

OT LESSON #40
“ENLARGE THE PLACE OF THY TENT”

Isaiah 54-56; 63-65
by Ted L. Gibbons

INTRODUCTION: When I served in the US Army, I had the opportunity on occasion to assist in the erecting of tents. Aside from the personal tents used by soldiers for their own shelter, administrative tents came in three sizes: GP (General Purpose) Small, GP Medium, and GP Large. I do not remember the dimensions of these tents, but I have the impression that there was room under a GP Large for St. Peter's Basilica.

We used sturdy poles to support the tent and numerous stakes to keep it in place. Those stakes were not the same as the ones used for our personal shelters. They needed to be much stronger because they were supporting a structure of much more size and weight.

The Church is much like a GP Large, except that the dimensions are not fixed for the tent of Zion as they are for Army issue items.

In the 1970's, I traveled to Fayetteville, North Carolina, to speak at the 1st Youth Conference of the North Carolina, Fayetteville stake. The plaque I was given on that occasion indicates that this newly organized stake was the 700th in the Church. At the end of 2001 there were 2601 stakes. As the leaders of the Church have often commented, one of the great challenges of the church is the need to continually lengthen the cords and strengthen the stakes.

The tent described in Isaiah is constantly expanding, making room for as many of God's children as are willing to seek shelter therein.

1. “LENGTHEN THY CORDS, AND STRENGTHEN THY STAKES” (Isaiah 54:2).

Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD. Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen

thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited (Is. 54:1-3).

In the Book of Mormon, the passage from Isaiah 54:1-3 is cited in 3 Nephi 22:1-3. The following verses (3N21:27-29) precede the quotation this passage. They testify that there will one day be a profound work done among the dispersed of Israel.

to prepare the way whereby they may come unto [the Son], that they may call on the Father in [his] name. Yea, and then shall the work commence, with the Father among all nations in preparing the way whereby his people may be gathered home to the land of their inheritance. And they shall go out from all nations; and they shall not go out in haste, nor go by flight, for I will go before them, saith the Father, and I will be their rearward (3N21:27-29).

It is as a result of this work by the Father that the barren will begin to sing. And the work will be so successful that the “the children of the desolate” will outnumber “the children of the married wife” (Isaiah 54:1). What does this suggest will happen as the outcasts of Israel begin to accept Christ and join his church?

The growth will be so rapid that it will become necessary to enlarge the tent of Zion by hanging new curtains, lengthening cords, and strengthening stakes. For the truth is that Israel will “break forth on the right hand and on the left.”

What is our part in all of this? What can you do to strengthen the stake in which you live. How can you help prevent your stake from being pulled from the ground, causing a part of the tent of Zion of sag? What individual efforts can we make to strengthen the Church in our own areas?

I have just listened to President Hinckley’s final remarks from General Conference. They provide a worthwhile pattern for members of the church who want to be better and stronger. After saying “I have made a resolution to be a better person than I was before,” he encouraged us to be better

husbands, fathers, grandfathers, neighbors, and friends.

Most of us have a longing to be better. President Hinckley said all of us can be better. He mentioned specific ways we can strengthen ourselves and thus our stakes. He spoke of such things as

lowering our voices
returning good for evil
dismissing any affront levied against us
being happy
working harder at being parents
etc.

How can our stakes help us in our endeavor to improve?

2. “WITH GREAT MERCIES WILL I GATHER THEE”

At least 6 times in the scriptures, the Lord promises to “set his hand to gather Israel the second time” (see Isaiah 11:11; 2N21:11; 2N25:17; 2N29:1; Jac. 6:2; D&C 137:6). Although that phrase does not appear in the following verses, they are a clear description of the character of the Lord, a character that impels him to try over and over again to reclaim those who wander. In these verses, the Lord preserves the image of the marriage between the Lord and Israel.

- 5 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.
- 6 For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God.
- 7 For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee.
- 8 In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer.

- 9 For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee.
- 10 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 (Isaiah 54:5-10).

Think about the implications of the following phrases taken from the verses above.

