

**Good News, and Bad
Messiah Prays and YAHWEH Answers
Isaiah 64:1 – 65:7**

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We are in the middle of Messiah praying on behalf of His people. He is interceding for them and even as He does so, He is teaching His people and us how to pray.

The one thing the Lord longs for on our behalf is that we become so in love with Him and identify with Him, that we desire what it is He desires for us. As we come to Isaiah 64, we learn more of what that is.

What God wants for us is a passion for his glory to be unrestrained, coming down into our experience in new ways. This matters. Typical American Christianity today just isn't enough to meet the challenge of our times. We need God to come down. (Ortlund, Jr. and Hughes 2005, 430)

At times, usually for me whenever I read or hear the news, we find ourselves longing for Jesus to return and to do so in power. He is fully prepared to do so, and His prayer reflects that as He reflects the heart of those who are truly following YAHWEH.

Isaiah 64:1–4

“Oh, that You would tear open the heavens and come down, That the mountains would quake at Your presence— As fire kindles brushwood, as fire causes water to boil— To make Your name known to Your adversaries, That the nations may tremble at Your presence! When You did awesome things which we did not expect, You came down, the mountains quaked at Your presence. For from days of old they have not heard or perceived by ear, Nor has the eye seen a God besides You, Who acts in behalf of one who waits for Him.” (NASB 2020)

Messiah has earlier provided the groundwork for when He comes as the avenger of blood, here though we hear the heart of the people as He prays for them.

For us as 21st century followers of Jesus Christ, we long for the day He will take us to be with Him. Those in Israel who were faithful followers of YAHWEH longed for the same. They want a return to the days when God did many mighty works among them.

Messiah reflects that longing in His prayer on their behalf. The people desire to see YAHWEH come down and move mightily on their behalf once again.

They want to see minds blown and the nations judged. They desire a visible manifestation of YAHWEH in full power and glory. There are times where we would also add, and zap 'em hard.

There is a longing for the days like when the law was given, and YAHWEH was visibly seen and heard on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16 – 30). Messiah asks on their behalf for this type of manifestation, a prayer which is indeed answered, see Isaiah 63, but not just yet.

We long for Jesus to take us out of here and judge the evil that we see running rampant all around us. But again, as we discussed before, His heart is to see repentance from the nations rather than them being stomped in wrath. At the end of the day, He is fully prepared to stomp for those who are just simply too stubborn to understand.

Our job, as Israel's, be salt and light.

There is the acknowledgement that they were to be salt and light to the nations. "If God were to come among these people and apply his fire to their unclean lips and hardened hearts, as he had to Isaiah in ch. 6, the brushwood of their lives would burst into flames, and the tepid water of their souls would break into a roiling boil. The result would be that God's adversaries, those who had so casually trampled down his temple (63:18), would come to know something about the name, i.e., the character, of Israel's God. This is always the purpose of God's self-revelation: that the world might know him correctly, and knowing him might be terrified over the peril in which it stands (so that in the end it might be thrilled at the possibilities that extend from his grace; cf. 64:18–19)." (Oswalt 1998, 621-622)

As we look back at Exodus 19, we see that the people were terrified at the presence of God. They asked Moses to never subject them to that again, it was completely unexpected to them.

Where are the people are now, in 700BC. They are about to go into exile due to disobedience. Now they talk about waiting for Him to show up and do those actions, the ones that scared them, again. This is rather ironic considering the questioning that we saw back in Isaiah 63:1 as Messiah moved into Jerusalem from the southeast.

There is the complaint that they have not heard from or seen anything from God, yet it is Messiah praying on their behalf as being related to them by Isaiah the prophet.

These are the same people, even now, that were complaining about their prayers not being answered because of their own religious hypocrisy. Not much has changed.

They are longing for Him to show Himself; Messiah is reflecting this in His prayer. Since the nations will not follow willingly, maybe they can be scared into following by YAHWEH showing up in power just as He did in Egypt and in the wilderness.

