

## Segment 9: Isaiah 54 & 55:1-5

“In ch. 54, ...the stress is on the wonder of God’s love for his people. In language similar to that of 26:1-3; 27:2-8; 29:22-24; and 30:23-32, Isaiah speaks of the amazing love of a God who is able to dispose of his righteous anger in a moment...and who glories in the wonderful opportunities to bless his people. The expansive language of vv. 1-3 and 11-17 is almost that of explosive relief. All of God’s cosmic desire to bless can finally be released...and it pours out in ways that only the most extravagant imagery can express.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Isaiah 54:1**

As with chapter 49:14ff, here again God speaks to Zion<sup>2</sup> using a number of metaphors. Zion is a barren woman who suddenly starts having children. While she lay in ruins, overgrown with weeds and languishing from neglect, she bore the shame of a barren woman. Barrenness in the ancient world was no minor matter, for a woman’s status depended in part on how many children she had. This theme appears frequently in the Bible: Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Elkanah and Hannah, and Zechariah and Elizabeth.

### **Verse 2**

In the ancient near east, women were responsible for erecting and maintaining the family tents. Now that she will have children, she needs to expand her living area—a task that she, no doubt, accomplishes with glee. In contrast to her former devastation (Jeremiah 10:20), Israel now establishes herself anew.

### **Verse 3**

This expansion was originally promised to Jacob when he dreamt at Bethel (Genesis 28:14). The phrase “(dis)possess nations” frequently referred to inheriting the land of Canaan in Deuteronomy (9:1; 11:23; 12:2; 31:3). The idea is one of returning to the land to reclaim both inhabited and forsaken cities.

### **Verse 4**

She will be so fruitful that she will forget her shame. She will hold her head high and enjoy a profusion of divine blessings.

### **Verses 5-6**

Although she once was like a forsaken wife, she will find reconciliation and restoration. This is like the story of Ruth and Boaz. She was a childless widow who had to glean the

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<sup>1</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1998), p. 414.

<sup>2</sup> Although the word “Zion” does not occur here, Paul applies Isaiah 54:1 in Galatians 4:27 to “Jerusalem above.”

edges of the fields to survive. Boaz redeemed her, erasing the shame and providing her with dignity and blessing.

### Verses 7-8

God's wrath passes in a moment, but His *chesed* endures forever. Translators struggle to express *chesed* in English (NASB = "lovingkindness"). However, *chesed* is at the core of God's character. It occurs 255 times in the Old Testament in the following distribution:



John Oswalt is helpful here:

"No single English word can encompass all the connotations of this Hebrew word, but its basic idea is of passionate loyalty, especially of a superior to an inferior. In its basic usage, it refers to the obligations of covenant, but in the biblical experience of God, it comes to express that loyalty which goes far beyond any legal obligation in a passionate concern for the well-being of the other. It is this that God has for his people, which expresses itself in 'grace,' 'mercy,' 'unfailing love,' 'kindness,' and several other similar English words."<sup>3</sup>

Although exiles living in Babylon for multiple generations may think God has forsaken them, or worse, that He was impotent to save, His *chesed* demands that He not give up on them. He made covenant promises and the seemingly end-of-the-world scenario that the captives endure is really just a detour on the road back to their promised land.

### Verses 9-10

*Chesed* is used parallel to covenant. The idea is that God's faithfulness and loyalty to His people are more steadfast than massive rocks and towering mountains.

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<sup>3</sup> Oswalt, p. 420.

**Verses 11-12**

The metaphor switches from a woman to a city. Both, of course, refer to the people of God who have just been redeemed from exile. This imagery bespeaks wealth and prosperity. (See also the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21:10-21.)

**Verses 13-14**

The blessings are not limited to prosperity but also encompass understanding God, peace (NASB = well-being), justice, and freedom from fear. What else could a people ask for?

**Verses 15-17**

People may still attack, but it is not because God has sent them as He did with Assyria and Babylon. The God who made the one who made the weapon can frustrate the endeavors of those who try to use weapons against His people. He is the God who vindicates.

