THE NEW SHOFAR

The Bible is one of the greatest blessings bestowed by God on the children of men. It has God for its author; salvation for its end, and truth without any mixture for its matter. It is all pure. John Locke

LENT 3

What's in a name?

For most of us in the West, a person's name is little more than a tag, a way of singling out an individual from among a group. The name may or may not have some special qualities – family history, the original meaning of the name itself, or maybe it is just a cute or popular name. But that is not the case for the majority of people around the world. Names are important and often not readily shared. In PNG, for example, to have a person's "special" name is to have power over them, hence the name they use in public would not necessarily be their "real" name.

In the ancient near east (Israel for example) it was widely believed that **the name of a thing reflected its essence and very being.** In other words, in some sense, the act of naming something meant creating it. What a name said was what that name (the person or god) would be doing and acting. God acts out His Name.

YHWH the God of Israel

It is for this reason, having God reveal to Moses the Divine Name was a very big deal indeed. It is, of course, never as simple as taking that Name and translating it. In Jewish writings today, when it comes to the name YHWY (Yahweh) they generally use the title ha ***SHEM*** (the NAME). It is too holy to dare to speak it.

It is critical to notice how God declares who He is in these verses. He says, **"I AM WHO I AM**" but this is a tricky phrase to translate. Hebrew does not have past, present or future tense. However, the reader can usually determine the tense implied. In this case, the possible translations could be "**I was who I was**" (past tense), "**I will be who I will be**" (future tense) or "**I am who I am**" (present tense). Or, possibly, a combination of all three together!

Depends as bit on how we understand God

There is one more observation to make in these verses, and that depends on how we understand the nature of the Divine being. Is "God" a noun or a verb? A flick through a Bible might show how the translators change between "I AM" and "LORD." The verbal form is translated as "I AM," and the noun form is translated as "LORD." The verbal form could be in the highly irregular English form meaning "I-am-***godding***", my divine being is **always** flowing out into creation and at this particular moment in history, into my people Israel. Some English Bibles choose to translate Yahweh by using the capitals letters LORD.

It is not that this is new. Genesis illustrates how the God of creation is the very same God who is revealing the divine Name to Moses, the same God who will

remain with them throughout the Exodus and through the End Time into eternity.

There is only One God and YAHWH is His Name. This is crucial to our understanding of what is happening in the revelation narratives of the Hebrew Bible. It is affirmed many times, as we see, for example, in **Deuteronomy 4:35,39-40**…*To you it was shown, that you might know that Yahweh (YHWH) is God there is no other besides him. Know therefore today, and lay it in your hearts, that YHWH is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. Therefore, you shall keep his statutes and his commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you and your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land YHWH your God is giving you for all time.*

This is then rounded off by **Psalm 121:8** which in essence means … *YHWH will guard your going out and your coming in [everything that you do] From this time forth and forever*. This God who self-revealed in the burning bush is the God of all things, all times, all peoples and all places. There is no other and God by name and nature is an ever-***godding*** God. Always active. Always at work, always flowing out into the very creation that came from his outflowing of divine love and mercy.

Jesus as the fullness of God

For Christians, the fullness of all that Yahweh means is to be found in Jesus of Nazareth who is The Christ of God. We know this from **Colossians 2:9**… *For the entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily in Christ*. And, incredibly, this same God who self-revealed to Moses came and dwelt among us as God's only Son… *The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth* (John 1:14).

It is our understanding of the Name YHWH that can help us in coming to know the power and proximity of the Risen and Reigning Christ in our lives. Jesus can be just another name, and Christ a title as in he is *the anointed one* of God. But that keeps the Son of God "out there", a noun or a title. Jesus, for Christians is much more than that. He is our Messiah, our Saviour, the living God of our *going out and our coming in*. Jesus is the Christ who has empowered our lives in the past, now in our present pilgrimage of faith and into the future when we are called to judgment before the throne of His Father.

Is that not our Lenten invitation?

I dabble in biblical Hebrew but am far from being a scholar. However, I have come to appreciate the idea of God being always a God who is *godding*, who is always reaching out to me, inviting me to allow him to be in my life as a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. No matter what I am doing, living or dying, God is my God and even through *the valley of the shadow of death*, God is there. I know this because *God pitched his tent and dwelt among us* (John 1:14). The closer I orient my life around the model of the life of Jesus, the more aware of God's godding I become.