In other words, "O Lord, we need an unusual divine event. We're thankful for your steady blessings day by day. But these are desperate times. We're in a pathetic condition. We need more blessing than we've ever seen before. We need the unmistakable intervention of God!" (Ortlund, Jr. and Hughes 2005, 432)

Messiah is reflecting the heart of the people and many times this reflects our heart as well. We really do not know what we are praying for or the full ramifications of the answer to that prayer if God were to answer just as we requested.

We find ourselves praying that the Lord severely judge, and do it right now, that political, business, sports or entertainment figure who seems to be causing us harm. But then they repent and become a believer, now what do we pray for?

As New Testament believers, we should be praying for their salvation, not their destruction.

Antony Flew is a renowned philosopher who was arguably the best-known atheist in the English-speaking world until his announcement in 2004 that he now accepts the existence of God. (Flew and Varghese 2007, 222)

Then there was this guy named Saul of Tarsus. He was a Pharisee and a Roman citizen. Saul was known for actively hunting and persecuting Christians. He was the man who held the coats of the mob that martyred Stephen and later described himself as trying to destroy the young Church. Then he met Jesus.

Acts 9:10–16

“There was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. He had a vision, in which the Lord said to him, “Ananias!” “Here I am, Lord,” he answered. The Lord said to him, “Get ready and go to Straight Street, and at the house of Judas ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying, and in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come in and place his hands on him so that he might see again.” Ananias answered, “Lord, many people have told me about this man and about all the terrible things he has done to your people in Jerusalem. And he has come to Damascus with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who worship you.” The Lord said to him, “Go, because I have chosen him to serve me, to make my name known to Gentiles and kings and to the people of Israel. And I myself will show him all that he must suffer for my sake.”” (GNB)

Just think about who we were before Jesus and how amazing it is that He revealed Himself to us and we are now His followers.

In other words, when we pray for God to judge, remember, He will do so and soon. But in the meantime, “But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.” (Luke 6:27–28, NET)

Probably one of the biggest surprises we will ever have is getting to heaven and discovering how different our perceptions of people are from God’s. We will probably be surprised at some of the people we see there, and also surprised at some of the rewards given to people. Maybe most surprising will be the absence of some people whom we thought for sure would be numbered among the saints in glory. (Jeremiah 2001, 74)

As we come to verse 4 though, we find the problem is more basic, a lack of perception.

Isaiah 64:4

“For from days of old they have not heard or perceived by ear, Nor has the eye seen a God besides You, Who acts in behalf of one who waits for Him.” (NASB 2020)

We get the reality of the matter though in verse 4. Jeremiah would later call it correctly as well about the status of His people. “Call to me and I’ll answer you, and will tell you about great and hidden things that you don’t know.” (Jeremiah 33:3, ISV)

They have missed it. What they desire to see versus what their reality is is an object of prayer being made on their behalf, but there is a realization of their own shortcomings also being reflected in this prayer. They are spiritually blind and deaf. They simply cannot see.

The history of their rebellion is brought to mind while at the same time the uniqueness of YAHWEH.

“Yahweh was distinct from other gods in the ancient Near East in a number of ways. Most fundamentally Yahweh was transcendent, meaning that he was not subject to or locked within the material universe. This is in stark contrast to the gods of Mesopotamia, who inhabited the material world. He was an only God, without consort or pantheon, unlike the gods of other nations, who shared in a multiplicity of power. The specific issue in this verse is the willingness of God to act on behalf of his faithful followers. The key here is that which motivates Yahweh to action. He does not have to be bribed or coerced into action.” (Matthews, Chavalas and Walton 2000, Is 64:4)

Indeed, there is no deity who can do for its people what Yahweh can do for His. (House 2018, 686)

Isaiah 64:5–7

“You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, Who remembers You in Your ways. Behold, You were angry, for we sinned, We continued in our sins for a long time; Yet shall we be saved? For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our wrongdoings, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on Your name, Who stirs himself to take hold of You; For You have hidden Your face from us And have surrendered us to the power of our wrongdoings.” (NASB 2020)

Messiah refers to the remnant, those who remained faithful when the majority were not.

