Isaiah 54 (WEB)

1 Sing, barren, you who didn't bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who did not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, says Yahweh.
2 Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of your habitations; don't spare: lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes.
3 For you shall spread aboard on the right hand and on the left; and your seed shall possess the nations, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.
4 Don't be afraid; for you shall not be ashamed: neither be confounded; for you shall not be put to shame: for you shall forget the shame of your youth; and the reproach of your widowhood shall you remember no more.
5 For your Maker is your husband; Yahweh of Hosts is his name: and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; the God of the whole earth shall he be called.
6 For Yahweh has called you as a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, even a wife of youth, when she is cast off, says your God.
7 For a small moment have I forsaken you; but with great mercies will I gather you.
8 In overflowing wrath I hid my face from you for a moment; but with everlasting lovingkindness will I have mercy on you, says Yahweh your Redeemer.
9 For this is [as] the waters of Noah to me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I will not be angry with you, nor rebuke you.
10 For the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but my lovingkindness shall not depart from you, neither shall my covenant of peace be removed, says Yahweh who has mercy on you.
11 you afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will set your stones in beautiful colors, and lay your foundations with sapphires.
12 I will make your pinnacles of rubies, and your gates of emeralds, and all your border of precious stones.
13 All your children shall be taught of Yahweh; and great shall be the peace of your children.
14 In righteousness shall you be established: you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not be afraid; and from terror, for it shall not come near you.
15 Behold, they may gather together, but not by me: whoever shall gather together against you shall fall because of you.
16 Behold, I have created the smith who blows the fire of coals, and brings forth a weapon for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy.
17 No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of Yahweh, and their righteousness which is of me, says Yahweh.

Isaiah Chapter 54 immediately follows the Suffering Servant song of Chapter 53 as the middle portion of a 3 chapter promise.

In chapter 53 we saw that YHWH is sending a servant that will take the full punishment owed to the people that rebelled against YHWH - and through his suffering the relationship is healed, through his offering sin is conquered.
In chapter 54 the focus turns to the beneficiary of that grace: the errant people of God that are described as a barren bride.

Q1) Why does the author describe Israel as a barren bride and what might the significance be?

Q2) Who were the "children" supposed to be? What was the expectation?

Q3) What might this reveal about how YHWH thought of ancient Israel's faith?

Q4) Look at verse 4 - Why should Judah be afraid? They have already lost everything - what might they be afraid of at this point?

Q5) Verse 5: YHWH is "the Maker is Your husband", "YHWH of hosts is his name", "God of the whole Earth shall He be called" - What is the purpose of verses 5-8?

> Before Israel entered the promised land they just lost, Moses read the Law to them and made them promise to hold it sacred - reading it aloud publicly every seven years. He addressed their fear of the Canaanites with a memorable promise to the people & Joshua:
>
> Deuteronomy 31:8 NIV **"The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."**

Q6) How do we reconcile "I will never forsake you" with "for a small moment I have forsaken you"?

Deuteronomy 31 holds two things together:

1. **31:6–8, the promise.** God goes before his obedient people and will not abandon them in their mission. It is spoken to Joshua and Israel on the eve of the conquest.
2. **31:16–18, the warning.** If they turn to other gods, he will withdraw his protective presence for a time.

In Hebrews 13:1-11 BSB, we see interesting parallels to Isaiah 54 and Deuteronomy 31:

> **1Continue in brotherly love. 2Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. 3Remember those in prison as if you were bound with them, and those who are mistreated as if you were suffering with them.**
> **4Marriage should be honored by all and the marriage bed kept undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers.**

5Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, for God has said:
“Never will I leave you,
never will I forsake you.”a
6So we say with confidence:
“The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.
What can man do to me?”b
7Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. 8Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.
9Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace and not by foods of no value to those devoted to them. 10We have an altar from which those who serve at the tabernacle have no right to eat.
11Although the high priest brings the blood of animals into the Holy Place as a sacrifice for sin, the bodies are burned outside the camp. 12And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate, to sanctify the people by His own blood.
13Therefore let us go to Him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace He bore.
14For here we do not have a permanent city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

Note: In Hebrews the promise not to forsake isn't conditional.

