EBS8 Isa 54-55

**Lesson 8: Isaiah 54-55**

**Title: My Thoughts Are Not Your Thoughts**

**Objectives:**

1. The student will understand the three metaphors in Isa 54 that offer the exiles reassurance.
2. The student will understand the teaching about God’s ways, thoughts and word.

**Preparation:**

1. Review the two major divisions of Isaiah 40-55:
   1. In Isa 40-47 the prophet seeks to remove the idols of Babylon from Israelite thinking and theology.
   2. Since many resist, Isa 48 represents a turning point from a focus on all the Israelites in exile to the group called Zion that is willing to return.
   3. In Isa 49-55 the prophet centers on removing Israel from Babylon. The servant leader plays an increasingly important role.
2. In Isa 49-55 Isaiah tends to alternate between addressing the servant and talking with Zion.
   1. Isa 54-55 address Zion.
      1. 49:1-13—servant.
      2. 49:14-50:3—Zion.
      3. 50:4-9—servant.
      4. 50:10-52:12—Zion.
      5. 52:13-53:12—servant.
      6. 54-55—Zion.
   2. Compare all the uses of Zion in Isaiah: Isa. 1:8, 27; 2:3; 3:16f; 4:3ff; 8:18; 10:12, 24, 32; 12:6; 14:32; 16:1; 18:7; 24:23; 28:16; 29:8; 30:19; 31:4, 9; 33:5, 14, 20; 34:8; 35:10; 37:22, 32; 40:9; 41:27; 46:13; 49:14; 51:3, 11, 16; 52:1f, 7f; 59:20; 60:14; 61:3; 62:11; 64:10; 66:8.
3. Review the historical circumstances of Isa 40-55.
4. Review the theme of Isa 40-55.

**Theme:** The God of hope and history sends a servant.

**Background:**

1. Isaiah writes to those in Babylonian captivity.
   1. The people question God on two levels:
      1. They do not think God is powerful enough to rescue them.
      2. They do not believe God cares enough about them to rescue them.
   2. Isaiah repeatedly responds with two central points:
      1. God is powerful enough to rescue them because he is the creator, the only one who causes all things to happen.
      2. God is their redeemer and savior who reassure them of his love and protection.
2. Many hymns appear in Isa 40-55 including the one that ends the section. Make a list of the similarities and differences among the hymns:
   1. 40:10-13
   2. 44:23
   3. 45:24-25
   4. 48:20-21
   5. 49:13
   6. 52:9-10
   7. 55:12-13
3. Review the experiences of the Bible’s reflection on barrenness:
   1. Barren land: Joel 2:20; Job 39:6; 2 Ki 2:19,21; Ps 107:34; Gen 3:17,18.
   2. Barren women: Sarah (Gen 11:30); Rebekah (Gen 25:21); Rachel (Gen 29:31); Manoah's wife (Jdg 13:2, 3); Hannah (1 Sam 2:5); Elizabeth (Lk 1:7, 36).

