

# ISAIAH

## ISAIAH 54:11-17, YAHWEH'S COVENANT FIDELITY, PART 2

The rest of chapter 54 is concerned with God's plans for Israel's future. "This is one of the most beautiful and touching declarations of God's love for His people and of His glorious plan for their ultimate destiny" [Victor Buksbazen, *The Prophet Isaiah: A Commentary*, 426]. The city is now the one being addressed rather than the woman. There are three elements to this revelation: the city's beauty is addressed, the spiritual state of righteousness the inhabitants of the city will enjoy is revealed, and the protection of the city is assured. "The imagery is clearly designed to convey feelings of richness, abundance, completeness, and glorious variety. Although some of the terminology is uncertain to us today, the overall effect is still well conveyed" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 427].

Isaiah 54:11–12 <sup>11</sup>“O afflicted [עָנִי] one, storm-tossed [סָעַר], and not comforted [נָחַם], Behold [הִנֵּה], I [אֲנֹכִי] will set [רַבֵּן] your stones in antimony [פְּיֹדֶה], And your foundations I will lay [יִסֵּד] in sapphires [סַפִּיר]. <sup>12</sup>Moreover, I will make your battlements [שְׁמִיט] of rubies [בְּרָדָד], And your gates [שַׁעַר] of crystal [אַקְדָּח], And your entire wall of precious [חֲפִצִּי] stones.

Israel's history is one of persecution and fear, but highly figurative language, in the image of craftsmanship and precious stones, is used here to reveal how glorious her future is going to be once all the persecution and fear is behind them. But first, Israel's state as it has existed, and still exists during the times of the Gentiles, is described.

Afflicted, עָנִי, means poor, wretched, oppressed, and afflicted which pertains to being in a lowly, needy state as reflected in a class of people who are of low status in society, usually of persons in fiscal poverty, and implying a lack of resources. The sense of the word refers to a person who has been the victim of some pain, injury, or harm which is either physical or mental and is often associated with recurring treatment or events. This seems to be a pretty good description of how Yahweh's divine temporal disciplinary program has been playing out throughout Israel's history the result of which has been imposed on the nation for rebellion and disobedience.

Storm-tossed, סָעַר, means a storm, rage, to be violently shaken, or lashed by storms referring to storms that cause the surface of a body of water to become violently rough in relation to a ship on the stormy surface of the body of water. This verb is in a form representing intensity leading to the sense of being lashed and buffeted about by intense, powerful storms. This is an appropriate figure to characterize the discrimination and the persecution the Jewish people have been subjected to during the times of the Gentiles.

Comforted, נָחַם, means to comfort, to console, to express sympathy for leading to being in a state or condition of finding a measure of relief from sorrow and distress which results in being consoled or encouraged. This verb form represents intensity. The sense is that of being comforted by alleviating sorrow or distress and being given emotional strength. In this context, it is negated which means that Israel is in a state of intense discomfort;

instead of emotional strength, they are suffering under extreme physical and emotional distress.

This situation is going to one day change and it will be God who is going to bring about that change. Set, רָבַץ, means to place or to put referring to making an object lay in place. The important element here is not that those stones will be set to build the future city, although that is important, but that it is God Himself who will see to it that the city will be built. He says, “Behold [הִנֵּה], I [אֲנִי] will set your stones ...” The exclamation “Behold” commands attention for the speaker, and the personal pronoun is specifically referring to God, the One speaking. Only God can see to it that a city this beautiful can be built. Anything man builds—no matter how spectacular—can only pale in comparison to this work of God. This is not a description of a rebuilt city after the restoration from the Babylonian captivity. Ezra and Nehemiah do not describe a grand city being rebuilt then, but Revelation describes a city like this that will be built in the future (Rev. 21:9-22:5). This could be a highly figurative description of the Jerusalem of the Messianic Kingdom, but while that is uncertain, it certainly seems to describe the New Jerusalem that John saw in Revelation. It could be a reference to both. We have to presume that the capital of the world during the Messianic Kingdom, Jerusalem, will be a magnificent city as befits such a magnificent King who will have His throne there, but I think we also have to presume that it will not be as magnificent as the New Jerusalem will be that John saw. The prophet “portrays the future, blending the glory of millennial Jerusalem, which will be the capital of the millennial earth, with the eternal city John describes. That gives a hint of the splendor of the millennial city” [Merrill F. Unger, “Isaiah” in *Unger’s Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1302].

