

chapters 41 to 53, have come to see more and more clearly that the essential question is not captivity to Babylon, but captivity to sin, and to feel their consequent inability to carry out the glorious world-wide mission assigned to the Servant of the Lord. This phrase, "Servant of the LORD" does not occur after Isaiah 53; in later chapters the prophet speaks instead of "servants of the LORD," as he tells how the followers of God's true Servant are to enjoy the fruits of His accomplishment and yield themselves as instruments to do His bidding.

When these people were driven into exile they would tend to feel desolate and abandoned, and during the subsequent years, as the exile continued, these feelings would be intensified. In chapter 54 God gives His suffering people words of joy and encouragement, based on the results of the work of the Servant.

The chapter is divisible into three parts. Verses 1-5 call on the people to rejoice because of the great increase which is to come to them. Verses 6-10 stress the permanence of the blessing God has in store for them. Verses 11-17 picture the stability of their future condition. In this chapter the people are addressed collectively as a unit.

In verse 1 the people is called "barren" because of its inability to carry out the world-wide mission, but it is told to sing and rejoice because "more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife." They who seemed doomed to ineffectiveness and sterility are assured that God will use them to accomplish a greater work than was possible even in the days when David reigned in Jerusalem and God seemed truly to be married to His people.

The next two verses dwell on the extension of the people, as the influence goes out to the right and to the left, and distant nations and desolate cities become centers of the true people of God. The figure of the tent in verse 2 is peculiarly appropriate to a description of God's blessing upon His people during their pilgrimage journey. A similar figure was used in chapter 4. There it was God's protection that was stressed; here it is their extension and widening influence. William Carey used this verse as his text in his famous sermon, as he urged his hearers to send the Gospel to the people of India. In the light of the context it is clear that he