The distinction is between two things:

- a **temporary withdrawal** of favor and protection, which really happened;
- a **final abandonment** of the covenant, which God never does.

Isaiah 54:7–8 states this distinction outright: a “small moment” of forsaking set against “everlasting loving kindness.”

Q7) How might verses 9-12 have sounded to a people in exile for their transgressions?

A modern reader takes jewels as luxury decoration. To an ancient Israelite, each stone in Isaiah 54:11–12 points to something specific. Read against the rest of Scripture, the jeweled city stops looking like bling and becomes four layered images.

1. A ruin reversed. Verse 11 addresses the city as “afflicted, storm-tossed, not comforted.” That is Jerusalem after 586 BC, a heap of broken stones. God’s answer is not just to rebuild the walls but to upgrade the rubble to gems. The reversal is the point: the materials of disgrace become the materials of glory.

2. A bride dressed for her wedding. The first line of verse 11 says God will set the city's stones in *puk*. That word is antimony, the black cosmetic women used to paint their eyes; Jezebel "painted her eyes" with *puk* in 2 Kings 9:30. In the same breath, the city is a woman wearing eye makeup and jewels.

That ties straight back to verses 1–10, where Zion is the wife taken back by her husband. Isaiah uses the same picture elsewhere: Zion wearing her returning children "like a bride's ornaments" (49:18), and "as a bride adorns herself with her jewels" (61:10). So the jewels are not random architecture. They are the restored wife's wedding finery, with God as the one dressing her.

3. God's own throne room (solid lexically; the connection is interpretation). The "sapphire" (*sappir*) of the foundations is almost certainly lapis lazuli, a deep blue stone. In Scripture that blue belongs to God's dwelling:

- (Exodus 24:10). At Sinai the elders saw "a pavement of sapphire" under God's feet
- (Ezekiel 1:26) Ezekiel's vision puts God's throne "like sapphire" .

A city founded on sapphire is built on the floor of heaven: God's presence is now its foundation.

4. The stones are people (this is how ancient readers took it). Verse 13 moves straight from stones to children: "All your children will be taught by the LORD." Hebrew readers noticed a near-pun here.

- "Your children" is *banayikh*.
- "Your builders" is *bonayikh*.
- The Talmud (Berakhot 64a) makes the play explicit: "Do not read your children [banayikh], but your builders [bonayikh]. Torah scholars are those who build peace for their generation." steinsaltz-center
- The Great Isaiah Scroll from Qumran shows the same reading: in that verse, the scribe inserted a vav into the word, over and between the bet and nun, turning "children" into "builders." Substack
- The Qumran community also wrote a commentary (4Q164) reading the foundation stones of 54:11–12 as the community's council of priests and people.

The New Testament carries the same idea forward:

- **1 Peter 2:5:** believers are "living stones" built into a spiritual house.
- **Ephesians 2:20:** the household of God is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.
- **Revelation 21:2, 14, 19–21:** the New Jerusalem comes down "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." Its twelve foundations carry the names of the twelve apostles, and they are adorned with precious stones.

John fuses exactly the images Isaiah 54 joins: bride, jewels, foundations, and people.

So the significance: the jeweled city is the forsaken wife, now a radiant bride. She is built upon God's own presence and made out of the people he has taught, so the gems are her children - the product of her union with YHWH..

Q8) Verse 13 speaks about Israel's children with her Husband (The Maker, YHWH of Hosts). are the recipients of Hebrews 13:7-8 those children? Is this the fulfillment or is something yet to come?

Q9) Verse 13 & 14 speak of Israel's children as being taught of YHWH, defined by peace, established in righteousness, and far from oppression, fear, and terror…What happened?

Q9b) Verse 13 says all the children will be "taught by the LORD." What does it look like for a whole community to be learners from God rather than from a few experts?

Q10) Verse 15-17 are often taken out of context to be used as encouragement…but they had an original context and meaning.

