

The Book of Isaiah, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 22: An Everlasting Covenant; Come to the Waters

Isaiah 54:1–55:13

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson should leave the class standing in the marketplace of Isaiah 55 hearing God's voice call them by name. The aim is to move the heart from earning to receiving. Help the class feel the wonder that the same God who sent the Servant to be crushed in chapter 53 now spreads a free feast in chapters 54 and 55, and that the freeness of the offer is purchased, not cheap. Keep the barren woman, the covenant of peace, and the come-to-the-waters invitation tied tightly to the cross that stands just before them in the text.

Doctrinally, guide the class to see these promises fulfilled in Christ and His church without reading New Testament specifics anachronistically into Isaiah's own words. Present the everlasting covenant and the sure mercies of David as fulfilled in the resurrection and reign of Jesus (Acts 13:34), the barren woman rejoicing as the church (Galatians 4:27), and the invitation as a real, universal gospel call answered today by the obedience of faith. Resist any drift toward faith-only or a mere private feeling; the invitation in Isaiah is answered in the New Testament way of hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized into Christ.

Question 1

Student Question:

In Isaiah 54:1–3, the barren woman is told to sing and enlarge the place of her tent because her children will be more than the children of the married woman. Galatians 4:27 applies this very verse to the church, the Jerusalem above. What does this teach us about how God grows His family, and why is it good news that the harvest depends on His promise rather than on what we can produce?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Isaiah 54 opens with a command that would have sounded absurd to its first hearers: a barren, childless woman is told to sing and shout for joy. In Israel, childlessness carried deep shame and a sense of having no future. Yet God reverses the script entirely, promising her more children than the woman who has a husband. The point is that God's family grows by His promise and power, not by ordinary human means.

Verse 2 tells her to enlarge her tent, lengthen her cords, and strengthen her stakes, because the family will spread out to the right and the left and possess the nations. This is missionary language. The tent of God's people must be built bigger than they think they need, because God intends to bring in far more than they can presently imagine.

Paul lifts Isaiah 54:1 directly into Galatians 4:27 and applies it to the Jerusalem above, the church, the mother of all who are free in Christ. So the New Testament itself tells us how to read

this. The barren woman who breaks into song is the people of God under the gospel, fruitful far beyond what the old order ever produced. The growth is God's doing, which is exactly why she can sing before she sees it.

For the teacher, the pastoral angle is that many in the class carry a quiet sense of barrenness, whether in family, ministry, or fruitfulness. The text invites them to sing on the basis of God's promise rather than waiting for visible results. Joy here is an act of faith in what God has said He will do.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's family expands by His promise and power, not by human effort or natural descent (Galatians 4:27–28).
- The growth of the Lord's church is His work, freeing us from anxious self-reliance while still calling us to labor.
- Reproach and shame from the past do not have the final word over those God claims as His own.
- Joy grounded in God's promise can come before the circumstances change.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you feel a sense of barrenness, and what would it mean to sing on the strength of God's promise rather than your present results?
- How does it change our view of evangelism to remember that God means to make His tent far larger than we expect?
- What past shame have you assumed is permanent that God may intend to overturn?

Question 2

Student Question:

Isaiah 54:4 tells the woman not to fear, for she will forget the shame of her youth. Are there past failures or seasons of shame that you still let define you? How does God's promise to remove that reproach change the way you see yourself today?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 4 through 6 speak tenderly to the woman as a wife who had been forsaken and grieved in spirit. God names Himself her Maker and her husband, the Holy One of Israel and Redeemer. The relationship is intimate and covenantal, and God Himself takes responsibility to restore it.

The promise that she will forget the shame of her youth and the reproach of her widowhood is striking. God does not merely overlook the past; He pledges to bring her into so full a restoration that the old disgrace loses its grip. This is the heart of a God who heals rather than merely tolerates.

Teachers should note the marriage imagery threaded through the prophets and into the New Testament, where Christ is the husband and the church is His bride (Ephesians 5:25–32). Isaiah is

sketching the same union from a distance. The God of Israel is not aloof; He binds Himself to His people in covenant love.