The stones of the city will be set in antimony, פִּזְרָה, which is hard mortar referring to a blackened mortar used for setting the stones of a wall. Some theologians believe the reference here is to paving stones, mosaics, or both, which makes sense because later the prophet writes of a wall with precious stones. “Antimony was a black powder that masons added to mortar that held stones in place. It set off the beauty of the stones by providing a dark edging for them” [Thomas L. Constable, “Isaiah,” in *Thomas Constable’s Notes on the Bible, Volume IV: Isaiah-Daniel*, 159]. This word is also thought to identify turquoise, and in the black powder form, it was used as mascara. This word could be translated “hard mortar” (LEB) or “cement” (YLT, LSV). It is also known as stibium. “... Jerusalem will rise again from the dust, like a glorious building of God. Jerome makes the following apt remark on v. 11b: ‘in stibio, i.e., in the likeness of an elegant woman, who paints her eyes with stibium; referring to the beauty of the city.’ pūk is eye-black, i.e., a sooty compound, the chief component of which was powdered antimony, or else manganese or lead, and with which oriental women coloured [sic] their eyebrows, and more particularly the eyelids both above and below the eyes, that the beauty of the latter might be all the more conspicuous (2 Kings 9:30)” [C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Isaiah*, vol. 7, 7:529].

In this context, there is no doubt that the text is referring to hard mortar or cement that has been dyed black with antimony in order to enhance the appearance of the city’s stonework. The antimony itself is not suitable as mortar although some theologians believe that to be the situation. Clearly, the beauty of the architecture is part of the revelation here, and part of it is simply about the fact of the city’s rebuilding at God’s command

and direction, and finally, it is about the city's protection from harm after it is built. The building materials will be luxurious and they will separate Jerusalem from all other cities in the world; no city will compare to it. These building materials reveal the high regard God has for the city.

The foundations are going to be laid in sapphires. Lay, *לָקַד*, means to establish, to found, or to fix, and in this context, it refers to laying a foundation in order to establish a base for construction. The word is most frequently used of actual building activities.

Figuratively, the Lord God will lay a costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly fixed in place.

Isaiah 28:16 <sup>16</sup>Therefore thus says the Lord GOD [*אֲדַבֵּר יְהוָה*], "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes *in it* will not be disturbed.

Christ Jesus is the foundation and the cornerstone laid by none other than Yahweh Himself.

1 Corinthians 3:11 <sup>11</sup>For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:6 <sup>6</sup>For *this* is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."

One thing to know about the translations of the words used to refer to precious stones is that there is no uniformity across the various English translations concerning what word refers to what particular precious stone. For example, ruby is translated agate in KJV, ESV, YLT, LSV, and RSV. Most of these words may be simply translated as "precious stones" or "gems" without any particular, individual identification as a specific precious stone or gem.

Sapphire, *סַפִּיר*, means a precious stone known as sapphire or lapis lazuli; the exact identification is uncertain. A sapphire is "a transparent precious stone, typically blue, which is a variety of corundum (aluminum oxide)" [s.v. "sapphire," *The Oxford American College Dictionary*]. Lapis lazuli is "a bright blue metamorphic rock consisting largely of lazurite" [s.v. "lapis lazuli," *The Oxford American College Dictionary*]. The English translations, with the exception of the NET Bible, have settled on translating this word as "sapphire." Lapis lazuli was used in artwork that decorated royal palaces in ancient times, particularly in Egypt and Babylon. What we call sapphire today may have been hyacinth (or jacinth) in the prophet's day. Some researchers claim that sapphires were largely unknown before the Roman Empire, but that is not known to be fact either. That is not a problem for dispensational theologians who understand this Scripture to be either a figurative way of describing the Millennial city, or it could be a literal stone that will be used in the construction of the Millennial city. This is certainly not a reference to a city that God will build in the dispensations of law, grace, and Tribulation; it is about a city in the future which is probably the Millennial Jerusalem.

