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The Symbolic Meaning of Biblical Names as a Narrative Tool

Moses, Abraham, and David

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This paper discusses the use of naming in the Bible as a narrative tool. It demonstrates how the meanings of names propel the biblical narrative and provide insights into the nature of a character's personality and fate. If the meaning of a name drives a story, it is therefore logical that a change in name correlates with a change in narrative, and this technique is also explored. In addition, the paper suggests that characters' names may have served as mnemonic devices to help the narrator recall the true essence of each story as well as shape its core message.

To demonstrate these assertions, the paper examines the stories of Abraham ("father of multitudes") and, briefly, his wife, Sarah; Moses ("draw," as in from water); and King David ("beloved") and, briefly, his lover, Jonathan. The etymology of each character's name is demonstrated in the narrative in pivotal life events such as birth, career, and death. In the cases in which a name change occurs (Abraham, Sarah, and Jonathan), I examine the parallel change in the attitude of the character or in the trajectory of the story. Finally, the study calls for further research into the examination of names of disenfranchised groups in the Bible, such as

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servants and foreigners, as well as nations and their rulers, to determine whether those names similarly impact and reflect the narrative.

The importance of names in the Jewish tradition is emphasized by the use of the word *HaShem*, which means "the Name," as one of the most common ways in which to refer to God. While humans have *a* name, God, as all that exists, possesses *the* name. Another indication of the significance of names in the tradition is the first task given to Adam after his creation, that is, to name his coinhabitants in Creation: "And the man gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field" (Gen. 2:20).[1]

The ancient Hebrews, as well as other Semitic cultures, followed the principle of *nomen est omen*, or nominative determinism, whereby the meaning of a name plays a significant role in the fate, talent, and skill set of its owner (e.g., Jastrow). This paper explores how biblical naming served as a narrative tool that helped sharpen characters' true identities, natures, and even, in Jungian terms, shadows. It specifically demonstrates how names in the Bible represent the most effective words to describe key aspects of characters' lives and natures, thus adding additional layers to the stories. In addition, the paper suggests that characters' names served as mnemonic devices to help the narrator recall the true essence of the story and focus its core message. The stories of three leading biblical characters are analyzed to support this assertion: Abraham, Moses, and King David.

Biblical Naming

It should be noted at the outset that any discussion of names in the Hebrew Bible, or *Tanakh*, must deal with the foundational question: Who chose the names? In broad terms, there are two views regarding the historicity of the Bible:

1. The Bible is historically accurate, and therefore the names of characters are their real given names.
2. The Bible is a collection of tales, mythologies, contracts, folklore, and so on, and because the characters are fictional, they were given names by their authors.

This paper takes as its foundation a middle ground. It treats names as leading forces in stories, regardless of whether the names are those of historical characters or of

fictional characters with symbolic names.

Scholars have long debated the etymology of place names in the Hebrew Bible. Albright saw the etymology of place names in biblical stories as having a rhetorical function, serving as either didactic or persuasive devices. Van Dyk, conversely, suggested that the meanings of place names may have served (1) to make stories more entertaining to listeners and (2) as mnemonic devices, whereby the repetition of a name could aid storytellers and listeners alike in recalling a narrative.

As opposed to the etymology of place names, little light has been shed on that of character names, particularly as a means for developing narrative. Yet the subject is of critical importance. If, as Ragussis has stated, "etymology is the unearthing of a forgotten discourse," then it is as significant with respect to characters as it is to settings (178).

In Jung's work on synchronicity, he found a questionable, albeit enduring connection between character name and story: "We find ourselves in something of a quandary when it comes to making up our minds about the phenomenon which Stekel calls the 'compulsion of the name.' What he means by this is the sometimes quite gross coincidence between a man's name and his peculiarities or profession." Jung goes on to list the etymology of his own name and that of other prominent psychologists: "Herr Freud (Joy) champions the pleasure principle, Herr Adler (Eagle) the will to power, Herr Jung (Young) the idea of rebirth" (15).

Nomen est omen is reflected throughout biblical narrative, as characters' names carry symbolic and direct meanings that serve as overtures to their stories. By introducing the protagonists' name at the outset of a story, the Bible gives the mindful listener or reader a hint not only of who the characters are or where they came from but also of their fates and destinies. The name chosen for the character thus serves as a one-word history and prophecy.

