

PROPHETS

Isaiah 65:1-16

“Judgment For Those Eating Unclean Things”

“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 swine’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 bosom, both their own iniquities and the iniquities of their 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 bosom.’ Thus says the LORD, ‘As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one says, “Do not destroy it, for there is benefit in it,” so I will act on behalf of My servants in order not to destroy all of them. I will bring forth offspring from Jacob, and an heir of My mountains from Judah; even My chosen ones shall inherit it, and My servants will dwell there. Sharon will be a pasture land for flocks, and the valley of Achor a resting place for herds, for My people who seek Me. But you who forsake the LORD, who forget My holy mountain, who set a table for Fortune, and who fill *cups* with mixed wine for Destiny, I will destine you for the sword, and all of you will bow down to the slaughter. Because I called, but you did not answer; I spoke, but you did not hear. And you did evil in My sight and chose that in which I did not delight.’ Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, My servants will eat, but you will be hungry. Behold, My servants will drink, but you will be thirsty. Behold, My servants will rejoice, but you will be put to shame. Behold, My servants will shout joyfully with a glad heart, but you will cry out with a heavy heart, and you will wail with a broken spirit. You will leave your name for a curse to My chosen ones, and the Lord GOD will slay you. But My servants will be called by another name. Because he who is blessed in the earth will be blessed by the God of truth; and he who swears in the earth will swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hidden from My sight!’”

The material witnessed in Isaiah 65:1-16 admittedly piques much of one’s discussion over the kosher dietary laws, because of its reference to those in rebellion to God eating pork (65:4). While quotations from Isaiah have been witnessed in reference to God’s disdain for those who refuse to obey Him, even in their diet—it should be obvious enough that there are contextual matters to attend to, as these words were issued to people in Ancient Israel.

It has been suggested that Isaiah 65:1-16 is similar to the previous indictment issued in Isaiah 57:3-13, which mainly involves the people of Israel being involved in various idolatrous practices. That judgment would come from the Lord, should not at all be a surprise. Yet among examiners of the Book of Isaiah, it has to be noted that there is not agreement on who the intended audience of Isaiah 65:1-16 is, given various authorship-origin disputes. It is common in more liberal theological circles to adhere to the Book of Isaiah being a composition of as many as three distinct prophets or prophetic schools: First Isaiah (chs. 1-39), Second Isaiah (chs. 40-55), and Third Isaiah (chs. 56-66). The figure of First Isaiah is believed to have prophesied in the Eighth Century B.C.E., Second Isaiah in the Sixth Century B.C.E., and Third Isaiah is believed to have probably prophesied after the end of the Babylonian exile. Thusly, the material of Isaiah 65:1-16 is thought, by various liberal

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interpreters, to be probably directed toward many of the returned exiles, or at least those few who had remained in the Land of Israel during the Babylonian exile, and were not deported.

Conservative examiners of the Book of Isaiah, who hold to some kind of unified origin of Isaiah's prophecies from Isaiah the son of Amoz (1:1), still have to recognize that some sort of an exilic context is intended for the word of Isaiah 65:1-16, probably being issued by Isaiah after the exile of the Northern Kingdom, and with the exile of the Southern Kingdom significantly impending for the future. Generally speaking, those who have tried to split up the Book of Isaiah, are those who have taken issue with Isaiah's level of predictive prophecy and detail. Our analysis here reflects the view that the Book of Isaiah is the product of a single prophetic voice.¹ The sins that are listed in Isaiah 65:1-16 are those which—even if finally being judged by the Sixth Century B.C.E.—were likely already present to various degrees, among the people of the Southern Kingdom of Judah in the Eighth Century B.C.E., with a critical mass of judgment to be anticipated on the horizon.

The word of Isaiah 65:1-16 is preceded by a prayer issued by the Prophet, on behalf of the people to God, in Isaiah 64, culminating in a recognition of the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple. This prayer appeals to God for His mercy and action:

"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, O LORD? Will You keep silent and afflict us beyond measure?" (64:10-12).

In response to the appeal to God, immediately in Isaiah 65:1-16, readers see some of the consequences which will result from Israel's sins, as it will include the nations at large seeking the Lord (65:1). Israel, but here targeted as those of the Southern Kingdom who would witness the fall of Jerusalem, is said to have participated in Canaanite idolatry (65:2-7). Those who sin against the Lord and reject Him will be forsaken (65:11-12, 15-16). Not all, however, are going to be judged and suffer calamity (65:8), with a future promise of restoration (65:9-10, 13-14). While needing to be read in concert with other prophetic passages in the Tanach and Apostolic Scriptures, to be sure, **Isaiah 65:17-66:24** depicts the restored Zion in association with the coming reality of a New Heavens and New Earth.