Some theologians claim that this Scripture in Isaiah was the inspiration for John's description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21. That thought reflects a low view of Scripture. Isn't it more biblical to view Isaiah as a prophecy, revealed to the prophet by the Holy Spirit, of what is to come? And then, isn't it more biblical to view John's work as a direct revelation from the Holy Spirit? It diminishes John's revelation from God to say that he wrote it based on Isaiah, which diminishes the Holy Spirit's role in directly interacting with the apostle and giving him the revelation recorded in the last book of the Bible. That is not to say that the apostles did not use the Old Testament record in their work; they certainly did use it, but it is to say that in this situation both prophets received revelation via the Holy Spirit independently one from the other. John's prophecy is in much more detail.

Battlements, *נִשְׁמֵרִים*, is actually the word meaning sun or daylight/sunlight. In this context, it is used as a figurative way to explain a battlement wall as a wall that protects as an extension of the sun at high apex in the sky, i.e., a protective wall that is built very high. It may be described as a parapet, which is a "1) a fortification either as a defensive wall or elevation, as of earth or stone, in a fortification or an elevation raised above the main wall or rampart of a permanent fortification; 2) any low protective wall or barrier at the edge of a balcony, roof, bridge, or the like" [Dictionary.com]. This word is also translated as "pinnacles," and if thought of that way, it refers to the highest point of a structure. The word is plural, and this is the only place in the Bible where it is used as a plural noun. This word can probably refer to both a low wall, a parapet, and a tower. Watchtowers extend upward beyond the walls they are set upon in order to facilitate keeping watch and to provide advantageous battle positions in case of an enemy attack.

Ruby, *כִּנְדִּיז*, is variously translated precious stone, ruby, or agate. Some theologians "caution that the word cannot be interpreted with any certainty, since rubies did not appear in any quantity in the Mediterranean world until late in the first millennium BC" [Willem A. VanGemeren, gen. ed., s.v. "כִּנְדִּיז," *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, 2:598]. Whether or not this itself is an accurate statement is probably up for debate, but whatever it is, the point is that the wall and the battlements are going to be beautiful.

The gates will be of crystal. Gate, *שַׁעַר*, in this context, is referring to a city or town, a population center, that usually has a defensive wall and gate. The sense is that of a movable barrier in a fence or a wall. The area around the gate was frequently used as place where business and legal matters were conducted and resolved. Gates, being a weak point in the wall, were vulnerable to attack; therefore, special attention had to be given to their construction and to their defense.

Crystal, *אֶקְדָּה*, means a precious stone or a sparkling jewel. "This word, among the ancients and even down to recent times, has been used simply to denote any hard material of great transparency and without marked color. Thus it was applied to glass and to the clear colorless varieties of quartz now designated as rock crystal" [Merrill F. Unger, s.v. "Mineral Kingdom: Crystal," *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 860].

Finally, the wall will be constructed of precious stones. Precious, *הַבְּרָרִים*, means delight, pleasure, or desire. In terms of this context, it can mean costly jewels or something precious. The entirety of the wall will be built of precious stones, or, if figurative, at least something

that is quite beautiful in appearance like precious stones. The primary meaning is delight and the translation can support this interpretation:

"... And all your border of stones of delight" (LSV).

"... And all thy border of stones of delight" (YLT).

The focus of the rest of the chapter shifts to the people and their life in the Messianic Kingdom.

Isaiah 54:13 <sup>13</sup>"All your sons will be taught [לְמַד] of the LORD; And the well-being [שְׁלוֹם] of your sons will be great.

Taught, לְמַד, means one taught, a learner, a follower, or a disciple. In the Hebrew mind, learning and teaching come from the same word because both disciplines are found in the fear of the Lord, who is the source of all truth.

Deuteronomy 31:12–13 <sup>12</sup>"Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the LORD your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law. <sup>13</sup>"Their children, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live on the land which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess."

Every English translation I use for comparative purposes uses the word "taught" in this verse except two: the NET Bible, which uses "followers," and the TANAKH, which uses "disciples." I think "followers" is the best translation, and that is due to the unconditional covenant stipulations of the New Covenant. The Kingdom Israelites will all know God, and He will write His Kingdom Law on their hearts.

