



Type: Book Chapter

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## The Lord's Covenant of Kindness: Isaiah 54 and 3 Nephi 22

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Source: *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*

Editor(s): Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch

Published: Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies,  
1998

Page(s): 313–349

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# The Lord's Covenant of Kindness

## Isaiah 54 and 3 Nephi 22

Cynthia L. Hallen

*Linguistic analysis of key words shows how a barren woman is symbolically associated with Zion, the earth, and the Lord's servants in God's beautiful, astonishing, merciful love.*



In 3 Nephi 22, the Saints who gathered at the temple to hear the message of the resurrected Jesus had recently survived terrible tempests and upheavals in their lives. The more wicked part of the people had been destroyed, and the more righteous part of the people mourned the loss of their loved ones. As part of his sermon to the Nephites, Jesus shared a message of comfort from the prophecies of Isaiah. Isaiah 54 is one of the richest passages of scripture ever spoken by the Lord, so it is not surprising that Jesus would recite this passage in its entirety for the faithful at the temple in Bountiful.<sup>1</sup>

Chapter 22 of 3 Nephi is a blessing of comfort from the Lord to his covenant people. In many ways it reads like a love letter from a husband to his wife, a *billet-doux*<sup>2</sup> with covenant blessings and promises encoded into every verse. The verses of the text also resemble an *epithalamium*,<sup>3</sup> a wedding song or poem that celebrates the joy of a bride and her groom. The language sings with poetic figures, scriptural allusions, and multilayered metaphors. All of these language features emphasize the kindness that the Lord feels for his people, making the Lord's love seem impossible to fully express. One can only attempt to "mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord . . . according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them" (Isaiah 63:7).

In English, the word *kindness* is a key to understanding the Lord's relation to his covenant people.<sup>4</sup> The earliest etymological meaning of *kindness* is the reconstructed Indo-European root *gen-*, meaning "to give birth, beget; with derivatives referring to . . . procreation and to familial and tribal groups."<sup>5</sup> Several other terms come from the same semantic root as *kindness* and have underlying meanings related to gospel themes in Isaiah and the Book of Mormon: *gentile, gentle, generation, gene, genealogy, genesis, progenitor, pregnant, natal, nation, nativity, kin, kindred, king,* and *kinder*.<sup>6</sup> Kindness is the key to the covenant that turns the hearts of the children to their parents and the hearts of the parents to each other in the plan of salvation. Loving-kindness is the chief characteristic of the covenant that binds the heart of the Lord to his people and the hearts of his people to the Lord: "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jeremiah 31:3; see also John 12:32; 3 Nephi 27:14–15; D&C 88:63).

In the scriptures, the Lord often uses a metaphor of marriage to describe his covenant of kindness: "I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies" (Hosea 2:19). The Hebrew word for *kindness* is *hesed*, which has connotations of mercy, courtship, favors, loyalty, cherishing, marital duty, and constant attention (see 3 Nephi 22:8, 10, parallel to Isaiah 54:8, 10).<sup>7</sup> In 3 Nephi 22, the Lord discusses his everlasting covenant of kindness by comparing latter-day Zion to a barren woman. Throughout the chapter and in related scriptures, the barren woman is symbolically associated with the destiny of (1) Zion and the church, (2) the earth and all creation, and (3) the Lord's servants and the Latter-day Saints. Each verse of 3 Nephi 22 weaves various combinations of these elements together into a beautiful song of loving-kindness.

This chapter identifies thirteen motifs in Isaiah 54 (paralleled in 3 Nephi 22) and explores their literary and theological nuances by examining the linguistic and scriptural backgrounds of key words or phrases in this beautiful text.

### *Sing!*

In Jewish culture, childbirth is associated with singing, rejoicing, and reciting psalms. A woman sings when she first discovers that she will have a baby, as Mary does after Gabriel's annunciation that she would bear the Christ child: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour" (Luke 1:46–47). A woman also sings when her baby is safely delivered, as Hannah does after the birth of Samuel: "My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in my salvation" (1 Samuel 2:1). Even today, an orthodox Jewish mother will use the words of a psalm to give thanks for the birth of her firstborn child: "Sing aloud unto God our strength: make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob" (Psalm 81:1).<sup>8</sup> Singing is a token of the covenant that promises that barren women will have posterity, that the Lord will have children in Zion, and that the Lord's people will have children in their homes. The singing of angels heralded the birth of Jesus, who will redeem the whole earth with a covenant of peace and goodwill (see Luke 2:13–14).

In 3 Nephi 22:1, Jesus assures the Nephites that his covenant promises will be fulfilled in the latter days. He then quotes a sacred annunciation from Isaiah:

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.

In these three phrases—(1) *sing*, (2) *break forth into singing*, and (3) *cry aloud*—the Lord encourages the barren woman literally to rejoice in song and figuratively to give birth to children.

The command to sing is a command for all Saints to rejoice in spite of difficult circumstances. We are to sing for joy in spite of present sorrows because the Lord will comfort us in our affliction (see 1 Nephi 21:13). We are to sing together because the Lord will redeem the waste places and the devastated peoples of the earth (see Isaiah 52:9; Mosiah 12:23; 15:30; 3 Nephi 16:19; 20:32–34). We “break forth into singing” because the Lord has done great things for us just as he once did great things for the Nephites and for Mary, the mother of Jesus (see 3 Nephi 4:31; Luke 1:49). We worship the Lord by singing in our hearts, in our homes, and in our church meetings because, as Elder Dallin H. Oaks has said, “music has a unique capacity to communicate our feelings of love for the Lord.”<sup>9</sup> When we sing, we remember the covenant of the Lord’s loving-kindness.

*Cry aloud* means “shout,” especially to make a joyful noise as in singing (see Psalm 55:17; Isaiah 24:14). The Lord tells the barren woman to cry aloud with joyful singing because she will soon cry aloud with paradoxical pain as she breaks forth into the joys of childbirth. The crying aloud of the woman for joy in marriage and childbirth foreshadows the glad shouts of the mountains, valleys, seas, dry lands, rivers, brooks, rills, woods, trees, rocks, sun, moon, stars, and all creation at the second coming of the Son of God, who gives new birth to all creatures and creations through the pain of his atoning sacrifice (see D&C 128:23; see also Isaiah 14:7; 42:11; 55:12; D&C 128:22).