It is natural to take Isaiah 65:1-16 as being a futuristic prophetic oracle for those who would see or be anticipating the fall of Jerusalem. John D.W. Watts describes his view, of how "Chaps. 65-66 form a thematic unity. They are set in the great hall of the heavenly king with Jerusalem and its struggling parties visible alongside it. A number of YHWH's speeches are introduced with the formulas of the court. In other books these might imply a prophet's presentation of YHWH's words, but there is no prophet here. These are to be seen as formal indicators that the heavenly court is in session and that YHWH's pronouncements are being delivered in a formal manner."² Watts does not hold to a traditional authorship framework for Isaiah, but the view of the Lord issuing a judgment in His court should be well taken. For those who hold to Isaiah 65:1-16 being issued by Isaiah son of Amoz, presumably the Prophet in his own generation would have anticipated some repentance or renewed godliness on the behalf of many individuals who would hear his message, avoiding the sins targeted.

Most important for sure, are those sinners, who exclaim in response to the charges against them, "Keep away; don't come near me, for I am too sacred for you!" (65:5, NIV). While there is necessary probing to be done why the eating of pork is mentioned in connection with this (65:4), the bigger issue, as summarized by John N. Oswalt, is how these rebellious people think that they know better than God Himself and God's ways:

¹ For a further review of the composition of Isaiah, consult "The Authorship of Isaiah," in *Archaeological Study Bible*, 1055, and the entry for the Book of Isaiah in the workbook *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic*.

² John D.W. Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 34-66*, Vol 25 (Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2005), 908.

"God insists that the problem is not his silence or his apparent unwillingness to save. He bluntly disclaims any responsibility for their sinful condition. He is not remote at all, but has constantly been saying 'Here am I, here am I.' What then is the problem? Hypocrisy. Contrary to the claims of the penitent, all the Judeans are not God's people. Some of them think that righteousness is a cultic matter and that they can procure God's holiness through cultic manipulation. Much as Nadab and Abihu thought they could determine the terms of their relationship with God (Lev. 10:1-5), these persons think they can make themselves holy in their own ways. God's response is to disabuse them of that notion in no uncertain terms. Their superficial, cultic righteousness provokes nothing but disgust from him."³

65:1 The Lord's response to the previous inquiry of His people begins with controversy: "I was accessible to those who did not ask; I could be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here I am! Here I am!' to a nation not called by My Name" (ATS). It is clear that Ancient Israel did not stay close to the Lord as they should have, as seeking the Lord is a previous directive seen in Isaiah (55:6; 58:2), and consequently instead, others sought Him out.

In v. 1, two Nifal stem verbs are employed, *nid'rash'ti* (נִדְרַשְׁתִּי) and *nim'tzei'ti* (נִמְצַעִתִּי), the Nifal stem normally representing some kind of passive action.⁴ A passive activity is witnessed in various English translations of these two verbs:

- "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" (NASU).
- "I **made** myself **accessible** to those who didn't ask for me, I **let** myself **be found** by those who didn't seek me" (CJB).
- "I **was ready to be sought** by those who did not ask for me. I **was ready to be found** by those who did not seek me" (Jerusalem Bible-Koren).
- "I **was accessible** to those who did not ask; I **could be found** by those who did not seek Me" (Keter Crown Bible).

God's cry to all is *hineini hineini* (הִנְנִי הִנְנִי), "Here am I, here am I." But in v. 1, we see that because of Israel's sin, Israel's God is sought by "a nation not called by My Name" (ATS), *el-goy lo-gora b'sh'mi* (אֱלֹהֵי לֹא-קָרָא בְשִׁמִּי). The reality represented in Isaiah's words is that because of Israel's sin, the goodness of Israel's God is going to be known by others, even if such an action may be a bit passive and secondary.

Understandably, Christian examiners of v. 1 often view Isaiah's prophecy to represent the spread of the good news or gospel message to the nations (cf. Acts 28:17-28), but frequently this can have joined with it various twinges of replacement theology. Quite contrary to this, the thrust of Paul's word of Romans 1:16 is, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek," as the Jewish people are to be presented with the message of Israel's Messiah **first**. Isaiah 65:1 represents the scenario of how Ancient Israel was told that others from the nations at large would seek after their God, because many of their own number have rejected the true ways of God and are living in sin. Israel has had the primary claim on the Lord as its God, and now the nations will be able to make a claim. Yet, a theme witnessed in Isaiah is that God will show His goodness **to whomever comes to Him**, whether they be of ethnic Israel, the nations, or even various marginalized and oppressed sub-groups (cf. 56:1-8).

