

ISAIAH

ISAIAH 54:1-3, FILL THE LAND!

The Suffering Servant song was about Israel's Redeemer. Next, in chapter 54, God, through the prophet Isaiah, turns His attention to the redeemed. The nation will be redeemed, and it will be a nation of redeemed Israelites. Although, the nation has yet to be redeemed, these verses concerning Israel's redemption are written to give the Israelites hope that their Messianic Kingdom promises will be fulfilled. The Kingdom has not been inaugurated yet, but some Israelites have been and continue to be saved who are then counted among the believing remnant. Once the nation is redeemed, the Messianic Kingdom will be inaugurated which will be a time when the nation, composed entirely of the believing remnant and the resurrected Old Testament saints, enjoys all the covenanted promises God made to them long ago.

Here is a good summary of what is going on in Isaiah 54. "The hearers are called to sing for joy, to expand their tents, and to live in confidence. For what reason? Because the childless, rejected wife is going to be restored to the arms of her loving husband, who promises that nothing can prevent him from loving her, and she will have enough children to fill the earth. Here indeed is cause for praise: abundance for emptiness, honor for shame, and eternal love for lonely despair" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 415].

According to the New Covenant, from the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom and going forward for the remainder of Israel's national history before the eternal state, all Israelites will become believers.

Jeremiah 31:33-34 ³³"But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴"They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

The revelation contained here in Isaiah 54 is all about the future when Israel is finally and completely redeemed. Isaiah 55 reveals a worldwide call to mankind to accept the Free Grace offer of God to come to Him and have life. These two chapters are parallel to Isaiah 40:1-42:17 where the revelation of the redemption of Israel is followed by the redemption of mankind and worldwide blessing. Once again, some theologians claim that Isaiah 54 is a picture of Israel after Cyrus released them from the Babylonian captivity, but also once again, the facts revealed here do not fit the facts revealed in Ezra and Nehemiah. This is clearly end times revelation. "After portraying the majestic person and redemptive work of the Servant-Redeemer (52:13-53:12), the prophet resumed His message concerning Israel when it turns to the Messiah at His second Advent and appropriates His redemptive work" [Merrill F. Unger, "Isaiah" in *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1301].

I do want to make you aware that some theologians believe that Isaiah 55 is still dealing with Israel and not with mankind in general. "The prophet begins by describing the promise of salvation (54:1-17) and then will invite Israel to receive it (55:1-13)" [Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer, "Isaiah" in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, 1091]. I favor the view that Isaiah 55 is a call to worldwide justification salvation, and I will explain that when we get to the next chapter.

The restoration of Israel set before us in these Scriptures is metaphorically related to the restoration of a broken marriage. "The image in this chapter is that of Jehovah, the faithful husband, forgiving Israel, the unfaithful wife, and restoring her to the place of blessing.... The nation was 'married' to Jehovah at Mt. Sinai, but she committed adultery by turning to other gods, and the Lord had to abandon her temporarily. However, the prophets promise that Israel will be restored when Messiah comes and establishes His kingdom" [Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Prophets*, 62].

Marriage is a biblical metaphor used to reveal truths concerning God's relationship with Israel in the Old Testament, and, in the New Testament, the relationship between Christ Jesus and the Church (Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:7-8). In the Old Testament, Isaiah uses it in 54:1-8, and 62:4. Jeremiah refers to it in 3:8, Ezekiel in chapters 16 and 23, and in the book of Hosea this marriage metaphor describes the relationship between Yahweh and unfaithful but ultimately restored Israel, His wife.

Constable suggested that because the name Zion, which represents Israel, is not found in this chapter, it is applicable to mankind and not just to Israel. He bases this assertion on the fact that mankind's salvation, not just Zion's, is part of the Suffering Servant song [cf. Thomas L. Constable, "Isaiah" in *Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible, Volume IV: Isaiah-Daniel*, 4:157]. That is true, but the Suffering Servant song is specifically concerned about Zion, or Israel, and is applied worldwide by means of the four references to "the many." In this chapter of Isaiah, Zion is clearly the subject, although unstated, and "the many" do not become part of the context until Isaiah 55. It is true that the word "Zion" as the personification of Israel is absent from Isaiah's writing from Isaiah 52:8 to 59:20, and it is true that all of what has been revealed concerning redemption is applicable to mankind (cf. Isaiah 52:14-15; 53:11-12), but whether or not each part of these Scriptures is related to Israel, to mankind in general, or to both must be determined by the immediate context.

Context determines meaning in any given Scripture, and application is a broader principle that flows from the meaning, arrived at in conjunction with a systematic understanding of the issues in question. In this case, the application is the truth that the justification salvation secured by the Suffering Servant is specifically for Israel, but available to mankind in total which is revealed by its application to the "many." In Isaiah 54; however, the immediate context only concerns Israel and the nation's life as it will be lived in the Messianic Kingdom.

Application can only be formulated based on an accurate interpretation of the Scriptures. Once the interpretation is properly completed based on the original languages, the meaning is ascertained according to dispensational distinctions and the properly applied principles of literal hermeneutics. Are there biblical and theological principles

revealed in the text, and for whom are they applicable? Are they applicable to Israel and the Israelites, the church and the body of Christ, mankind in general, or a combination of all of them? How is this principle revealed and what does it mean in other places in the Word of God? How does that factor into application? The truth being presented in Isaiah 54 is the realization of the covenant promises Yahweh revealed to Israel; it is not about the Church, and it is not about the availability of justification salvation for mankind. The question is does a plain reading of Isaiah 54 allow for an application beyond the meaning that life for Israel in the Messianic Kingdom is the subject? The answer has to be "no."

Oswalt fell into the same trap, which is confusing application with meaning, and making them the same; they are not. We cannot read application, no matter how truthful it is, back into a text, when it is not part of the text. "Now it is the people of God personified as a woman. It is probably not coincidental that while the term 'Zion' occurs 8 times between 49:14 and 52:8, it does not occur again until 59:20. This suggests that the prophet is consciously resisting the limitation of the implications of God's forgiving grace that would result from the use of that term here. To be sure, the imagery is that which has been previously applied to Zion. But the absence of that term here when it had been used frequently immediately before suggest that, because of the work of the Servant, all who feel barren and dejected and alone as a result of their sins have reason to shout for joy now. All, Gentiles and Jews alike, may become the blessed people of God" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 415]. In Isaiah 54, the reality of saved Israel living life in the Messianic Kingdom as promised in the covenants is the context. We cannot force the availability of justification salvation for all, no matter how truthful it is, into this text. That truth will be part of Isaiah 55. The word "Zion" may not be in these verses, but the revelation that this is about Zion without specifically naming Zion is quite clear.

One other error in the interpretation of these verses is the fruit of replacement theology and amillennial eschatology. Amillennialists cannot understand Messianic Kingdom prophecies because they do not believe there will be a literal Messianic Kingdom in which Israel will inherit her covenant promises. Placing the church in these verses obviously eliminates any possibility of understanding God's plan for Israel in terms of fulfilling His plan for history which includes mankind in general, the Messianic Kingdom and Israel, along with the Church, but separate and distinct from Israel. All four are part of God's plan for history; the Church does not replace Israel in any way.

"In chapter fifty-three the work of redemption is described as spiritual. In the present chapter, therefore, the prophet turns to the redeemed ones, the Church, and speaks of its glorious exaltation. From this point on through chapter fifty-seven, i.e., to the conclusion of the second part of this larger section of the prophecy (40-66), the people are no longer addressed as Zion or Jerusalem. The names of the city, which figuratively had represented the Church, are now removed; and the prophet speaks of the spiritual glory that awaits God's people. By coming to the Church, Isaiah causes us to understand more deeply the value and efficacy of the servant's atoning work. The sufferings of the servant were for the Church, his body, and not for himself" [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 3, 3:360]. This kind of teaching inflicts an incredible amount of damage to the Word of God and spiritual harm to those who believe this false teaching. It is

completely false. Anyone trying to learn God's plan for history is led astray by teachers such as Young who shatter the plan of God for Israel and turn it into falsehoods not based on biblical revelation, but based instead on unbiblical theological systems.