Etymology of Names in the Hebrew Bible

There are approximately eighty passages in the Hebrew Bible in which words designating people or places are given semantic interpretation based on their phonetic correspondence (Marks). In many cases, the naming of the newborn is given in past tense, for example, "and she called his name Samuel," followed with an explanation of the meaning of the name: "because I have asked him of

the Lord" (1 Sam. 1:19). However, in some instances, as with King David, who is introduced in his teens, the meaning of the name unfolds as the story progresses, and the character "grows" into his given name. To quote from Abigail's description of her husband, Nabal, to David (who ended up marrying her soon after), "For as his name is, so is he: Nabal is his name, and churlishness is with him (1 Sam. 25:25). In Hebrew, *nabal* means "villain," "nasty," and "carcass."

This type of biblical name is an aptronym,[2] that is, a name that describes the individual who has it. Aptronyms serve various purposes in narrative:

1. Ironic (or "inaptronym"): Noah in Hebrew means "rest," but the character's life was anything but restful (Gen. 5:32). Absalom, Hebrew for "father's peace," led a rebellion against his father, King David, and after banishing him from Jerusalem, raped David's concubines in broad daylight.
2. Predictive: Mahlon, meaning "disease," and Kilion, "perish," are the names of the sons of Naomi, and after being introduced in the second verse of the book of Ruth, they are declared dead by the fifth (Ruth 1:2–5).
3. Associative and/or descriptive: Adam, meaning "earth," was made out of earth and later, as part of his punishment, was cast from the Garden of Eden to toil the earth in sweat. God says, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in toil shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life." Notice that the word "ground" in Hebrew (*adama*) contains the name Adam (Gen. 2:7).
4. Political: King Saul's only surviving son, Ishboshet, is declared king over the northern tribes, thus opposing King David, who is king over Judea in the south (2 Sam. 2:10). Ishboshet means "man of shame." The Bible was most likely written in Judea (Friedman), which was loyal to the House of David, suggesting that the name was chosen out of political opposition to the House of Saul.

This paper examines the three pillars of the Hebrew Bible: Abraham, the initiator; Moses, the giver of law and therefore the sustainer; and David, the king who provided (in Christianity) or is destined to provide (in Judaism) the bloodline of the Messiah (Isa. 11:1). To demonstrate the correlation between name and narrative, I start with Moses, as his name and story present the simplest demonstration of the use of etymology. I then discuss Abraham's (and his wife, Sarah's) name changes to demonstrate the process by which a name conversion corresponds to a change in the narrative. The paper concludes with an investigation of King David's name, the meaning of which he grows into with time.

Moses: "For I Drew Him from the Water"

In Exodus 2:10, we read that the name Moses (in Hebrew, Moshe) means "he who was drawn out of water." The Hebrew word *masha (drew) sounds similar (a clear case of paronomasia, that is, a pun) to* Moshe. However, the word *moshe is actually Egyptian, and that name was usually given when a baby was born on a god's anniversary, similar to the practice in both Orthodox and Catholic traditions of naming a newborn after the saint associated with the date of birth. For example, the name Thutmose (third pharaoh of the Eighteenth Dynasty) means "the god Thoth is born." Kirsch describes the dual meaning as a "bilingual pun" (Moses 56). Putting aside this reason for naming the character Moses, a short review of the pivotal moments in his life demonstrates that each one occurs in connection to water.*

Moses' Birth

For the first three months of Moses's life, the baby born to Amram (meaning "exalted nation") and Yocheved (meaning "God's glory") remains nameless. His parents hide him from the pharaoh, who has commanded that all male Hebrew babies be thrown into the river. When it becomes too risky to keep the baby hidden, Yocheved places the infant in a floating box made of papyrus and sets him in the Nile instead of simply drowning him. The baby is soon spotted and adopted by the pharaoh's daughter, Batiah or Bithia (Exod. 2:5; 1 Chron. 4:18). Thus, the river, which was supposed to be the boy's executioner, becomes his salvation. Batiah names him Moses, because she "drew him out of the water" (Exod. 2:10). As we see, Moses's name explains his origin and his special relation to rivers and other water sources.