## *O Barren*

The message in 3 Nephi 22 is addressed to a barren woman with whom the Lord has made a covenant of kindness. With marriage as a metaphor for the covenant, we would expect the Lord to address the woman as a bride or as a married wife with children. However, in keeping with the plan of salvation, the faith and the faithfulness of the woman must be tried; she experiences a temporary separation from her husband and promised children. The woman lives alone as if she has been widowed or as if she has never been married. She has never been able to bear the children that she was promised in the covenant. The woman feels abandoned and fearful because she does not have a companion; she feels sad and desolate because she has no children to care for; she feels ashamed and vulnerable because in her culture singleness is a stigma and barrenness is a curse. Other women in her society have the blessings of family life, while she is “afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted!” (3 Nephi 22:11, parallel to Isaiah 54:11).

The Lord acknowledges the woman’s affliction in four parallel phrases: (1) *O barren*, (2) *thou that didst not bear*, (3) *thou that didst not travail with child*, and (4) *the desolate* (see 3 Nephi 22:1, parallel to Isaiah 54:1). By addressing the woman as “barren,” the Lord evokes the stories of various female progenitors in the house of Israel whose blessings of posterity came after the trial of their faith: Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, the mother of Sampson, and Elisabeth.

At first Sarah was barren (see Genesis 11:30), but the Lord’s covenant with Abraham included blessings for his wife:

I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her. Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child

be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? . . . And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him. (Genesis 17:16–19)

Abraham and Sarah’s response to the Lord’s promise is to laugh, but their humor is prompted by joy, not just incredulity (see Genesis 18:9–15). The Hebrew word *tzachak* means “to laugh” and “to rejoice” (see Genesis 21:6 note a; 17:17, note a).<sup>10</sup> When Isaac is born, Sarah rejoices: “God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me” (Genesis 21:6). In the Lord’s covenant, the joy of Abraham and Sarah is extended to their posterity and to all of the Lord’s children in Zion:<sup>11</sup>

Look unto Abraham your father,  
and unto Sarah that bare you:  
for I called him alone,  
and blessed him, and increased him.  
For the Lord shall comfort Zion:  
he will comfort all her waste places;  
and he will make her wilderness like Eden,  
and her desert like the garden of the Lord;  
joy and gladness shall be found therein,  
thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.

(Isaiah 51:2–3, parallel to 2 Nephi 8:2–3)

The Lord will comfort Zion, in spite of barrenness, old age, and death, and the earth will become a millennial garden, full of music.

In addressing Zion as “thou that didst not bear” (3 Nephi 22:1, parallel to Isaiah 54:1), the Lord evokes the story of Sampson’s mother, the wife of Manoah: “And the angel of the Lord appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt

conceive, and bear a son" (Judges 13:3). Not only does the angel's message announce the birth of Sampson, but it also foreshadows Gabriel's annunciation to Mary of the birth of Jesus: "thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus" (Luke 1:31).<sup>12</sup>

Some women might welcome the idea of being exempt from the labor of childbirth, but the emotional agony of the woman who does not travail with child may be more severe than physical pain. Despite her husband's kindness, the childless Hannah grieves intensely: "Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons? . . . And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore[, saying] . . . I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit" (1 Samuel 1:8, 10, 15).

The woman who gives birth may also experience sorrow, but she usually experiences great joy in family life: "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world" (John 16:21). Women who bear children may carry heavy burdens of pain in raising a child, but the barren woman may carry an even heavier burden of emptiness. The childless woman may feel ashamed, saying to herself, "I travail not, nor bring forth children, neither do I nourish up young men, nor bring up virgins" (Isaiah 23:4). The childless woman's anguish is intensified by her desolation. Yet the barren woman will not always be desolate; she will someday have more children than any married wife can give birth to in one mortal lifetime (see 3 Nephi 22:1, parallel to Isaiah 54:1).<sup>13</sup> The offspring of the barren woman will be infinite in number because she symbolizes the earth, individuals, and groups of people that will eventually receive the full blessings of the Lord's covenant.



The barren wife is a scriptural type for faithful people who must wait for promised blessings, not a symbol of the covenant-breakers personified in Jeremiah's backsliding harlot or Hosea's unfaithful wife. When explaining the marriage metaphor, many scholars interpret all references to the woman as references to people who break their covenants.<sup>14</sup> They read the Lord's kind words as an offer of forgiveness to a wayward but eventually repentant people.<sup>15</sup> We should not equate the faithful barren wife with the adulterous wife. Although "all we like sheep have gone astray" (Isaiah 53:6), the language of 3 Nephi 22 suggests that the Lord is addressing a woman who has tried to remain faithful to her covenants, not a woman who has been rejected because of infidelity.

The Lord explicitly equates the barren woman with "the servants of the Lord" (3 Nephi 22:17, parallel to Isaiah 54:17). Each individual man or woman who enters into a covenant relationship is a servant of the Lord. Couples who make sacred marriage covenants in the temple act as servants of the Lord when they pray to bring children into their homes. Every prophet, apostle, seventy, or missionary who bears the glad tidings of the gospel is a servant in the Lord's vineyard. Just as a barren woman would willingly experience labor pains in order to give physical life to children, so are the servants of the Lord willing to labor as missionaries so that all of God's children might be born again in the name of Jesus Christ.<sup>16</sup> The enemies of the Lord try to prevent the work from going forward, and the efforts of the servants may seem futile, but the Lord's servants will see the fruits of their labors if they endure to the end in the latter-day harvest of souls (see Jacob 5).

The chapter heading of 3 Nephi 22 identifies the barren woman as Zion: "In the last days, Zion and her stakes shall be established." Zion the woman symbolizes a city or

community of people in a covenant relationship with God. In the last days, all of the righteous inhabitants of the earth will become citizens of Zion. Zion will fulfill her destiny as a city of holiness, a New Jerusalem for the Jews, a habitation for the gentiles, a haven for the scattered tribes of Israel, a church for the followers of Christ, a millennial home for faithful children of God, and a kingdom for the King of Kings. The formal name of Zion as an institution is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Christ (the Bridegroom) works with the church (the bride) to teach the gospel of peace and to publish the plan of salvation. Members of the church become the children of Christ, then help others to enter into spiritual kinship with the Lord through faith, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost.

