

Introduction to the Bible [series7a]

God in Hebrew Scriptures [Old Testament]

Abraham's descendants became a very large tribal family. Seeking relief from a famine, they go to Egypt [Genesis 46]. There they grew into a significant people but over time the leadership of Egypt [Pharaoh] saw the Hebrews as an underclass people that they can enslave. Book of Exodus tells the story of how God hears the cry of this persecuted people and rescues them through the leadership of Moses and promises them a land of their own [Exodus 13-14]. God here is seen as generous, merciful and compassionate.

The Divine Name

A new way of knowing God emerges with the calling of Moses to go to Egypt and liberate the Hebrew people. Genesis, chapter 1 begins with God naming the world into existence. Then Adam was gifted with the speech to name other creatures and Eve. In the bible addressing someone by name is to enter into a personal and special relationship with the subject of the address. Same way, naming God or calling on God is to participate in the mystery of God, enter into his gracious presence. How do we name God? This is Moses' question to God: who shall I say sent me? [Exodus 3:13].

Exodus 3:13-14 reveals God's name as "I am who I am"-YHWH [Yahweh]; these four Hebrew letters are referred to as **Tetragrammaton**, without vowels and therefore cannot be pronounced. Does this name reveal anything about God's nature? Yahweh derives from Hebrew verb 'to be' [**hayah**]. God is simply IS, the ever living One; human language about God is an attempt to fathom what has been revealed about God in the Bible. The name Yahweh is used 6,823 times in the Old Testament. The ancient Hebrew tradition is that this name is so sacred that it is not to be actually spoken in either prayer or teaching. For such use, the divine name Yahweh is replaced with the formal term 'Lord' [*Adonai*]. Receiving a proper name to call God implies a special, personal relationship with God'. 'To be' in a covenant relationship would mean something like 'I shall be who I am as I am with you'. Thus, who God is and what God is can only be understood through relationship.

The Breath of God [*another name for God*]

In Genesis chapter 2, God formed the first human being [adam] out of the soil [adamah]- a play on the words- and blew into his nostrils the breath [ruach] of life and so the man became a living being [Genesis 2:7]. Ruach also means 'wind or spirit'. The first chapter of Genesis says, a 'mighty wind' [ruach] sweeps over the formless abyss and the process of creation begins. In the bible, the breath of God, dynamic presence of God, is associated with gifts of faith, prayer, fidelity to the covenant and sensitivity to God's will. In later books of the Old Testament [Wisdom books] the ruach of God [breath of God] is closely connected with creative act of God and with divinely inspired wisdom, so that human beings seek the ruach [Spirit] as the greatest source of wisdom, knowledge and understanding.

Father Jose