Moses' Marriage

Moses escapes Egypt after killing an Egyptian officer who is mistreating a slave. He survives the long march in the desert and reaches a well, at which the seven daughters of "the priest of Midian ... came and *drew* water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock" (Exod. 2:16). The serene theme of drawing water continues in the life of Moses but is abruptly marred by the arrival of a gang of brutes that harasses the women. Moses comes to their rescue and not only saves them but also helps them draw water for their sheep. When they return to their

father, they tell him, "An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds, and moreover he *drew* water for us, and watered the flock" (Exod. 2:19). Once again, drawing water is the focus of the conversation, action, and motivation. The Midian priest sends his daughters to fetch the gallant man and, upon meeting him, offers Moses one daughter's hand in marriage.

Bloody Waters

While Moses shepherds his father-in-law's flock, he receives a call to action in the guise of a burning bush. Through it, God, identifying himself as "I am that I am" (Exod. 3:14), commands Moses to *draw* his people out of slavery in the land of Egypt. To achieve this goal, Moses uses his staff to perform God's miracles (Exod. 4:17). When Pharaoh refuses to free the slaves, Moses brings upon him and his people ten plagues. The first plague transforms all water sources, including the Nile, into blood. Moses follows God's instructions: "Take thy rod, and stretch out thy hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, over their streams, and over their pools, and over all their ponds of water, that they may become blood; and there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt" (Exod. 7:17). Hence, the first of the plagues involves water.

After the last plague kills Pharaoh's crown prince, he capitulates and allows the slaves three days off work to worship their god in the wilderness. Moses gathers his people and escapes. Pharaoh gives chase and catches up with them on the bank of the Sea of Reeds, sometimes interpreted as the Red Sea. Again, the theme of water emerges as barrier, block, and source of danger and violence but also as salvation. Moses draws his rod and parts the sea for his people to cross (Exod. 14:16). Once they are on the other side, the water again transforms from a source of life to death and closes on Pharaoh's chariots.

Moses's Sin

The next water episode takes us to the lowest point in Moses's long career. Moses's name not only points to his salvation but also exposes his tragic flaws: impatience and lack of trust. The people are resting in Kadesh (Num. 20:1) when his beloved sister, Miriam (meaning, incidentally, "strong water"), dies. Then the people, thirsty for water, begin to question Moses's leadership: "And there was no water for the congregation; and they assembled themselves together against Moses"

(Num. 20:2). We arrive at a critical juncture in Moses's life. Forty years have passed since leaving Egypt. Moses is close to 120 years of age, and the people are cranky, as they can see no end to their flight: "And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? It is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink" (Num. 20:5). Once again, water is at issue in Moses's life.

As Moses loses patience with his fellow Hebrews, God tells him, "Speak ye unto the rock ... that it give forth its water" (Num. 20:8). Instead of simply speaking to the rock, however, Moses hits it with his staff, to no avail. Only when he tries again does the water gush from the rock, quenching the people and their cattle (Num. 20:11). The biblical author later provides a title to the scene, calling the incident "Meribah": the "water of strife" (Num. 20:13). The great biblical commentator Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, 1040–1105) argues that because Moses struck the rock twice instead of simply speaking to it as instructed, he did not "sanctify [God] before the eyes of the Children of Israel." Once again, water is the driving force and a repeating motif in the story of Moses (Kapach 17, 33).

Moses's Death

Finally, Moses delivers his people to the borders of Canaan, the Promised Land. All he needs to do is cross the Jordan River and claim God's bequest. However, God does not grant Moses entrance. "Because ye believed not in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them" (Num. 20:12). Moses can see the land but cannot touch it. The man whose name means "draw water" saw his journey not only begin with a river but also end with one.

The meaning of Moses's name is a theme and a driving force in his life. His name, "to draw," has been used in reference to water but also as a metaphor for his life's mission of drawing slaves out of oppression and delivering them to a safe haven. Therefore, water flows as a connecting thread in his life. Moses's life begins with the threat of being cast into the river. His rise among the Egyptians and Hebrews occurs when he transforms all sources of water into blood and then parts the sea. His "Watergate" concerns drawing water out of a rock, for which he is prevented from reaching the Promised Land. As postulated earlier in this paper, perhaps the emphasis on water and drawing was not only a way for the storytellers to recall the story but also a tool for retelling it. In addition, the first

letter (and sound) of the name Moses is *mem*, which in ancient Hebrew means "water." Again, it is possible that the sound (in the oral tradition) and the word Moses served as memory devices, as well as providing the settings (well, river, sea) in which the story takes place.