### *Enlarge Thy Tent*

In five lexically parallel phrases, the Lord instructs the barren woman to make room in her home for children: (1) *enlarge the place of thy tent*, (2) *let them stretch forth the curtains of thy habitations*, (3) *spare not*, (4) *lengthen thy cords*, and (5) *strengthen thy stakes* (see 3 Nephi 22:2, parallel to Isaiah 54:2). *Enlarge the place of thy tent* literally means “make the place where you set up your tent larger” and figuratively means “make room in your life for promised blessings” (see Genesis 9:27). *Let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations* means “let the birth of children cause you to enlarge your home.” The childbearing images of enlarging, stretching, and cords make the woman’s home a metaphor for her own body. The Lord asks married women to enlarge their bodies in order to provide bodies as tabernacles or temples for his spirit children. The desolate woman must have a great deal of faith to enlarge her tent to prepare for the blessing of children.

The tent is reminiscent of the tabernacle in the wilderness, which provided a place of worship for the children of Israel (see Numbers 3:25–26).<sup>17</sup> The tent is also a metaphor for the Lord’s covenant with the descendants of Noah’s sons Shem, Japheth, and Ham: “God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant” (Genesis 9:27; see also Acts 10:9–48). Just as the Lord promised Japheth that his people would someday become members of the household of Shem, so the Lord promises that Ham and all other nations will have the opportunity to dwell in the tent of gospel covenants in the latter days (see 3 Nephi 22:3, 5, parallel to Isaiah 54:3, 5; see also D&C: Official Declaration—2).

The image of stretching forth curtains describes not only childbirth but also how the Lord created the earth as a dwelling place for his children: “Bless the Lord . . . who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain . . . who laid the foundations of the earth” (Psalm 104:1–2, 5; see also Zechariah 12:1). The same image occurs often in Isaiah: “Have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he . . . that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in” (Isaiah 40:21–22). Images of singing, birth, creation, protection, and temple-building combine in another Isaiah passage:

Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it:  
 shout, ye lower parts of the earth:  
 break forth into singing, ye mountains,  
 O forest, and every tree therein:  
 for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob,  
 and glorified himself in Israel.  
 Thus saith the Lord, thy redeemer,  
 and he that formed thee from the womb,  
 I am the Lord that maketh all things;  
 that stretcheth forth the heavens alone;  
 that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself;

That frustrateth the tokens of the liars; . . .  
That confirmeth the word of his servant . . . ;  
that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited;  
and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built, . . .  
even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built;  
and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.

(Isaiah 44:23–26, 28)

Variations on these themes carry over into the beautiful music of kindness in Isaiah 54 and 3 Nephi 22.<sup>18</sup>

Enoch also testifies of the Lord’s kindness toward his creations. The Lord stretches out curtains and creates countless worlds for his children because his mercy is infinite: “And were it possible that man could number the particles of the earth, yea, millions of earths like this, it would not be a beginning to the number of thy creations; and thy curtains are stretched out still; and yet thou art there, and thy bosom is there; and also thou art just; thou art merciful and kind forever” (Moses 7:30).

Not only does the Lord allow us to observe his creations, he also invites us to participate in creation. Childbirth is the Lord’s way of teaching his children about love; bearing children and building homes teaches the Lord’s covenant people about the creation of worlds. Church members can teach each other to renew the covenant of kindness on a weekly basis and to perform good works on a daily basis. Saints can magnify their callings and enlarge the influence of Christlike service in a world hungry for loving-kindness.

Childbirth teaches the Lord’s people how to establish his church family on earth. To Zion, *let them stretch forth the curtains* means “let missionary work cause you to enlarge the church.” When the Lord needs more room for gathering his children, he provides mission fields: “When there is found no more room for them . . . I have other places which I will

appoint unto them, and they shall be called stakes, for the curtains or the strength of Zion" (D&C 101:21). The missionaries of the church help the Lord make room for his children: "Go ye forth unto the land of Zion, that the borders of my people may be enlarged, and that her stakes may be strengthened, and that Zion may go forth unto the regions round about" (D&C 133:9).

To the woman enlarging her tent, *spare not* means "do not hold back the curtains." In missionary work, *spare not* means "do not refrain from speaking the truth": "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet" (Isaiah 58:1). The Lord tells his servants to "open your mouths and spare not, and you shall be laden with sheaves upon your backs" (D&C 33:9; see also D&C 43:20). *Spare not* also figuratively means "cry aloud," echoing the meaning of *sing*, *break forth*, and *cry aloud* in 3 Nephi 22:1. The call to spare not is a sacred call. In the affirmative sense, *spare not* means "do whatever is necessary to accomplish something for good." To Zion it means "do not neglect to feed the poor," and to the church it means "use the best materials to build the Lord's kingdom." To the Latter-day Saint it means "do not be stingy with your time and money in serving others." To the married woman, it means "do not refrain from having children; do not hold back your love." To the barren woman, it means "love in spite of loneliness"; it means "do not forget to prepare for future children" (see Proverbs 21:26). The Lord asks us to do whatever is necessary to prepare a place for children, just as Heavenly Father was willing to give his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, in order to prepare a place for us in his kingdom: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all" (Romans 8:32).

If we live the law of consecration, the Lord will help us progress and endure: "Look upon Zion . . . thine eyes shall see . . . a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of

the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken" (Isaiah 33:20). But if we break our covenants, the Lord will not be able to protect us: "My tabernacle is spoiled, and all my cords are broken: my children are gone forth of me, and they are not: there is none to stretch forth my tent any more, and to set up my curtains" (Jeremiah 10:20). Family members lengthen their cords through prayer, scripture study, and family reunions. Church members strengthen their stakes through home teaching, visiting teaching, temple worship, and regular attendance at meetings and conferences. Zion arises from the dust and puts on sacred garments of righteousness, which are like the curtains of a sanctuary: "Put on thy beautiful garments . . . strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever, that thou mayest no more be confounded, that the covenants of the Eternal Father . . . may be fulfilled" (Moroni 10:31; see also D&C 82:14).