The confession of their wrongdoing is as follows:

- We sinned.
- We continued to sin for a long time.
- Is salvation even possible for us?
- We are unclean.
- Our deeds are like dirty menstrual cloths.
- We are confused (wither like a leaf).
- Our sin has taken over.
- No one turns to YAHWEH.

Ever get the feeling that sin has control? No matter what you do, there are those things we sometimes tend to fall back into that give us comfort and appeal to our flesh.

Paul outlined the problem for us as well as the solution.

Galatians 5:19–24

“What human nature does is quite plain. It shows itself in immoral, filthy, and indecent actions; in worship of idols and witchcraft. People become enemies and they fight; they become jealous, angry, and ambitious. They separate into parties and groups; they are envious, get drunk, have orgies, and do other things like these. I warn you now as I have before: those who do these things will not possess the Kingdom of God. But the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control. There is no law against such things as these. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have put to death their human nature with all its passions and desires.” (GNB)

This was the central issue for the nation. They had been given an exclusive deal with the God of the Universe, the condition, just remain faithful to Him. They did not do very well. The temptation was strong to be like the world. We find it tough to remain faithful today, and we have the Holy Spirit inside of us to enable us to do so. Yet we still find it tough as well.

The nations did not have to follow the same standards that Israel did, Israel was to be salt and light to the nations. What the nations did though was attractive to Israel. The enemy always tempts us with his bait before he sets the hook and reels us in.

The central difficulty was the people’s personal inability to avoid what was sinful. Sin had so pervaded their lives that even the things that most people would usually regard as righteous deeds were in fact

more like filthy menstruation rags. This is an honest appraisal of the filthiness of sin, which is relatively rare in the past or today. Too often sin is deemed a slight mistake, a small or relatively minor infraction that is not really significant enough to confess. It is all too easy to overlook sin, forget it, or excuse it, assuming that it will not have a major impact on anyone's relationship to God. (Smith 2009, 690)

Sin is always sin. God has never changed His mind about it. Sin affects us in every aspect of our being and ultimately leads us to be surrounded, imprisoned by it.

2 Corinthians 2:14–16

“But thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and who makes known through us the fragrance that consists of the knowledge of him in every place. For we are a sweet aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing—to the latter an odor from death to death, but to the former a fragrance from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?” (NET)

With the conclusion of verse 7, the confession of the current status of the nation becomes complete. With the confession of the sin of the people complete, the Messiah then moves to conclude His intercessory prayer for the people.

Isaiah 64:8–12

“But now, LORD, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our potter, And all of us are the work of Your hand. Do not be angry beyond measure, LORD, Nor remember wrongdoing forever. Behold, please look, all of us are Your people. Your holy cities have become a wilderness, Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and beautiful house, Where our fathers praised You, Has been burned by fire; And all our precious things have become a ruin. Will You restrain Yourself at these things, LORD? Will You keep silent and afflict us beyond measure?” (NASB 2020)

Judgment is coming and YAHWEH will answer this prayer.

Starting with verse 8, Messiah transitions from confessing the sin of the people to YAHWEH to cries for deliverance on their behalf. The deliverance begins with a recognition of who the creator is. This is given to us in the image of a potter who has the control to make out of the clay, whatever he wants to. It is his choice.

The prayer is one based in the future but being prayed as if it is in the past. Messiah is interceding on behalf of the remnant, those who have remained faithful throughout the centuries up to the end of the age.

It is this remnant that is being submissive to YAHWEH as clay. They are the ones acknowledging their complete reliance upon Him.

He is Lord, He is Father, and He is King.

“The prayer which now ensues in v. 8 (9) is derived from the confession of sin. It takes for granted that God cannot simply overlook his people's sin, and that this is bound to arouse his anger.