The pastoral weight here is for those defined by old failures. God's word to them is not denial of the past but a promise large enough to swallow its shame.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God presents Himself as Maker, husband, and Redeemer, binding Himself to His people in covenant love.
- Restoration in God removes the controlling power of past shame (Isaiah 54:4).
- The marriage imagery anticipates Christ and His bride, the church (Ephesians 5:25–32).
- God heals the relationship rather than merely tolerating the offender.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it do to your heart to hear God call Himself your Maker and Redeemer in personal terms?
- Is there a reproach from your past you have never let God touch? What holds you back?
- How should the picture of Christ and His bride shape the way we value the church?

Question 3

Student Question:

In Isaiah 54:7–8, God says, “For a brief moment I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you... with everlasting love I will have compassion on you.” How do we hold together the reality of God’s discipline and the permanence of His love, and what guards us from reading every hardship as God’s rejection?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 7 and 8 contain a difficult and beautiful tension. God says, “For a brief moment I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you.” The discipline is real, but it is brief; the love is everlasting.

The teacher must handle this carefully so the class does not conclude that every hardship is divine abandonment. Isaiah is describing the experience of covenant discipline that the nation went through, the felt absence of God for a season followed by gathering compassion. The proportions are the point: a moment of hiding against an eternity of love.

Verse 9 anchors the promise in the days of Noah. Just as God swore the waters would never again cover the earth, so He swears not to be angry with His people in that overwhelming way again. God stakes His own faithfulness on a remembered oath, teaching us to ground assurance in His character and word, not in our shifting feelings.

Pastorally, this is medicine for the person convinced that a painful season proves God has rejected them. The text refuses that conclusion. Discipline is not desertion, and the love outlasts the storm.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's discipline is real but proportionate and temporary against the backdrop of His everlasting love (Isaiah 54:7–8).
- Hardship is not proof of God's rejection; we must not read every trial as abandonment.
- God grounds assurance in His own oath and character, as in the days of Noah (Isaiah 54:9).
- Feelings of God's distance must be measured against His revealed promises, not the reverse.

Discussion Prompts

- When have you been tempted to read a hard season as God deserting you? What would Isaiah 54:7–8 say to that?
- Why is it important that God grounds His promise in His own oath rather than in our performance?
- How can we comfort someone who is convinced their suffering means God has given up on them?

Question 4

Student Question:

Isaiah 54:10 promises, "My steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed." When the mountains feel like they are shaking in your own life, what practical difference does it make to rest on the steadfastness of God rather than the steadiness of your circumstances?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Isaiah 54:10 is one of the great mountains of the chapter: "For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you." Mountains are the very image of permanence, yet God says His love outlasts even them.

The covenant of peace looks ahead to the peace secured by the Servant who was crushed in chapter 53. The chastisement that brought us peace was upon Him (53:5), and now God promises a peace that cannot be removed. The two chapters are bound together: the Servant suffers, and out of His suffering comes an unshakable covenant of peace.

Teachers should let the class feel the contrast between shaking circumstances and unshaking love. Lives do get shaken; mountains in our world do move. The promise is not that the ground will never tremble but that God's love and peace will still be standing when it does.

This is the soil for genuine assurance, distinct from the false security of once-saved-always-saved. The covenant is sure on God's side and steadfast; we are still called to abide in it, to hold

our confidence firm to the end (Hebrews 3:14). God's faithfulness never fails, and we are warned not to harden our hearts and depart.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's steadfast love and covenant of peace are more permanent than mountains (Isaiah 54:10).
- The covenant of peace flows from the Servant's suffering in chapter 53 (Isaiah 53:5).
- Assurance rests on God's unfailing faithfulness, not on the steadiness of our circumstances.
- God's covenant is sure on His side, yet Scripture still calls us to hold fast and not fall away (Hebrews 3:12–14).
- True assurance is not the same as the unconditional security of once-saved-always-saved teaching.