**Isaiah 55:1-2**

It is difficult to plug these verses into a particular historical context. They must be metaphorical (John 4:14; 7:37-39) or eschatological (Revelation 21:6-7; 22:17) or both, since Israel never functioned on such communism (although the early church did in Acts 2:44-46; 4:32-34).

**Verses 3-4**

Since Israel already had a covenant with God (mediated by Moses), this “everlasting covenant” must be a new one. (See Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:7-13; 10:14-18.) That this is more likely a reference to the Davidic Messiah than David himself is shown by the apostle’s use of it in Acts 13:34. Paul sees in Isaiah 55:3 a reference to the resurrection of Jesus, the ultimate Davidic descendant. (See also Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14 as applied to Christ in Hebrews 1:5.)

**Verse 5**

That the Messiah would draw the nations unto himself is also predicted in Isaiah 2:3-4; 42:4; and 49:6. Jesus knew his death was required to draw all people to himself (John 12:32). This mystery of Gentile inclusion began to be understood when Philip preached to the Ethiopian and Peter converted the Italians. However, the theology and full outworking of the Davidic Messiah’s accomplishment would not be spelled out until Paul’s writings (e.g. Ephesians 2:10-19).

## Segment 10: Isaiah 55:6-13; 56:1-8

### **Seek Yahweh while He may be found**

Isaiah 55:6-7

Seek Yahweh while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near.

God is not hiding from His people, or moving away from His people; rather, sins cause mankind to run away and hide from God. This was true from the very first man – Adam (Gen 3:6-10). Is 59:1-2; 58:1-4; James 4:1-4

Seek Yahweh (Psalm 105:1-4; Matthew 7:7-11; Luke 11:9-13). Don't hide or run away from God; rather, turn to Him and be saved (Psalm 32:1ff; Isaiah 45:18-22). God is not hiding or running away from His people. He wants His people to seek Him, to put their trust in His forgiveness, salvation, and deliverance (2 Chronicles 16:7-9). "The eyes of Yahweh move to and fro throughout the whole earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His."

No one can be so far gone or so far away that God cannot "abundantly pardon." Remember King Manasseh (2 Kings 21:2-9; 2 Chronicles 33:10-13). God's abundant mercy and grace are beyond human understanding.

### **My ways are higher than your ways**

Isaiah 55:8-9

Great reverse parallel structure in these two verses:

- A. My thoughts are not your thoughts
- B. Nor are your ways My ways

***For as the heavens are higher than the earth, (Psalm 103:7-12)***

- B. So are My ways higher than your ways
- A. And My thoughts than your thoughts

### **My word will not return to Me empty.**

Isaiah 55:10-13

### **Blessed is the man that holds fast My covenant.**

Isaiah 56:1-8

In this section, to "keep" or "not profane the Sabbath" serves as the example of obedience to "hold fast My Covenant" (verses 2, 4, and 6). See Exodus 20:8-11; 31:13-

17; Isaiah 58:13; Ezekiel 20:20-21). The Sabbath was a sign between the nation of Israel and God that they would know that Yahweh sanctified them – a perpetual covenant.

According to the Law, the foreigner who had joined himself to the nation of Israel and the eunuchs were excluded from certain forms of worship, entering the assembly of Yahweh. (Exodus 12:43; Deuteronomy 23:1-3, 7-8). However, even these foreigners and eunuchs, if they “hold fast the covenant” and choose to love the name of Yahweh, they, too, will be part of God’s promised redemption and be brought to His holy mountain. They, too, will be able to enter God’s house of prayer for all the peoples. (Verse 7 is quoted in Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46.)

#### Verse 8

The Lord Yahweh will gather the dispersed of Israel (Isaiah 11:10-12); however, in this last gathering, “others will be gathered to those already gathered.” All nations, gentiles, foreigners will come and bow down (Isaiah 55:5; 60:3-14; 66:18-21). There would be “others” besides Israel (John 10:16).