### ***Break Forth***

After instructing Zion to sing for joy and enlarge her tent, the Lord makes three parallel promises: (1) *thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left*, (2) *thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles*, and (3) *thy seed shall make the desolate cities to be inhabited* (see 3 Nephi 22:3, parallel to Isaiah 54:3). The command to break forth is a pun: in the first verse it has connotations of singing; in this verse it has connotations of childbirth, light, and growth. *Break forth on the right hand and on the left* means literally to "enlarge, stretch forth, or spread out in all directions": "Then shall thy light break forth as the morning" (Isaiah 58:8).<sup>19</sup> *Break forth* also means "give birth": "The sorrows of a travailing woman shall come upon him . . . for he should not stay long in the place of the breaking forth of children" (Hosea 13:13; see also Genesis 38:29).

*On the right hand and on the left* means “in all directions” or “on all sides”: “I saw the Lord sitting upon his throne, and all the host of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left” (2 Chronicles 18:18). If she is faithful to her covenants, the barren woman will give light and peace to all around her. If they are faithful, church members will radiate the light of Christ. They will reach out to others instead of withdrawing in fear and self-pity. To the surprise of many, the earth will go into labor and bring forth the children of Zion in one day (see Isaiah 66:7–8). Zion will receive so many children that she will not know where they came from: “Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro?” (Isaiah 49:21, parallel to 1 Nephi 21:21).

*Thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles* means that the children of the covenant will take the light of the gospel to all nations: “And when the times of the Gentiles is come in, a light shall break forth among them that sit in darkness, and it shall be the fulness of my gospel” (D&C 45:28). Those who come into the church from out of the world will strengthen the children of Zion: “I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles . . . and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers” (Isaiah 49:22–23, parallel to 1 Nephi 21:22–23). The children of the faithful will inherit the earth (see Psalm 25:12–13).

The image of the desolate woman in 3 Nephi 22:1 now shifts to the desolate cities and lands of Zion that have been ravaged because of Israel’s apostasy in earlier dispensations. The faithful children of latter-day Zion will “make the desolate cities to be inhabited” (3 Nephi 22:3, parallel to Isaiah 54:3). The restored gospel will bring many people back into the covenant family of God: “Thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants” (Isaiah 49:19, parallel to 1 Nephi

21:19). Israel will no longer be ashamed and confounded by iniquity, but will instead prepare the earth for the millennium: "This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited" (Ezekiel 36:35). Zion will no longer be forsaken and the land will no longer be desolate; instead Zion will be the Lord's delight, and the land will be called "married wife" (Isaiah 62:4).

### *Fear Not*

The Lord counsels Zion not to be afraid and not to let enemies silence her singing: "fear not . . . neither be thou confounded" (3 Nephi 22:4, parallel to Isaiah 54:4). *Confounded* can mean "disturbed," "humiliated," "terrified," "confused," "destroyed," or "silenced by foes." Women need not fear the pain and risks of childbirth; righteous servants need not fear being mistreated or misunderstood. The single woman need not fear that her blessings will never come; the childless woman need not fear being ostracized; the woman alone should not be afraid of those who mock her efforts to rejoice in spite of rejection or loneliness. The church need not fear the power of the adversary. Zion should not be afraid of opposition: "fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings" (2 Nephi 8:7, parallel to Isaiah 51:7). The Saints should not heed the worldly scorn of those who reside in the "great and spacious building" (1 Nephi 11:36). The servants of the Lord need not fear, even when they are surrounded by hostile armies: "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them" (2 Kings 6:16). The earth need not fear destruction by flood because the Lord will keep the covenant that he made with Noah and the prophets: "I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth" (3 Nephi 22:9). We need not fear that death is final or that Christlike love is in vain: "fear not



them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul" (Matthew 10:28).

To ease her fears, the Lord comforts Zion in four parallel phrases: (1) *thou shalt not be ashamed*, (2) *thou shalt not be put to shame*, (3) *thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth*, and (4) *[thou] shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more* (see 3 Nephi 22:4, parallel to Isaiah 54:4). *Thou shalt not be ashamed* means that ultimately the barren woman need not feel ashamed because of her vulnerability. The Lord's servants may have to endure shame and spitting for a time as Jesus did, but he will succor them in their afflictions: "therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed" (Isaiah 50:7).

*Thou shalt not be put to shame* means that the wicked will never be able to shame those who have "tender and chaste and delicate" feelings (Jacob 2:7). Instead, the people who choose wickedness instead of kindness will lose their children: "thou shalt no more be called tender and delicate . . . [thou] sayest in thine heart . . . I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children: But these two things shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood" (Isaiah 47:1, 8–9).

People who choose goodness will temporarily experience "the shame of [their] youth," that is, the vulnerability of being childlike, but such meekness helps them to become Christlike. Christ faced Gethsemane and the crucifixion just as each of us must face our own *Sabachthani* of afflictions: "Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonor: mine adversaries are all before thee. Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (Psalm

69:19–21). Because Christ endured the agonies of death upon the cross, he suffered an “open shame” from his persecutors (Hebrews 6:6). Likewise, the barren woman appears to be cursed. She may have to bear the reproach of her peers instead of bearing promised children. The widowed or divorced person may also experience discomfort or disgrace. The church may suffer ridicule or condemnation from those who do not recognize its divine origins. Prophets may suffer martyrdom in spite of their holy calling. The earth suffers in the shadow of Satan’s wrath in spite of her glorious destiny. Notwithstanding these sorrows, Zion will forget the temporary disgrace of not having a husband, and the Lord will remember Zion eternally: “I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant” (Ezekiel 16:60). Zion “shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end” (Isaiah 45:17).