**Learning Experiences:**

1. Introduction to Isa 54.
   1. Isa 54 is often divided into two Hallmark cards (salvation oracles).
      1. Isa 54:1-10 includes the double admonition not to fear or be confounded (v 4) and the promise of redemption (vv 5, 8)
      2. Isa 54:11-17 includes the admonition not to fear (v 14) and promise of vindication (v 17)
   2. In Isa 54 three extended metaphors describe God’s relationship to Israel in Babylonian captivity:
      1. Husband and wife, children and tents.
      2. Noah and the flood.
      3. War.
   3. Isa 54 includes many qualities of God. Make a list.
2. Metaphor One—Husband and wife, children and tents.
   1. The first metaphor is the most developed.
   2. The double call to sing reflects other doubles:
      1. Comfort in Isa 40:1.
      2. Sing in 49:13.
      3. Awake in 51:9.
      4. I in 51:12; 52:1.
      5. Arouse yourself in 51:17.
      6. Depart in 52:11.
   3. Hosea 1-3 and Jer 2-3 use the same metaphor as does Eph 5.
   4. Isa 54:1—Israel in captivity is compared to a barren woman who is told to sing for joy, not because of her barrenness, but because it was about to be over.
   5. Isa 54:2—The end to captivity is compared to a formerly barren woman who now has so many children that she must enlarge her tents. Even though they lived in houses, tents may be used to draw the parallel with the tent-dwelling, barren Sarah, whose offspring were like the sands of the sea.
   6. Isa 54:3—The children will multiply and spread worldwide.
   7. Isa 54:4-6—The coming reversal will overshadow the barren time. The creator God is the husband who has called his grieving wife.
   8. Isa 54:7-8—The exile is compared to a time when the husband forsook his wife, but then brought her back with great compassion.
   9. Isa 54:13—Although this verse is separated from the metaphor by the Noah comparison, the metaphor is the same. Not only has the barren woman borne children, many children, who have spread far and wide, but those children have been taught by God.
      1. This verse is quoted in the NT in Jn. 6:45; 1 Thess. 4:9.
      2. Prosperity is the Hebrew word shalom.
      3. Deut 6 and Proverbs seem to imply widespread instruction of children.
3. Metaphor Two—Noah and the flood.
   1. Gen 6-9 tells the story of Noah and the flood.
   2. Isa 54:9—The metaphor with the flood suggests that God’s punishment of the world by the Genesis flood parallels God’s punishment of Judah by exile and that just as God ended the flood so now he ends exile. Perhaps given the point of the war metaphor to follow there is also the parallel that just as God would never again destroy the earth by a flood, so God would never again use another nation to punish his people (Isa 54:10, 15).
   3. Isa 54:10—The mountain and hills could be the development of a fourth metaphor or an extension of the flood metaphor. Even if the flood went so far as to move mountains and erode the hills, God would not remove his love or peace.
      1. A possible unstated parallel between the flood and exile is that neither accomplished the purpose of eradicating human sin. After the flood the family saved by the flood falls into sin.
      2. After the exiles return, Isa 56-66 reports on extensive unrighteousness and injustice by the post exilic population in Jerusalem.
      3. Covenant of peace is also used in a variety of forms in Num. 25:12; Ezek. 34:25; 37:26; Mal. 2:5; Heb. 13:20.
   4. Isa 54:11—The unsettledness of the flood (“afflicted one, storm-tossed”) will be replaced by the solidness of some of the hardest available materials. Some suggest that the barren woman now wears fine jewels as the meaning here.
      1. Antimony is a silver-white brittle metal used as an alloy to harden metals.
      2. Sapphire is a hard dark blue clear stone.
      3. Agate is a hard semi-precious stone that was either stripped or clear.