Thus, the line taken in asking for forgiveness is not that God should simply cancel this sin; it has been committed, and it has its inevitable consequences. Instead, supplication is made that, in spite of it, it should still be possible to go on living. This possibility is created if God only looks, if he only turns again towards sinful Israel. The prayer is reinforced by an annexed reason designed to move God: ‘we are after all thy people.’” (Westermann 1969, 397)

Messiah is reminding YAHWEH of what He has said in His word in the past. When we pray, we can do the same. There is nothing wrong with reminding the Lord about the promises that He has made to us and our expectation that He will do as He has promised.

As the nation returns from exile and again as they return from the diaspora and then again at the end of the age, the prayer from those who have remained faithful will be the same. “We are your people.”

Isaiah 64:10

“Your holy cities have become a wilderness, Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation.” (NASB 2020)

We see honesty, a reflection of the current condition in this prayer. As we pray it is ok for us to let the Lord know what we see regarding the condition we are in as well. It is a simple factual stating of what the conditions are with no spin. There is no blaming or pointing fingers, just the facts.

Isaiah 64:11

“Our holy and beautiful house, Where our fathers praised You, Has been burned by fire; And all our precious things have become a ruin.” (NASB 2020)

At the end of the exile, the city is in ruins and the Temple has been burned and destroyed. At the end of the diaspora, the same and at the end of the age, conditions will be similar. “...the first was burnt with fire by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Jer. 52:13 and the second by the Romans under Titus the Roman emperor, as Josephus relates: and all our pleasant things are laid waste; their pleasant land, and pleasant cities, and especially Jerusalem, the palaces of their princes and nobles, and all the riches and grandeur of them, the temple, and all the rich vessels and utensils in it.” (Gill 1810, 379)

The prayer ends with two questions, both showing a total and complete reliance on the mercy of God.

Isaiah 64:12

“Will You restrain Yourself at these things, LORD? Will You keep silent and afflict us beyond measure?” (NASB 2020)

The question is asked, “will God refuse to act?” As the remnant reflects back on the past looking at rubble that once was Jerusalem, the Temple and Israel, prior to Messiah arriving, will He ever act on behalf of His people? This question is asked by Messiah as He closes out His intercessory prayer knowing full well the answer is coming from YAHWEH. He has reflected the heart of the remnant of His people.

The answer will be clear. As related in the prayer with the realization of their sin being a primary cause, God will affirm that is indeed the case, but He made promises and they will be fulfilled.

There has been, throughout the ages, a remnant of Israel that has been faithful. Even today, we see those of His people who have recognized who their Messiah is, and they have given themselves over to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

YAHWEH answers.

Isaiah 65:1–7

““I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, ‘Here am I, here am I,’ To a nation which did not call on My name. I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, Who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts, A people who continually provoke Me to My face, Offering sacrifices in gardens and burning incense on bricks; Who sit among graves and spend the night in secret places; Who eat pig’s flesh, And the broth of unclean meat is in their pots. Who say, ‘Keep to yourself, do not come near me, For I am holier than you!’ These are smoke in My nostrils, A fire that burns all the day. Behold, it is written before Me: I will not keep silent, but I will repay; I will even repay into their laps, Both your own wrongdoings and the wrongdoings of your fathers together,” says the LORD. “Because they have burned incense on the mountains And scorned Me on the hills, Therefore I will measure their former work into their laps.”” (NASB 2020)

The answer begins with a mystery, one which was not resolved until Paul pointed it out. This mystery is God's plan involving the gentiles, something we call the church. "And later Isaiah spoke boldly for God, saying, "I was found by people who were not looking for me. I showed myself to those who were not asking for me." But regarding Israel, God said, "All day long I opened my arms to them, but they were disobedient and rebellious.'" (Romans 10:20–21, NLT)

The apostle Paul (an expositor we may depend upon) has given us the true sense of these verses, and told us what was the event they pointed at and were fulfilled in, namely, the calling in of the Gentiles and the rejection of the Jews, by the preaching of the gospel, Rom. 10:20, 21. (Henry 1994, 1211)

In verse 1, we see the calling of the Gentiles, and in verse 2, a rejection of the Jews due to sin.