### *Thy Maker Is Thine Husband*

The Lord identifies himself as the messenger of the covenant with Zion (see 3 Nephi 22:1, 8, 10, 17, parallel to Isaiah 54:1, 8, 10, 17). He refers to himself by several different names and roles: (1) *Maker*, (2) *Husband*, (3) *Lord of Hosts*, (4) *Redeemer*, (5) *Holy One of Israel*, and (6) *God of the whole earth* (see 3 Nephi 22:5, parallel to Isaiah 54:5). “Thy Maker is thine husband” means that the Creator of the world is the one who acts as our main companion and nurturer: “as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee” (Isaiah 62:5). Our Maker is the one who cultivates us and helps us grow in the plan of salvation.<sup>20</sup> When Zion begins to fear “the fury of the oppressor,” the Lord reminds her of the covenant: “forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth?” (2 Nephi 8:13, parallel to Isaiah 51:13).

The etymology of the English word *husband* is a compound of *house* and *prepare*; thus a *husband* is “one who prepares or builds a house.”<sup>21</sup> Our Maker is our husband because he prepares the earth as a house for all creatures; he prepares our bodies as houses or temples for our spirits; he prepares temples as places of worship in Zion, and he promises to prepare mansions for us in heaven (see John 14:2). He transforms the dwelling place of the barren woman from a tent into a temple as she makes room for future children: “I will lay thy stones with fair colors, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones. And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord” (3 Nephi 22:11–13, parallel to Isaiah 54:11–13).

The husband’s name is Jehovah,<sup>22</sup> or the Lord of Hosts: “I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded” (Isaiah 45:12).<sup>23</sup> The Lord is not ashamed to be called the “God of the whole earth” (3 Nephi 22:5, parallel to Isaiah 54:5). In former days, he was a husband to the house of Israel, even when the people broke their covenants (see Jeremiah 31:32). In Book of Mormon times, he invited the more righteous part of the Nephite people to touch the wounds in his hands and feet and side: “that ye may know that I am . . . the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world” (3 Nephi 11:14). Surely he will care for Zion, who has been faithful in the latter days. Zion’s Redeemer is the “Holy One of Israel,” who hallows and heals everyone who has lived on the earth: “For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after” (Jeremiah 30:17).

### *Called to Grief*

In two parallel phrases, the Lord tells Zion that she has temporarily been called as “a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit” and as “a wife of youth, when thou wast refused” (3 Nephi 22:6, parallel to Isaiah 54:6). Christ understands Zion as a woman “forsaken and grieved” because he was a man “despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). For a moment, it may seem as if the Lord has abandoned Zion, just as for a moment it seemed that God the Father abandoned Jesus, who cried out from the cross, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1; see also Matthew 27:46). As part of our earthly probation, we must endure periods of separation from God, but the Lord will never forsake his covenant people: “But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me” (Isaiah 49:14–16, parallel to 1 Nephi 21:14–16).

“A wife of youth” implies childlike submission to the will of the Father. The Lord’s calling and that of the woman are similar: the barren woman will give birth to her children after suffering desolation; Jesus spiritually gives birth to his children after suffering rejection. Christ can console the woman who was refused as a wife in her youth, because he was refused as a Savior in his mortal life: “The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner” (Psalm 118:22). Zion may be alone now, but the Lord’s law of love will compensate for her losses: “Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated, so that no man went through thee, I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many

generations" (Isaiah 60:15). If we can endure the pain, the Lord will bless us with peace: "thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes" (D&C 121:7–8).

### *For a Small Moment*

The Lord explains Zion's calling as a forsaken woman in two verses that are connected by parallelism, antithesis, and word repetition:

For a **small moment** have I **forsaken** thee,  
 but with **great mercies** will I **gather** thee.  
 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.

(3 Nephi 22:7–8, parallel to Isaiah 54:7–8)

The phrase *for a small moment have I forsaken thee* makes it seem that the Lord has been angry with Zion. The barren woman may feel that she is forsaken because the Lord has left her childless. Noah's family may have felt that the Lord abandoned them when the storms beat upon the ark for forty days. Christ may have felt that the Father had forsaken him when he writhed in agony on the cross. Yet because of the ark of the covenant, the fear and anguish are not in vain: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17). The Lord will gather the barren woman with great mercies, and Zion will gather children into her land: "Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth" (Isaiah 49:18, parallel to 1 Nephi 21:18).

The phrase *I hid my face from thee for a moment* implies a temporary withdrawal of the Lord's presence (see 3 Nephi 22:8). The Lord will never completely abandon his people, even if his presence seems to be withdrawn for a little while: "he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard" (Psalm 22:24). In Jewish culture, a husband is not permitted to see his wife going through the travail of childbirth, but he does not abandon her. He sits in the corner of the room with his back turned so that she will not feel embarrassed or immodest in her hour of agony. She recites psalms as she goes through contractions. When the woman can no longer sing because of the pain, her husband takes over, reciting the psalms for her.<sup>24</sup> Though we cannot see the Lord, when we weep, he weeps with us; when we sing, he rejoices with us. He understands our pain because he "hid not [his] face from shame and spitting" (Isaiah 50:6, parallel to 2 Nephi 7:6), even though sometimes "we [hide] as it were our faces from him" (Isaiah 53:3, parallel to Mosiah 14:3).

### *The Waters of Noah*

From the Lord's perspective, the small moment of forsaking and wrath that Zion experiences is like the flood that Noah experienced:

For this, **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.

(3 Nephi 22:9, parallel to Isaiah 54:9)

The people of Zion are the children of Noah, who must remember the shining promises of salvation even as storms threaten to dash their arks into oblivion. Noah and his family experienced forty days of storms in the ark, but the Lord

preserved Noah and his posterity in a covenant of kindness (see Genesis 7:6–7). The flood destroyed every living substance on the earth, but the barren earth was then ready to become a garden, having been born again and cleansed of mankind’s wickedness in a baptismal covenant (see Moses 7:47–64). After the flood, the house of Israel was scattered by wickedness, but the Lord will bring them home again so that “after they [are] restored they should no more be confounded, neither should they be scattered again” (1 Nephi 15:20). The earth still labors under the curses of sin and death, but the Lord sent Noah, the angel Gabriel, to Mary to announce the birth of the Savior Jesus Christ who conquered sin and death (see Luke 1:26–38).<sup>25</sup>

The barren woman experiences distress, but the Lord comforts Zion by comparing her to Noah, whose Hebrew name means “rest” or “comfort.” The Lord reminds Zion of his promises to Noah, who was spared destruction like the Nephites because of his faithfulness. After the floods of sin, affliction, sorrow, and barrenness abate, the Lord will gather or embrace Zion with great mercies: “For his merciful kindness is great toward us” (Psalm 117:2). Those who cry out in pain will someday celebrate the Lord’s everlasting kindness: “And now the year of my redeemed is come; and 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” (D&C 133:52).

