

Proposal

Title – *Shem, Shem, I Know Your Name: Tracing the Significance of Shem through Genesis*

Program of Study – Biblical Studies

Presentation Type – PowerPoint

Mentor and Mentor Email – Dr. Gary Yates (gyates@liberty.edu)

Student name and email – Wesley Walker (wwalker4@liberty.edu)

Category – Textual or Investigative

Abstract: The author(s) of Genesis have a preoccupation with the concept of naming. The Hebrew word for “name” (*shem*) appears in the Hebrew Bible approximately 864 times in 771 verses. As a unit, the Pentateuch contains 250 (30%) of those occurrences. Within the Pentateuch, the frequency of usage may be ranked as follows: (1) Genesis (111x); (2) Numbers (49x); (3) Exodus (43x); (4) Deuteronomy (36x); and Leviticus (11x). Genesis makes up 44 percent of the uses of *shem* in the first five books of the Bible. This paper traces the various significant uses of *shem* throughout Genesis and seeks to understand its purpose in the narrative of the book. Throughout the stories of Genesis, rivers are named, animals receive names, various humans are named (often times with significant bearing on the narrative), locations are assigned titles, etc. At the end of the book, the reader is left with a nice resolution in the Joseph story (Gen 50:22-26) while still looking forward to things to come, as Joseph prophesies a time when “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here” (50:25; ESV). Given the pervasiveness of *naming* throughout the book, one of the questions the reader is left asking is, “Who is this God that has been the driving force of the book? What is his *name*?” While an answer is never supplied in the book of Genesis, the Divine Name is revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:15. Naming in the book of Genesis, then, functions as a means of building anticipation for this divine self-revelation which opens the book of Exodus.

Worldview Integration: Within the field of biblical studies, one’s worldview regarding religion will ultimately be expressed. In regards to the Pentateuch, the underlying modern hermeneutic in many scholarly circles has a tendency to dissect the text based on its speculative source (i.e. Documentary Hypothesis or the more radical Supplementary Hypothesis). While this paper does not seek to directly interact with these methods, the underlying assumption is that the canon of Scripture is a divinely inspired, self-revelation of God. At its core, it is based in grace, as “Grace is the way in which God extends himself to the world so that creatures can come to know and love him.”¹ Instead of speculating on the disparate parts which make the whole, this paper seeks to analyze the text of Genesis as a literary whole, a cohesive and self-contained unit which does in fact reveal something about God and his nature. This stems from a Christian understanding of Scripture and the presupposition that all divine communicative activity is grounded in grace.

¹ Kevin Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016), 36.

This research could bring multiple impacts to the culture at large. First, anytime Scripture is further understood allows Christians an opportunity to better tell the story of salvation-history. Second, readings like the one presented in the paper give Christians more reasons to view the text holistically. Third, by understanding the importance of naming in the book of Genesis, it adds another layer of literary artistry to a book which is often reduced to the subject of scientific debate and helps us look at the book on its own terms.