- "They may gather together" - Refers to enemies that assemble to threaten Israel.
- "But not by me" - YHWH has sent Assyria and Babylon to punish Israel in the past so there is precedent for this being an act of YHWH…but here the prophet denies future threats will be due to YHWH's wrath. The only conclusion is that enemies of YHWH also have the power to assemble threats.
- Verse 16&17 reinforce that YHWH is the maker of all - including those that make themselves enemies. YHWH will use his people to rebuke the wrath of his enemies.

Q11) Verse 17 is often quoted alone. How does reading verses 11–17 as a whole passage change what it means?

ISAIAH 55

1 “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters;
and you without money, come, buy, and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost!
2 Why spend money on that which is not bread,
and your labor on that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,
and your soul will delight in the richest of foods.
3 Incline your ear and come to Me; listen, so that your soul may live.
I will make with you an everlasting covenant—
My loving devotion promised to David.a

Acts 13:32-35

32 And now we proclaim to you the good news: What God promised our fathers
33 He has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the
second Psalm:

‘You are My Son;
today I have become Your Father.’ *c* [literally: I have begotten you]

34 In fact, God raised Him from the dead, never to see decay. As He has said:

‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.’ *d*

35 So also, He says in another Psalm:

‘You will not let Your Holy One see decay.’ *e*

How does one buy without money? How could we "buy" what is given without cost?

Note: Verse 2 is the diagnosis: people spending money and labor on what "doesn't satisfy." The verse names its own cure: "Listen diligently to me… come to me. Hear, and your soul will live" (vv. 2–3). What fails to satisfy is anything pursued in place of God himself. It is not ordinary work; Jeremiah 29:5–7 told these same exiles to build, plant, and seek Babylon's welfare. Compare Deuteronomy 8:3 and Jesus' likely echo in John 6:27: "Don't work for the food which perishes."

4 Behold, I have made him a witness to the nations,
a leader and commander of the peoples.
5 Surely you will summon a nation you do not know,
and nations who do not know you will run to you.
For the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel,
has bestowed glory on you.”

Q12) Who is the subject of verses 4 & 5?

6 Seek the LORD while He may be found;
call on Him while He is near.
7 Let the wicked man forsake his way
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the LORD,
that He may have compassion,
and to our God,
for He will freely pardon.
Q13) Verse 6 presents a time scarcity - an urgency. When does the deadline expire?

Q14) How does a wicked man forsake his way? How does an unrighteous man forsake his thoughts?

This verse talks about two distinct elements: a man's Way, and a man's thoughts.
True Repentance is BOTH: Outward & Inward

Q15) Why would God ever have compassion on the unrighteous?

8 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways My ways,”
declares the LORD.
9 “For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so My ways are higher than your ways
and My thoughts than your thoughts.
10 For just as rain and snow fall from heaven
and do not return without watering the earth,
making it bud and sprout,
and providing seed to sow and food to eat,
11 so My word that proceeds from My mouth
will not return to Me empty,
but it will accomplish what I please,
and it will prosper where I send it.

Q16) Do you take comfort in verses 8-11? Why?

Context matters for verses 8–9. "My thoughts are not your thoughts" is usually quoted to mean "God is mysterious and we cannot fathom Him" But in context it follows directly on "he will freely pardon" (v. 7). The first meaning is that God's willingness to forgive is higher than ours.

Q16b) Why is it so difficult for us to accept a gift that is truly free?

Q17) Do you think the exiles in Babylon were comforted?

12 You will indeed go out with joy
and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and hills will burst into song before you,
and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.
13 Instead of the thornbush, the cypressb will grow,
and instead of the brier, the myrtle will spring up;
this will make a name for the LORD,

an everlasting sign, never to be destroyed.”

Q18) What does it mean that the hills will burst forth in song and the trees will clap their hands?

Note: Isaiah used "briers and thorns" for the ruined vineyard of judgment (5:6; 7:23–25).

Here in chapter 55:13 cypress and myrtle replace them. Many Christian readers also hear an echo of the curse in Genesis 3:18.

Q19) How will this reversal make a name for YHWH?

Q20) What is your expectation when the prophet says "everlasting sign, never to be destroyed?"

Footnotes:

3 a Cited in Acts 13:34
13 b Or pine or juniper or fir