Moses predicted this would be the case in his third sermon if the nation chose to be disobedient.

Deuteronomy 32:21

"They have made me jealous with what is no god; they have provoked me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are no people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation." (ESV)

Paul talked about this event at length in Romans. Do the promises that were made to Israel, still apply? Yes, they do. They do not apply to the church. Those who teach that they do teach what is called replacement theology.

Before going any further let me make clear what the Bible teaches, it teaches that all of the promises made to Israel are still applicable to Israel. They will be fulfilled literally just as all other prophecies and promises have been fulfilled. "The view known as replacement theology is not biblical and does not hold up under exegetical scrutiny." (Vlach 2000, 32)

What is it though?

Replacement theology is based on two premises: (1) God has permanently rejected National Israel, and (2) the church has replaced or superceded Israel in God's plan. The end result is that the church has become the inheritor of God's covenant blessings originally given to Israel, and Israel will not be restored as a nation with a distinct identity and function. (Vlach 2000, 6)

Replacement theology or Covenant theology, although it is also appearing these days under other names; it says that the Church is "Spiritual" Israel or the "New" Israel, having replaced the "Old" Israel (the Jews) as God's people. (Stern 1988, 16-17)

Paul's definitive statement in Romans 11, in my mind, settles the argument which has gone on since 50AD. I think this is why Paul was inspired to write it.

Romans 11:1–6

"I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace." (ESV)

According to Mattityahu [Matthew] 24:30, when the sign of the Son of Man appears in the sky, "all the tribes of the Land will mourn"—not "all the tribes of the earth," as in most versions, because Yeshua is alluding to Zechariah 12:10, 14. Mattityahu comes to tell us that when the Messiah returns "on the clouds

of heaven, with tremendous power and glory,” the twelve tribes of Israel will be living in the Land of Israel, and they will see him. (Stern 1988, 39)

Looking at our text, Isaiah 65:1 speaks about the Gentiles and Isaiah 65:2, about the nation of Israel. What we are seeing here, in prophecy, is something entirely new. “This great watershed of history marks a new beginning of universal proportions (65:17). It will be such a definitive turning point that everything before it will be forgotten, and everything after it will be joy. Nothing that could detract from their gladness will be left to trouble the children of God. And nothing will trouble the new creation either (65:17–25).” (Thomson 2012, 151)

God’s constant loving all day long appeal to His own people found them in rebellion. As this message is being communicated, they are still in Jerusalem, but the northern kingdom is gone in exile. The southern kingdom is living on borrowed time. The heart of the people who have predominately turned or are turning away is more accurately reflected in Deuteronomy 28. “The LORD will also subject you to madness, blindness, and confusion of mind. You will feel your way along at noon like the blind person does in darkness and you will not succeed in anything you do; you will be constantly oppressed and continually robbed, with no one to save you.” (Deuteronomy 28:28–29, NET)

All they have left to look forward to, as a nation, is madness. How bad is it? YAHWEH continues.

Isaiah 65:3–5

“A people who **continually provoke Me to My face**, Offering sacrifices in gardens and burning incense on bricks; Who sit among graves and spend the night in secret places; Who eat pig’s flesh, And the broth of unclean meat is in their pots. Who say, ‘Keep to yourself, do not come near me, For I am holier than you!’ These are smoke in My nostrils, A fire that burns all the day.” (NASB 2020)

Putting this in terms we can better understand...in God’s presence, in His temple, in His very face, they are thumbing their nose at Him.