Discussion Prompts

- What mountain in your life feels like it is shaking right now, and how does Isaiah 54:10 speak to it?
- How is biblical assurance different from a presumption that we can never fall away?
- Why is it significant that the covenant of peace grows directly out of the Servant's suffering?

Question 5

Student Question:

Isaiah 54:11–12 describes a city rebuilt with sapphires and precious stones, and verse 13 says, "All your children shall be taught by the LORD." Jesus quotes this in John 6:45. How does this picture point past physical stones to the people of God taught by Him, and what does it say about the place of God's word among His people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 11 through 14 picture the afflicted, storm-tossed city rebuilt with antimony, sapphires, and gates of precious stones. The imagery of a jeweled city reappears in Revelation 21 when the new Jerusalem is described, and it is a picture of God lavishing beauty and security on His restored people.

Verse 13 is the heart of the passage: "All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your children." Jesus quotes this in John 6:45 to explain that those who truly come to Him are those taught by the Father. The jeweled city is finally a people, and what makes them precious is that they are taught of God.

The teacher should help the class move from physical stones to living people. God's restoration project was never mainly about architecture; it was about forming a people shaped by His word, established in righteousness and far from oppression. This guards us against expecting a literal rebuilt city as the goal of prophecy.

Practically, this exalts the place of God's word in the life of His people. A church taught by the Lord through His revealed word is the jeweled city; great peace belongs to those whose children are instructed in the truth.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The jeweled-city imagery describes God's people, not merely a physical structure (Isaiah 54:11–13, Revelation 21).
- Jesus applies "taught by the LORD" to those drawn to Him by the Father (John 6:45).
- God's restoration aims at forming a people shaped by His word, not at architecture.
- Great peace belongs to a people instructed in the truth and established in righteousness.

Discussion Prompts

- What changes when we see the jeweled city as a picture of God's people rather than a literal building?
- How seriously do we take being "taught by the LORD" in our own homes and congregation?
- Where do you most need God's word to establish you in righteousness right now?

Question 6

Student Question:

Isaiah 54:17 says, "No weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed." How is this a comfort without being a promise of an easy, trouble-free life? Where do you need to trust this assurance right now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Isaiah 54:17 closes the chapter with the famous promise, "No weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed, and you shall confute every tongue that rises against you in judgment." It is vital to read this in context. It is not a charm against all difficulty; it is the assurance that no opposition will finally defeat God's covenant purpose for His servants.

The verse ends, "This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD and their vindication from me." The vindication is from God. His people may be attacked, accused, and slandered, but the final verdict belongs to Him, and He will uphold those who are His.

Teachers should correct a common misuse of this verse as a guarantee of personal invincibility or material protection. The Servant Himself, just one chapter earlier, was pierced and crushed. The promise is that the cause of God and the people of God cannot be ultimately overthrown, not that they will never be wounded.

Pastorally this is a strong word for those facing hostility for their faith. The accusations may sting now, but the heritage of the Lord's servants is vindication from His own hand.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Isaiah 54:17 promises that no opposition will finally defeat God's purpose, not that life will be free of trouble.

- Final vindication belongs to God, who upholds His servants (Isaiah 54:17).
- The verse must not be misused as a guarantee of personal invincibility or material prosperity.
- The Servant of chapter 53 shows that God's people can be wounded yet not overthrown.

Discussion Prompts

- How do we claim Isaiah 54:17 honestly without turning it into a promise of an easy life?
- Where are you facing opposition or accusation, and how does it help to know vindication is God's to give?
- Why does the suffering Servant keep us from misreading this verse?

Question 7

Student Question:

Isaiah 55:1-2 invites the thirsty to come and buy without money. How does this free invitation expose the difference between earning God's favor and receiving it, and why is grace offensive to the human instinct to pay our own way?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Isaiah 55:1-2 throws open the great invitation: "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." God is the generous host shouting in the marketplace, and the price is the strangest price of all, which is no price at all.

