



Enlarge your tent, for the Spirit Dwells in You: Reflections on Isaiah 54:2
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Is 54,2: *Enlarge the space for your tent, spread out your tent cloths unsparingly; lengthen your ropes and make firm your stakes.* The image of the tent enlarged that appears in Is 54, 2, has a signification we can approach from the historical context of Isaiah's prophecy. It is also an image that has a history and a future. Isaiah speaks a word of consolation to Israel at a time when God's people suffer abandonment and exile. The Lord had left this chosen nation to humiliations inflicted by her enemies. She had suffered for her infidelities. But her Maker and Spouse will renew his presence in her midst. The enlargement of the tent points to the numerous children that will be given to Israel after her time of exile: *"For you shall spread abroad to the right and to the left; Your descendants shall dispossess the nations and shall people the desolate cities."* (54, 3) Enlarge, then the tent, to make room for those who have yet to come.

Exodus 40, 34: *Moses set up the court around the Dwelling and the altar and hung the curtain at the entrance of the court. Thus Moses finished all the work. Then the cloud covered the meeting tent, and the glory of the LORD filled the Dwelling.* The tent of Israel is an image of what constitutes her as a people chosen by the Lord. *"My father was a wandering Aramean"* (Dt 26, 5). Once not a people, yet Israel was made God's people. Wandering in the desert in tents, yet by special providence this people grew into a great nation while sojourning in Egypt. Israel has a memory of wandering in tents, and of having been saved from slavery by the Pillar of Fire and Luminous Cloud, that is to say, by the Hand of the Living God. As Israel wandered through the desert after being freed, the Lord God dwelt with them. This was the meeting tent that Moses established, the place where the Law of the Covenant was kept, and where the glory of the Lord dwelt. Indelibly marked in the memory of God's people, God had chosen to dwell with them. And they dwelt with him; God's tent was where God's people could approach him with confidence in his mercy.

In Israel's movement from being not a people to becoming God's people there is a movement from tent to temple. One could almost describe the history of Israel with these two images as guide: 2 Sam 7: *David said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God dwells in a tent!"* 2 Sam 5: *Go, tell my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD: Should you build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day on which I led the Israelites out of Egypt to the present, but I have been going about in a tent under cloth.* 2 Sam 12: *I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your loins, and I will make his*

kingdom firm. It is he who shall build a house for my name. And I will make his royal throne firm forever.

The New Testament understands the prophetic events surrounding the tent and the temple in direct relation to the person and work of Christ and our receiving the gift of the Spirit: Jn 1, 14: *And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, [σκηνώω, skēnoō : He encamped, tented among us] and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth. Jn 2,19: Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." [...] But he was speaking about the temple of his body. 1 Cor 3,16: Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? Ephesians 1,22: And he put all things beneath his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.*

Is 54,2: *Enlarge the space for your tent, spread out your tent cloths unsparingly; lengthen your ropes and make firm your stakes.* In light of this Scriptural tradition, a few points:

1. Take heart after what may seem like an experience of exile and wandering.
2. The tent endures and it will be made large, to bring in all the nations.
3. The tent is not ours first. It is the Lord's dwelling. He is its firmness.
4. The New Testament locates the tent of God's definitive dwelling place in the person of Jesus himself.
5. His Pascal Mystery is the restoration of the tent / temple, and the pledge of God's fidelity in establishing the kingdom as described and enacted by Jesus himself.
6. In his body the Church, Christ dwells in a most plentiful fashion. He gives life to those who enter the space of his victory over sin and death, division and despair.
7. We are in him by the Spirit, and the Spirit is in us. We are his temple, *and he equips the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ. (Eph 4,12)*

In light of this Scriptural development of the image of "God's Tent" among us, what do you consider most significant about Isaiah's prophetic word?

*Enlarge the space,
spread out your tent cloths;
lengthen your ropes
make firm your stakes.*

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