

I. REVIEW

- A. Paul the apostle says that the gospel “according to the mystery now revealed” in Christ is God’s ordained means of establishing the saints in maturity, perseverance, righteousness, and obedience.

Romans 16:25-27 (NIV)

25 Now to him who is able to establish you (in faith and obedience, cf. vs. 26, Rom. 1:5) by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, 26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him— 27 to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

- B. Many of those in the early centuries of the church who called themselves Christian, but were actually Gnostic in their theological orientation, liked to take biblical words and give them unbiblical meanings. For example, Marcion of Sinope in the second century. He rejected the Old Testament and kept parts of Luke and Paul’s letters, twisting Paul’s use of the word “mystery” to dismiss and spiritualize the Old Testament. When we use the word “mystery,” want to make sure that we do not read Gnostic-oriented meanings into the term.
- C. In the New Testament, the “gospel according to the mystery” simply means the gospel that was prophesied and understood in the Old Testament, but the precise details and historical circumstances of which were not yet fully disclosed or understood. However, that which was hidden is now disclosed and therefore understood because God has made it known in Jesus. God gave the apostles understanding of this mystery through Jesus’ preaching, ministry, death and resurrection, and also through the work of the Holy Spirit.
- D. The gospel according to the mystery of Christ is a story full of drama and fascinating characters. The story begins in the Garden, where there was perfection of life, perfection of government, and perfection of fellowship. Human beings yielded to Satan’s lies and disobeyed God. Sin opened a door for death to enter God’s good creation. However, God promised that the “seed” of the woman would come and make the wrong things right. The serpent would strike the seed’s heel, but the seed would crush the serpent’s head. The seed of the woman would thus be God’s instrument for restoring all that was lost in the Fall.
- E. The conclusion of the story is the restoration of all things. When Jesus comes back, the human body will be restored through *the resurrection of the body*. When Jesus comes back, *righteous government* will be restored through the establishment of the Messiah’s kingdom on the earth. When Jesus comes back, *fellowship with God* will be restored as it was in the beginning. We will once again walk with God in the cool of the day. We will see God face-to-face.
- F. The mystery of Christ concerns the manner in which God has chosen to administrate, execute, implement, and carry out His plan of redemption and fulfill His promises made in the covenants recorded (or prophesied about – NC) in the Hebrew Scriptures (Creation, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New).

Ephesians 3:8-9 (NIV)

⁸ Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

G. Today we are going to look at the covenant God made with Abraham. In order for us to understand what Paul and the other apostles meant by the “mystery of Christ,” we must have clear understanding of God’s promises to Abraham. Today, we will focus our study on the *content* of these promises. What were the promises God made to Abraham, and how did Abraham himself and the nation of Israel understand those promises? In the next ERG, we will explore “the how” related to the fulfillment of those promises. But to fully grasp the significance of “the how,” we must first have a clear understanding of “the what.” In fact, we can’t understand most of what God is doing in the nations, in Israel, and the Body of Christ today without a clear understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant.

II. BABYLON

A. After the Flood, human beings built a city in the plains of Shinar (or Babylonia) in rebellion against God. After the flood, God commanded them to “multiply on the earth and increase upon it” (Gen. 9:7). However, instead of spreading out, they came together in one place and decided to build a city and tower in order to “make a name for themselves.”

Genesis 11:1-4 (NKJV)

¹ Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. ² And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east (NIV – “as men moved eastward;” NIV alternatives – “from the east” or “in the east”), that they found a plain in the land of Shinar (Babylonia), and they dwelt there. ³ Then they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar (NIV – “they used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar”; did they come upon some pits of tar or asphalt? cf. Gen. 14:10; materials conducive to an accelerated rate of building). ⁴ And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top (Heb. “rosh” – “head,” literally or in sense of authority, cf. Gen. 3:15, 40:19; “source,” as in headwaters of Gen. 2:10; “chief” or “leader,” cf. Ex. 18:25; “top” spatially, cf. Gen. 2:10; “beginning,” cf. Ecc. 3:11, e.g. Rosh Hashana) is in the heavens (Heb. “shamayim” – includes air around us, sky, the visible universe; also a part of the heavens occupied by fallen principalities and powers, cf. Eph. 6:12, Rev. 12:8; also the third heavens and the height of the heavens, cf. 2 Cor. 12:2); let us make a name (reputation, fame, renown, cf. Gen. 6:4) for ourselves (pride and self-exaltation), lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth (rebellion against God’s command to fill the earth in Gen. 9:7).”