Abraham: "Father of Multitudes"

The case of Abraham is slightly more complex than that of Moses, because a name change accompanies a change in the narrative. Abraham's given name is Abram, which in Hebrew means "elevated father." However, he is subsequently called Abraham, which means "father of multitudes." Why did the most important character in the Hebrew Bible need to change his name? After the examination of Moses's name and its influence over and reflection of his story, it is evident that the story of Abram/Abraham will orbit around fatherhood: God as father and, later, Abraham's own experience with fatherhood.

Abram

We are introduced to Abraham as Abram in Genesis 12:1–2, through one of the most well-known passages in the Bible: "Now the Lord said unto Abram: 'Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing.'" The English translation does not fully capture the subtlety of the verse. The words *lech lecha* (get thee out) can also be translated as "go into yourself" or "go for yourself." God tells Abram to embark on a journey of inward and outward discovery that will make his name great and make him father of a great nation. At the onset of Abram's story, we see the meaning of the word "father" as a driving force, powerful enough to take him on a long journey into the unknown. After introducing Abram and the meaning of his name, the Bible introduces the character's antagonist: time. "And Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran" (Gen. 12:4). Abram is old, past his prime, and his wife, Sarai, is only a decade younger and barren. Until now, Abram might have known and prayed to one God, his elevated father, but he himself was not a father. For Abram to have children, a miracle must occur.

Change of Name, Change of Story

If a character's name drives and reflects his or her story, then a change of name will in turn change his or her story. This principle is evident in the case of the biblical patriarch. Abram leaves his secured life in Haran hoping to reinvent himself. His first lesson is in trust. Uprooting himself and his household, Abram has only the voice of God as an explanation for his erratic behavior. He must trust that the voice that commands him to leave his comfortable, prosperous life is indeed the voice of the one true God, the "exalted father," and not a fraudulent deity.

In the first part of his journey to self-realization, the name Abram reflects his obedience to his elevated father, rather than to his "low father," that is, his biological parent. God asks him to get "out of the land of your *father*." Where to? To the land that the elevated father will show him. Abram follows the lead of his newly adopted father and breaks away from his original father's household.

Abram receives his wife's scorn whenever he mentions God's promise of children. In spite of Abram's advanced age, God continues to insist that he will have children. God tells Abram, "'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars, if thou be able to count them'; and He said unto him: 'So shall thy seed be'" (Gen. 15:5).

For the rabbis of the Talmud, Abram was a great astrologer. After all, he was born in Ur, a place associated with the Chaldeans, a group of tribes often mixed in the Bible with Babylonians, the inventors of astrology. Ur in Hebrew and Semitic languages means "light," and the root for the word *Chaldeans* is also used to refer to astrologers (Dobin). The rabbis inferred from the text just quoted that God tells Abram to look at the stars (elevated father) and count them, as would an astrologer. In *Midrash Rabbah* is the passage, "Rabbi Samuel ben Isaac commented that Abram said: 'My planetary fate oppresses me and declares "Abram cannot beget a child." Said the Holy One, Blessed Be He to him: "Let it be even as the words; Abram and Sarai cannot beget, but Abraham and Sarah can beget."'"

Abram's Name Change

The change of name occurs in Genesis 17. God appears before Abram and establishes a covenant with him and his future offspring. Abram by this stage is ninety-nine years old, and his wife, Sarai, is about eighty-nine. God tells Abram, "Thou shalt be the father of a multitude of nations. Neither shall thy name anymore

be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for the father of a multitude of nations have I made thee" (Gen. 17:4–5).

At this point, the story of Abram transforms into the story of Abraham. From a son of an elevated father to a father of many nations, Abraham will no longer focus on trying to beget children but rather on raising them.

Kabbalah and Sefer Yetzirah

Sefer Yetzirah, or *The Book of Creation*, is one of the oldest and most influential kabbalistic manuscripts. Saadia Gaon (882–942) confirms that "the ancients say that Abraham wrote it" (Kaplan, xii). Ascribing the manuscript to Abraham pushes the date of its authorship to over five hundred years before Moses is said to have received the Torah on Mount Sinai. This fact was crucial for kabbalists who practiced astrology, which according to the Torah, is forbidden (Deut. 18:10).

It is perhaps not surprising that a man whose new name emphasizes fatherhood might be said to have written a book about creation and procreation. *Sefer Yetzirah* describes how God "fathered" the cosmos. In the fifth chapter, the author assigns Hebrew letters to the signs of the zodiac. The addition of the letter *hei* turning Abram into Abraham (and, for that matter, Sarai into Sarah) is highly symbolic. "He made the letter hei king over speech and He bound a crown to it. ... He formed Aries in the Universe, Nissan in the Year ..." (5:7).