Isaiah 54:1 ¹ "Shout for joy [רִנְּנוּ], O barren [עֲקָרָה] one, you who have borne [יָלַדְתְּ] no *child*; Break forth into joyful shouting [רִנְּנָה] and cry aloud [צִהַלְתְּ], you who have not travailed [הָיִלְתְּ]; For the sons of the desolate [שְׁמָמָה] one *will be* more numerous Than the sons of the married woman," says the LORD.

Shouting for joy, joyful shouting, and crying aloud are all words describing the joy the Israelites are going to express when these things finally transpire and the nation is saved to enter the Kingdom.

Shout for joy, רִנְּנוּ, means to give a ringing cry and to shout or sing for joy. It refers to making loud public melodic and rhythmic words with a focus on the joy being expressed. The sense of the word is the production of a song with the voice as a response of joy. Throughout the Old Testament, this word is used to express the joy Israel expressed at various times in response to God's saving acts on the nations' behalf. The verb is primarily used to express joy towards God.

Joyful shouting, רִנְּנָה, means a ringing cry, a cry of jubilation, and rejoicing relating to the expression of a joyful state. The sense is one of exultation represented by the utterance of sounds expressing great joy. This word is quite close to the meaning of רִנְּנוּ translated "shout for joy."

Cry aloud, צִהַלְתְּ, means to cry shrilly, to shout or cry out, and yell referring to making a relatively loud noise either in pain or joy and with or without verbal content. It has the sense of shouting or crying out by uttering a sudden, loud cry.

We can only imagine the joy that will be expressed by the Israelites when this prophecy is finally fulfilled at the Second Coming and the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom. At some point, the Israelites react to the change in their situation, and their reaction will be one of great joy. They are going to experience a miraculous deliverance the end result of which will be both national physical salvation and national spiritual salvation. All three of these verbs are in the form of a command, although I'm not so certain that at that point that any command to be joyful will be necessary.

In the middle of these expressions of joy, we have the picture of a barren woman who is childless. This is obviously used as a figure of speech, but just what is it revealing? The nation is pictured as a barren woman who has been put away for unfaithfulness, the result of which is no children.

The state of being barren has played a significant role in the history of Israel, and that condition was instrumental in providing the opportunity for God's supernatural intervention in the lives of individual people in order to establish the nation and further His plan for history. Sarah, the mother of Isaac, was barren (Gen. 11:30); Rebecca, the mother of Jacob, was barren (Gen. 25:21); Rachel, the mother of Joseph, was barren (Gen. 29:31); Manoh's wife, the mother of Samson was barren (Judges 13:1-7, 24); Hannah, the

mother of the prophet Samuel, was barren (1 Sam. 1:5-6); and in the New Testament Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, was barren (Luke 1:7).

Barren, עָקָר, means infertile, sterile, or barren with no descendants referring to being sexually infertile and so not able to inseminate a female, or, in the case of a woman, not able to bear children. "It refers to the state of not being fertile, not being able to become pregnant. God is often mentioned as the one who brought about this condition and/or the one who overcomes it" [Baker & Carpenter, s.v. "עָקָר," *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, 865]. Fertility leading to population growth was one of the blessings God promised Israel for covenant faithfulness (Lv. 26:9; Dt. 28:4, 11). If the nation had been faithful, barrenness among the Israelites would not have been an issue. God promised them that once they settled the land, no one would be barren (Ex. 23:26; Dt. 7:14).

However, the issue in this verse is not the infertility of an individual; it is the barren state of the nation. Israel rebelled against God and never fulfilled her divine mandate to be God's "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). The nation was spiritually barren and unproductive. That is a state that will not change until the time period comes that this Scripture is revealing.

We know that the Israelites had children, yet this verse says they had "borne no child" and had "not travailed;" therefore, the metaphor of childbirth must be relating to spiritual issues. These are perfect verbs which indicate completed action from the standpoint of the writer whether the completion refers to past, present, or future. The nation was not then and continues to the present day not completing the spiritual task that was set before it. Nothing is impossible for God; therefore, He will see to it that these things come to pass. The verse ends with "says the LORD," which is a statement of certainty. If God says it, it must come to pass.