B. Babylon was full of idols and infested with demons. Terah was Abraham’s father. Terah lived in the city of Ur of the Chaldeans, and he and household also worshipped idols. Abraham grew up in an idol-worshipping family.

Joshua 24:2 (ESV)

And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods.’

C. At one point, Terah left Ur with his family, apparently with the intention of moving to Canaan. Had God originally called Terah out of the idolatry of Babylon, even before He called Abraham? Possibly. In Genesis 24, Abraham insists that Isaac not marry a Canaanite woman, but rather someone from Abraham’s family in Haran (Gen. 24:1-4). This was probably because Abraham wanted to safeguard Isaac from becoming ensnared by the idolatry pervasive among the Canaanites. Does this mean that Terah and his entire family at some point had had some kind of family conversion experience to the LORD? Perhaps. If so, the family seems to have severely backslidden by the time of Terah’s great grandson, Laban (Gen. 31:30-35). Whatever the case, Terah and his family didn’t make it all the way to Canaan, but ended up settling in the city of Haran.

Genesis 11:31 (NIV)

Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there.

D. God called Abraham to leave the wickedness of Babylon behind. He called him to live a different kind of life – a holy life separated and set apart from the idolatry, pride, self-exaltation, and rebellion of Babylon. He called Abraham to live a blameless life before Him, to obey His voice, to keep His commands and statutes, and to instruct his children and household in the ways of God.

Joshua 24:2-4 (ESV)

² And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods. ³ Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring (seed) many. I gave him Isaac.

Genesis 17:1 (NIV)

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless.

Genesis 18:16-19 (ESV)

¹⁶ Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. ¹⁷ The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, ¹⁸ seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? ¹⁹ For I have chosen (Heb- “known;” cf. Am. 3:2; Rom. 11:2) him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.”

Genesis 26:5 (ESV)

“...because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge (NIV – “requirements”), my commandments, my statutes (NIV – “decrees”), and my laws.”

- E. Can you feel the drama and weightiness of this situation? Would Abraham believe in the certainty of God’s promises in the face of the rebellion surrounding him? Would he risk the stigma of being called “crazy” by the world? Abraham was a wealthy man from a wealthy family. Would he be willing to leave it all behind to walk with God in hope of receiving something promised for the future, but not yet seen? How do you think his friends and business partners reacted when they first heard the news that Abraham was leaving? What was the “buzz” circulating through the gossip chain in Haran? Did Abraham have to persuade Sarah to come along, or was she on board from the beginning? Would Abraham leave the perceived security of a fortified city behind and, in obedience to God, intentionally put his family in a place of vulnerability and weakness as a stranger and nomad in a foreign land? Would he trust God to protect and take care of his family?
- F. When God called Abraham, He called him: 1) *out of* Babylon; 2) *to* a life of faith and obedience; 3) *through* the tests, trials, and pruning of this age; 4) *unto and into* the inheritance of the promises in the restoration of all things; and 5) *as* a light and witness to the nations around him. We too are called to the “obedience of faith.” Through the gospel, God gives us the same invitation and call that He extended to Abraham.

Romans 1:5 (ESV)

...through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.