Isaiah 65:1-2 would be specifically referenced by the Apostle Paul in Romans 10:20-21, when speaking of the First Century dilemma of many of his fellow Jews rejecting Israel's Messiah. He

³ John N. Oswalt, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 635.

⁴ Cf. C.L. Seow, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*, revised edition (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), pp 288-297; Gary D. Pratico and Miles V. Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), pp 289-308.

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used it to describe how many from the nations at large had received Yeshua, but that God continues to have His hands open wide to Israel as His chosen:

ISAIAH 65:1-2	ROMANS 10:20-21
<p>I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask <i>for Me</i>; 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 <i>in</i> the way which is not good, following their own thoughts.</p>	<p>And Isaiah is very bold and says, "I WAS FOUND BY THOSE WHO DID NOT SEEK ME, I BECAME MANIFEST TO THOSE WHO DID NOT ASK FOR ME" [Isaiah 65:1]. But as for Israel He says, "ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE" [Isaiah 65:2].</p>

Further in vs. 10-11, the main difference that one sees, is not that God's choice of corporate Israel has somehow been forfeited because of the sin that has manifested; the main difference is that the Lord is interested in those among His own **seeking Him** and not forsaking Him. This places a significant responsibility on the *individuals* within Israel, who knowing Him as their God, knowing His ways, and seeing or having seen His Temple—should be faithful. Unfortunately, as will be witnessed in vs. 2-16, those who would be present to experience the fall of Jerusalem and the Temple had turned themselves over to a great deal of idolatry. The beginnings of this idolatry would have had to have been present during the time of Isaiah, who prophesied this several centuries before it reached a breaking point.

65:2-5a Human beings who are in need of Divine intervention and/or God's mercy, are typically those who spread out their hands to Him (Exodus 9:28, 33; 1 Kings 8:22, 38; Isaiah 1:15). It is observed by the Lord, "I constantly spread out My hands to a disloyal people, who walk the way that is not good, following their own designs" (v. 2, NJPS). Here, God is the One who extends His hands out to a widely rebellious Israel, people who are unfortunately recognized as being in sin against Him throughout much of Isaiah's prophecy (1:2; 30:1, 9). While idolatry will be observed to be the problem of their "straying" (Keter Crown Bible), it has previously been stated to involve violence as well:

"Their feet run to evil, and they hasten to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity, devastation and destruction are in their highways" (59:7).

God's own are found to be provoking Him by their idolatry, and while the oracle of 65:1-16 specifically concerned those in the Southern Kingdom of Judah who would have experienced, or would have been about to experience, the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians—the kind of idolatry described was present in Canaan long before the period of the Conquest led by Joshua. It is stated how these sinners are, "the people who continually anger Me to My face; who sacrifice in their gardens and burn incense on the bricks" (v. 3, ATS). Given previous references in Isaiah to idolatrous activities being involved with gardens (1:29; 17:8, 10-11; 27:9; 57:5), there is likely to be some kind of involvement of the worship of the goddess Asherah.⁵ While the offering of incense before the Lord is a feature of the priestly service in the Torah, v. 7 suggests that the offering of incense here took place in association with pagan high places. In the view of Watts, the idolatrous activities committed "belong to the popular paganism that had dominated that area for centuries. These practices may belong to the cult of Adonis and Babylonian Tammuz, both vegetarian deities."⁶

⁵ Cf. K.G. Jung, "Asherah," in *ISBE*, 1:317-318.

⁶ Watts, 914.

The rebellious people are also those “who sit inside tombs, and spend the night in secret places” (v. 4a, NRSV), as they sit *b'qevarim u'b'netzurim* (בְּקִבְרִים וּבְנִצְזִרִים), “secret places” considered by the Septuagint to be *en tois spēlairois* (ἐν τοῖς σπηλαίοις) or “in the caves” (LXE). These locations, where human remains are interred, had to involve some kind of either forbidden ancestor worship or necromancy, as consulting the dead is witnessed in Isaiah (8:19), but is most especially prohibited by the Torah (Leviticus 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deuteronomy 18:11), with capital punishment for violators. Those who commit such sins of divination, as described later in the Book of Revelation, are excluded from entering into the Kingdom of God (Revelation 21:8; 22:15).

