrews 7-10)
  - The New Covenant – not named here, but implied (cf. Jer 31:31; Luke 22:20; 2Cor 3:6; Heb 8:8; 9:15; 12:24)
- Two Cities:
  - “*the present Jerusalem*” (= the center of Judaism in Paul’s day)
  - “*the Jerusalem above*” (= the heavenly Jerusalem, cf. Heb 12:22; Rev 3:12; 21:2,10)
- Two Sets of Children:
  - Those children who are “*in slavery*” (= the Jews in Paul’s day who are enslaved to the Law )
  - Those children who are “*free*” (= Christians like Paul and the Galatians who are free from the Law)

# Rejoice O Barren Woman

- With this allegory as background, Paul then gives his citation of Isaiah 54:1:
- *For it is written: “Rejoice, O barren woman who does not bear children; break forth and shout, you who have no birth pains, because the children of the desolate woman are more numerous than those of the woman who has a husband.”*
- This quotation from Isaiah picks up the idea of motherhood which was introduced in the preceding verse.
- The barren woman corresponds to Sarah, who had no child until late in her life.
- The woman who *“has a husband”* (by whom she has children) corresponds to Hagar.
- The point of the quotation is that Sarah, though barren most of her life, finally became (through Isaac) the mother of more children than Hagar.

# Rejoice O Barren Woman

- Applied spiritually, it means that in Paul's day the Christian community (symbolized by Sarah) was small and did not have the size and strength that Judaism (symbolized by Hagar) had.
- But it was destined for greater fruitfulness and glory in the future.

# Next Time

I plan to begin looking at a section entitled  
**“A City Restored”** (Isaiah 54:11-17)



# Class Discussion Time



## Class Discussion Time

- Our text today describes the people of God in a disgraced and barren condition being commanded to “shout for joy” because of the future hope that they now have as a result of the servant’s work on their behalf.
- As the people of God today living in a fallen world and in a nation that seems to be turning away from God more and more, is there a lesson here for *us*?
- Do we have reason to be *optimistic*, though the world around us seems to be collapsing?

## Class Discussion Time

- There are many believers today, even conservative, orthodox believers in the Reformed camp, that believe we are in some way still under the Law of Moses.
- And yet the Apostle Paul in his citation of Isaiah 54:1 in Galatians 4:27, stresses the fact that New Covenant believers are no longer under the Law of Moses.
- Can we learn something from this?