

THE WHERE AND WHEN OF HOME

A Devotional Meditation on Vayechi (And He Lived)

Genesis 47:28-50:26, 24:1-9; 1 Kings 2:1-12; Exodus 10:8-10; Jeremiah 29:1-14;
John 4:1-4; Acts 7:15-16; Romans 1:18-32; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12

Albert J. McCarn

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Homestead. Photo by Anthony Tong Lee, December 28, 2016, [via Flickr](#).

In my first year in the Army, my boss asked me what place I would call home after my military career. I told him Alabama was my home. He responded that that was my answer at the beginning of my career, but after 20 years of service I would not know what to answer. He spoke with the certainty of experience. As he neared retirement, he had moved so many times with each assignment that he was no longer sure his native Connecticut would still be home for him.

He was right, of course. Somewhere during my 30 years of military service, Alabama had ceased to be my home. Alabama holds a special place in my heart, but now I call South Carolina home. I had hoped we would settle down in Virginia, Texas, or North Carolina, but each of those turned out to be waystations where we accomplished Kingdom assignments and awaited the next stage in what has become a lifelong pilgrimage at our Messiah's direction.

There is a difference between knowing where home is, and knowing when it's time to go there. Jacob and his sons knew the difference. They transplanted the entire family of Israel to Egypt out of necessity, but they knew Egypt was not and never would be home. That's why, at the end of his life, Jacob asked Joseph to make a solemn oath about his burial:

As the time of Israel's death drew near, he called for his son Joseph and said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, please put your hand under my thigh and show me faithful kindness. Please do not bury me in Egypt. When I lie down with my fathers, you must carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place."

So he said, "I myself will do according to your word."

"Swear to me," he said. So he swore to him. Then Israel bowed down in worship on the head of his staff.

Genesis 47:29-31 TLV

This is the same intimate, binding ritual that Abraham required of his steward when he asked him to find a wife for his son Isaac and bring her back to the Promised Land. He, too, understood that God intended his Covenant Family to live in what was then known as Canaan, and what is now Israel. In Abraham's day, it was a matter of cultivating the promised seed in the Promised Land. Sending Isaac, the Son of Promise, away from

the Land to find a wife would risk losing the connection to the Land before it could be firmly established. A century and a half later, the risk was still the same: if Jacob, the last Patriarch, were buried outside the Promised Land, then the family might lose its connection to that place and transfer their affections to the land of their sojourn. Egypt, not Canaan, would be home, and thus the work of redemption for all the earth would be in peril. That is why Israel the Patriarch insisted that he be buried with his fathers and mothers in the plot of land Abraham had acquired at great cost.

Joseph carried out his oath, not only in cooperation with his brothers, but also with the royal blessing of Egypt's Pharaoh. Jacob's body received the same elaborate embalming procedures reserved for the highest rank of Egypt's nobility. We might think it strange that Jacob, and Joseph after him, went to the grave equipped with treasures like those uncovered in King Tutankhamun's tomb, but what else would we expect of a prince of Egypt?

Yet Joseph was also a Prince of Israel, along with his eleven brothers. They knew where home was, and that's why they chose to be buried in the Promised Land. Joseph followed his father's example by asking his brothers and sons and nephews to swear that they would carry his body up to the Land when God brought them home. Jewish tradition says all the brothers, not only Joseph, were carried up from Egypt and buried in Israel. Stephen speaks of this in his testimony before Israel's leaders:

Jacob went down to Egypt and died, he and our fathers. They were carried to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.

Acts 7:15-16 TLV

That testifies to the point about home: the fathers of Israel's Twelve Tribes knew that Egypt was not and never would be home. No great empire or pleasant land could compare to the Homeland promised and prepared by the Creator Himself. They had grown up there, and they knew they would one day return – either in person, or in the persons of their descendants. By having their children swear to carry them up from Egypt when God called, they imparted to them the same knowledge of their true home.

But why did they not return as soon as the famine that brought them there was over? The answer is complex. It involved the importance of Israel's family to the Egyptian nation, as administrators and shepherds. It also involved the need for a place of relative peace and security where the family could multiply into a nation ready to exercise dominion over the place God where put His Name. And it involved the freedom given to the Canaanites to choose their own path and seal their fate. That's what God meant when He told Abraham that his seed would be foreigners in a land not their own until the iniquity of the Canaanites had matured. In other words, God's judgment required that they have opportunity to respond to the example of righteousness walked out by Abraham's family, or harden their hearts and fall increasingly into the strong delusions of their depraved minds.

It's probably because of those depravities in Canaan that the Hebrews left their little ones and their flocks and herds back in Egypt when they buried Jacob. They were safe in Egypt, and because they were safe, the future of the nation was secure. It was different a couple of centuries later, when the Pharaoh who didn't know Joseph refused to let

Moses lead the people, with their little ones and flocks and herds, out to the wilderness to worship the Creator. By that time, Egypt had ceased being the safe place of their sojourn, and Israel's Deliverer had come to call them out of exile.

This is where we are now. Israel's Messiah long ago revealed that we are all in exile. This world as it now exists is not our home. Our home is the Garden the Creator prepared – the Garden we are to cultivate and expand until it encompasses the whole earth. That's the mission of Israel, and the mission of all who are called to join Abraham's seed through Israel's Messiah. What we now await is His call to return home, to the place He is preparing for us.

Until then, we would be wise to follow the advice Jeremiah gave to Judah's exiles in Babylon: seek the peace of the land where we are exiled, and grow and prosper there. We do that for the same reason God explained to Jeremiah:

For I know the plans that I have in mind for you," declares *ADONAI*, "plans for *shalom* and not calamity—to give you a future and a hope.

"Then you will call on Me, and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me, when you will search for Me with all your heart. Then I will be found by you," says *ADONAI*, "and I will return you from exile, and gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you," says *ADONAI*, "and I will bring you back to the place from which I removed you as captives into exile."

Jeremiah 29:11-14 TLV

The time is drawing near for this call to our true home. The question is, do we know where home is? If not, then we might miss the call when it's time to go there.