V. 4b further describes that these sinners “eat the flesh of swine, with broth of unclean things in their bowls” (NJPS), the term *piggul* (פִּיגּוּל) technically meaning “**meat fm. sacrifice which has become unclean** because not eaten within specified time” (*CHALOT*).⁷ Not all of the actions being committed are “vegetarian.” The consumption of pork is prohibited in the Torah, for certain (Leviticus 11:7-8; Deuteronomy 14:8), and the condemnation of eating pork is picked up again by Isaiah (66:3, 17). In Isaiah 65:4, there is little doubting how the eating of pork is being connected to Ancient Canaanite rituals for conjuring up the dead.

The attitude of these sinners—those sitting in gardens, burning incense, involved in necromancy, and eating pork—is one which can be perplexing to the modern reader. The sinners say, “Keep away; don’t come near me, for I am too sacred for you!” (v. 5a, NIV), or “Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you” (NRSV). Older versions like the KJV actually do have, “holier than thou.” The attitude of these sinners is one of superiority for those who witness their activities, presumably with disapproval, with themselves having a high(er) level of presumed holiness or sacredness. Far from being aware that their activities are highly offensive to the Lord, **they revel in them**, exclaiming *ki qedash'tikha* (כִּי קִדְשְׁתִּיךָ), “for I-am-sacred-for-you” (Kohlenberger).⁸ Watts draws the conclusion, “The rebellious ones claim for themselves a special and separate status...By their priestly status they consider themselves to have received a special quality of holiness that sets them apart or that gives them special powers.”⁹ Christopher R. Seitz further interjects, regarding the sins being committed,

“Garden-sacrificing would appear to involve nature rites of some kind, but again we get half-glimpses only in places like Hosea 1-3, and these suggest some effort to conflate human sexuality and nature and the divine realm. There is as well here mention of dietary practices at odds with the Torah of Moses. It is only conjecture, but the servants seem to be under assault from a group claiming special knowledge, which exempts them from the law as related to death, sex, and food; and that this is done on the basis of claims to holiness.”¹⁰

So, it may be that the statement “For I am holier than you!” is directed by the sinners, toward those (few) who are actually in obedience to God and staying away from these actions that inflame Him. While corporately Israel is here witnessed to be involved in idolatrous activities, there are those who are faithful to Him.

65:5b-7 The Lord is absolutely incensed by these sinners, exclaiming how “These are the smoke of My anger, like a fire burning all the day” (v. 5b, Keter Crown Bible). Such language is not irregular at all to describe God’s anger. In Deuteronomy 32:22 He previously said, “For a fire is kindled in My anger, and burns to the lowest part of Sheol, and consumes the earth with its yield, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains.” And later, describing the Southern Kingdom via the prophecy of Jeremiah, “And you will, even of yourself, let go of your inheritance that I gave you; and I will make you serve your enemies in the land which you do not know; for you have kindled a fire in My anger which will burn forever” (Jeremiah 17:4). The record of these sins, as

⁷ *CHALOT*, 288.

⁸ Kohlenberger, 4:129.

⁹ Watts, 914.

¹⁰ Christopher R. Seitz, “The Book of Isaiah 40-66,” in Leander E. Keck, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 6 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 6:543.

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asserted in vs. 6-7, is inscribed before God—a definite indication of how severe He considers them to be:

“See, it stands written before me: I will not keep silent but will pay back in full; I will pay it back into their laps—both your sins and the sins of your ancestors,’ says the LORD. ‘Because they burned sacrifices on the mountains and defied me on the hills, I will measure into their laps the full payment for their former deeds’” (NRSV).

The rebels against the Lord “burned incense on the mountains and blasphemed Me on the hills” (ATS). While a compilation of sinful activities has been committed, this probably involves sacrifices to Canaanite deities on various high places, like Baal. Isaiah 57:7 has previously noted, “Upon a high and lofty mountain you have made your bed. You also went up there to offer sacrifice.”