Jeremiah 31:33–34 <sup>33</sup>"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. <sup>34</sup>"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 NASB translation is "taught of the Lord" which I think means taught about the Lord, but a few Hebrew professors believe this should be translated, "taught by the Lord." Grammatically, that is possible, but it does not fit with the facts of the New Covenant. If we consider that God is the One who will be writing the Kingdom Law on the hearts of the people, they are, in a sense, being taught by Him, and if that is correct, then "taught" seems to be an appropriate translation. "Disciple" is also a good translation in that case, because לְמַד also means a learner, which defines a disciple who sits at the feet of a teacher and learns from him. Because the New Covenant says that God is going to write His Kingdom Law on their hearts, there will be no need for being taught Kingdom Law, just as there will be no need to teach them to believe. They will all know God's Kingdom Law, and they will all believe in Yahweh, the King. This leads me to accept that the NET Bible translation, "followers," is the best translation in this context.

Isaiah 54:13 <sup>13</sup>All your children will be followers of the LORD ... (NET Bible).

The Messiah quoted this verse in John 6:44-45 and applied it within the context of dealing with people coming to faith before the Kingdom. Then, at the Lord's First Advent, and continuing on into this dispensation, people have to hear and learn to come to faith.

John 6:44-45 <sup>44</sup>"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. <sup>45</sup>"It is written in the prophets, 'AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me.

According to the New Covenant, they, the Messianic Kingdom Israelites, will all know God because He will put that knowledge, along with the knowledge of Kingdom Law, within them. They will not need to be taught, unless we consider the fact that they will all intrinsically know Him and His Kingdom Law to be itself a form of instruction. That seems to be the concept that Blum embraces. "They will all be taught by God, is from the Prophets, probably Isaiah 54:13, though Jeremiah 31:34 has the same thought. This 'teaching' of God refers to His inner work that disposes people to accept the truth about Jesus and respond to Him. Everyone who listens to and learns from God will come to and believe in Jesus" [Edwin A. Blum, "John" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 296].

"Well-being" is the NASB translation of the familiar word shalom, שָׁלוֹם, which connotes a life of completeness, wholeness, welfare, and peace. This word is also translated peace and prosperity, but "well-being" suggests the completeness of the Israelites' blessed Kingdom life. Because this is a Messianic Kingdom prophecy, we know that the well-being of the nation is the result of the implementation/fulfillment of the covenant promises and the presence of the King. The reality of life in the Messianic Kingdom will be a blessed life such that the world has not seen since the Garden of Eden before the Fall.

The Israelites will be a righteous people and they never need to fear other people and nations again.

Isaiah 54:14 <sup>14</sup>"In righteousness you will be established [בְּיָדָי]; You will be far from oppression [עֲשָׂק], for you will not fear [יִרָא]; And from terror [מִחֲתָה], for it will not come near you.

It will take about 3,500 years to get Israel to a place where the nation will willingly serve Yahweh and live in the land in a state of righteousness. The Lord will return and rescue the nation (Rev. 19:19-21), He will bring the Jewish people into the land (Is. 11:11; Mt. 24:31), and they will live in peace and safety for the duration of the Messianic Kingdom (Is. 54:14). The nation will finally be a righteous nation, a nation living for Yahweh who is present with them (Lv. 26:11), they will fulfill the mandate to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6), and Israel will finally be the head nation of the world and not the tail (Dt. 28:1, 13). Then the nation and her people experience the covenant blessings they could have had all along, if they had only been obedient from the beginning.

The word "established" reveals that it is by means of the work of Yahweh that Israel will inhabit the land to live in covenant fulfillment. Established, בְּיָדָי, means to set up, to make

firm, to establish, or to prepare. It also refers to causing to stand upright, and therefore can mean fixed or steadfast. The root meaning is to bring something into being with the consequence that its existence is a certainty. The word expresses a sense of well-being which results from living under the providence of God's hand. This situation is not just about founding the nation and setting it up, it is about ensuring the spiritual and physical survival of the nation as the people enjoy the unconditional covenant promises that lead to the kind of life Yahweh envisioned for His people from the beginning when He created the nation to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6).

Oppression and terror will no longer be an issue for the Israelites; the King will ensure their safety and survival. The nation will be living in peace.

Oppression, *עֲשָׂק*, means oppression and tyranny referring to that which causes hardship and trouble as a form of mistreatment. The mistreatment comes in the form of defrauding or robbing people of what is theirs, and of denying justice to the weak, powerless members of society. Oppression may be personal, political, or military. The word has the sense of subjugating by cruelty.