In the symbolic system of astrology, each sign of the zodiac is said to rule or govern certain aspects of life. Aries, the sign that corresponds to the letter *hei*, begins on the spring equinox and therefore is said to rule seeds and procreation. What better sign is there to add to a story of a man desperate to father a child? In addition, the meaning of the name of the month of Nisan, Aries, is "miracle." It is not surprising that Moses delivered his people out of Egypt in Nisan and that God commanded this month to be the "first of the months of the year" (Exod. 12:2).

Incidentally, because the fertility of the mother is also important, the name of Abraham's wife, Sarai, meaning "my princess," changes to Sarah, or "princess." "And God said unto Abraham: 'As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and moreover I will give thee a son of her ... and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be of her'" (Gen. 17:15–16).

Name Fulfillment

The rest of Abraham's story is filled with scenes spinning around fatherhood. He is asked by God, "Take thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering" (Gen. 22:2). At the last minute, God sends an angel to stop the slaying and asks Abraham to sacrifice a ram instead. (The ram is the symbol of Aries.)

The etymology of Abraham's name and its importance in the narrative is clear. Abraham does indeed become a father of many nations. The Jews perceive Abraham as their undisputed forefather, as do the Muslims. Even for Christians, in the second century, Melito of Sardis spoke of the connection between the binding of Isaac and the sacrifice of Christ (Doukhan 117).

King David: "The Beloved"

David, whose name means "beloved," is perhaps the most complex, commanding, and intriguing character in the Bible: a man who inspired musicians, politicians, warriors, poets, shakedown artists, and revolutionaries. He is mentioned more than one thousand times and receives the most amount of space in the text (Kirsch, *King David*), even though he is a liar, thief, adulterer, and mass murderer. David is intimate with men and women, kings and queens, angels and God.

Since David is called beloved, we can expect his narrative to focus on love, romance, and passion. An examination of the biblical text indeed confirms that the word "love" is mentioned more in connection to David than to anyone else in the Hebrew Bible (Shalev). He is adored by his enemies, servants, slaves, wives, and mistresses. He is "a man after God's own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14). Even though David ends up violating four of the ten commandments, "Yahweh is the God who fell in love with David" (Bloom and Rosenberg).

David's Lovers

First to fall for David's charm is King Saul, who in the course of the narrative becomes his arch enemy and father-in-law: "David came to Saul, and stood before him; and he loved him greatly" (1 Sam. 16:21). This Davidic love, like a virus, spreads to Saul's son and crown prince Jonathan: "The soul of Jonathan was knit

with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him" (1 Sam. 18:1).

Regarding Jonathan (in Hebrew, Yonatan), it is interesting to note that when the character is first introduced, his name is Yonatan, but after he meets David and their love blossoms, his name is Y'honatan, with the letter *hei.* As we saw with Abraham, *hei* is linked to Aries and the renewal of spring. (It is also used in Hebrew as an abbreviation of God's name.) The storyteller suggests that Yonatan's encounter with David has changed his story; Jonathan shifts from being groomed to rule to becoming David's lover, willing to abdicate his crown to his beloved (1 Sam. 23:17). When Saul speaks to his son, the spelling of Jonathan's name is without the letter *hei*; however, in the second part of the verse, when the love for David is mentioned, the letter returns.

The next character to be enamored with David is Michal, the first Jewish princess, daughter of King Saul and sister of Jonathan. The love for David was not confined to Saul's family, however. In the same chapter are the words "Israel and Judah loved David" (1 Sam. 18:16). Love for David extended even beyond the borders of Israel, "for Hiram had always loved David" (1 Kings 5:1).

One-Sided Love

Again and again, the Bible demonstrates how everyone loves David, but whom does David love? "Nowhere do we read of love that flows from David to another person. Everyone loves him, and he loves no one" (Shalev 162). That small and powerful observation is found in the etymology of David's name. He is not the lover, after all, but the beloved. The closest David ever comes to confessing love for another is in his lament for Jonathan after his death: "Very pleasant hast thou been unto me; wonderful was thy love to me, passing the love of women" (2 Sam. 1:26).

David's Death

As was the case with Abraham and Moses, the etymology of names not only reflects the beginning of a life but also sheds light on the shadow, nadir, and death. In the case of David, the story of the beloved's ascension to kingship is filled with valor, gallantry, and piety. As he goes astray in midlife, however, his story again reflects the meaning of his name.