65:8-10 In spite of the severity of the record of sins that stands recorded before God, there will be a future restoration of Israel: “Thus said HASHEM: Just as when the wine is found in a cluster, and someone says, ‘Do not destroy it, for there is blessing in it,’ so will I do for My servants, not to destroy everything” (v. 8, ATS). If there is anything important to be noted, while Israel, or more specifically the Southern Kingdom proper, will be judged—there are those who will be regarded as *avdai* (אֲבָדַי), “My servants.” There may be a demonstrable shift from how earlier Israel proper is considered to be God’s servant (41:8-10; 42:1), whereas here it is the righteous individuals, obviously from Israel, who are considered God’s servants. While God’s promises to His corporate people remain in force, for sure, it is ultimately the responsibility of individual people to make sure that they are faithful and loyal to Him. Even in Revelation, we see how it is “servants” in the plural, who serve the Lord (Revelation 22:3, 6). Watts’ observation is well taken:

“YHWH’s servants will include the elect, and presumably faithful, of the northern tribes as well as Judeans and Jerusalemites...There is to be a division here, but not between north and south or between Judah and the other tribes or between priest and people. It will be between true servants of YHWH and those who rebel by insisting on their own ways of worship and politics.”¹¹

Even with modern readers recognizing how the Babylonians would come and decimate Jerusalem and Judea, the reality of future restoration to the Promised Land, and a restoration of substantial population, is witnessed:

“I will bring forth offspring from Jacob, from Judah heirs to My mountains; My chosen ones shall take possession, My servants shall dwell thereon. Sharon shall become a pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor a place for cattle to lie down, for My people who seek Me” (vs. 9-10, NJPS).

That there will always be physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob on Planet Earth, is a major thrust witnessed in the Tanach. So serious is it, that Jeremiah 31:36 asserts, “If this fixed order departs from before Me,’ declares the LORD, ‘Then the offspring of Israel also will cease from being a nation before Me forever.’”

65:11-12 While there will be those faithful who seek the Lord, and will be restored to the Promised Land, “you that forsake the LORD that forget my holy mountain, that set out a table for Gad (Fortune,) and fill the cup of liquor for Meni (Destiny,) you will I destine for the sword, and you shall all bow down to the slaughter: because when I called, you did not answer; when I spoke, you did not hear; but did evil before my eyes, and did choose that in which I delighted not” (vs. 11-12, Jerusalem Bible-Koren). In v. 11, we see a meal and drink offering spread out for pagan deities, something likely witnessed previously in Isaiah 5:22, and later with offerings presented before the Queen of Heaven in Jeremiah 7:18.

The two deities are mentioned by name in v. 11, “who set a table for Gad, who fill a libation to Meni” (ATS), meaning “who array a table for Fortune, and who fill mixed wine for Fate” (LITV). The reference to *Gad* (גַּד) is probably to a Canaanite god of fortune,¹² with *ABD* noting how “Jewish tradition identified Gad with the planet Jupiter, regarded in Arabic astrology as the star of greater

¹¹ Watts, 915.

¹² A.F. Campbell, “Fortune,” in *ISBE*, 2:354-355.

fortune,"¹³ although this might not have any bearing on how *Gad* was viewed by the original recipients of this rebuke. The second deity mentioned is *Meni* (מְנִי), probably a male associated with destiny, although "probably [also] connected with the goddess *manât*, an idol (a large stone) worshipped by pre-Islamic Arabs" (*ABD*).¹⁴ In the later Quran it is witnessed, "Have you thought on Al-Lât and Al'Uzzâ, and on Manât, the third other?" (Surah 53:20 [al-Najm {the Star}]).¹⁵

It is often recognized that in vs. 11-12, with meal and drink offerings presented *l'Meni* (לְמְנִי) or "to Meni," that there is a likely play on words with the Lord asserting, *u'maniti* (וּמְנִיתִי) or "I will destine." The deities which are entreated will for certain, be completely powerless to help those who entreat them for favor, as all rebels against the Lord will suffer the consequences of their sin (1:20; 59:18; 66:16). Yet, as Jewish commentator I.W. Slotki rightly acknowledges, "Despite the debased practices of many, the nation will be preserved for the sake of those who remained loyal to their God. The degenerate, however, who persist in their idolatrous ritual will be delivered to slaughter."¹⁶ Much of what it means for God's people to seek out nefarious spiritual forces, will be picked up again in Paul's instruction of 1 Corinthians 10:21-22 (discussed further).

65:13-16 It seems unlikely that in spite of the indictments issued against the rebels and their idolatrous practices, that there will be any substantial repentance. Vs. 13-15 include a contrasting description of what will happen to those regarded as "My servants," those who are faithful to the Lord—and those who will remain in rebellion, for whom God has a most unpleasant destiny (v. 12a):

"Therefore, thus said my Lord, HASHEM/ELOHIM: Behold, My servants will eat and you will starve; behold, My servants will drink and you will thirst; behold, My servants will rejoice and you will be ashamed; behold, My servants will exult from goodheartedness, and you will cry out from pain of heart and wail from a broken spirit. You will leave your name as an oath for My chosen ones, and the Lord, HASHEM/ELOHIM, will put you to death; but He will call His servants a different name" (vs. 13-15, ATS).

