

## “MY COVENANT OF PEACE”

Isaiah 54:1–17

Key Verse: 54:10

“For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,’ says the LORD, who has compassion on you.”

Would you like to have peace? Most of us would say, “Yes, please.” But what is peace? Partly it means wars and conflicts ending. But peace is also a condition of mind, heart, and soul. The Bible promises that the birth of Jesus brings peace.<sup>1</sup> Yet Jesus himself warned that in this world we’ll have “tribulation”—which means pressure, affliction and distress (John 16:33). In fact, in real life it’s easy to lose our inner peace. We get upset, or stressed out, or hurt, or afraid, or we start feeling guilty about something. We can’t sleep well and feel overwhelmed. We become like this even when outwardly we’re doing all the right things. What so many of us need most is peace. So, how does Jesus’ coming give us peace? Today we’re looking at Isaiah 54. It’s about God’s covenant of peace that can never be removed. This prophecy was fulfilled through the coming of Jesus. What is this “covenant of peace,” and how can we experience it? May God speak to us through his word today.

As we read Isaiah 54, we find that the whole chapter describes a woman. // What kind of woman is she? First of all, in verse 1 she’s barren and has never been in labor. On top of that, in verse 4 she’s experienced the shame and disgrace of a young widow. Verse 6 says she’s like a woman deserted and grieved in spirit, like a young wife who’s been cast off. In fact, in verses 8 and 9 God himself has been angry with her and rebuked her. In verse 11 she’s afflicted, storm-tossed and not comforted. In verse 15 people stir up strife with her, and in verse 17 they speak against her. What a nightmare she’s been through!

Who is God talking about here? He’s speaking to his own people, whom he sent into Babylonian exile due to their sins. They’ve been through some of the most traumatic things imaginable. But this passage is not just for people in extreme circumstances. The woman in it represents all those who suffer the consequences of sin in any way. To certain people, life can seem like “a series of unfortunate events,” a dark comedy of moral

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 1:79; 2:14

relativism.<sup>2</sup> Of course, life is not always black and white; bad things don't happen just because we did something wrong (cf. John 9:3). But hardships do befall us if we've been rebelling against God. It happens when we refuse to listen to God, and when we knowingly violate his moral standards. Sooner or later we suffer, maybe not outwardly, but definitely inwardly. We do our best to put on a good show, but shame, fear, guilt, condemnation, insecurity and a sense of failure begin gnawing at our soul. No matter how clever we may be, we become restless, anxious, and have no peace.

But notice how God speaks to the woman throughout this chapter. In verses 1–3 he tells her to sing, to enlarge the place of her tent, and that she will have so many offspring they'll possess the nations and many desolate places. In verses 4–5 he promises she's going to forget all her shame and disgrace, because he's her Maker, her husband, her Redeemer. In verses 6–8 he says he's disciplined her only for a moment, then reassures her that he's called her and will have compassion on her.

/// In verses 9–10 he swears to her his steadfast love and eternal covenant of peace. In verses 11–12 he promises her an eternal dwelling place of beautiful, precious jewels. In verses 13–14 he promises to teach her children and give them great peace, and to establish her in righteousness and protect her from all fear. In verses 15–17 he even promises to protect her from all who stir up strife with her and speak against her. These promises seem too good to be true! They were partially fulfilled when God brought his people out of exile.

But these promises are fulfilled most fully in Jesus. As Paul interpreted Isaiah 54:1, by faith in God's promise we're all members of the new covenant in Jesus, God's true children living in freedom.<sup>3</sup> In our sin we were "barren" and spiritually "desolate," but God by his grace makes us fruitful and influential; he even gives us the vision to spread our spiritual offspring all over the world (1–3). Jesus is our true Husband, our Bridegroom who makes us fruitful, and our Redeemer, who gave himself to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify us to belong to Him.<sup>4</sup> He's the real expression of God's "everlasting love" (verse 8b) for us. He "establishes us in righteousness" (verse 14a) because// he himself became our "righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). He promises us real security in the beautiful heavenly city, the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:18–21). Until we get there, he's our Advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1), // who gives us wisdom that none of our adversaries can withstand or contradict (Luke 21:15).

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<sup>2</sup> *A Series of Unfortunate Events* is a series of thirteen children's novels written by American author Daniel Handler under the pen name Lemony Snicket. It was turned into three seasons of a TV series and a movie. Sadly, it is well-known as "a dark comedy of moral relativism" (*Wikipedia*).