Then comes the searching question of verse 2: "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?" Every person in the class is spending their life on something. The text presses them to ask whether the thing they are buying actually fills them or only leaves them hungrier.

The freeness of the offer is the heart of grace. We cannot purchase God's salvation; we can only receive it. Yet we must not mistake free for cheap. What is free to us was paid for in full by the Servant who poured out His soul unto death. The invitation in chapter 55 stands on the cross of chapter 53.

Teachers should let this confront the human instinct to earn. Faith-only schemes and works-righteousness alike miss the picture; the water is free, yet God still says "come," "buy," "eat," "listen," and "seek." Grace is received, but it is received by a real, active response, not passive sentiment.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Salvation is offered freely, by grace, and cannot be earned or purchased (Isaiah 55:1).
- What is free to us was costly to the Servant; free is not the same as cheap (Isaiah 53:5).
- The invitation exposes how we waste our lives chasing things that do not satisfy (Isaiah 55:2).

- Grace is received through a real, active response of coming, listening, and seeking, not passive feeling.

Discussion Prompts

- What are you currently spending your life buying, and is it actually feeding your soul?
- Why is the freeness of grace so offensive to our instinct to pay our own way?
- How do we hold together that salvation is free and yet calls for a real response?

Question 8

Student Question:

Isaiah 55:7 calls the wicked to “forsake his way” and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and return to the LORD. Repentance here is more than feeling sorry; it is forsaking and returning. What is one way or one thought you sense God asking you to forsake and turn from?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Isaiah 55:6–7 turns the invitation into urgency: “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him.” The phrase “while he may be found” implies there is a time of opportunity that must not be presumed upon.

Repentance here is concrete. It is forsaking a way and a thought pattern, and returning to the LORD. It is not mere regret; it is a turning of direction at both the level of behavior and the level of the mind. The wicked forsakes his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts.

The promise attached is abundant pardon: God will “abundantly pardon.” The same God who calls for the turn meets the one who turns with overflowing mercy. Repentance and grace are not rivals; the call to forsake sin is itself an act of mercy.

Teachers should press the urgency without manufacturing panic. The point is not that God is hard to find but that the human heart is prone to delay. Today, while He is near, is the time to seek Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- There is a real season of opportunity to seek God that we must not presume upon (Isaiah 55:6).
- Repentance is forsaking both sinful ways and sinful thoughts and returning to God (Isaiah 55:7).
- God responds to genuine repentance with abundant pardon (Isaiah 55:7).
- The call to repent is itself an expression of God’s mercy, not its opposite.

Discussion Prompts

- Is there a way or a thought God is calling you to forsake and turn from today?
- Why is delay such a danger when God says to seek Him while He may be found?

- How does the promise of abundant pardon make repentance an act of hope rather than dread?

Question 9

Student Question:

Isaiah 55:1–3 issues the great invitation, “Come, everyone who thirsts,” and promises, “I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.” In Acts 13:34 Paul says this “sure love for David” was fulfilled when God raised Jesus from the dead, never to return to corruption. Trace how this free gospel invitation, the everlasting covenant of peace (54:10), and the sure mercies of David all come together in Christ. How does the New Testament teach us to answer this invitation today, by hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized into Christ, and why is it crucial that we let the gospel define the response rather than treating the offer as a vague spiritual feeling?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal heart of the lesson. Isaiah 55:1–3 joins the free invitation, “Come, everyone who thirsts,” to a covenant promise: “Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.” These are the sure mercies promised to David, and the New Testament tells us exactly where they land.

In Acts 13:34 Paul stands in the synagogue at Antioch and declares that God fulfilled this very promise, “the holy and sure blessings of David,” by raising Jesus from the dead, never again to return to corruption. So the everlasting covenant of Isaiah 55, the covenant of peace of 54:10, and the sure mercies of David all converge on the risen Christ. The reign promised to David’s house is fulfilled in Jesus reigning now at God’s right hand, established at Pentecost (Acts 2), not in a future earthly political kingdom or rebuilt throne in Jerusalem.