Borne, יָלַד, means to bear or give birth to, to beget as a reference having a child. The picture is that of a female being pregnant with a child and that pregnancy culminating in the birth of that offspring.

Travail, חָיִל, in this context, is referring to the labor of childbirth, that is, the effort expended in bringing forth the birth of the baby. Elements of travail include pain, agony and sorrow. The sense of the word refers to writhing in labor pains.

The sense is that the nation is not engaged in doing the will of God, which, if it was doing God's will, would result in the birth of spiritual children. "Although she has no expectation of having children at the present time because she was not in a close relationship with God her husband, God predicts a change 'because' in the future the children of the woman who is presently desolate and alone will number 'many' more than the children of the married woman. These children are spiritual children in an eschatological era ..., for at that time these people will acknowledge God and will be taught by God himself" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*, 477-478]. Some theologians believe this reference to the numerous children of the desolate one is the believing remnant that is going to inherit the Messianic Kingdom "The returning exiles from all the corners of the earth will be more

in number than the children of Zion before her dispersion" [Victor Buksbazen, *The Prophet Isaiah: A Commentary*, 425]. I do not think this is a tenable understanding of the situation at the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom. The Jewish population of the world is quite small now, and it will be reduced by two-thirds during the Tribulation. They will produce many offspring during the Kingdom, and they will be responsible for showing God to the world once the Kingdom begins thus begetting many spiritual children which seems to be the point of this Scripture.

At some point in the future, Israel will be faithful to do the will of God and execute the assignment He appointed them to do so very many years ago.

The reference to the "married woman" here is unclear. There is no identifying name or other indication of her identity. Some theologians believe this is a general truth that Israel, the desolate one, will become astonishingly fruitful at some point in the future in contrast to a married woman who might be expected to have many children. Others see the "married woman" as a contrast between the Israel that was the spouse of Yahweh, and the Israel that has been put out and divinely disciplined in various ways including dispersion and exile [cf. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Isaiah*, vol. 7, 7:525]. I think the most likely way to view the "married woman" is in light of the story of Abraham and Hagar (Gen. 16:1-6) which Paul later used as an application for New Testament truth. The married woman is one who was able to conceive and bear children, represented by Hagar, while the barren woman was also married, represented by Sarah, but unable to conceive [cf. Robert N. Wilkin, "Galatians" in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, rev. ed., 414].

At this time, Israel is a desolate nation. Desolate, *עָרֵב*, is a strong, unpleasant word meaning to be desolate, devastated, destitute, laid waste, ravaged, ruined, or deserted referring to being in a destroyed and ruined state implying the object or area destroyed is now abandoned from all help, deserted, or in personal poverty. It may also mean to be astonished and appalled and, while some lexicons assign this meaning to it for this verse, I think the first meaning is closer to describing the state of Israel throughout the nation's history. All of these things have happened to them one way or another. This is even more related to the spiritual condition of the nation which has been devastated from the very beginning. At any one point in time in the nation's history, beginning shortly after the conquest of the land began (cf. Judges), Israel has had only a small believing remnant. That is all going to change at some point in the future.

"The one who is *barren* (i.e., without ability to have a child), who *never bore* (without a child in fact), and who is *desolate* (without a chance to conceive since she is without a husband's care), will actually have more children than one who has a husband. There is no natural explanation for this fertility" [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 340].

This verse was quoted by Paul in Galatians 4:27. Paul used it to demonstrate that there is a difference between physical seed that is in bondage and spiritual seed who are truly free. "The quotation from Isaiah 54:1 prophesied the changing fortunes of Israel, which Paul applied to Sarah's history. Israel before her Babylonian Captivity was likened to a woman with a husband. The barren woman was Israel in Captivity. The woman bearing

... children may have pictured Israel restored to the land after the Exile, but more particularly it portrays her millennial blessings. Paul applied this passage (he did not claim it was fulfilled) in this context to Sarah, who though previously barren, was later blessed with a child, and who would ultimately enjoy a greater progeny than Hagar" [Donald K. Campbell, "Galatians" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 604]. I would suggest that Israel in the Babylonian captivity was only a type of the barren woman which is found in the *Diaspora* that began in AD 70 and will last into the Tribulation.

