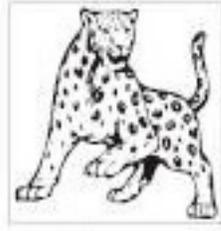


Adam's Animals



REMEMBER THE STORY of Adam in the book of Genesis and how he named all the animals? The Bible tells us that "the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field" (Genesis 2:19-20).

Did you ever wonder how Adam thought of enough names to go around for all the animals in the world? How would you have tackled this task if you had been Adam? Perhaps you might have given the animals names like people have - Bill or Susan or Poindexter. When you ran out of ordinary names, you might have invented some sort of "Dr. Seussian nonsense names, like the Sneetches or the Ooblecks or something like that.

However, Adam did not have quite the same problem that you and I would have had. Mark Twain, the great American writer and author of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, once described Adam as a very fortunate person. Why? Because he was "a man who when he said a good thing . . . knew nobody had said it before." He certainly didn't have to worry about being original - everything he said and did was altogether new and different!

We often think of Adam just "inventing" these names or creating them from his own imagination. This was not really the case, though, and by considering how Adam named his many animals we can learn a valuable lesson about the importance and meaning of names in the Bible.

You see, when Adam named the animals he was actually identifying or categorizing them. And in order to do this, he named each animal according to its chief characteristics or traits. Perhaps you have had a cat with fluffy fur and you named her "Fluffy," or a dog with beautiful red hair and you called him "Red" or "Ruddy." This is more or less what Adam did in regard to every animal in the garden. But with Adam,

his names were not just nicknames or proper names but generic or family names which God allowed to become the actual designations of the animals permanently.

The Bible doesn't list many of the names in the account of Adam itself, but many animals are listed here and there throughout the Bible. There is one creature, however, which we always associate with Adam and this is the serpent. How would you have named such a creature? We might have called him "Creepy" or "Slimy" or "Sneaky," but the Bible hints at least that the serpent was not always an unpleasant-looking creature that slithered silently across the ground (see Genesis 3:14). When Adam named the serpent he called him after a word which means in the Hebrew language (the language in which the Old Testament was originally written) "to hiss." That is, he named him literally the Hisser. What clue does this give us about the way the serpent may have spoken to Eve in Genesis 3:4-5 (as controlled by Satan)?

Later, the Bible mentions other kinds of snakes: one was called the Creeper or the Crawler (this is the snake mentioned in Deuteronomy 32:24 and Micah 7:17). Another was named the Extender or the Stretcher from the way a snake stretches his body as he glides across the ground (Exodus 7:9 and Psalm 91 : 13 mention these kinds of snakes).

What other kinds of animals did Adam probably name? There is a species of gazelle, often referred to as a wild goat, which was named the Leaper because of its ability to leap and bound over the mountain rocks (as in Deuteronomy 14:5). Another type of gazelle was called the Splendid One or the Glorious One (found in Isaiah 13:14) because of its great beauty which was admired by the Hebrews and others during ancient times.

The camel was called the Carrier because his back was just suited for carrying things. Camels have been used as beasts of burden for many centuries in the Eastern countries.

The name for dog comes quite naturally from a word meaning "to bark." Thus he was literally named the Barker.

There were many types of lions and many names for them in the ancient world, but one particular type was called the Violent One. What does that tell us about the temperament of a lion?

Birds were not forgotten either. The dove was called the Gentle One and the raven was named the Dusky or Dark One (from the dark color of its feathers).

Fish were included as well. One type of fish was named the Squirmer because of the way a fish squirms as it moves and splashes through the water.

Even the lowly flea was not overlooked. The flea was named the Springer from its characteristic of jumping, leaping, or "springing." Did you know that the flea is mentioned in the Bible? Look at I Samuel 24:14 and 26:20.

There were many more animals that Adam named - too many to consider separately here - and in each case, he named the creature according to its chief or most noticeable characteristics. Even the name of Adam himself tells us something about his origin. Adam (or man) comes from a word meaning "red" and refers not only to a red or ruddy complexion as might be supposed but probably to the fact that he was taken from the red dirt or earth.

Even the names of God reveal His attributes. In the Old Testament God's names describe Him as the Most High, the Almighty, the Eternal One, the Self-Existent One. In the New Testament we have an even more precious name given to us. Jesus often refers to God as our "heavenly Father" (see Matthew 6:14 for example).

And, of course, the name of Jesus which was given to Him before His birth also tells us a lot about His character and mission in the world. The name "Jesus Christ" tells us that He was the Son of God, sent from God, the One who is able to save us from our sins.

So the next time you are reading the Bible and you encounter a name or even read the word "name" (as in "Hallowed be thy name," - Matthew 6:9), remember that a name is not just a title but a revelation of a person or thing or God or even an animal and its character and attributes.

How about you? Do you bear the name Christian in addition to your own proper name? If so, does this name (meaning "Christlike") reveal something of your true nature and character?

If you are not a Christian, wouldn't you like to bear (and thereby share) the most glorious name of all - the name of Jesus Christ?

The End

---- by Walter J. Clark