

A FAMILY FOR ALL THE LONELY

A Devotional Meditation on Vayechi (And He Lived)

Genesis 47:28-50:26; Jeremiah 31:7-9; Psalm 68:1-10;

Luke 19:1-10; Romans 8:18-25; Galatians 4:1-7

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My siblings and I grew up in a stable Christian home where marital fidelity was not only a biblical value, but an important part of our culture. Our extended family has suffered instances of divorce and other domestic tragedy, but those were the exception, and therefore memorable. Yet even in the worst of such situations, the family did what was necessary to ensure no child was left without a home and the opportunity to thrive.



That is God's intent for us all, or so we understand from passages like this:

Photo by DQmountaingirl, May 28, 2008, [via Flickr](#).

God sets the lonely in families,
he leads out the prisoners with singing;
but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.

Psalm 68:6 NIV

If that is what God wants, then why do we need social welfare systems to intervene when children are in danger, and look after them when they have no home?

There is no single answer to that question. Sin is at the heart of the problem, and in our generation the problem has grown much worse because our society has come unmoored from the righteous standard of God's word. Yet God is in the habit of taking that which was meant for evil and turning it for good. If we believe this, then even the lawless, loveless condition of our society cannot extinguish our hope.

One aspect of that hope is in the reality of adoption. Paul writes about it:

I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Galatians 4:1-7 ESV

Adoption was a very important legal procedure in the Roman world. Emperors Augustus, Tiberias, and Nero had all been adopted, and thus became the legal heirs to everything that belonged to their adoptive fathers. That is how Tiberias and Nero inherited the throne even though their adoptive fathers had biological descendants.

Paul was aware of this Roman practice, but he was actually referring to a much older practice of adoption. As a Torah scholar, he based his teaching on the instructions God gave to Moses, further revealed through the prophets, and sealed with the death and resurrection of Messiah Yeshua. All of that was part of God's intent to bring humanity back into his family and reconcile the whole earth to himself. As Paul says, "creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God." (Romans 8:19).

If we are to be revealed as members of God's family, it is helpful to understand that our family name is Israel. We are the people who struggled with God and men and prevailed, just like our father Jacob. We know Israel is the family name because God names Israel as his child several times in scripture, such as in this passage:

For thus says the LORD:
"Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;
proclaim, give praise, and say,
'O LORD, save your people,
the remnant of Israel.'
Behold, I will bring them from the north country
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
among them the blind and the lame,
the pregnant woman and she who is in labor, together;
a great company, they shall return here.
With weeping they shall come,
and with pleas for mercy I will lead them back,
I will make them walk by brooks of water,
in a straight path in which they shall not stumble,
for I am a father to Israel,
and Ephraim is my firstborn.

Jeremiah 31:7-9 ESV

This is from Jeremiah 31, the New Covenant chapter. God's family includes the native born, which are the Jewish people, or House of Judah, and those from the nations, who are adopted into the House of Israel. Another name for the House of Israel is the House of Joseph, Jacob's son who was lost and assimilated in Egypt until he was reunited with the family. Moses records that Jacob adopted Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, making them his own sons and co-heirs with their uncles. That gave Joseph the double portion of the firstborn. However, Jacob gave Judah the status as ruler over the whole house, which is why David of the tribe of Judah became king over all Israel, and why Messiah Son of David rules over both the native born and those adopted from the nations.

This is the foundational truth about God's adoption process. Messiah Yeshua was born into God's Covenant family of Israel, and specifically the House and Tribe of Judah, and the royal line of David. His ancestry included parentage from multiple tribes of Israel, and several different nations. When he laid down his life at Calvary and activated the New Covenant with his blood, he paid for the adoption of all humanity, both the native-born of Judah and the foreign-born who entered through Joseph, the one who had been lost to the nations.

This is how God places the lonely in his family. It's the mystery of our identity in Messiah. As adopted Israelites, we are no longer part of the lawless and loveless world that eats its own young, but instead are agents of the Redeemer who go in his name to seek and to save that which was lost.