Ephesians 4:1 (NIV)

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

1 Thessalonians 2:12 (NIV)

...encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

- G. Of course, like the rest of us, Abraham couldn’t walk in obedience to God in his own strength. He needed God’s strength and grace. Throughout Genesis, we constantly see Abraham calling on the name of the LORD in prayer. To call on the LORD’s name means to appeal to and lean into God’s character (cf. Gen. 34:6) and covenant faithfulness in prayer. Prayer is God’s ordained means for accessing grace to live a life pleasing to God. Abraham was constantly leaning to God’s heart and character in his times of need.

Genesis 13:3-4 (NIV)

³From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier ⁴and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the LORD.

Hebrews 4:16 (NIV)

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

III. PRELIMINARY – RIGHTLY DEFINING “SEED” AND “BLESSING”

- A. In order to rightly interpret the promises God made to Abraham, we need to have clear understanding of the terminology God uses in the promises, and how those terms make sense and have meaning in context to the overall storyline of Scripture. If we read passages in isolation apart from the broader narrative of Scripture, we are much more susceptible to reading unbiblical meanings and ideas into biblical words.
- B. As we read about God’s promises to Abraham, we will see God constantly using the terms “seed” and “blessing.” The question we need to ask ourselves is, “How would *Abraham* (and more importantly God) have understood these terms?”
- C. *Definition of “Seed”* – Genesis 1 sets the stage for a right understanding of “seed” and “blessing.” From Genesis 1, we learn the following principles about “seed”: 1) seed and life are inextricably bound together; 2) seed when planted grows over time and eventually becomes a mature organism; 3) contained in seed is the potential to reproduce and multiply life of like kind; 4) the development and multiplication of seed occurs through God’s word of blessing. Plants, animals, and human beings all have seed “in” them, and therefore have the capacity to reproduce life.

Genesis 1:11-12 (ESV)

11 And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed (Heb. “zera;” LXX – “sperma”), and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so. 12 The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1:22 (ESV)

And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.”

- D. It is important to note that in Scripture, God’s word is often likened to God’s “seed.” When God’s word in the gospel goes forth from Him and connects with a tender, responsive, and repentant heart, a new creation is conceived. We become God’s children, and He becomes our Father. We are “conceived” in the womb of this age through the gospel, and “born” into the age to come when we receive resurrected bodies at the Second Coming.

1 Peter 1:22-25 (ESV)

22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, 23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; 24 for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, 25 but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good

news that was preached to you (i.e. the gospel, or the word of God, is the seed that leads to life).

Luke 20:35-36 (NIV)

³⁵ But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, ³⁶ and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection.

- E. The word “seed” is a collective singular noun, and thus can refer to a singular reality or a corporate reality. Unfortunately, when used in context to the Abrahamic Covenant, most English translations of the Bible translate seed as either descendant or descendants. However, by doing this, they are inadvertently obscuring for modern readers some very key points of apostolic teaching in the New Testament. The most helpful rendering would simply be to consistently translate the Hebrew word “zera” as “seed,” as they do in Genesis 1. The KJV is the only translation that consistently translates “zera” as seed.
- F. *Definition of Blessing* – Hebrew is a Semitic language. Like Arabic, Hebrew vocabulary sets are built on various clusters of consonants called “roots.” Different words are formed as different vowels are variously inserted into a cluster of root consonants. The common root provides a common conceptual link for a vocabulary set.
- G. The consonantal root for blessing is B-R-K. The concept linked to this root is kneeling or other knee-related things. So “barak” is the verb form of “to bless,” and can also be translated as “to kneel.” “Berek (different vowels, same consonants), means “knees.” “Baraka,” in turn, means “blessing.”

Psalm 95:6-7 (NIV)

⁶ Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel (Heb. “barak”; “bless”) before the LORD our Maker; ⁷ for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

Genesis 48:12 (ESV)

Then Joseph removed them from his knees (Heb. “berek”), and he bowed himself with his face to the earth.