The next two verses are promises that the numerous sons will spread out across the land and even control other nations.

Isaiah 54:2 ²"Enlarge [רָחַב] the place [מְקוֹם] of your tent; Stretch out [נָטְהָ] the curtains [רִיטוּעַ] of your dwellings [מִשְׁכָּנֶיךָ], spare [תִּשְׁדָּךְ] not; Lengthen [אָרְבֵךְ] your cords And strengthen [תְּזַקֵּךְ] your pegs.

The point being made here is that the nation is going to grow so large that the people will need a lot of room in order to spread out in such a way that the area will accommodate all of them. This truth can only begin to be fulfilled when the Messianic Kingdom is inaugurated. The metaphor of a tent, obviously something very common in the Middle East, is used to express this truth.

A number of theologians express the thought that women were responsible for erecting tents in the nomadic cultures of the Middle East. Presumably, that would have been the situation with the Israelites during their wilderness wanderings, but after that the Israelites generally lived in permanent dwelling places. I am not familiar with tent erecting protocol in that time and place, but, if this was the practice, it fits with the metaphor of a barren woman having so many children that she would need to enlarge her living arrangements.

"Women were responsible to erect and maintain the family tents in the ancient Near East, so it was appropriate for the Lord to call this formerly barren woman to enlarge her tent. She should prepare for a larger family with urgency and exuberance. The figure is an old one reaching back into the patriarchal period of Israel's history and the wilderness wanderings. Most Israelites did not live in tents in Isaiah's day. This type of living recalls, therefore, the Lord's faithfulness to the patriarchs in fulfilling His promises to them, and to the Israelites, in bringing them into the Promised Land" [Thomas L. Constable, "Isaiah" in *Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible, Volume IV: Isaiah-Daniel*, 158]. If that is correct, then God is saying that He protected the nation in the wilderness and restored them after losing an entire generation. If that was true then, it is still true now. Despite all the terrible things that have and will be done to Israel throughout the nation's history, they will one day be restored such that this verse will be completely fulfilled.

There are five verbs in this verse, all of them are commands, that relate to the idea that a great deal of space couched in the metaphor of making one's tent larger which would be needed to accommodate all the descendants that would eventually be the progeny of this barren woman and who would need to be housed in Zion. Zion is not named here, but it is clear that Israel or Zion is the focus of the revelation. The Israelites should find this prophecy comforting.

“The initial imperatives encourage the listener to be optimistic in the expansion of the tent. ‘Make it wide’ and ‘stretch it out’ encourage the woman to not be shortsighted or pessimistic about how many children will be added and how much space will be needed. She is not to hold back her imagination in dreaming just how big the tent might need to be” [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*, 478].

Enlarge, רָחַב, means to enlarge, to broaden, to make or open wide referring to being in a state of a spatial dimension which is relatively broad and wide often implying adequate room to move and so have a greater ease of life. The sense is simply one of making larger. This word is a command to the barren woman to cause to provide more space for people, “... you enlarge ...”.

The first thing that needs to be accomplished is to provide enough space for a larger tent. Place, מְקוֹם, is simply a place or a site referring to a spatial area of any size whether inside or outside. The sense is that of a particular portion of space occupied by something possibly including the general vicinity of the object as well.

Enlarging refers to the space occupied by the people's dwellings, and stretching out refers to the enlargement of the dwelling itself.

Stretch out, נָטַח, means to stretch out, spread out, or extend referring to spreading out, i.e., to make a non-linear motion of an object covering an ever-larger area that is extending out from a source. It means to gain space or territory especially as a result of the work of the Lord. The sense is that of fullness by spreading out a single object to its full extent. The NASB translation makes it sound as though to “stretch out” is a strong command, but it is more of a request than a command. It is a jussive verb form which should be translated “let them stretch out ...” which is the most common way to translate this word (KJV, NKJV, ASV, CSB, LEB, ESV, ISV). A jussive verb expresses a more or less definite desire that something should or should not happen.