We must be careful with the text. Isaiah does not yet speak the New Testament’s specific language of baptism and confession, and we should not read it back into his mouth anachronistically. What we can rightly say is that this gracious gospel invitation, offered freely to all who thirst, is answered today in the way the New Testament teaches. The Lord who calls, “Come to the waters,” is the same Lord whose apostle later answers the convicted crowd, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38).

So the response to the invitation is not a vague spiritual feeling or a one-time mental decision. The thirsty come to Christ by hearing the gospel, believing in Him, repenting of sin, confessing His name, and being baptized into Him for the forgiveness of sins (Romans 6:3–4, Galatians 3:26–27, Mark 16:16). The water of Isaiah 55:1 is freely offered; the New Testament tells us how God has appointed that we come and drink. This is a real and universal call, extended to everyone who thirsts, not a secret offer to a pre-selected few.

Teachers should hold both truths firmly: the invitation is gloriously free, purchased by the Servant, offered to all, and it is answered by the obedience of faith. Refuse the faith-only reading that empties the response, and refuse the works-righteousness reading that empties the grace. The waters are free, and God has told us how to come.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The everlasting covenant and the sure mercies of David are fulfilled in the resurrection and reign of the risen Christ (Acts 13:34).
- Christ reigns now at God's right hand, the kingdom established at Pentecost, not a future earthly political throne in Jerusalem (Acts 2).
- Isaiah's invitation is free and universal, offered to everyone who thirsts (Isaiah 55:1).
- We should not read New Testament baptismal language back into Isaiah's own words anachronistically, but we rightly say his invitation is answered in the New Testament way.
- The gospel call is answered by hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38, Romans 6:3-4).
- The response is a real, active obedience of faith, not a vague feeling or faith-only mental decision.
- The call is genuine and universal, not a limited offer to the pre-selected, which refutes Calvinism.

Discussion Prompts

- How does it deepen your confidence to know the everlasting covenant of Isaiah 55 was fulfilled when God raised Jesus from the dead?
- Why does it matter that we let the New Testament define how we answer the invitation rather than treating it as a vague feeling?
- If the call to come to the waters is for everyone who thirsts, who in your life still needs to hear it, and how will you extend it?

Question 10

Student Question:

Isaiah 55:11 says God's word "shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose." Name one specific way you intend to put yourself in the path of God's word this week so that it can do its work in you, and how do you want Christ to be forming you through it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The chapter closes with two glorious assurances. First, in verses 8 and 9, God reminds us that His thoughts and ways are higher than ours as the heavens are higher than the earth. The grace that gives bread without price does not run on human logic, and we must let God be larger than our accounting.

Then in verses 10 and 11 comes the promise about the word: as the rain and snow come down and do not return without watering the earth and giving seed and bread, "so shall my word be

that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose.” God’s word is effective; it does the work He sends it to do.

The chapter ends in verses 12 and 13 with joy and creation itself rejoicing, mountains and hills breaking into singing and the trees clapping their hands, with thorns replaced by cypress and brier by myrtle, for an everlasting sign. The word that goes out produces a transformed world and a singing people.

For the capstone question, the teacher should turn this toward action. If God’s word will not return empty, then the wise response is to get into its path. Encourage each student to name a concrete way they will sit under the word this week and to ask how they want Christ to be forming them through it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God’s thoughts and ways are higher than ours, so His grace will not always fit our logic (Isaiah 55:8–9).
- God’s word is powerful and effective; it accomplishes what He purposes (Isaiah 55:11).
- The word that goes out produces transformation and joy in God’s people (Isaiah 55:12–13).
- The wise response is to place ourselves deliberately in the path of God’s word.

Discussion Prompts

- What is one concrete way you will put yourself under God’s word this week?
- How does it encourage you that the word does not depend on your eloquence but on God’s purpose?
- In what specific way do you most want Christ to be forming you through His word right now?