

Barren, Yet Fruitful
Isaiah 54:1-8

December 4, 2011

A. Introduction

1. Cultural and Historical Background^A

2. Contextual Background^B

3. New Testament Explanation^C

B. Her^D Enlarged Family 54:1-3

1. A Cause for Joy (1)^E

2. A Cause to Expand (2-3)^F

C. Her Desolation Forgotten 54:4-6

1. Her Shame Removed (4)

2. Her Marriage Restored (6)

3. Her Husband (5)^G

D. Briefly Forsaken, Forever a Bride 54:7-8

1. Her Short Sorrow (7a, 8a)

2. Her Eternal Glory (7b, 8b)^H

E. Conclusion

^A Genesis 15:2-4, Numbers 27:1-7

^B Isaiah 49:19-21, 53:5, 2 Chronicles 29:27

^C Galatians 4:26-28

^D Jerusalem & Zion, the Church

^E John 4:22, Matthew 23:15, Isaiah 53:10

^F Luke 14:16-24

^G Ephesians 5:25-32, Revelation 19:7-8, 21:2, Romans 3:29-30

^H Romans 12:26, 2 Corinthians 4:17

A. Introduction

1. Cultural and Historical Background

- a. in order to see the picture that is being drawn in the passage before us, let me attempt to describe this background
- b. first, in the OT, spiritual blessing was manifest in a material form, in possessions
 - (A) this is to be seen in the cases of such men as Abraham and Job, Kings David and Solomon
 - (B) as well as to the people of Israel as a nation
 - (C) that those who beheld these people, and this nation, should come to recognize that their God, Yahweh, was the one, true God
- c. second, that for the nation of Israel, the very special possession that marked them out was the land
 - (A) this was true for them collectively, as the land of promise, was their holy land, set apart for them by God
 - (B) and it was also true of them individually, as that land was divided – allotted – among them family by family by lot
- d. and third, having heirs was most important to a person
 - (A) so that these possessions, and particularly the family allotment – could be passed on down within the family
 - (B) thus the plea of the aging Abraham to God, in Genesis 15:2-3, '2 ¶ ... O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?... 3 ... Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.' and God's response, '...This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.' (Genesis 15:4)
 - (C) we find another illustration of this in Numbers 27:1-7, where the 5 daughters of Zelophehad, seek the portion of their now dead father, in order that his name be kept alive in the family of Manasseh
 - (D) you see, then, how important heirs were, and to have none was considered to be a cause of reproach and a mark of God's disfavour

2. Contextual Background

a. The last 27 chapters of Isaiah consist of comforting messages of salvation against the background of the prophecy of the captivity in Babylon

(A) the section from chapters 49 to 57 are central to these messages, foretelling the redemption of Jerusalem and Zion, the people of God

(B) and those chapters are divided in two parts by Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12, which we examined two Sundays ago

(1) in the preceding chapters the emphasis is on the physical redemption of the people from Babylon and repopulation of Jerusalem and Judah, as described in Isaiah 49:19-21, '19 For your waste and desolate places and your destroyed land— Surely now you will be too cramped for the inhabitants, ... 20 The children of whom you were bereaved will yet say in your ears, 'The place is too cramped for me; Make room for me that I may live here.' 21 Then you will say in your heart, 'Who has begotten these for me, Since I have been bereaved of my children And am barren, an exile and a wanderer? And who has reared these? Behold, I was left alone; From where did these come?'''

(2) but Isaiah 53 transforms the emphasis to the spiritual redemption of God's people, of all nations, from the bondage of sin by the sacrificial work of the suffering Servant, of Christ, that is, Messiah, on the cross: 'But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.' (Isaiah 53:5)

(C) today's passage begins 'Shout, or sing with a ringing cry, O barren one' arises directly from the message of chapter 53

(1) and so the principle given in 2 Chronicles 29:27 is carried out: '... When the burnt offering began, the song to the Lord also began ...'

(2) Christ's sacrifice complete, spiritual worship begins

(3) no longer in this section are Jerusalem or Zion mentioned by name, for the Holy Spirit in speaking through Isaiah has turned from the natural nation to the spiritual people of God; that this is evident can be seen in the ...

3. New Testament Explanation

- a. it is always good when you are preaching on the OT to have the NT explanation of that passage, because when you are given that, then you don't have to look at the guesses of man, but at the inspired application of the Holy Spirit.
- b. this we find in Galatians 4:26-28, [26 But the Jerusalem above \(represented by Sarah\) is free; she is our mother. 27 For it is written, "Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear; break forth and shout, you who are not in labour; for more numerous are the children of the desolate than of the one who has a husband." 28 And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.](#)
- c. so that although there may be incidental reference in these words to the repopulation of Jerusalem and Judah after the return from Babylon, these are illustrative only of a far greater work, when at Pentecost, in a day a new nation was born: it is the NT church being described here
- d. this is the true reason for songs of worship