- H. It is one thing for us to “bless” and “kneel” before God in worship. But as we will soon see, God promises to “bless” and kneel before Abraham and his seed as a servant to accomplish His purposes! God’s character, His humility, His power, His authority, and His loving intentions are all bound up in the concept of “blessing.”
- I. Question: Before the Fall, was the earth under God’s word of blessing or under God’s curse?
- J. Question: Before the Fall, what were some of the different ways that God “knelt down” and served His creation unto its flourishing and fruitfulness?
- K. Before the Fall, God’s word/deed of blessing led to the perpetuation of life (access to the tree of life), fruitful co-operation governmentally (e.g. the naming and care of the animals,

tending the garden, etc.), and intimate face-to-face fellowship. When God called Abraham out of Babylon and promised to *bless* him, both He and Abraham would have had the recovery of the Garden Paradise at the forefront of their minds. Indeed, we learn from Scripture that God's primary definition of "blessing" is the *blessing of the Spirit*, unto the *resurrection of the body* in the Day of the Lord. We must keep this in mind as we study the promises God made to Abraham.

Isaiah 44:1-5 (NIV)

"But now listen, O Jacob, my servant, Israel, whom I have chosen. ² This is what the LORD says— he who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you: Do not be afraid, O Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. ³ For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring (seed), and my blessing on your descendants. ⁴ They will spring up (from the ground in resurrected glory in the Day of the Lord) like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams. ⁵ One will say, 'I belong to the LORD'; another will call himself by the name of Jacob; still another will write on his hand, 'The LORD's,' and will take the name Israel.

Romans 8:10-11 (ESV)

¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Galatians 3:13-14 (NIV)

¹³ Christ redeemed us (Jews) from the curse of the law (death) by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."¹⁴ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

L. Any "blessing" that did not ultimately result in the full restoration of Eden would not have been a true blessing in Abraham's mind. Can you imagine God saying to Abraham, "Abraham, I love you so much that I'm going to bless you with a new car, but you'll only get to enjoy it a few years because I'm going to leave your body to decay in the dirt"?

IV. A GREAT AND HOLY NATION

A. God promised Abraham that *He* would make of his seed a *great nation*.

Genesis 12:1,2 (NRSV)

¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you (NKJV – "I will make you"; NIV – "I will make you into") a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

B. *Created and Fathered by God*. In the Old Testament, God calls Israel his "firstborn son" (Ex. 4:22). Beginning with Abraham's call (remember God's word=his "seed"), Israel was the first nation "adopted" (cf. Rom. 9:4) or called into existence out from the illegitimate

“orphan” nations of Babylon – those “fathered” and “reared” illegitimately by false gods and demons. The nation was brought into existence or “born” miraculously through the Spirit’s power in Isaac’s birth. The nation was also called and brought out of Egypt not by human strength, but miraculously by God’s power. The nation thus owed its very existence to God’s power and word alone. That was the point. God intentionally birthed the nation in a way that removed all grounds for human boasting.

Exodus 4:22-23a (NIV)

22 Then say to Pharaoh, ‘This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son,²³ and I told you, “Let my son go, so he may worship me.”

Deuteronomy 32:5-6 (NIV) (Portions of Deut. 32 sung every Sabbath¹)

5 They have acted corruptly toward him; to their shame they are no longer his children, but a warped and crooked generation. 6 Is this the way you repay the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?

Isaiah 63:16 (NIV)

But you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name.

Isaiah 64:8 (NIV)

Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.

Genesis 21:12 (ESV)

But God said to Abraham, “Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your seed be named” (NIV “be reckoned;” NKJV – “be called;” Young’s Literal – “for in Isaac is a seed called to you;” cf. Rom. 9:7; Heb. 11:18).

Galatians 4:28-29 (ESV)

28 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.

C. As the “firstborn,” this nation is promised a double portion when the Father’s inheritance (the earth) is finally released (in the age to come).

Deut. 21:15-17 (ESV)

15 “If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved, and both the loved and the unloved have borne him children, and if the firstborn son belongs to the unloved,¹⁶ then on the day when he assigns his possessions as an inheritance to his sons, he may

¹Edersheim, A. (2003). *The Temple, its ministry and services as they were at the time of Jesus Christ*. (188). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

not treat the son of the loved as the firstborn in preference to the son of the unloved, who is the firstborn, ¹⁷ but he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the firstfruits of his strength. The right of the firstborn is his.