The rhetorical figures in 3 Nephi 22:10 show that the Lord’s loving-kindness is related to his covenant of peace:

For the **mountains** shall **depart** and the **hills** be **re-**  
**moved,**  
 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.

(3 Nephi 22:10, parallel to Isaiah 54:10)

*Mountains* and *hills* have parallel meanings. “The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed” suggests the disappearance of the mountains and hills in the flood waters of Noah: “the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered. Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered” (Genesis 7:19–20).

“The mountains shall depart” also reminds us that kindness is greater than the power to move mountains: “though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:2). No matter what happens in our lives, the Lord’s covenant of kindness will comfort us: “Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof” (Psalm 46:2–3). The Lord protects all those who put their trust in him: “They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people henceforth even for ever” (Psalm 125:1–2).

“My kindness” is parallel to the “covenant of my peace,” implying that the main characteristic of the Lord’s covenant is kindness, a charity that is characterized by peace. The covenant of kindness will not depart: “Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away” (1 Corinthians 13:8). The rainbow that the Lord presented after the flood is a token of the covenant of kindness:

This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with



you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. . . . And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. (Genesis 9:12–13, 16)

The Noachian covenant includes a renewal of creation and generation, a restoration of the command to give birth to children: “And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis 9:1). This is the same command that the Lord gives to the barren woman in 3 Nephi 22.

The “covenant of peace” will remove the natural enmity between creatures: “And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods” (Ezekiel 34:25). Warfare will cease, and the Lord will redeem Israel: “I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore” (Ezekiel 37:26).

### *Pleasant Stones*

The Lord empathizes with the woman who suffers affliction, trouble, and grief: “Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted” (Isaiah 49:13, parallel to 1 Nephi 21:13). He promises to comfort Zion by revealing her beauty and her worth through temple covenants and ordinances. He promises that her children will learn the gospel and receive the covenant of peace. The image of the tempest resolves into the image of a temple:

O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted!

Behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colors,  
and lay thy foundations with sapphires.

And I will make thy windows of agates,  
and thy gates of carbuncles,

and all thy borders of pleasant stones.

And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord;  
and great shall be the peace of thy children.

(3 Nephi 22:11–13, parallel to Isaiah 54:11–13)

The tempest image is an echo of the previous references to the waters of Noah and to other scriptural storms (see 3 Nephi 22:9, parallel to Isaiah 54:9). The Lord will lead Zion to a promised land as he led the Jaredites: “God caused that there should be a furious wind blow upon the face of the waters, towards the promised land; and thus they were tossed upon the waves of the sea before the wind” (Ether 6:5). The disciples of Jesus were frightened by a tempest on the Sea of Galilee, but he calmed the waters and built their faith: “there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. . . . Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm” (Matthew 8:24, 26). The more wicked part of the Nephites were killed by tempests and other disasters, but the Lord appeared to the righteous Nephite remnant at the temple in Bountiful and established his covenant of peace (see 3 Nephi 8:17; 9:13).

The Lord comforts Zion with images of temple-building. *I will lay thy stones with fair colors* means “I will use beautifully colored stones to make a foundation for you” (3 Nephi 22:11). Whenever the Lord commands his people to build a temple, the best possible materials are procured: “I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God . . . onyx stones, and stones to be set, glistering stones, and of

divers colours, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance" (1 Chronicles 29:2). Choosing the stones is an important part of laying the foundation of the temple: "they brought great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones, to lay the foundation of the house" (1 Kings 5:17). The cornerstone of the temple is a symbol of the redeeming sacrifice of Jesus Christ: "thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste" (Isaiah 28:16). Zion will no longer be comfortless because the Lord is the foundation of her life: "Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded" (1 Peter 2:6).

The Lord's servants sing and make beautiful music when the foundations of the temple are laid: "And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets . . . to praise the Lord" (Ezra 3:10). Laying foundations also refers to the creation of the earth and its inhabitants: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? . . . When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4, 7).

When the Lord promises to lay the foundations of Zion with sapphires (see 3 Nephi 22:11), he suggests that she will one day enter his presence:<sup>26</sup> "And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness" (Exodus 24:10). Sapphires, beautiful blue gemstones, are often associated with heaven and the presence of the Lord:

And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. . . . As

the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. (Ezekiel 1:26, 28)

The light and colors of the temple stones shine like rainbows, reminding Zion of the Lord's covenant with the children of Noah. Similar stones will shine in the celestial city of the New Jerusalem: "And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones" (Revelation 21:19).

Zion's temple will have windows made of beautiful multicolored agates (see 3 Nephi 22:12; see also 1 Kings 6:4). Agates are one of the precious gems found on the breastplate of the high priest, along with sardius, topaz, carbuncle, emerald, sapphire, diamond, ligure, amethyst, beryl, onyx, and jasper (see Exodus 28:15–20): "And the stones shall be with the names of the children of Israel" (Exodus 28:21). The gate of Zion's temple will be made of carbuncles, the valuable red garnets mentioned in a lamentation for the once-great king of Tyrus:<sup>27</sup> "Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold" (Ezekiel 28:13). If Zion is faithful to her covenants, all her possibilities, perspectives, and perimeters will be as lovely as "borders of pleasant stones" (3 Nephi 22:12, parallel to Isaiah 54:12).

The most beautiful temple blessing for Zion will be in her posterity: "thy children shall be taught of the Lord" (3 Nephi 22:13, parallel to Isaiah 54:13). Her yet unborn children will live in peace, and the Lord will teach all her children (see Psalm 132:12). The Lord will teach his commandments to the children of Zion so that they may "enter into his rest" (Alma 13:6), and those commandments

will lead Zion's children into the covenant of peace: "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them" (Psalm 119:165). The children of the barren woman will thus become the children of the Lord: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew 5:9).

