

“Sing, O Barren”

By Elder David Pyles

The 53rd and 54th chapters of Isaiah contain some of the most amazing prophecies in the Bible. They attest to the inspiration of the book, and confirm the Christian interpretation of it. Over 700 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, Isaiah prophesied in his 53rd chapter of the coming of a very special but intriguing man. Isaiah did not name the man, but said that:

- 1) He would be of unimpressive appearance and social standing.
- 2) This world would not be His proper habitat.
- 3) He would be rejected of Israel.
- 4) He would deliberately offer His life for the atonement of others.
- 5) He would be put on trial but would offer no defense for Himself.
- 6) He would be beaten with stripes.
- 7) He would be punished along with true criminals.
- 8) He would be killed.
- 9) His death would be accepted of God as atonement for many.
- 10) He would be buried in a rich man’s tomb.
- 11) The Lord would prolong His days (by resurrecting Him).
- 12) He would thereafter be elevated by God to greatness.

Many Christians are familiar with this chapter, and thousands have been put on a path to conversion after considering the power of its prophecies. However, not so many are aware of the 54th chapter even though it also is a remarkable prophecy.

This chapter speaks of a woman who was childless because she had become a widow in her youth. Proper understanding here requires knowledge of the marriage practices of the Jews. They considered an engagement (or betrothal) as legally binding. It could be terminated only by formal divorce. Accordingly, if a girl were to lose her fiancé in the period of engagement, she was counted as a widow. Such was the case with the woman here.

Now the 5th verse made an unexpected revelation as to the identity of her husband: *“For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called.”* So the husband she had lost to death was actually God Himself. Obviously, this would have been very difficult to explain in the times of Isaiah, but all would become very clear centuries later. Now the prophecy

commanded the woman to joyously sing because she would eventually have a great multitude of children, implying that her husband would rise from the dead. These children would include even Gentiles, and because of these, formerly desolate places would become inhabited.

Isaiah was much in the habit of speaking in symbolic language. Such was the case here. The woman represents the church of Jesus Christ and the covenant upon which it is established (Gal 4:21-27). The church is presented as being His bride, as is done elsewhere in the Bible (Mt 9:15, 25:1, Jn 3:29, Eph 5:25-33, Rev 19:7, 21:2). She became a widow when He died on the cross. The woman's children represent converts to Christianity. There were none of these in the earliest eras of the earth even though the marriage covenant between Christ and His church had been established even before the world was created (2Tim 1:8-10, Tit 1:1-3). However, since the resurrection of her husband, her children have multiplied to millions, especially among the Gentiles. The “*desolate places*” are places in the world that were formerly destitute of religious truth, but are now occupied by her converted Gentile children.

So we see that Isaiah 53 and 54 are really both part of the same story. The first chapter is about the suffering but victorious groom, and the second is about the suffering but victorious the bride.

God then makes promises to His church that should move any sensible person to desire it and fully commit themselves to it:

For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee. – 54:10

No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord. – 54:17

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