Isaiah 61:7 (NIV)

Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a double portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs.

Jeremiah 3:19-20 (NIV)

¹⁹ “I myself said, “ ‘How gladly would I treat you like sons and give you a desirable land, the most beautiful inheritance of any nation.’ I thought you would call me ‘Father’ and not turn away from following me. ²⁰ But like a woman unfaithful to her husband, so you have been unfaithful to me, O house of Israel,” declares the LORD.

D. The nation is required to humbly yield in repentance to the Father’s corrective and instructive discipline in this age.

Jeremiah 31:18-20 (NIV)

¹⁸ “I have surely heard Ephraim’s moaning: ‘You disciplined me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined. Restore me, and I will return, because you are the LORD my God. ¹⁹ After I strayed, I repented; after I came to understand, I beat my breast. I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth.’ ²⁰ Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight? Though I often speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him,” declares the LORD.

Hebrews 12:7-8 (NIV)

⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

E. Constituted of Seed Blessed and Multiplied by God (cf. Gen. 12:1-2, 13:16, 15:5, 17:6, 22:17, 26:24, 28:14, 32:12, 35:11). There was a *quantitative dimension* to God’s promise. By God’s power, many descendants would come into existence through Isaac’s line.

Genesis 12:1-2 (ESV)

¹ Now the LORD said) to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

Genesis 13:16 (ESV)

I will make your offspring (seed) as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring (seed) also can be counted.

Genesis 15:5 (ESV)

And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring (seed) be.”

F. *The Qualitative Dimension* – “great nation” does not simply mean numbers to God. It also means the nation *being remade into God’s image* through God’s filing, molding, purging, and refining in this age, and ultimately being remade in the resurrection. In Babylon, the nations rebelled against God by fashioning from wood and stone idols made in the image of man. The irony of this is that God had originally fashioned human beings in *His* image to worship Him. Idols are the work of man’s hands.

Isaiah 44:12-13 (NIV)

¹² The blacksmith takes a tool and works with it in the coals; he shapes an idol with hammers, he forges it with the might of his arm. He gets hungry and loses his strength; he drinks no water and grows faint. ¹³ The carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline with a marker; he roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in the form of man, of man in all his glory, that it may dwell in a shrine (cf. Rom. 1:22-23).

Isaiah 2:8 (NIV)

Their land is full of idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their fingers have made (cf. 2 Chr. 32:18-19, Mic. 5:13).

G. Human beings, in contrast, are the work of God’s hands made in His image. In stark contrast to the idol-making happening in Babylon, God promises to mold, shape, and craft of Abraham’s seed a nation refashioned and re-chiseled back into *His image*. In Scripture, Abraham’s biological descendants through Isaac are likened to a national “lump of clay” (Is. 29:15-16, 45:9, 64:8; Rom. 9:21), a “rock quarry” (Is. 51:1-2), and a “vineyard” (Is. 5:1-7) that provides the materials for God to do His work. The righteous – those in Israel who humbly submit and yield to God’s refining work – are forged back into the image of God over time and exalted and vindicated as righteous in the Day of the Lord. They are the “work of His hands,” His “handiwork.” The wicked and unrepentant within the nation – the “dross” – are ultimately filed off, purged, cut off, and separated from the nation in the Day of the Lord.

Genesis 12:1-2 (ESV)

¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you (NKJV – “I will make you”; NIV – “I will make you into”) a great (quantitative and qualitative) nation

Isaiah 64:8 (NIV)

Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.

Jeremiah 18:5-6 (NIV)

⁵ Then the word of the LORD came to me: ⁶ “O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?” declares the LORD. “Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.”

Isaiah 51:1-2 (NIV)

“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness (like Abraham and Sarah) and who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; ² look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was but one, and I blessed him and made him many.