Ezekiel 8:14–18

“Then he brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the house of the LORD, and behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz. Then he said to me, “Have you seen this, O son of man? You will see still greater abominations than these.” And he brought me into the inner court of the house of the LORD. And behold, at the entrance of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men, with their backs to the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east, worshiping the sun toward the east. Then he said to me, “Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations that they commit here, that they should fill the land with violence and provoke me still further to anger? Behold, they put the branch to their nose. Therefore I will act in wrath. My eye will not spare, nor will I have pity. And though they cry in my ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them.” (ESV)

They are doing “great abominations”.

Ones which have the impact of driving the presence of God away.

What is it that God considers to be abominations?

As it pertained to Israel, a list includes:

- Unclean food, Deut. 14:2
- Idols, Deut. 7:25; 18:9, 12; 27:15
- Pagan spiritists, Deut. 18:9, 12
- Burning children to Molech, Lev. 18:21–22; 20:2–5; Deut. 12:31; 18:9, 12; 2 Kgs. 16:3; 17:17–18; 21:6; Jer. 32:35

- Canaanite idolatry, Deut. 13:14; 17:4; 20:17–18; 32:16; Isa. 44:19; Jer. 16:18; Ezek. 5:11; 6:9; 11:18, 21; 14:6; 16:50; 18:12
- Sacrificing blemished animals, Deut. 17:1 (cf. 15:19–23; Mal. 1:12–13)
- Sacrificing to idols, Jer. 44:4–5
- Remarrying a woman who you have previously divorced, Deut. 24:2
- Women wearing man’s clothes (possibly Canaan worship), Deut. 22:5
- Money from cultic prostitution (Canaanite worship), Deut. 23:18
- Israel’s idolatry, Jer. 2:7
- Homosexuality (possibly Canaanite worship), Lev. 18:22; 20:13
- Use of false weights, Deut. 25:16; Pro. 11:1; 20:23
- Food laws violated (possibly Canaanite worship), Deut. 14:3 (Utley 2008, 52)

They did not miss anything that God defined as an abomination.

Today, it continues, but in the church.

2 Peter 2:1–3.

“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.” (ESV)

Revelation 3:15–20

“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.” (ESV)

Then we read that they are sitting among graves. The LXX is much more graphic in the description of what is going on.

Isaiah 65:3–5

“This people who provokes me is before me always; they sacrifice in their gardens and burn incense on their bricks to demons that do not exist; among their graves and in caves they who eat swine meat and the broth of sacrifices sleep for the sake of dreams; all their vessels are defiled, they who say, ‘Depart far from me, do not approach me for I am clean.’ This is the smoke of my wrath; fire burns in it all the day.” (Lexham Press 2020, Isa 65:3-5)

To “sit among the graves,” the tombs, indicates spiritist attempts to contact the dead. Spending the night in “secret vigil,” guarded places (some suggest “among rock cliffs”; the Septuagint says “in caves where they lie for the sake of dreams”), indicates occult practices. (Horton 2000, 456)

Rather than having a Torah worldview, they are venerating the dead and participating in soothsaying and necromancy. These were just a few of the practices they were not to engage in. There were strong reasons for that prohibition in the Torah.

“Some practices are just basically and inherently wrong because they spring from pagan religions and culture and, in many instances, carry with them that which the Bible opposes on moral, ethical, and theological grounds. In some cases, the retention or adoption of some of these practices could be a

bridge that could lead the practitioner back into the paganism from which he or she came or, in other cases, introduce them into that form of paganism.

The Bible's strong condemnation of bestiality, homosexual behavior, transvestism, and deliberate flaunting of one's nudity are often connected with what these practices meant in paganism.

Each one of these Canaanite practices offended one aspect or another of God's moral nature and his attributes. In these cases there could be no doubting the fact that the form was so inextricably bound up with the content and meaning of the pagan religion and its practices that the believer could have no part of any of it." (Kaiser, Jr. 2007, 235)

The reference here in Isaiah is connected with the worship of false gods.