Curtains, רִיפָּה, refers to the tent curtains which are woven cloth or hair, usually goat's hair, hanging from some sort of structural support that divides an area or covers an area, thus shielding that area from view. Simply put, it functions as a wall. This word may also mean the tent itself, but the context suggests here that it is a reference to the tent fabric since the word is further explained by the word “dwellings.”

Dwelling, מִשְׁכָּן, means a dwelling place of any kind, but context determines meaning. It may refer to the Tabernacle, to a tent, or to a dwelling in general. The context here makes it clear that it a tent is the meaning. The sense is that of any location where a person or being dwells more than temporarily and can refer to supernatural locations. This word is plural indicating that it refers to numerous people and dwellings.

Some non-dispensational theologians claim that this verse is referring to a tent that is serving as the Tabernacle, i.e., God's dwelling place, but that claim has no textual support at all [cf. G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*]. We know from Ezekiel 40-46, that the Temple of God in the Millennial Kingdom is a building and not a tent. Furthermore, the people who think this way

do not believe in a literal Messianic Kingdom with a literal Temple operative during that time.

This is something that must be done to accommodate the population that will one day occupy these dwellings. Spare, שָׁמַר, means to keep back, to withhold, to restrain, or to halt to the point of stopping an action from occurring. The word is negated meaning that they are not to keep from enlarging both the place where the dwellings will be located and the dwellings themselves. According to the Word of God, this will happen! This is also a jussive verb that is negated, "... you do not halt ...". "[Jussive verbs are used in] negative sentences to express prohibitions or dissuasion, warning, a negative wish (or imprecation), and a request. The prohibitive particle used before the jussive is almost always אַל [which it is here]" [Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, sec. 109 1c (b), p. 311].

Lengthening the cords and securing the pegs relates to enlarging and securely anchoring the tents. This is something that one must normally do when pitching a tent, but now they will need to be longer and/or stronger to support the larger tent that presents more surface area to the wind and needs more cords simply to accommodate the larger square footage. It will take more stakes to keep the tent secure, and they will need to be driven deeper to increase their holding power.

Lengthen, אָרַךְ, means to make long, to extend, to stretch out, and to become long. In this context, means to lengthen by making longer. It is a causative verb form issued as a command, "... you cause to lengthen ...".

Strengthen, הִקְיָה, means to tie fast, to bind, to strengthen. This verb is widely used to express the strength of various things. This verb form is intense and it is also a command, "... you intensely strengthen ...".

This metaphor relates the expansion of a tent and the land to pitch it on as a revelation of Zion's future when the Messianic Kingdom begins which will require space to accommodate all the dwellings that will be required to house everyone. This thought continues in the next verse.

As we have seen a lot of lately, some theologians just have to insert the Church into this verse which entirely obliterates its meaning. "To prepare for the great increase in her sons, the Church is to enlarge the place of her habitation.... The figure may be intended to suggest that the Church has no permanent abode in this world but is like a nomad, travelling from place to place until she come to her final and enduring abode, the heavenly city.... [T]he Church is to enlarge the place where her tents were located.... The Church is to spare no labor in obedience to these commands. She need not retrench but must make room for a great posterity.... Too much cannot be done to enlarge the tents, so gracious is the Lord in the promise of a large increase" [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, 361-362]. I hope you can see for yourself just how much damage this theology does to the Word of God and God's plan for history as it involves Israel.

Isaiah 54:3 ³“For you will spread [פָּרֵץ] abroad to the right [יָמִין, south] and to the left [שְׂמֹאל, north]. And your descendants [אֲדָרְבָּי] will possess [יָרֵשׁ] nations And will resettle the desolate [שְׁמָמָה] cities.

The command to enlarge the tents is now explained in more detail in this verse. They are going to spread out throughout the land. Spread out, פָּרֵץ, means to spread out, to scatter referring to making linear movement from a central area to outer regions. “It indicates the powerful multiplication and spreading of something in all directions, especially the spread of God's people so they would be a blessing to all peoples according to the promises to Abraham” [Baker & Carpenter, s.v. “פָּרֵץ,” *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, 922].