Terror, *מִתְהַיֵּא*, means terror, destruction, ruin. To experience terror is to live in a state of fear. Terror always has a source; it originates in an entity that causes the terror or pain.

These things will never be an issue during the Messianic Kingdom, although I will discuss in a moment the possibility of aggression, but it will fail if it occurs. The nation will be living in perfect peace and the nation will be secure. That is not a national status that has ever occurred in the past, even under the reigns of David and Solomon there was always a threat of conflict, there is a threat of conflict occurring now, and that will continue on into the future until the Messiah saves all Israel at the end of the Tribulation.

Can you imagine what it is like for a nation that has been persecuted and attacked throughout its history to suddenly be placed in a position where fear is no longer a factor in their daily thinking? That requires a tremendous shift in mindset and worldview. It is no wonder the nation will experience the joy that Isaiah 54:1 revealed they will express once they are saved and the Messianic Kingdom begins. Fear, *יָרָא*, means to fear, to tremble, to be afraid or frightened referring to being in a state of great distress and deep concern of pain or unfavorable circumstances. The concept of experiencing fear is negated; therefore, they will never experience fear again. It will never come near them.

God will no longer use mankind to impose temporal divine discipline on the nation, and they will be enabled to repulse any attempt to attack them. If this situation ever arises, it will not be because it is the will of God that it takes place.

Isaiah 54:15 <sup>15</sup>"If anyone fiercely assails [גִּוֵר] you it will not be from Me. Whoever assails you will fall because of you.

The revelation in these verses concerning attacks against Israel during the Messianic Kingdom, seem to suggest that such threats are a real possibility. We have to remember that the Kingdom is not the perfect, eternal state as it will one day be, nor is it a return to the idyllic time as it existed in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. We also have to remember

that swords will be beaten into plowshares, and the peoples will not learn war (Is. 2:4). Yet, Gentiles will still have a sin nature, and they will still have to come to faith. Satan will be locked up during that time and unable to foment rebellion against Israel for 1,000 years, so, it seems, from our standpoint at this time and according to what we now know and understand, hostility against Israel seems unlikely. We have to take these verses at face value and presume that these things could be a possibility. At times, there must be some level of hostility towards Israel, and some degree of some sort of aggression against the nation. However, even if that does take place, Israel will not fear because the nation will successfully fend off any attempts to harm or subjugate the nation, and their adversaries will not succeed in oppressing and terrorizing the nation. Israel will have the strength and confidence, not to mention the support of Yahweh, to repel and defeat any aggression (Lv. 26:6-8; Dt. 28:7) which were promises of blessing for covenant fidelity on the part of the nation.

"This indicates that conditions for the redeemed will not be completely placid at this time, as they will be in the eternal state where nothing offensive will assail God's people. Isaiah rather described conditions during the first part of the renovation of all things, the Millennium. It seems that assault by enemies is not just a theoretical possibility that Isaiah raised to stress the security of believers, but a real possibility for two reasons. First, the prophet spoke of this hostility at some length (vv. 15-17). Second, he already said enough about the security of the redeemed, so raising the *theoretical* possibility of opposition is unnecessary and disturbing" [Thomas L. Constable, "Isaiah" in *Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible, Volume IV: Isaiah-Daniel*, 4:159].

On the other hand, there is a real possibility that this is a revelation of theoretically real, yet hypothetical aggression, proclaimed in a way that should give Israel comfort meant to help them adjust to their new normal. The "if" that begins the sentence is understood to be conditional. There will be no need for Yahweh to use the nations as His instrument of divine temporal discipline. Israel will be empowered to overcome whatever an enemy might throw at them in terms of offensive warfare. "Since God has already promised that these violent activities will not happen in 54:14, these hypothetical examples only provide an additional sense of security and assurance that God will protect his people from all danger" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*, 491]. I think this hypothetical way to view this issue is the correct view, given all the Scriptures that indicate this will be a time of great peace. It will be a time when the nations come to Israel to learn about Yahweh (Is. 2:3-4), not to learn about war and destroy the nation.

Isaiah 2:3-4 <sup>3</sup>And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup>And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war.