      4. Carbuncle is a deep red gem.
4. Metaphor Three—War.
   1. The metaphor of war is hardly a metaphor since exile resulted from war and the return could be threatened by military action, but the tools of war seem to have a metaphorical use.
   2. Isa 54:14—The return from exile will end oppression and terror.
      1. The word “righteousness” is used extensively in Isaiah:
         1. Isa. 1:21, 26f; 5:7, 16; 9:7; 10:22; 11:4f; 16:5; 26:9f; 28:17; 32:1, 16f; 33:5; 42:6; 45:8, 13, 23f; 48:18; 51:7; 54:14; 56:1; 57:12; 58:2, 8; 59:9, 14, 16f; 60:17; 61:3, 10f; 64:5.
         2. Sending the people into exile was an act of righteousness on God’s part (Isa 45:8) and now restoring the people was the righteous action.
   3. Isa 54:15—Although the world will continue to know strife, any coming war against Judah will not originate with God and God will protect the people from such action.
   4. Isa 54:16-17—God created the metal arts and thus permits weapons, but no weapon will be able to stand against Judah.
      1. V 17 seems to invoke the courtroom metaphor as God promises that no voice in court will prevail against his people.
      2. In v 17 God calls his people his “heritage” and his “servants.” While Isa 40-55 centered on the singular servant, Isa 56-66 will speak of God’s servants.
5. Introduction to Isa 55
   1. Isa 55 returns to some of the themes of Isa 40.
      1. Both announce God’s availability—40:9; 55:6.
      2. Humans and God are compared—40:6-9; 55:6-9.
      3. The Word of God endures—40:8; 55:11.
      4. Road home—40:3-5; 55:12.
      5. Mountains and hills—40:4; 55:12.
   2. The chapter unfolds in sets of two. List them. The following includes some of the more significant pairs:
      1. Babylonian food and the food of God—vv 1-2.
      2. Double behold—vv 4-5.
      3. Way and thoughts—vv 7-9.
      4. Rain and snow—v 10.
      5. Thorn and brier versus the cypress and myrtle—v 13.
   3. Isa 55:1-5—God’s invitation
      1. Other biblical invitations are found in Prov 9:5, Isa 25:6; Mt 22:8-10; Lk 14:16-24.
      2. The choices confronting Israel are to buy from Babylon or accept the free substance of God.
         1. The Babylonian food and drink costs money and does not satisfy.
         2. God’s food is free and gives life.
      3. Some suggest that the scene is the marketplace where vendors sell food to shoppers.
      4. The Bible describes multiple covenants.
         1. Major covenants include the one with Noah (Isa 54:9), Abraham, Moses, David and Christ.
         2. Isa 54:10 describes a covenant of peace.
         3. The covenant with David established in 2 Sam 7:8-16 (cf. 2 Sam 23:5) promised that the Davidic dynastic would endure and was renewed to Solomon in 1 Kings 8:23-26 but questioned by the writer of Psa 89 (see especially vv 38-39).
         4. The covenant seems renewed by Amos (9:11) and here by Isaiah (see other references to David in the book of Isaiah: Isa. 7:2, 13; 9:7; 16:5; 22:9, 22; 29:1; 37:35; 38:5; 55:3).
         5. Isaiah also affirms that God will continue the Davidic covenant out of which grew the Messianic hope and the new covenant.
         6. See the large number of references to David in the NT: Matt. 1:1, 6, 17, 20; 9:27; 12:3, 23; 15:22; 20:30f; 21:9, 15; 22:42f, 45; Mk. 2:25; 10:47f; 11:10; 12:35ff; Lk. 1:27, 32, 69; 2:4, 11; 3:31; 6:3; 18:38f; 20:42, 44; Jn. 7:42; Acts 1:16; 2:25, 29, 34; 4:25; 7:45; 13:22, 34, 36; 15:16; Rom. 1:3; 4:6; 11:9; 2 Tim. 2:8; Heb. 4:7; 11:32; Rev. 3:7; 5:5; 22:16.
      5. The double behold has two difference referents.
         1. The “behold” of Isa 54:4 is to David.
         2. The “behold” of v 5 is to the returnees (Zion).
            1. Instead of the nations attacking Israel (cf. Isa 54:13-17), the nations will now serve Israel (55:5).
            2. See the other prophecies in Isaiah about the nations:

See the nations coming to Zion in Isa 2:1-3.

Isa 13-23 is a long section of oracles against the nations.

See the nations observing the servant in Isa 53:13-15.

See the nations coming to Jerusalem in Isa 60:5-14; 61:5; 62:2; 66:18-20.

* 1. Isa 55:6-11—My thoughts and your thoughts.
     1. Isa 55:6 drops the marketplace metaphor of the previous section and directly invites the exiles into God’s presence. God provides an opportunity for the nation to return. They do well not to miss it.
     2. Isa 55:7 refers to the wicked.
        1. The wicked may be those who have rejected Isaiah’s offer to return.
        2. See the following passages which refer to their rejection:
           1. Isa 40:27—Jacob complains that God has hidden himself from the exiles
           2. Isa 42:14-25—Isaiah critiques the people as blind and deaf to the invitation of God.
           3. Isa 43:22-28—Isaiah accuses Israel of not worshipping God and not understanding God’s discipline.
           4. Isa 45:9-13—Israel complains about God’s use of Cyrus.
           5. Isa 48:1-16—God calls the people who do not listen obstinate and now turns to those who listen and the servant/teacher who leads.
           6. Isa 49:14-50:3—Even the returnees (Zion) complain about circumstances of the return.
           7. Isa 50:6—Smiters attack the servant/teacher.
           8. Isa 53:7-8—Some oppress and afflict the servant.
           9. Isa 55:1-5—Some choose the Babylonian food over God’s substance.
     3. The passage uses the “way” five times and “thoughts” five times.
        1. The wicked way and thoughts seem to be those who trust idols and refuse to trust God to return them from exile.
        2. God has clearly revealed his way and thoughts throughout Isa 40-55. In fact, one of the major points is that God has announced his ways and thoughts in advance for all to know. His word has been clear and oft stated and it will not fail.
        3. This passage is generally misinterpreted as if God could not be understood.
           1. Isa 40:12 stresses that humans cannot comprehend all that God is.
           2. This passage contrasts the ways and thoughts of God which have been clearly stated repeatedly with the ways and thoughts of those who have rejected God.
           3. The availability and dependability of God’s word has been repeatedly cited by Isaiah in contrast to the unavailability and undependability of the idols.
           4. The two sets of ways and thoughts are as different as heaven and earth.
           5. The point here is God’s ways and thoughts are clearly accessible, but rejected by human ways and thoughts.
           6. From Isa 40-55, the prophet has clearly and repeatedly made the ways and thoughts of God known. This chapter climaxes with the affirmation that God’s clearly announced ways and thoughts will take place.
     4. The dependability of God’s word (ways and thoughts of vv 8-9) is compared to the rain and snow.
        1. Once the rain and snow begin to fall their journey to the earth is never interrupted.
        2. Once God announces his ways, thoughts and words, their journey to completion is never interrupted.
        3. Just as the rain and snow provide nourishment to plants (which results in bread for humans), so the word of God provides nourishment to humans.
        4. God has announced his word. Many in Israel have ignored it. Those who have heard it will be nourished and will prosper.
        5. Isa 55:11 is a good summary statement of the theology of Isaiah.
  2. Isa 55:12-13—Announcement.
     1. Isaiah again announces the return. See previous announcements in Isa 40:1-2; 48:20; 52:1-2; 9-11.
     2. See references to the highway in Isa 40:3-5; 49:11.
     3. The mountains and valleys which were removed in Isa 40:3f now are personified as worshipping.
     4. All nature responds to the return from exile (unlike Israel which is badly divided among those who stay behind and those who return in obedience).
     5. Isa 55 ends with a hymn.

**Continuities:**

1. Share stories of couples’ experience with bearing children or not being able to bear children. How do these experiences enliven the understanding of Isa 54?
2. Discuss the possible parallels between Noah’s flood and Babylonian captivity. How might those events parallel events today?
3. How is the promise of Isa 54:10 meaningful now?
4. How is the promise of Isa 54:17 meaningful now?
5. Explore parallels between the invitation to eat in Isa 55:1ff and the Gospel invitation offered at every service of the church.
6. Discuss the implications of Isa 55:6. Is there ever a time when God cannot be found or when he is not near? How was God near in Isa 55 and not at other times?
7. Consider the common understanding of Isa 55:8-9 with the teaching of this lesson. Discuss the importance of context for reliable interpretation of Scripture.
8. List other verses in the Bible that speak about the reliability of the word of God.