In these tombs and fissures they seek contact with the spirits of the dead (cf. 8:19; 29:4) in order to obtain information through incubations or dreams (cf. LXX δι' ἐνύπνια) (cf. Gen. 28:11ff.; 1 K. 3:4ff.). The prophet goes on to castigate the sacrilegious meals (v. 4b): "... who eat swine's flesh, and broth (meraḳ) of abominable things (pigḡulîm [possibly unclean decayed sacrificial flesh, on the basis of Lev. 7:18; 19:7, or the flesh of unclean animals, on the basis of Isa. 66:17; Ezk. 4:14])." After participation in these meals and cultic ceremonies, they consider themselves holy, like initiates or mystae, and warn the uninitiated (v. 5a). (Botterweck 1980, 297-298)

They were openly engaging in sin, engaging in necromancy and consulting the dead (demons) for guidance. They were providing sacrifices to the dead as well as meals and after engaging in such practices they have the temerity to tell others back in town that they are holier than they are.

God's view is that this is replacing the smoke from the real sacrifices as well as the altar of incense and instead, this smoke is one that He is dealing with all day long. A stench. In reality, it may even be worse. They may have reached the point where they are intentionally breaking the covenant and telling God to leave them alone.

"Those who partake of the filthy practices just set forth are now introduced as speaking. They arrogate to themselves a certain superiority, believing that through their practices they have become holy (i.e. set apart from others). The first expression means literally, Draw near unto thyself, i.e. "Keep apart from me." This command is uttered by the idolatrous Jews not to those who had remained faithful to God, but to God Himself. To give fullness to the command it is then stated obversely, do not draw near to me. At the ratification of the covenant at Sinai Yahweh had come down from heaven (cf. Ex. 3:8, 9), His holy dwelling, to take up His abode in the midst of His people. Unbelieving Israel no longer desires this nearness of Yahweh, its God, but in effect is telling Him to break the covenant relationship (i.e. in effect to deny Himself) and to go back to heaven from whence He came." (Young 1972, 504)

Madness. To take the view that what they are now doing makes them more religious and holy than following YAHWEH. What this points out is that Israel had reached the point where it hated the holiness of God and preferred their own version. They were syncretizing their own religion from elements they wanted to include immorality, child sacrifice veneration of dead and mysticism. Welcome to 2022.

This is not a stench, but the smoke and fire, they are actually figures of God's impending wrath and judgement.

Isaiah 65:6-7

"Behold, it is written before Me: I will not keep silent, but I will repay; I will even repay into their laps, Both your own wrongdoings and the wrongdoings of your fathers together," says the LORD. "Because they have burned incense on the mountains And scorned Me on the hills, Therefore I will measure their former work into their laps." (NASB 2020)

God is a God of justice. That is one of His attributes. It follows that He must deal with those who are not faithful.

How God will react is written, it is in His word. It has already been decided upon and it is personal.

His judgement is measured. He will not be indiscriminate, but He will repay and do so individually (in their laps).

But I thought we would be held responsible for our sins, not for those of past generations? That is a good assumption. If we repent, then indeed the impact of past generations sin has been severed from us. We begin to become more like Him and we change. But if that does not happen, if there is no repentance, then the next generation will reflect what they have been taught to reflect.

In Scripture, sin becomes more aggravated with each succeeding generation—not that coming generations are pre-doomed by the sins of the past (Ezek. 18), but that failure to break with the past involves bearing the entail of the past (Luke 11:47–51). This is the price of being human. (Motyer 1999, 447)

Isaiah 65:7

“Both your own wrongdoings and the wrongdoings of your fathers together,” says the LORD. “Because they have burned incense on the mountains And scorned Me on the hills, Therefore I will measure their former work into their laps.” (NASB 2020)

Numbers 14:18

“The LORD is slow to anger and filled with unfailing love, forgiving every kind of sin and rebellion. But he does not excuse the guilty. He lays the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations.” (NLT)

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