What does it mean when the Lord says, "My servants will be called by another name" (v. 15) or a "different name" (ATS, NJPS), *shem acheir* (שֵׁם אַחֵר)? This is probably best understood in light of the previous assertion of restored Zion in 62:2: "The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; and you will be called by a new name [*shem chadash*, שֵׁם חֲדָשׁ] which the mouth of the LORD will designate." This will involve a new reputation, vindicated forth to Israel by the Lord, and something also seemingly alluded to in v. 16:

"For whoever blesses himself in the land shall bless himself by the true God; and whoever swears in the land shall swear by the true God. The former troubles shall be forgotten, shall be hidden from My eyes" (NJPS).

65:1-16 application It can be common, in various Messianic quarters, to hear the indictment of Isaiah 65:4, "They sit among the graves and spend the night in caverns; they eat pig meat and their pots hold soup made from disgusting things" (CJB), quoted by various people toward Christians who eat unclean things. This is then often enjoined with the word, in response, "Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou" (Isaiah 65:5, KJV). Unfortunately, it has to be observed how kosher-friendly Messianics are often spurned by Christian family and friends who eat pork on a regular basis, and who think that those who keep the kosher dietary laws must be trying to prove themselves spiritually superior, i.e., "holier than thou," when those targeted in v. 5 are, in fact, those who ate pork. And it has to be observed how some of these people tend to have little interest to fairly discuss what the dietary laws of the Torah actually are.

¹³ Walter A. Maier III, "Gad (Deity)," in *ABD*, 2:863.

¹⁴ Walter A. Maier III, "Meni," in *Ibid.*, 4:695.

¹⁵ *The Koran With a Parallel Arabic Text*, trans. N.J. Dawood (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 525.

¹⁶ I.W. Slotki, *Soncino Books of the Bible: Isaiah* (London: Soncino Press, 1983), 315.

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While it is important to keep the words of Isaiah 65:4, 5 in mind, especially for the eschatological judgment witnessed in Isaiah 66:15-17—these verses were quoted a bit too frequently by Messianics in the 2000s, without enough consideration for their original setting and context, and/or without any real further investigation as provided here. This passage was originally concerned about the idolatry present in the Southern Kingdom either immediately after or prior to the fall of Jerusalem and Judea, with God's judgment befalling the people because of their idolatry. This involved rituals associated with gardens, incense, necromancy or communication with the dead, *and* eating pork (65:3-5). While eating pork is directly associated with pagan idolatry, what receives more attention from the Lord is His rebuke of those who would search out false deities like Fortune and Destiny (65:11). This word is not issued to those who take a lunch break by sitting down at a local cemetery, eating a bacon sandwich.

Compared to the other idolatrous practices, the statement about the sinners eating swine's flesh is actually more of a sidebar insult by God, than anything else, as eating unclean meat did not merit any capital penalties in the Torah—**unlike** divination. What is, to be certain, a significant problem, is that those of Israel in view are utterly shameless about what they are doing, seen in the statement, "Keep to thyself, come not nigh to me, for I have declared thee unholy" (65:5, YLT). When presented with their faults, they flaunt their superior sanctity, believing themselves to be getting away with their crimes against the Holy One. Noting 65:3, "A people who continually provoke Me to My face," Oswald astutely observes for the modern reader,

"When we refuse to surrender our own ways and thoughts for God's ways and thoughts, the result is paganism, however it may be garbed. It involves sacrificing to images of ourselves in the fertile gardens (cf. 1:29) and groves that symbolize the life force we are trying to harness. It involves the offering of incense and other costly substances to create an aura of mystery and holiness when we are unwilling to surrender our lives to the Holy Spirit so he can invest them with such an aura."¹⁷

While we should not expect an exact one-to-one correlation for those of ancient times who defiantly ate pork, among other things—to those today who look down upon Messianic people honoring kosher—**are there ever any echoes of the attitudes present?** This is what has to be kept in mind, as when the Lord returns, those in the end-times will be judged (66:15-17) for participating in the same sort of activities as detailed in 65:4-6. And as always, as is witnessed in Isaiah 65:1-16, the Lord earnestly desires as many as possible to seek Him (65:1-2), to turn to His ways and be reckoned as His servants (65:9, 13-16).

¹⁷ Oswald, pp 637-638.