“My kindness shall not depart from thee . . .”

“I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee.”

“With everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee . . .”

“With great mercies will I gather thee.”

May we not be confident that these promises are sure not only for all the house of Israel, but also for individuals within the house of Israel? I believe that the Lord will set his hand over and over again to gather his children, and will continue to do so as long as there is any hope of any kind that they will respond.

The invitation to participate in the blessings to be found withing the shelter of the stakes of Zion is extended to all the world. Isaiah mentions some groups in particular.

Anyone who is thirsty for the waters of life, or anyone who is dissatisfied with the broken cisterns of Jeremiah 2:13: HO, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies

of David (Isaiah 55:1-3)

Anyone who is willing to repent: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon (Isaiah 55:7).

The righteous: Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil (ISAIAH 56:2).

Strangers, non-Israelites, Gentiles: Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices [shall be] accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people (Isaiah 56:6,7).

The outcasts of Israel: The Lord GOD which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him (Isaiah 56:8).

Sometimes auto dealerships and department stores will erect huge tents in their parking lots and have sales. I have occasionally received invitations to attend such sales in the newspaper or the mail.

Earlier this year my daughter conscripted me to go with her to deliver invitations to her birthday party. She had 14 of them, I believe, and a list of who they were and where they lived. We went to the home of each child with those invitations to insure that they knew they were invited to the celebration. This was a fairly easy task. We had the names and we had the addresses. But all of us who have been gathered have other invitations, a great stack of them, and we do not usually know who they are for. And so we must offer them to everybody. The Lord is having a "tent sale" and has charged us to carry the invitations. We must not be too selective about them. Our duty as disciples is to offer them to everyone on the Lord's list,

and, amazingly, *everyone is on the list.*

3. THE MILLENNIUM WILL BE A TIME OF PEACE AND JOY.

In chapter 11 of Isaiah, we get a dramatic picture of millennial conditions.

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:6-9).

Animals will learn to live in peace at this time, with each other and with people.

In Isaiah 65, promises are made to the people who will inhabit this planet after the Second Coming.

- A. For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind v(65:17)
- B. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever [in that] which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying (Isaiah 65:18,19).
- C. There shall be no more thence an infant of days . . . (Isaiah 65:20)
- D. There shall be no more . . . an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old . . . (Isaiah 65:20)
- E. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for

they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them (Isaiah 65:21-23).

- F. And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear (Isaiah 65:24).

CONCLUSION: What would you sacrifice to live in a society like the one described above? It is for this eventuality that we hope and labor. Promises like these cause my wife to pray frequently for the coming of the Lord. The dimensions of needless human suffering make her long for a millennial peace. But when Christ comes, he will come with power and drama and fire.

for the presence of the Lord shall be as the melting fire that burneth, and as the fire which causeth the waters to boil. O Lord, thou shalt come down to make thy name known to thine adversaries, and all nations shall tremble at thy presence-- When thou doest terrible things, things they look not for; Yea, when thou comest down, and the mountains flow down at thy presence, thou shalt meet him who rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, who remembereth thee in thy ways (D&C 133:41-44).

In fact, his return to the earth will be among the most dramatic events in recorded history:

And so great shall be the glory of his presence that the sun shall hide his face in shame, and the moon shall withhold its light, and the stars shall be hurled from their places. And his voice shall be heard: I have trodden the wine-press alone, and have brought judgment upon all people; and none were with me. And I have trampled them in my fury, and I did tread upon them in mine anger, and their blood have I sprinkled upon my garments, and stained all my raiment; for this was the day of vengeance which was in my heart (D&C 133:49-51).

But when he comes, when the cataclysmic events described here are over and he descends to reign among his people and to heal the ravages of mortality, what will his people speak of?

They shall mention the loving kindness of their Lord, and all that he has bestowed upon them according to his goodness, and according to his loving kindness, forever and ever (D&C 133:52).

It is of that loving kindness that these chapters in Isaiah testify. And since we will speak of it then, why not now?

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