One evening, David climbs his highest balcony overlooking Jerusalem's skyline to view the women bathing on their rooftops (2 Sam. 11:2). He sees Bathsheba

and is immediately smitten. The king asks for her, and within a few verses, we are told that she is pregnant. While fertility is usually encouraged in the Bible, this particular conception is problematic. Bathsheba is married to Uriah, meaning "God's light," who is off fighting David's wars at Rabbah. Indeed, the prophet Nathan, whose name means "give," sends a harsh message to the king; the sword (war) will never leave his house. Indeed, to this day, it hovers over Jerusalem, the City of David (2 Sam. 12:10).

All aspects of David's punishment relate to love. First, the crown prince Amnon lusts for his half sister, Tamar, proclaims his love to her, and after raping her, throws her out to the street. (2 Sam. 13:1). When David refuses to punish the rapist, Absalom, Tamar's full brother, avenges her honor and kills Amnon (2 Sam. 13:28). After a great deal of negotiation, Absalom returns to David's court, but soon after, he rebels against his father, driving him out of Jerusalem and raping his concubines on the rooftop for all to see (2 Sam. 16:22).

David's Last Days

As has been demonstrated earlier in this paper, the meaning of a name can at times take an ironic twist. The first verse in the first book of Kings reads, "Now King David was old and stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he could get no heat" (1 Kings 1:1). The reference to heat reflects the notion that the beloved is no longer ready for sex. The following verse introduces a remedy in the pre-Viagra age, suggested by a clever adviser: "Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin; and let her stand before the king, and be a companion unto him; and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat" (1 Kings 1:2). The woman who is chosen to minister the seventy-year-old king is Abishag, whose name means "my father's error." True to her name, bringing her to the king was an error: "The damsel was very fair; and she became a companion unto the king, and ministered to him; but the king knew her not" (1 Kings 1:4). The beloved, who made everyone love him and yet could not bring himself to love in return, dies leaving his wife a virgin.

David's destiny, evident in his name, is to be loved—to charm and conquer hearts. However, the name also shows the protagonist's conflict: although able to make everyone love him, David has little ability to love. His search for love and acceptance also leads to his downfall, as his desire for Bathsheba leads him to murder her husband, as well as to the death of their first child, the rape of his

only daughter and concubines, the death of his eldest son, and the rebellion and death of Absalom, his successor. Eventually David dies alone, unable to function as a lover.

Conclusion

A critical examination of biblical names and their etymologies shows that these names follow the principle of nominative determinism, suggesting that names are prime story motivators. In the case of Moses, the motivation "to draw" is embedded in the many ways in which water is entwined with the mission of delivering his people from slavery. Abraham's name propels his journey from an infertile man to a "father" of many nations. For David, it is his status as "beloved" that allows him to charm a nation and it's God.

This article has demonstrated three ways in which biblical names determine destiny, whether from birth, in the case of Moses; as a change of name reflecting a change in the story line of Abram/Avraham and to a lesser extent Sarai/Sarah and Jonatan/Y'honaton; or in manhood, as with David. In addition, the paper has suggested that names of characters in the Bible serve as a mnemonic technique to help the oral storyteller and listener recall the essence of the story and develop what drives and motivates the character.

It is hoped that this article serves as a catalyst for future research, focusing on examining the names and stories of disenfranchised characters in the Bible, such as servants and foreigners, to determine whether the principles and patterns highlighted herein also apply to them. Furthermore, looking into names of nations, as well as those of foreign rulers, could shed light on how the ancient Hebrews viewed their geopolitical environment and whether such names played a pivotal role in storytelling. Finally, further research could examine whether names of characters both fictional and real correlate to their stories in other cultures and traditions.

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NOTES

1. All quotes from the Bible use the Masoretic Text and JPS 1917 edition.
2. *Aptronym* is a word coined by Franklin P. Adams meaning a name that is especially suited to its owner. In *What's in a Name?*, Paul Dickson describes many such cases, for example, Willburn, who on October 6, 1941, went to the electric chair; Hiram R. Bird, head of the Poultry Sciences Department at the University of Wisconsin; Dr. Fish, head of the University of Rhode Island Oceanographic Institute; Gary Player, a professional golfer; Leona Couch, a psychiatrist; and Ralph True, a lie-detector expert.

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