### *Established in Righteousness*

The Lord tells the afflicted woman that he will verify her righteousness. She will not be afraid, so oppression will not touch her. She will not panic, so terror will not affect her. Some people will conspire to harm Zion, but the Lord will not support them; in their conspiracy against her they will destroy themselves:

In righteousness shalt thou be established;  
 thou shalt be far from oppression for thou shalt not fear,  
 and from terror for it shall not come near thee.  
 Behold, they shall surely gather together against thee,  
 not by me;  
 whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall  
 for thy sake.

(3 Nephi 22:14–15, parallel to Isaiah 54:14–15)

Zion and her children will be established, or qualified, to enter into the presence of the Lord because of their righteousness: "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psalm 17:15). The Lord, who has called Zion as a woman of grief, has also called Zion as a woman of righteousness: "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people" (Isaiah 42:6). The servants of the Lord will be able to build the city of Zion, or the New Jerusalem (see Isaiah 45:13), and they will be blessed with children

who will carry on the Lord's work: "The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established" (Psalm 102:28).

Zion will be "far from oppression" (3 Nephi 22:14). She will be calm in the face of affliction: "For the oppression of the poor . . . now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him" (Psalm 12:5). Zion will not be afraid of her enemies: "Ye shall not fear them: for the Lord your God he shall fight for you" (Deuteronomy 3:22). Zion will trust in the Lord in spite of the plans of her opponents: "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident" (Psalm 27:3).<sup>28</sup> Zion will not be terrified when her enemies seek to destroy her, even if she is called to suffer temporarily: "if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled" (1 Peter 3:14). Not even the threat of death can harm Zion because she has faith in the atonement of Christ: "they never did look upon death with any degree of terror, for their hope and views of Christ and the resurrection" (Alma 27:28).

Wicked people will certainly conspire to humiliate Zion: "They have gaped upon me with their mouth; they have smitten me upon the cheek reproachfully; they have gathered themselves together against me" (Job 16:10). Some will plot to destroy Zion because they resent her goodness: "They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood" (Psalm 94:21). In spite of their craftiness, however, the plans of the wicked will backfire because Zion has kept her covenants.

The nations of the world may collaborate furiously against Zion, but they will not escape the hand of the Lord: "Now also many nations are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion. But they

know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understand they his counsel: for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor” (Micah 4:11–12). Zion’s enemies cannot succeed because their power does not come from the Lord: “They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not” (Hosea 8:4). Every person or group that fights against Zion will fail miserably: “And every nation which shall war against thee, O house of Israel, shall be turned one against another, and they shall fall into the pit which they digged to ensnare the people of the Lord. And all that fight against Zion shall be destroyed” (1 Nephi 22:14). Because Zion has endured persecution for the Lord’s sake, he will protect her. The Lord is no stranger to tyranny; he patiently suffered injustice for us all: “Because for thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face” (Psalm 69:7).

### *The Servants of the Lord*

The Lord has created the people who make weapons to destroy his servants, but he will not allow the weapons of oppressors to be successful against Zion. Zion will be able to refute the arguments of all the people who speak evil against her. The Lord gives such protection to all people who serve him, and he is the source of their righteousness:

Behold, I have created the smith  
that bloweth the coals in the fire,  
and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work;  
and I have created the waster to destroy.  
No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper;  
and every tongue that shall [revile / rise against] thee  
in judgment thou shalt condemn.  
This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord,  
and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord.

(3 Nephi 22:16–17, parallel to Isaiah 54:16–17)

The adversary may call upon skilled laborers to create weapons for the destruction of Zion, but the skill of those workers is in the hands of the Lord who created them. No matter how shrewd they are, those who work against Zion will not be able to destroy the Lord's work:

All his fellows shall be ashamed: and the workmen, they are of men: let them be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together. The smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with the strength of his arms: yea, he is hungry, and his strength faileth: he drinketh no water, and is faint. (Isaiah 44:11–12)

Satan may assign bloodthirsty agents to ravage the work of the Lord: "Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood . . . wasting and destruction are in their paths" (Isaiah 59:7). But no power of darkness can overcome the power of the Lord's covenant of peace: "Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise" (Isaiah 60:18).

No weapon that is formed against Zion can prosper. No murder, no slander, no torture can stop the Lord from endowing his people in holy places, as evidenced by the dedicatory prayer at the temple in Kirtland, Ohio:

We ask thee, Holy Father, to establish the people that shall worship, and honorably hold a name and standing in this thy house, to all generations and for eternity; That no weapon formed against them shall prosper; that he who diggeth a pit for them shall fall into the same himself; That no combination of wickedness shall have power to rise up and prevail over thy people upon whom thy name shall be put in this house. . . . And if they shall smite this people thou wilt smite them; thou wilt fight for



thy people as thou didst in the day of battle, that they may be delivered from the hands of all their enemies. We ask thee, Holy Father, to confound, and astonish, and to bring to shame and confusion, all those who have spread lying reports abroad, over the world, against thy servant or servants, if they will not repent. (Doctrine and Covenants 109:24–26, 28–29)

The enemies of Zion will revile or rise against the servants of the Lord (see Alma 30:31). Instead of suffering permanent damage, however, Zion will be blessed because she will feel the Lord's kind words of affirmation: "And blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake" (3 Nephi 12:11).

The sentence *this is the heritage of the servants of the Lord* (see 3 Nephi 22:17, parallel to Isaiah 54:17) refers to all of the promises that the Lord has made to the barren woman: (1) that she will have children, (2) that she will be a gathering place for the gentiles and all other nations, (3) that she will not be ashamed or desolate, (4) that the Lord will encircle her with everlasting kindness, (5) that her children will be taught in the temple, and (6) that her enemies will not be able to destroy her. The heritage of the Lord is an inheritance or an endowment. For her inheritance, Zion will receive the earth as a promised land: "And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the Lord" (Exodus 6:8). Zion will help the earth become the celestial kingdom: "In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages" (Isaiah 49:8, parallel to 1 Nephi 21:8).

