

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 8/5/2022

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

It can be both fun and interesting to read biblical stories, especially from the Old Testament, in light of the meaning of the names of the people. These names help tell the story as they can be very descriptive of the person who carries the identity. Like in the children's story where Little Red Riding Hood is pursued by the Big Bad Wolf, we can know a great deal about the individual simply by understanding the literal translation of their name.

Adam's name is a play on the Hebrew word *adama*, which means "earth," so Adam is the "son of red earth" created by GOD. It is also reflective to a degree of the color of his skin. Eve's name is understood simply to mean "living one" or "source of life" and is the one who gave birth and life to Cain and Abel. Cain's name has no meaning, but Abel's name contains the same Hebrew consonants as the words "breath" and "son," and he loses his breath when his brother, Cain, kills him.

Abraham and Sarah were originally called Abram and Sarai. Abram means "exalted father," while Abraham means "father of many" or "father of a multitude." GOD promised that Abraham would be the father of a great nation. Both Sarai and Sarah mean "princess" or "woman of strength." When they were told by GOD that they would have a child, though both were quite elderly and Sarah was beyond childbearing age, Sarah laughed at the ridiculous notion. But they did have a child together and named him Isaac, which means "laughter."

Isaac married Rebekah (which means "to bind" or "to tie," as a calf in a stall) and they had twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Esau was born first and was given this name which means "hairy" and "red" because, well, he was. Being the first born meant that Esau would receive the birthright, the first two-thirds of the inheritance. Jacob, even in the womb, didn't seem to like that arrangement so when he was born immediately after Esau, he was given his name which can mean "to follow behind" or "grasps at the heel." You see, as Esau emerged from the womb, Jacob's hand was holding on to his foot, seeming to be trying to pull him back in order to be the one born first. Jacob later manages to trick Esau into giving him the birthright (Jacob's name can also have the connotation of "he deceives") but creates a division between them that leads to Jacob leaving the territory and going to live with his mother's brother, Laban.

Upon reaching Laban's land, Jacob comes upon a well (which is still there today) and asks the young woman there for a drink. She is Laban's younger daughter called Rachel, meaning "sheep eyes" because her father has many sheep. Her sister is Leah which means "cow eyes" because Laban also has many cows. Jacob asks to marry Rachel which Laban agrees to if Jacob will work for him for seven years. Jacob agrees and works the seven years, but when Jacob lifts the bride's veil at the wedding, it is not Rachel, but Leah. Seems Laban is a bit of a deceiver also. He tells Jacob that it would not be right for the younger sister to marry before the older, but that Jacob can marry Leah, too, if he works another seven years, which he does. After this marriage is completed, Jacob offers to oversee Laban's flocks. But Laban, whose name means "white," says he only wants the sheep with pure white fleeces. If they have blemishes, Jacob is to get rid of them, though Jacob asks if he can have them for his own flock, and Laban agrees. Jacob ("He deceives") then makes a point of cross breeding the sheep so that all the newborns have blemishes so that he gets them and ends up with his own very large flock. This doesn't go over well with Laban and again Jacob, now with his two wives,

takes his flock and flees. Deciding to return and try to work things out with Esau, Jacob one night has a dream in which he wrestles with GOD. They wrestle all night and Jacob refuses to release his opponent unless he is given a blessing. At daybreak, GOD does bless him with a new name. From now on, “He deceives” will be called Israel, which means “wrestles with God.” If you follow the history of the nation of Israel, the descendants of Jacob/Israel, you’ll recognize that this is a pretty accurate name of the nation.

Biblical names can add a richness to these stories as we learn them and their meanings. Imagine going through life being called “Deceiver.” “Wrestles with GOD” would indeed be a blessing even if it was a prophecy for the future relationship with the LORD. We, too, all carry a name, “Christian,” meaning “follower of CHRIST.” How well does this name fit you?

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey