

## IDENTIFICATIONAL DELIVERANCE

### A Devotional Meditation on Vaera (And I Appeared)

Exodus 6:2-9:35; Ezekiel 28:25-29:21; Romans 9:1-5; Galatians 3:26-29

Albert J. McCarn

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What was your family doing two hundred years ago? In the 1820s, my ancestors were settling their homestead in Alabama. The last of the Scottish-born McCarns who emigrated to North Carolina had passed away a generation earlier. By that time, the family had already begun migrating to the west and south. The branch from which I am descended settled in Alabama after acquiring land in return for their service in the war against the Muscogee, or Creek, nation.

Our family roots remain in Alabama, even though many of us have acquired additional identities. Above all, we are

Americans, and have been since the first generation of our American-born ancestors fought for independence from Great Britain. Our participation in the Revolutionary War accelerated the transformation of our identity from Scottish to American. In a sense, the American Revolution was an extension of the age-old war of Scots against English, but there was something new and different about this war. In the old country, the endless wars and feuds against the English and against other clans were simply part of what it meant to be a Scot. In the new country, my Scottish ancestors added their identity to an American identity distinct from any connection to Britain. Today we honor our Scottishness as a component of what has made us the Americans we now are, but it is highly unlikely we will ever return to the old country to reestablish an identity obscured by the mists of time.

But what if God has another plan? What if our American identity is something temporary, and our sojourn in this country has been an incubation period until the fulness of time when we are called out to become something we had forgotten we were destined to be?

This is a question that has confronted the children of Abraham ever since his grandson Israel led the family out of the Promised Land and into the temporary sanctuary of Egypt. That is, of course, a Jewish story, but it's much bigger than that. The Jewish people are the visible remnant of Israel, as Paul makes clear:

To them belong the adoption and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the *Torah* and the Temple service and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs—and from them, according to the flesh, the Messiah, who is over all, God, blessed forever. Amen.

## Romans 9:4-5 TLV

This is the beginning of Paul's essay in which he demonstrates that God has one covenant nation, that it is called Israel, and that all who profess faith in Messiah Yeshua are adopted into that nation, along with the Jewish remnant who remain faithful to the God of Abraham. That's why, in another letter, he confidently affirms:

For you are all sons of God through trusting in Messiah *Yeshua*. For all of you who were immersed in Messiah have clothed yourselves with Messiah. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female—for you are all one in Messiah *Yeshua*. And if you belong to Messiah, then you are Abraham's seed—heirs according to the promise.

## Galatians 3:26-29 TLV

This is the identity we have forgotten, if we ever knew it. We are not Jewish, but we are adopted into the family of Abraham, and therefore share with the Jews a Hebrew identity. The history of the Hebrew people of Israel is, therefore, our history, just as the history of Scotland is my family's history. When we understand this, then we step into a new horizon of our identity as the people God has called to Himself out of all nations.

Think about how that worked out for our Hebrew ancestors in Egypt. The Hebrews at the time of the Exodus had been strangers in foreign lands for 400 years, first as nomads in Canaan, and then as foreign residents of Egypt. Their attachment to Canaan included the family's acquisition of land at Hebron and Shechem, and intermarriage with the local people, but after two centuries in Egypt, that attachment would have become a distant cultural memory. The new identity of the Hebrew family was Egyptian, even though they remained a distinct people who did not assimilate into Egyptian society. From the biblical record we understand that the Hebrews acquired substantial land holdings, as well as flocks and herds, and positions of authority in the civil administration. They probably also served in Egypt's army, contributing to the security of their adopted homeland.

But that was the problem: Egypt was their adopted home, not their native land. The younger generations of Egypt-born Hebrews had no direct knowledge of Canaan. Their elders told stories of an identity and destiny far different from what they knew in Egypt, but that was the stuff of legend. Daily reality told them that Egypt was changing, and not for the better. Somehow, they had ceased being favored residents and servants of Pharaoh, and had become enemies of the state. They still had land holdings, businesses, and large flocks and herds, but it was clear that the Egyptian leadership was not pleased with their presence as unassimilated foreigners. That's why the Hebrews began to cry out to the God many of them barely knew to save them from the growing oppression.

What was the nature of their prayers? I suggest they were not praying for God to take them out of Egypt and into the Promised Land, but that He help them restore Egypt to the way it had been. Their identity, after all, was Hebrew-Egyptian, with more emphasis on the Egyptian. That's a thing we don't understand at the distance of so many centuries, but why would it be otherwise? Their hopes and dreams for the future existed within an Egyptian context. They could not imagine being a distinct, independent people living in a land of their own as the nation of Israel.

With that in mind, consider the task in front of Moses. Not only did he have to deal with the hostile attitude of Pharaoh, but he also had to help his own people understand their identity. That's why the plagues God sent had two purposes. One was to judge Egypt and its gods, and compel Pharaoh to let the Hebrews leave. The other, and perhaps more important, was to show the Hebrews who they were and remind them of their destiny.

Is God doing the same thing in our day? We have seen the miracles He performed to bring the Jewish people back to the Promised Land and reestablish the nation of Israel, but is He finished with this work? It's a grand work, as we learn from prophets like Ezekiel:

Thus says *ADONAI Elohim*: "When I have gathered the house of Israel from the people among whom they are scattered and show my holiness through them in the eyes of the nations, then they will live in their own land which I gave to My servant Jacob. They will live safely there, and they will build houses and plant vineyards. They will live securely when I have executed judgments on all those around them that treated them with contempt. So they will know that I am *ADONAI* their God."

Ezekiel 28:25-26 TLV

Is this a promise only for the Jewish nation, or does it apply to all who are identified in Messiah as part of Abraham's seed? This is the question for our day, as we see God's judgments falling on the nations of the earth. We are right to pray for deliverance, but perhaps we should start asking what that deliverance means.