<sup>3</sup> Verse 1; cf. Gal. 4:21–31

<sup>4</sup> Verse 5; cf. John 3:29; 4:26; 15:5; Titus 2:14; the Book of Isaiah describes God as our "Redeemer 13 times (41:14; 43:14; 44:6,24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7,26; 54:5,8; 59:20; 60:16; 63:16)

Today's chapter climaxes in verse 10. Let's read it. "For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you." This covenant of peace is at the essence of having a real relationship with God. In this context, it's as though God is renewing his marriage vows with his people. It's like the everlasting covenant God made after the flood in Noah's day.<sup>5</sup> God says here that his covenant of peace is more permanent than even the mountains and hills. Later God urges us: "Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David" (55:3). Once again God mentions his "steadfast love" toward sinful, unworthy people. It's what makes his covenant possible. We fail over and over again, but God's love for us is steadfast, unyielding.

Usually we think of a covenant as a kind of contract between two parties. But Isaiah adds something unusual about this "covenant of peace." In the first "Servant Song" God tells his Servant, "I will give *you* as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations..." (42:6b); in the second song God repeats it: "I will keep you and will give *you* as a covenant to the people..." (49:8b). The Servant of the Lord himself *becomes* the covenant of peace. Earlier, Isaiah writes: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end..." (9:6–7a). This is a prophecy of the birth of Jesus our true King, our Prince of Peace. One day he will spread his peace among all the nations. Isaiah tells us that when we receive Jesus as our King, he will pour his Spirit upon us from on high and bring us his righteousness, which will produce in us peace and quietness and trust forever.<sup>6</sup>

The key to God's covenant of peace is what Jesus the Servant of the Lord did for us. Isaiah writes, "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed" (53:5). Jesus brought us peace through his death on the cross. His covenant of peace costs us nothing, but it was so costly to God. Apostle Paul tells us: "For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility...that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to those who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to

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<sup>5</sup> Verse 9; see Gen.9:8–17

<sup>6</sup> 32:1,15–17

the Father” (Eph.2:14–18). Jesus himself, who gave his own body on the cross to bring us to God, is our peace. He’s able to reconcile us to the Holy God. He helps us abide in his peace through the Holy Spirit. He’s also able to reconcile us to one another, no matter what kind of hostility we might have between us.

So how can we experience his peace? It’s not about just saying the sinner’s prayer, or keeping some religious rituals, or ticking off a checklist of seemingly spiritual activities. The Bible says if we receive God’s grace by faith in Jesus, we have peace with God (Rom.5:1). Then, each day, if we choose to set our mind on the Spirit, we have life and peace (Rom.8:6). And as we learn to walk by the Spirit and be led by the Spirit, we keep growing in the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, *peace*, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.<sup>7</sup> We need to remember that Jesus came to give us such a beautiful life of inner peace. By coming to his cross daily and asking him for his Spirit, he renews God’s peace in our soul.

Isaiah goes on to say one more thing about this covenant of peace. Read verse 13. “All your children will be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your children.” These words might be the deepest comfort to any parent. Honestly, one of our greatest anxieties is what might happen to our children or grandchildren. But instead of worrying, we need to stay close to Jesus in this covenant of peace that only he gives. He’s the one who can teach our descendants, and when he does, he gives them this same “great peace.” It’s his promise not only for physical but also for spiritual children. We need to give our children and Bible students the influence of God’s peace, and depend on God himself to teach them to come to Jesus (cf. John 6:45).

How does God’s peace in Jesus impact our lives? It doesn’t mean that we just sit down and do nothing. The end of the Book of Hebrews blesses us with some powerful words: “Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Heb.13:20–21). Our Lord Jesus, our Great Shepherd, came to this world and shed his blood to give us an eternal covenant with the God of peace. What great news it is! When he does so, he equips us with everything good to do his will and works in us what is pleasing in his sight. With his peace in our souls, we can work hard for his glory in all that we do every day.

It’s well-known that the times we live in are sorely lacking peace. There are many theories as to why so many people have no peace. Some say it’s due to media information overload. Some say it’s because people have so many broken relationships and so many

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<sup>7</sup> Gal.5:16,18,22–23a

hidden grudges. Some say it's because people have such low self-esteem and so many self-destructive bad habits. All of this may be true to some degree. But the root problem seems to be that people are cut off from God our Maker. Even many who profess faith in Christ are not really close to him in their practical lives. We can't find peace in our feelings. We can't find peace in people or traditions or material things or entertainment or music or pleasure or drugs and alcohol. We can find peace only in Jesus. He himself is God's covenant of peace with us. He alone can heal our afflicted, storm-tossed soul. This Christmas may God help us to deeply experience his covenant of peace with us in Jesus. In this beautiful peace in Jesus, may he help us serve him wholeheartedly in the new year according to his will, and for his glory.