B. Her Enlarged Family 54:1-3

1. A Cause for Joy – v 1 – [‘Shout for joy, O barren one, you who have borne no child; Break forth into joyful shouting and cry aloud, you who have not travailed; For the sons of the desolate one will be more numerous Than the sons of the married woman,’ says the Lord.](#)
 - a. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, [‘salvation is from the Jews’](#) (John 4:22), and with the death of Christ who is the ever-living One, that salvation came to pass: so rejoice!
 - b. Judaism as a religious practice had become barren, failing to produce new life – Jesus described it well in Matthew 23:15, [‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.’](#)
 - c. But the offspring of Christ, prophesied in Isaiah 53:10b, [‘... He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand.’](#) will far outnumber the nation of Israel while she was still accounted as the married wife of Jehovah living in His land; this is
2. A Cause to Expand – vv 2-3 – [‘2 Enlarge the place of your tent; Stretch out the curtains of your dwellings, spare not; Lengthen your cords And strengthen your pegs. 3 For you will spread abroad to the right and](#)

to the left. And your descendants will possess nations And will resettle the desolate cities.'

- a. in keeping with the implied reference to barren Sarah, the picture turns to the nomadic life that she and Abraham led
- b. the looking after the tent was under the wife's oversight
- c. when we gather as a church in someone's house, we can describe the place as bursting at the seams – if you lived in a tent this could be literally the case! Campbell, a missionary in southwest Africa described how at a tent meeting, the people pulled out the tent-pegs and stretched the canvas a yard or two in all directions, thus making room for more people to enter^{2}. – that's the picture here
- d. in Jesus' parable in Luke 14:16-24, where He described the gospel invitation as a feast to which some refused to come, that after the servant gathered the poor people of the city, he reported that 'yet there is room'; so the master, who represents Jesus says to him, 'And the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, so that my house may be filled.'
- e. no one will be excluded from the people of God on account of any lack or room; our Father's house has many mansions

C. Her Desolation Forgotten. 54:4-6

- 1. Her Shame Removed – v 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.'
 - a. I am told, and personally I find it true, that shame brings on us the greatest feeling of fear
 - b. Israel had reasons for shame, because of her rebellion from the days of her youth when God brought her out of Egypt until the time of the captivity, when it seemed as though her husband Yahweh were dead, and she abandoned
 - c. but sin is a shame to every one of us, and when we come to Jesus Christ for salvation, He removes it completely
- 2. Her Marriage Restored – v 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.'
 - a. this is a difficult verse both to translate and to understand

- b. but the general meaning is straightforward – even at such a time when Israel seems forsaken and abandoned, God reaches out to her to restore the fellowship with Himself – a restoration illustrated by her return to the land
- c. so also is the gospel: man’s fellowship with God was broken by sin, and God reached out in Christ to restore mankind to fellowship with Himself: by grace; through faith

3. Her Husband – v 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 (or, shall be) called the God of all the earth.’

- a. The OT shows Yahweh as the husband of His people Israel
- b. this picture is taken up in the NT with Christ, the Son of God as the husband of the bride, God’s people, the church
- c. the reason Israel can forget the shame of her sin and exile, the reason that believers can forget the shame of their sin
- d. is found in the nature of their Maker and Redeemer
- e. He is the Holy One; one who cannot countenance sin; who if He is satisfied in the sacrifice of Christ for our sins must really be satisfied; and so we have no further cause to fear
- f. by the act of redemption on the cross, God proves Himself to be, and to be recognized as, the God of all the earth
- g. the church of God is to be a testimony to all the world

D. Briefly Forsaken, Forever a Bride 54:7-8

1. Her Short Sorrow – vv 7a, 8a – ‘7a For a brief moment I forsook you, ... 8a In an outburst of anger I hid My face from you for a moment, ...’

- a. sin destroyed the marriage relationship between Yahweh and His people Israel – and so they were set aside
- b. sin destroyed the relationship that existed in the garden between man and His creator – so they were put out
- c. but in the light of eternity, these were but brief in God’s plan of eternal redemption, as compared with

2. Her Eternal Glory – vv 7b, 8b – ‘7b... But with great compassion I will gather you. 8b... But with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on you," Says the Lord your Redeemer.’
- a. has God forgotten Israel? no, the promise still remains as found in Romans 12:26, ‘and thus all Israel will be saved...’
 - b. when we face conflict and tribulation, has God forgotten His church? no, the promise still remains, ‘For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison’ (2 Corinthians 4:17)
 - c. and to this promise, God puts His own signature, with the words, ‘Says the Lord your Redeemer.’

E. Conclusion – our examination of this passage has been necessarily brief, but it is very clear that God has done everything necessary for salvation and restoration to fellowship of man with Himself, and God has given to us as believers this message to give to our world.

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
ERV	The Revised Version of 1885
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of my favourite commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

BM – Biblical Museum, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870

EBC – The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan

Volume 6, Isaiah, by Geoffrey W. Grogan, Principal, Bible Training Institute, Glasgow, Scotland;

EJY – The Book of Isaiah by Edward J. Young; © 1965; Wm. B. Eerdmans

K&D – Commentary on the Old Testament, by Keil & Delitzsch; Volume 7, Isaiah, by Franz Delitzsch

Kerux – The sermon and illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick to be found at the web-site, www.holwick.com.

2. Biblical Museum, *in loc*