**Additional Study:**

1. Zion
   1. Read the article on Zion in a good Bible encyclopedia.
   2. The term is used in multiple ways. The confusion is compounded by the unrelated modern Zionism movement.
   3. Study the ways the term is used in the Bible.
      1. Zion is used in
         1. The OT: 2 Sam. 5:7; 1 Ki. 8:1; 2 Ki. 19:21, 31; 1 Chr. 11:5; 2 Chr. 5:2; Ps. 2:6; 9:11, 14; 14:7; 20:2; 48:2, 11f; 50:2; 51:18; 53:6; 65:1; 69:35; 74:2; 76:2; 78:68; 84:5, 7; 87:2, 5; 97:8; 99:2; 102:13, 16, 21; 110:2; 125:1; 126:1; 128:5; 129:5; 132:13; 133:3; 134:3; 135:21; 137:1, 3; 146:10; 147:12; 149:2; Cant. 3:11; Isa. 1:8, 27; 2:3; 3:16f; 4:3ff; 8:18; 10:12, 24, 32; 12:6; 14:32; 16:1; 18:7; 24:23; 28:16; 29:8; 30:19; 31:4, 9; 33:5, 14, 20; 34:8; 35:10; 37:22, 32; 40:9; 41:27; 46:13; 49:14; 51:3, 11, 16; 52:1f, 7f; 59:20; 60:14; 61:3; 62:11; 64:10; 66:8; Jer. 3:14; 4:6, 31; 6:2, 23; 8:19; 9:19; 14:19; 26:18; 30:17; 31:6, 12; 50:5, 28; 51:10, 24, 35; Lam. 1:4, 6, 17; 2:1, 4, 6, 8, 10, 13, 18; 4:2, 11, 22; 5:11, 18; Joel 2:1, 15, 23, 32; 3:16f, 21; Amos 1:2; 6:1; Obad. 1:17, 21; Mic. 1:13; 3:10, 12; 4:2, 7f, 10f, 13; Zeph. 3:14, 16; Zech. 1:14, 17; 2:7, 10; 8:2f; 9:9, 13.
         2. The NT: Matt. 21:5; Jn. 12:15; Rom. 9:33; 11:26; Heb. 12:22; 1 Pet. 2:6; Rev. 14:1.
         3. The Apocryphal: Jdt. 9:13; Sir. 24:10; 36:14; 48:18, 24; Bar. 4:9, 14, 24; 1 Ma. 4:37, 60; 5:54; 6:48, 62; 7:33; 10:11; 14:27; 1 Es. 8:81; 4 Es. 2:40, 42; 3:2, 28, 31; 5:25; 6:4, 19; 10:7, 20, 23, 39, 44; 12:44, 48; 13:35f; 14:31.
2. Study the exodus language used in Isaiah 40-55. Consider this list:
   1. Isa 40:3-4
      1. way in wilderness.
      2. straight highway.
      3. lift valleys, lower hills.
   2. Isa 41:18-91
      1. water in dry areas.
      2. plants in desert.
   3. Isa 42:16 rough to level.
   4. Isa 43:16-19
      1. Red Sea
      2. Desert.
   5. Isa 44:3-4
      1. water in dry areas.
      2. Vegetation.
   6. Isa 45:2 level mountains.
   7. Isa 48:21 water from rock, no thirst in desert, led them through desert.
   8. Isa 49:10-11
      1. no hunger or thirst.
      2. no scorching wind or sin.
      3. mountain way.
      4. high way.
   9. Isa 51
      1. 51:3 wilderness and desert.
      2. 51:10 Red Sea.
      3. 51:15 stirs up the sea.
   10. Isa 52: 12 flight not in haste, God will go before them as a rear guard.
   11. Isa 55:12 led forth.
3. Consider all the creation language used in Isaiah 40-55.
   1. Isa 40:
      1. 12 measured waters in his hand.
      2. 12 marked heavens with span.
      3. 12 measured earth’s dust.
      4. 12 weighed mountains on scale.
      5. 21 God has been known from the foundations of the earth, from the beginning.
      6. 22 God sits above the earth viewing all below.
      7. 22 makes heavens like putting up curtain.
      8. 24 supervises plant life.
      9. 26 creator.
      10. 26 makes and names all that exists.
      11. 28 creator of the ends of the earth.
   2. Isa 41:
      1. 17 controls water sources.
      2. 18 controls water sources.
      3. 19 plants trees.
      4. 20 creator.
   3. Isa 42:
      1. 5 created & stretched out heavens.
      2. 5 spread earth.
      3. 5 gives breath and spirit.
   4. Isa 43:
      1. 1 created and formed Israel.
      2. 7 created, formed and made Israel for God’s glory.
      3. 15 creator of Israel.
      4. 21 formed Israel.
   5. Isa 44:
      1. 2 Lord made you, formed them in womb.
      2. 21 formed Israel.
      3. 24 made
         1. all things.
         2. heavens.
         3. earth.
   6. Isa 45:
      1. 7-8, 12-13 God creates.
         1. light and darkness.
         2. weal and woe.
         3. righteousness and salvation.
         4. earth and man.
         5. heavens and the host.
         6. righteousness and straight ways.
      2. 18 God and creation.
         1. creator of heavens.
         2. he is God.
         3. formed and made the earth.
         4. did not create chaos, but made it to be inhabited.
   7. Isa 46:
      1. 4 God made Israel.
   8. Isa 48:
      1. 13 God laid earth’s foundation and spread out the heavens.
      2. 16 from the beginning.
   9. Isa 51:
      1. 13, 16 God stretched out heavens, laid earth’s foundations.