Like the barren woman, the servants of the Lord will sing praises: "Praise, O ye servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord" (Psalm 113:1). Zion will be blessed because she has taken upon her the name of the Lord: "For thou, O God, hast heard my vows: thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name" (Psalm 61:5). All who come to Zion will receive the Lord's covenant of kindness: "there shall they fall down and be crowned with glory, even in Zion, by the hands of the servants of the Lord, even the children of Ephraim" (D&C 133:32). Their righteousness will be established because of their faith: "that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Philippians 3:9). The servants of the Lord will receive all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: "Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father" (Isaiah 58:14).

### **Children Are the Heritage of the Lord**

Zion will receive children and eternal increase as an inheritance from the Father: "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward" (Psalm 127:3). Because the Lord loves his spirit children with perfect kindness, children are the greatest blessing he can bestow upon his servants on earth. In Zion or the church, children are signs of sacred covenants and ordinances of salvation. For the earth, children are signs of genesis, renewal, and preparation for celestial glory. For church members, children are the tangible representations of the power of godliness.

The Lord uses the promise of children to represent important events and blessings in the plan of salvation: "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders" (2 Nephi 18:18, parallel to Isaiah

8:18). The promise of children is the greatest blessing a barren woman can hope for, even if she must wait in faith. For the promise of this blessing, Christ was willing to be called as a man rejected, like a barren woman who is willing to suffer in order to be eventually blessed with children. Christ wanted us to be his children spiritually. We are to be like him, also desiring to give birth and work hard to raise children in a covenant of infinitely tender loving-kindness. The only barrenness we need ever fear is a lack of kindness; the only desolation we need ever dread is the loss of charity. We are to sing.

## Notes

1. For fairly standard LDS interpretations of Isaiah 54, see Sidney B. Sperry, *The Old Testament Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1965); *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968); and Victor L. Ludlow, *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982).

2. From French *billet doux*, “sweet letter.”

3. From Greek *thalamos*, “bridal chamber.” For more information on the covenant significance of bridal chamber imagery, see John A. Tvedtnes, “Olive Oil: Symbol of the Holy Ghost,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 439–41, 447.

4. Making an analysis based on the etymology of English words translated from Isaiah’s Hebrew text or from the Book of Mormon’s unidentified source language may seem questionable to some. However, because the Lord has chosen English as the main language of translation for the Book of Mormon, attention to the English words is relevant. Furthermore, comparative historical linguists have been working to reconstruct genetic connections between the Indo-European family of languages to which English belongs and the Afroasiatic family to which Hebrew and Egyptian belong. See Allan R. Bomhard, *Toward Proto-Nostratic: A*

*New Approach to the Comparison of Proto-Indo-European and Proto-Afroasiatic* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1984).

5. From the appendix of *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 3rd ed., s.v. "gen-."

6. *Kinder* is the German word for *children*, as in the English word borrowed from the German word *kindergarten* (a garden for children).

7. Special thanks to Robert J. Norman, former director of the Tucson Institute of Religion, for the Hebrew lexis.

8. Lynn Clark Callister, "Cultural Meanings of Childbirth," *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic and Neonatal Nurses* 24 (May 1995): 327.

9. Dallin H. Oaks, "Worship through Music," *Ensign* (November 1994): 10.

10. The Lord tells Abraham to name the child Isaac, which means "he laugheth" or "he rejoiceth."

11. Sarah's son Isaac married Rebekah, who was barren until she conceived Esau and Jacob (see Genesis 25:21–24). Jacob's wife Rachel was barren, but the Lord finally remembered her and took away the reproach (see Genesis 29:31; 30:22–23).

12. Although Mary is described as a virgin rather than as a barren woman, the unique circumstances of Christ's conception make her as vulnerable as the woman alone until Joseph agrees not to put her away from him privately.

13. *Married wife* in 3 Nephi 22:1 has several possible interpretations: (1) any woman who has a husband and children, in contrast to the desolate woman who has neither husband nor children; (2) the Lord's former-day covenant peoples in contrast to the Lord's latter-day covenant peoples; (3) anyone who appears to be blessed, while some covenant people appear to be cursed, being denied blessings in spite of their faithfulness.

14. David Rolph Seely, "The Allegory of the Olive Tree and the Use of Related Figurative Language in the Ancient Near East and the Old Testament," in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree*, 298–9.

15. Richard K. Hart, "The Marriage Metaphor," *Ensign* (January 1995): 27.

16. The act of travailing to give birth to a child is compared to the struggle for spiritual birth in Galatians 4:19 and to the rebirth of the earth in Doctrine and Covenants 84:101.

17. The Lord's cloud and pillar of fire showed the Israelites where to pitch their tents and where to place the tabernacle in the wilderness (see Numbers 9:17; Deuteronomy 1:33).

18. Images of creation and singing combine in Isaiah 42:5–12: the Lord is he that "created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it"; the Lord commands the earth and its inhabitants to "sing unto the Lord a new song" (see also Isaiah 51:3, 11).

19. *Break forth* can also mean "appear": "And let the priests also, which come near to the Lord, sanctify themselves, lest the Lord break forth upon them" (Exodus 19:22).

20. The Lord's husbandry extends not only to Israel and Zion but to other kings and nations such as Cyrus of Elam, who allowed the Jews to rebuild the temple: "I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me" (Isaiah 45:4).

21. The *-band* morpheme in the English word *husband* comes from Old Norse *būa* (to live, prepare) and *būask* (to make oneself ready). See the Indo-European root *bheu-* (to be, exist, grow) in the appendix of the *American Heritage Dictionary*, 3rd edition.

22. The Hebrew word *Yahweh* is translated as *Lord* in the King James Version of the Bible. See *The NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament*, ed. John R. Kohlenberger III (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1985), 110.

23. See also Isaiah 47:4; 48:2; 51:15; Jeremiah 31:35; 50:34.

24. Lynn Callister, conversation, 24 June 1995.

25. Thanks to Linda Smith for pointing out this connection.

26. Just as the Nephites are blessed in 3 Nephi 11 to be in the presence of Jesus after their trial of faith.

27. For more about the king of Tyrus, see John A. Tvedtnes, "Lucifer, Son of the Morning," unpublished paper (1995).

28. See also “The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Hebrews 13:6); “And the righteous need not fear, for they are those who shall not be confounded” (1 Nephi 22:22); “Wherefore, be of good cheer, and do not fear, for I the Lord am with you, and will stand by you” (D&C 68:6).