

THE LORD RESPONDS TO ISRAEL'S QUESTIONS

TEXT: ISAIAH 65: 1-16

Introduction:

1. In Isaiah 64:12, two questions are asked. Isaiah, representing the nation of Israel, asks, "Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O LORD? wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?"
2. In chapters 65 and 66, the LORD answers these questions.
3. Israel has been a rebellious nation (65:2), but God's promise to restore Israel is unconditional.
4. God always works through a remnant, and there has always been a remnant of faithful Jews.
5. The apostle Paul (quoting Isaiah 10:22) said in Romans 9:27, "Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved."
6. And Paul said in Romans 11:5, "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace."

I. JEWS AND GENTILES ARE ALL REBELLIOUS PEOPLE

1. The LORD says, "I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name" (65:1). God graciously reaches out to all peoples – both Jews and Gentiles.
2. While Isaiah 65:1 refers to both Jews and Gentiles, verses 2-5 refer to God's dealings with the nation Israel.
3. The apostle Paul quotes verse 2 in Romans 10:21, "But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people."
4. Israel was supposed to be a light unto the Gentiles, but they often behaved just as badly as their heathen neighbors (Isa. 65:3-5).
5. The idea conveyed in verses 3-5 is that Israel continually provoked God to wrath by their idolatry.
6. They flaunted their sin – just like America with its so-called "gay marriage" and filthy Hollywood movies and legal abortion, etc.
7. There is a reference in Isaiah 65:4 to these apostate Israelites sitting in graves. This refers to the sin of necromancy, which is forbidden in the Bible (Deut. 18:11).

8. Necromancy is the practice of supposedly communicating with the spirits of the dead in order to predict the future. God killed King Saul because of this.
9. Remember, Isaiah's prophecies look beyond his day – all the way up to the second coming of Christ. Occultism will be widespread during the coming tribulation period (Rev. 9:20, 21).
10. Israel's spiritual blindness is shown in the fact that they consider themselves "holier than thou" (65:5). The Pharisees of our Lord's day were like this.
11. Luke 18:9 describes them well, where it says our Lord "spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others."
12. In Isaiah 65:5, the Lord describes this religious hypocrisy as "smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day."
13. The smoke refers to their idolatrous sacrifices (65:3). Their idolatry and self-righteousness and hypocrisy angered God. Psalm 18:8 says, "There went up a smoke out of His nostrils, and fire out of His mouth devoured; coals were kindled by it."
14. The fire burning all day (65:5) refers to God's burning displeasure with their flagrant sin. God "will not keep silence" (65:6). God is a holy God and He must judge sin (65:6, 7).

II. GOD HAS A FAITHFUL REMNANT

1. Isaiah 65:8 refers to the faithful remnant. Israel is compared to a cluster of sour grapes that were about to be thrown away as worthless, but God sees a "blessing in it."
2. The "new wine" is the faithful remnant. Judges 9:13 says the new wine "cheereth God and man."
3. God will spare the believing remnant of Israelites – for His "servants' sakes" He will not destroy them all (65:8).
4. Isaiah 1:9 says, "Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah."
5. But the vast majority of Israelites will continue in their sin and will be destroyed (cf. Zech. 13:8, 9).
6. The faithful remnant is called "a seed" and God's "elect" and "chosen" (65:9, 15) and His "servants" (65:9, 13-15). They will go through the Great Tribulation (called "the time of Jacob's trouble" in Jeremiah 30:7), but will be preserved by God.
7. "Sharon" (Isa. 65:10) refers to the fertile coastal plain extending along the Mediterranean Sea from Joppa to Caesarea. Isaiah prophesied that in the millennial kingdom "Sharon shall be a fold of flocks." Isaiah 35:2 says, "Sharon shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God."

8. "The valley of Achor" (65:10) is a valley near Jericho, famous for God's judgment upon Achan (Joshua 7). The word "Achor" means, "trouble."
9. But when Christ returns, this valley of trouble will become "a place for the herds to lie down in" (65:10).
10. The LORD's people will seek His face, so the place, which has been well known for trouble, will become well known for blessing.
11. In a similar prophecy, Hosea 2:15 says the LORD will give "the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt."
12. There is a tremendous lesson here for us. Achor represents the troubles we bring upon ourselves by our sin. But if we repent, God in His grace and mercy can turn things, and turn our troubles into blessings.
13. William Cowper wrote,

God moves in a mysterious way
 His wonders to perform;
 He plants His footsteps in the sea,
 And rides upon the storm.
 Deep in unfathomable mines
 Of never-failing skill
 He treasures up His bright designs,
 And works His sovereign will.
 Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
 The clouds ye so much dread
 Are big with mercy, and shall break
 In blessings on your head.

III. GOD WILL DESTROY THE APOSTATES

1. Apostates are "they that forsake the LORD" (65:11). Way back in Isaiah 1:4 we read, "Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward."
2. In verse 11, Isaiah again refers to Israel's idolatry (cf. 65:3-7). The meaning is rather obscure. Matthew Henry wrote, "They *prepared a*

table for that troop of deities which the heathen worship and *poured out drink-offerings to that* numberless number of them; for those that thought one God too little never thought scores and hundreds sufficient, but were still adding to the number of them, till they had as many gods as cities and their altars were as thick as *heaps in the furrows of the field* (Hosea 12:11). Some take *Gad* and *Meni*, which we translate *a troop* and *a number*, to be the proper names of two of their idols, answering to Jupiter and Mercury. Whatever they were, their worshippers spared no cost to do them honour; they prepared a table for them, and filled out mixed wine for drink-offerings to them.”

3. Israel will be severely judged for their abominable idolatry (65:12).
Isaiah 65:15 says “the LORD God shall slay” them.
4. But God will bless His faithful “servants” (65:13-16).

CONCLUSION:

1. Isaiah 65:16 sets forth the glorious blessings of salvation. Those who put their trust in the true God of heaven, bless themselves “in the God of truth,” and “swear by the God of truth.”
2. Our Lord said in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”
3. In John 14:17; 15:26; 16:7, and 16:13, our Lord referred to the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of truth.”
4. Our Lord said in John 16:13, “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth.”
5. In John 17:17, our Lord prayed to God the Father, “Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth.”
6. God will not only remove their sin and guilt, He will also remove from their minds all remembrances of it (Isa. 65:16).

7. God is omniscient and omnipresent, but in His sovereignty and grace He chooses to hide from His eyes all our transgressions.
8. Isaiah 38:17 says, “Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back.”

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