
3 Nephi 22 — With Everlasting Kindness — The Forsaken Wife Gathered Home

3 Nephi 22: Jesus quotes Isaiah 54 in full — the great song of comfort to a forsaken and barren Zion. 'Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear... for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife.' Zion is told to enlarge her tent and lengthen her cords, for she shall break forth on the right hand and the left and her seed shall inherit the Gentiles. She shall forget the shame of her youth and the reproach of her widowhood, 'for thy Maker, thy husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.' The Lord has called her as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit: '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.' As he swore the waters of Noah would no more flood the earth, so he swears he will not be wroth with her: '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.' He will lay her stones with fair colors, her foundations with sapphires, her windows with agates; 'all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children.' In righteousness she shall be established, far from oppression and terror; 'no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper.' The chapter is the tenderest covenant-song in scripture — the forsaken, grieving, barren wife reclaimed by her Maker and Husband, the brief moment of wrath swallowed by everlasting kindness, the covenant of peace that outlasts the very mountains.

This short chapter is one long song — Isaiah 54, quoted whole by the risen Christ — and it is perhaps the tenderest passage of covenant love in all of scripture. It is addressed to *Zion* under the image of a *woman*: a barren woman who never bore children, a wife forsaken in her youth, a widow grieved in spirit, a city tossed with tempest and not comforted. And to this forsaken, grieving, barren woman, the Lord speaks words of overwhelming tenderness and restoration. She will sing; she will have more children than she ever imagined; her shame and reproach will be forgotten; her Maker will be her Husband; and the brief moment of his hidden face will be swallowed up in *everlasting kindness* and a *covenant of peace* that will outlast the very mountains. It is a chapter of pure comfort — the wounded covenant people reclaimed and restored by the God who never finally lets them go.

Hebrew Word Studies

■esed (נֶסֶד) — "steadfast love, lovingkindness, covenant faithfulness, mercy" — **■esed**, the loyal, faithful, covenant love of God; not a fleeting feeling but a committed, enduring, faithful love that keeps its promises and does not let go. The great covenant-word for the love of God that endures forever vv. 8, 10 (with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee... my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed). The word translated *kindness* in this chapter — *with everlasting kindness... my kindness shall not depart* — is the Hebrew **■esed**, and it is one of the most important and most untranslatable words in all of scripture. **■esed** is the *covenant love* of God — and no single English word captures it, which is why translators reach for "lovingkindness," "steadfast love," "mercy," "faithfulness," "loyalty," all at once. **■esed** is not a feeling that comes and goes; it is a *committed, loyal, faithful love* — the love that *keeps covenant*, that *does not let go*, that remains faithful even when the other party has been unfaithful. It is the love a faithful spouse has for a wandering spouse, the love that holds the relationship together from one side even when the other side has failed. And that is exactly its meaning in this chapter, where Zion is the *forsaken, refused wife* (v. 6) and God is the faithful Husband whose **■esed** reclaims her. **■esed** is the heartbeat of the Old Testament's vision of God. It rings through the great refrain: *the Lord is good; his mercy (■esed) is everlasting* (Ps. 100:5); the entire 136th Psalm repeats, twenty-six times, *for his mercy (■esed) endureth for ever*. It is at the center of God's self-revelation: *the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness (■esed) and truth, keeping mercy (■esed) for thousands* (Ex. 34:6–7). And it is the word of the new-covenant promise of unbreakable love. The crucial thing about **■esed** is its *durability* — it is love that *endures*, that *does not depart*, that outlasts everything. And this chapter makes the most extravagant possible claim for its durability: *the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my ■esed shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed* (v. 10). The mountains — the very emblem of permanence — will sooner vanish than God's **■esed** will fail. This is the deepest comfort the Bible offers: not that God feels warmly toward us in the moment, but that his **■esed**, his loyal covenant love, is *more permanent than the mountains*, that it *will not depart*, that it *endures forever*. It is the answer to every fear of being forsaken — for though God's face may be hidden *for a small moment* (v. 8), his **■esed** is *everlasting*, and the momentary hiding is swallowed in the eternal faithfulness. And the New Testament gathers it all into the great assurance that *neither death, nor life... nor things present, nor things to come... shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Rom. 8:38–39) — the **■esed** of God, now revealed in Christ, from which nothing in all creation can separate the covenant people. **■esed** is the love that gathered the forsaken wife, that swore the oath surer than the flood, that outlasts the mountains. It is the love that does not let go — and the whole of Isaiah 54, the tenderest covenant-song in scripture, is the song of God's unfailing **■esed** toward a people who had failed him, reclaimed, restored, and held forever in a covenant of peace that cannot be removed.

From the Chapter's Architecture

```cross-references Isa. 54 (the source of the whole chapter, quoted entire); Ex. 34:6–7 (the Lord God, merciful and gracious... abundant in goodness — ■esed — and truth, keeping mercy — ■esed — for thousands — the covenant love of God, vv. 8, 10); Ps. 136:1–26 (for his mercy — ■esed — endureth for ever, twenty-six times — the everlasting kindness, v. 8); Ps. 100:5 (the Lord is good; his mercy — ■esed — is everlasting — v. 8); Gen. 9:11–17 (God's oath that the waters... no more... destroy the earth, sealed with the rainbow — the oath of v. 9); Rom. 8:38–39 (neither death, nor life... shall be able to separate us from the love of God — the ■esed from which nothing separates, v. 10); Jer. 31:31–34 (they shall all know me... I will be merciful — the children taught of the Lord, v. 13); John 6:45 (they shall be all taught of God — the divine teaching of v. 13); Rev. 21:18–21 (the holy city with foundations of precious stones and gates of pearl — the jeweled Zion of vv. 11–12); Hos. 2:14–20 (God wooing back the unfaithful wife Israel, I will betroth thee unto me for ever — the forsaken wife reclaimed, vv. 5–8); Isa. 62:4–5 (thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken... for the Lord delighteth in thee... as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee — the husband-God reclaiming Zion, vv. 5–6); 3 Ne. 20:34–35; 21:1 (the redeemed and gathered Zion — the city this song restores). ```