Since east and west are not mentioned here, it is probably best to understand right (or south) and left (or north) as referring to a general spreading out in all directions. When Yahweh passed the Abrahamic Covenant to Jacob, He did mention all four points of the compass and He used the same word, spread out, פָּרֵץ, that is being used here in Isaiah 54:3. Ultimately, because Israel has never possessed the land to the extent promised in the Abrahamic Covenant, both Genesis and Isaiah are referring to the same time period, that is, the Messianic Kingdom, and both are referring to Israel spreading throughout the land to possess it.

Genesis 28:13–14 ¹³And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, “I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. ¹⁴“Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out [פָּרֵץ] to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

The word translated “descendants” also relates to the Abrahamic Covenant. Descendants, אֲדָרְבָּי, means seed, offspring, descendants, or posterity referring to one that is related more than one generation removed. The sense is that of a person's posterity conceived of as seed. In this verse, the word is variously translated descendants, offspring, seed, and children. It is frequently used in relation to Israel and the land.

Genesis 12:7 ⁷The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants [אֲדָרְבָּי] I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him.

Possess, יָרֵשׁ, means to take possession of, to inherit, to dispossess, or to drive out. To inherit refers to being an heir and gaining possession of an inheritance that is received by ancestral agreement, or some other agreement. Dispossess means to displace one from one's property, taking by military force which may or may not be rightfully one's inheritance which implies a loss of economic means and benefit.

“But the word is used usually in connection with the idea of conquering a land. This verb is a theme of Deuteronomy in particular where God's promise of covenantal relationship is directly related to Israelite possession (and thereby foreign dispossession) of the land of Israel. This theme continued throughout Israel's history and prophetic message. Possession of the land was directly connected to a person's relationship with the Lord; breaking the

covenantal relationship led to dispossession. But even in exile, Israelites awaited the day when they would repossess the land" [Baker & Carpenter, s.v. "גָּרַשׁ," *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, 478-479].

As used in the Torah, this word is usually translated "dispossess" in the NASB when it refers to the nations in the land of Canaan the first time that they entered the land. That implies a use of force to remove them. What we do not know in connection with Israel entering the land to possess it as the Kingdom begins, is how whatever Gentiles left in the land will be dispossessed. Will they be allowed to stay in the land alongside the Israelites? Will the King simply have them move elsewhere? There is no indication that the Israelites will have to conquer the land as they did when they moved into it under Joshua and Caleb. There will be great desolation and a greatly diminished Gentile population as a result of the Tribulation not only in Israel but around the world, which is indicated by the fact that the Israelites will be resettling desolate cities as they repopulate the land and spread throughout it.

The fact that the cities will be desolate is also a reference to the degree of destruction that will result from God's judgment on the Israel and the world during the Tribulation. Desolate, מְשֻׁמָּה, means to be desolate, devastated, destitute, laid waste, ravaged, ruined, and deserted referring to being in a destroyed and ruined state implying that the object or area destroyed is now abandoned from all help, deserted, or in personal poverty.

The word "resettle" is in a causative verb form and "desolate" is in a passive verb form. The Israelites are going to be caused to resettle the land as God calls them back to the land and regathers them from worldwide dispersion at the end of the Tribulation, for the second and final time (Is. 11:11). "Desolate" refers to the fact that an outside force, i.e., Yahweh, brought this condition upon the cities that are now desolate.

I think we have to conclude that possessing nations and desolate cities refers to the land area promised Israel under the terms of the Abrahamic Covenant which is a land area much greater than anything Israel has ever possessed to this point in time. Other nations and cities will exist and be populated by Gentiles during the Messianic Kingdom.

Replacement theology rears its ugly head in relation to this verse as well, and in so doing the literal meaning of the text is destroyed. "... Isaiah is using the figures of the Old Testament to portray or symbolize the great spiritual conquest of the nations through the worldwide preaching of the Gospel.... [T]hese desolate cities will be repopulated by the seed of the Church.... the conquest herein depicted is spiritual and not physical.... At the Apostolic Council James brought out the true meaning, when he interpreted Amos 9:12 as speaking of 'all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called' (Acts 15:17)" [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, 363]. This is an overt denial that there will be a literal 1,000-year Messianic Kingdom.