Isaiah 29:22-24 (NIV)

²² Therefore this is what the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, says to the house of Jacob: “No longer will Jacob be ashamed; no longer will their faces grow pale. ²³ When they see among them their children, the work of my hands, they will keep my name holy; they will acknowledge the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel. ²⁴ Those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding; those who complain will accept instruction.”

Isaiah 60:21-22 (NIV)

²¹ Then will all your people be righteous and they will possess the land forever. They are the shoot I have planted (vineyard analogy – i.e. the righteous and humble from the vineyard), the work of my hands, for the display of my splendor. ²² The least of you will become a thousand, the smallest a mighty nation. I am the LORD; in its time I will do this swiftly.”

Isaiah 5:1-6 (NIV)

¹ I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. ² He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. ³ “Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. ⁴ What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? ⁵ Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. ⁶ I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it.”

Isaiah 1:21-26 (NIV)

²¹ See how the faithful city has become a harlot! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her— but now murderers! ²² Your silver has become dross, your choice wine is diluted with water. ²³ Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow’s case does not come before them. ²⁴ Therefore the Lord, the LORD Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: “Ah, I will get relief from my foes and avenge myself on my enemies. ²⁵ I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge

away your dross and remove all your impurities. ²⁶ I will restore your judges as in days of old, your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City.”

H. We must articulate, interpret, and present the Abrahamic Covenant in terms not only in terms of the end-game of God’s plan, but also in terms of the refining processes necessitated by *the revealed character of the end-game*. The age to come is going to be an age of *righteousness*. Therefore, the inheritors of the age to come must also be forged into vessels of righteousness.

Genesis 46:2-4 (ESV)

² And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, “Jacob, Jacob.” And he said, “Here am I.” ³ Then he said, “I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. ⁴ I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph’s hand shall close your eyes.”

Genesis 15:12-16 (ESV)

¹² As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. ¹³ Then the LORD said to Abram, “Know for certain that your offspring (seed) will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. ¹⁴ But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. ¹⁵ As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. ¹⁶ And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

I. *Preserved by God* – God has promised to preserve the nation’s existence and national identity forever. Israel will always have a national existence. To fight this is to fight God, because God is a God of integrity and will always keep His promise to Abraham. The rebellion of part, or even most, of the “lump of clay,” does not negate His commitment to ensuring the “lump’s” survival unto the accomplishment of His God-ordained purposes for that nation.

Genesis 12:3a (NIV)

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse...

Jeremiah 31:35-37 (ESV)

³⁵ Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar— the LORD of hosts is his name: ³⁶ “If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the LORD, then shall the offspring (seed) of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever.” ³⁷ Thus says the LORD: “If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be explored, then I will cast off all the offspring (seed) of Israel for all that they have done, declares the LORD.”

J. *What this doesn’t mean*. The fact that God has promised to preserve the nation’s existence on some level, doesn’t mean that He winks at the sin of the wicked and rebellious within the

nation simply because of their lineage. Nor does it mean that all of Abraham's biological descendants through Isaac will automatically receive the inheritance in the age to come simply because Abraham is their biological ancestor. It does mean that in this age, in faithfulness to *Abraham* God is committed to preserving the "lump of clay" (the nation) and even uses the wicked and rebellious within that lump to carry out His purposes (e.g. the crucifixion). In the age to come, the entire nation will be righteous and forever preserved by God, the dross (wicked) having been completely purged and cut off from the national "lump" in the Day of the Lord.

Matthew 3:7-10 (NIV)

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. 9 And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 10 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Isaiah 4:2-4 (NIV)

2 In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel. 3 Those who are left in Zion, who remain in Jerusalem, will be called holy, all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem. 4 The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire.

Romans 2:7-10 (NIV)

7 To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. 8 But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. 9 There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; 10 but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Romans 11:28-29 (NIV)

28 As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, 29 for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.

Acts 26:22-23 (NIV)

***22 But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen— 23 that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles"* (Gentiles not the only ones who need the light of the gospel).**