The word "assails" indicates that there will be hostility, or at least theoretically could be hostility, against Israel during the Kingdom period. Assail, גָּיַר, means to gather together,



to conspire, to incite, to treat with hostility, and to attack. The primary meaning is to gather together, which is why a number of translators used "assemble" to translate this word, although the gathering together in this context, is with hostile intent. The problem with using "assemble" is that in English, the "hostile intent" sense of the word is lost. In this context, to cause trouble, to make war, or to attack is the meaning and it refers to causing or initiating a military fight. This may take the form of a physical altercation, or it could be in the form of psychological warfare. This word is actually used twice for emphasis and in a verbal form that indicates emphasis, which is why the NASB uses the word "fiercely" in its translation, and I think that is the best English translation. Some versions use the word "attacks," but they also ignore the emphasis the grammar places on the use of this word; therefore, I would translate it "fiercely attacks."

God's power to control world events within the parameters of His creation is the subject of the next two verses. In this context, His power to keep and protect Israel is the focus.

Isaiah 54:16 <sup>16</sup>"Behold, I Myself have created [בָּרָא] the smith who blows the fire of coals And brings out a weapon for its work; And I have created the destroyer to ruin.

In this verse, God proclaims His power and authority to direct the one who forges the weapons of war as well as those who use them. They are part of His created order and therefore subject to His will. Often, people are unaware that they are doing God's will at His direction, because they are simply doing what they wanted to do and were going to do anyway. God is simply using them to accomplish their will which is really what He wanted them to do on His behalf. He doesn't make people and nations do evil things; He simply channels the evil things they do to accomplish His purposes. "Although God is in control of history, and nothing happens outside that control, he is not a puppet master whose sovereignty requires that every event be individually initiated by him.... This is not to enter into the quagmire of 'intentional will' and 'permissive will ... It is to say that things do not happen simply because they are 'fated' to do so as an expression of the inscrutable determinism of a cyclical cosmos, but that all things will serve the purposes of a Creator who is himself the Redeemer" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 429-430].

Mankind has free will and God uses that free will to accomplish His purposes. He who sees the end from the beginning can use people and events to move history inexorably to the end game that He has determined for the history of the world. That is not to say that some things are not specifically guided and directed by God, for example the work of the Suffering Servant was determined before the foundation of the world, but generally God uses what man does of his own free will to accomplish His purposes. That is also not to say that some theological systems do not think that every single thing that happens was foreordained by God, particularly five-point Calvinism [William G. T. Shedd, "Characteristics of the Divine Decree" in *Dogmatic Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 314-318]. "This is not to deny that God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass ... It [v. 16] teaches that nothing occurs, not even the destroying acts of the enemies of God's people, apart from God Himself" [cf. Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, 371-372].

This verse begins "I, I have created ..." which is a point of emphasis by using the personal pronoun twice. Created, is בָּרָא, (*bārā*) which is the same word used of God's creative

work in Genesis 1:1, is only used as a reference to God's creative work; it is never used to refer to anything created by mankind.

Isaiah 54:17 <sup>17</sup>“No weapon that is formed against you will prosper [צָלַח]; And every tongue that accuses you in judgment [מִשְׁפָּט] you will condemn. This is the heritage [נַחֲלָה] of the servants of the LORD, And their vindication [צְדָקָה] is from Me,” declares the LORD.

God reassures Israel that any weapon that is formed by any adversary with the intention of being used against them will not be effective. Prosper, צָלַח, means to succeed, to prosper, to be victorious, that is, to successfully accomplish a task or goal. This is a causative verb form, but negated, meaning that no weapon can be formed and used to cause Israel's defeat. They can forge their weapons, but they will be ineffective; they will be unable to be successfully employed.

Just as an aside, this verse may be one the most abused Scriptures in the Bible. Pentecostals and Charismatics constantly quote it and claim it as a promise to themselves. Swaggert, a Pentecostal pastor, wrote this in his so-called study Bible, “Irrespective of the efforts made by Satan to come against the people of God, it must ever be remembered that the Lord is in control of all things. This means that ‘no weapon that is formed against the Believer shall prosper.’ More particularly, it refers to Israel, but, in general, it refers to all who trust the Lord, because ‘this is the heritage of the servants of the LORD,’ and that includes all Believers, and for all time” [Jimmy Swaggert, s.v. “Isaiah 54:7,” *The Expositor's Study Bible*]. Notice what he did here; he changed the text from “you” (Israel) to “all Believers.” Usually, the people who claim this verse give no credence to context, and therefore never even mention Israel. If this interpretation of the verse is viable, then why is it that the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:12:

2 Timothy 3:12 <sup>12</sup>Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

If this interpretation is applicable to the church, then why is it that that the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries are seeing more Christian persecution and more martyrs than at any time in history? These verses are not even applicable to Israel in this dispensation; it is Messianic Kingdom truth. Israel is certainly suffering under a relentless assault that involves bombs, rockets, and terror attacks primarily by Islam.

The history of Israel is a history of libel, slander, false accusations, and physical violence at the hands of Satan's world system. None of these things succeeded in destroying the nation, but they certainly have made life difficult, frightening, and dangerous for the Israelites. In the end, they will be able to refute all the lies and accusations made against them. The word judgment, מִשְׁפָּט, is a legal term pertaining to a legal dispute; Israel will be found “not guilty” of all charges whenever and wherever they are made.

All of these blessings are from Yahweh. They have a heritage as His servants. Heritage, נַחֲלָה, means an inheritance, a hereditary possession referring to a part or a share that is a part of a whole as a portion that has been assigned which implies association. The sense is one of a portion or state of blessing assigned to the nation by God who recognizes the nation as a nation of His people. The heritage in this context is the imputed righteousness the nation will possess during the Messianic Kingdom.

All of these blessings are from Yahweh. Vindication, *הִצְדִּיק*, is most frequently translated as righteousness and most translations use it that way in this verse (KJV, NKJV, ASV, CSB, YLT, LSV, ISV); others use vindication (NASB, ESV, NET Bible), and legal right is the LEB translation. In this context, the sense of the word is the act of vindicating or defending. The word means "righteousness, blameless conduct, and integrity. The noun describes justice, right actions, and right attitudes as expected from both God and people when they judge.... The word may indicate a just claim before the king or the righteous claim for vindication God gives to His people" [Baker & Carpenter, s.v. "*הִצְדִּיק*," *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, 939]. "This root basically connotes conformity to an ethical or moral standard.... It is appropriate that Israel be assured of ultimate victory over her foes.... The word describes the righteous standing of God's heirs to salvation, with no charge to be laid against them ..." [Harris, Archer, Jr., and Waltke, s.v. "*הִצְדִּיק*," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 752-755]. I believe that vindication is the appropriate translation in this context.

The righteousness that Israel will have in the Messianic Kingdom, is the Lord's righteousness; Israel possesses no intrinsic righteousness of its own either as a people or as a nation.

Jeremiah 23:6 <sup>6</sup>"In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell securely; And this is His name by which He will be called, 'The LORD our righteousness.'

That truth is also applicable to those in the church. His righteousness is imputed to us as a grace gift from Him to us the moment we place our faith in Him.

2 Corinthians 5:21 <sup>21</sup>He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

"As a redeemed nation and servants of the Lord, their heritage (portion) is the imputed righteousness of God (through the Servant's work, Isa. 53:1-10). So their righteousness, being the LORD's is their justification. How then can anyone condemn them, when the LORD justifies and vindicates them?" [Merrill F. Unger, "Isaiah" in *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1303].

Interestingly, from Isaiah 40 to this point, the word "servant" has been in the singular and usually referred to the Messiah, although the nation was called the servant a couple of times. From here on out, the word is plural, "servants," referring to the nation as a nation of God's people serving as God's servants.

To summarize this set of amazing promises from God, we need to understand that these are Messianic Kingdom promises. "Not only will the next generation of Israelites obey the Lord, but also God will usher in an unprecedented era of peace and safety. Israel will not be ruled by tyrants. They will have no need to be afraid any longer because God will protect them from oppression ... and from terror (v. 14). In the millennial kingdom, God will not allow any nation to defeat Israel. In the past God allowed the destroyer ([Assyria and] Babylon [and in the future Greece and Rome]) to ruin. But in the end of days no weapon that is formed against you will prosper (v. 17). There is no blacksmith in the world who can forge a weapon that will defeat Israel in those days. God's people have been

vindicated and stand before God as part of an everlasting covenant" [Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer, "Isaiah" in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, 1092].