

# **NAMING AS A SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY IN THE BIBLE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Naming is a very important process, and it plays a major role in anyone's life, because it is a very significant part of our identity and culture. No matter what context we may live in, a name can easily identify us anywhere in this world. In essence, it carries all the privileges that comes with it, also with one's family honour within the family and community. Naming with a prophetic element has a self-fulfilling purpose which is emphasized in this work. It extends the study to another level of understanding in uncovering the deeper meanings and origins of names, utilizing its significances to understand the methods, ideas and theologies behind it. The purpose of this study is to explore the process of naming in the Biblical World and also in the Samoan context. Arguing the names with a prophetic sense to be self-fulfilling prophecies that the bearers ought to live out accordingly with their meanings and significances, with a theological viewpoint on naming as in the names of God and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family, to my mother, Misimasefili I'asā Ieremia and all my siblings and their families. Your prayers and never-ending support during my four years in Malua are remembered with gratitude. It is your words of encouragement that have carried me this far in my journey and have made this work possible. This work is also dedicated to the memory of my late father, Rev. Ieremia Le'autulī Sili Samuelu F.S., and grandmother Gogosina Tu'u'au Sao who contributed a lot in raising me, who encouraged and paved the way for me on this path and have taught me so many lessons in life that I will forever cherish. I would also like to dedicate this project to an extraordinary friend that is close to my heart, Taililigooamo Samoa, for always being there and being patient with me and supporting me. To God be all honour and glory, now and forever more!

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Fa'afetai, fa'afetai tele lava.

## Introduction

This thesis is an attempt at re-establishing the theological significance of *Naming* as Self-fulfilling prophecies in the Bible. This thesis will look at some of the key figures in the Bible, and the significance of their names in relation to their places in the history of the Church as well as Christianity in its early years. The meanings of their names, the traditions and processes behind how they were given and obtained will also be an important part of this study, with the aim of exploring further the issue of being self-fulfilled. Some have had their names changed throughout their lives, and with those conversions it had changed their lives for the better in the work of the Lord and the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Naming, in the sense of the word, is one of the most important part of our existence. It carries a very deep and an essential connection of a person to his/her culture, ancestral and historical roots with how one came to be in this world. Not only that, but it gives us a sense of knowing who we are, where we come from and belong, as well as our place in this world.

So, in Chapter 1, I will elaborate on the essence of ‘naming’ and its significance not only in the context of our families, but also within the parameters of the *fa’a-Samoa* and most importantly, the Bible. The aim is to explore whether those named live up to the meanings and expectations of their names in their life’s work and existence. A discussion of the origin of the author’s first name will also form part of this discussion. For the purposes of this thesis, I shall be using the Anthropological model as proposed by Stephen B. Bevans as a means of articulating a theology of naming, in relation to various contexts and origins.

In Chapter 2, I will explore the significance of Naming in the Biblical world of the Old and New Testaments, and how that relates to today’s world and experience.

In Chapter 3, I will present a theological reflection upon the significance of Naming in the context of the *fa'a-Samoa*, particularly the traditional 'matai titles' (chiefly titles) and its significance within our families and everyday living. Furthermore, an analysis of how names are connected to our ancestral roots, and our existence will also be discussed. As stated earlier, the need to reflect upon the issue of 'prophetic fulfilment' is a key point of this thesis and it will be dealt with within this section.

The conclusion of this thesis will provide the theological connection of naming, in relation to our context, and the relevance of self-fulfilment in relation to Biblical prophecy. The reply to the issue of whether one's name has reflected the original bearer of the name shall be explored herein. The underlying theological imperative is that one who has been named after someone (in Samoan context, mainly a family figure or relation-wise) comes with the purpose of impersonating that person's characteristics and qualities, or better still, improve on the notion that the perfect way to remember and be truthful to our *augatamā* or *tua'ā*, or grandparents or forefathers is imitating their lives.

## Chapter 1

# The Anthropological Model of Contextual Theology and the Process of Naming

### Introduction

Interpretation of Christian faith in the light of one's own context, is one of the main functions of contextual theology, in particular, discerning and understanding one's relationship with God whilst doing theology. This concept of 'contextualization' was given its impetus by well-acclaimed author and theologian, Stephen B. Bevans<sup>1</sup>, who asserted the belief that;

'There is no such thing as "theology"; there is only contextual theology....the attempt to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context is really a theological imperative" and cannot be "something on the fringes of the theological enterprises. It is at the very centre of what it means to do theology in today's world".<sup>2</sup>

Bevan's view on theology and how it shifted from classical to contextual theology was a very interesting transition. From past experiences as a theologian himself, writing his theological view in response to the changing nature of one's context and living experiences was not accepted by those with different cultural backgrounds and ethnicities. However, he maintained the validity of doing theology from a contextual standpoint, by looking at the biblical message from the life experiences of those who have come to know and share the love of God for His people.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Culture* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Bevans, 3.

## Contextual Theology and the Anthropological Model

### 1.1 Contextual Theology

Contextual theology reflects on the raw experience of the people. It represents an incorporation of Christian concepts, stories and more. On the other hand, it is with the particular indigenous culture of the people. The significance of contextualization as a method of doing theology has already been used at the forefront of theological agendas. It makes the Gospel meaningful and relevant in the implication of a given situation, which for Bevans, is

a way of doing theology in which one takes into account the spirit and message of the gospel; the tradition of the church; the culture in which one is theologizing; and social change within that culture, whether brought about by western culture process or the grass-roots struggle for equality, justice and liberation.<sup>3</sup>

The significance of contextualization as a method of doing theology, therefore, has been adopted as key theological agendas, not only by mainline Churches, but also theologians and bible readers worldwide. This significance is given preference by one Lourdino A. Yuzon, who asserted that the task of theology is to discern “signs” of God’s presence and make that presence explicit or manifest.<sup>4</sup> Adding to the same conversation and theological dialogue, David J Hesselgrave maintained that contextual theology has to do with making the gospel meaningful and by making it, the gospel must be relevant and discovering the implications of the gospel in a given situation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Bevans, 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> Lourdino A. Yuzon, “Towards a Contextual Theology” in *International Review of Mission* (January 2002, Vol. 91 Issue 360), p102. According to Yuzon, that there are many, not one, contextual theologies. For instance, Black theology, feminist theology, Minjung theology (Korea), Dalit theology (India), theology of struggle (Philippines), Latin American liberation theology are all contextual theologies that have emerged out of particular historical realities to which the liberative aspects of the Christian message are addressed.

<sup>5</sup> David J Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: A Guide for Home and Foreign Missions* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1993), 209.

For Bevens alone, it is a way of understanding the Christian faith not only on the basis of Scripture and tradition – the two main theological sources of reflection of classical/traditional theology – but also on the basis of concrete culturally conditioned human experience. This is where contextual theology was thought to have been born. Since we all have different cultural backgrounds and experiences, we cannot accept others' views of our culture from their cultural perspective and context because they have not lived it. Anyone's theological view on any matter in a given context or situation, is a contextual theology on its own and that is what Bevens is trying to emphasize in his book.

## **1.2 The Anthropological Model**

For purposes of this project, I have decided to adopt the Anthropological Model as proposed by Stephen B. Bevens, in order to highlight the theological significance of naming. The said model starts with the context, whereby the present human situation is the focus of divine revelation as much as scripture and tradition have been the focus of divine revelation in the past. Thus, one needs to attend and listen to God's presence in the present context (also known as indigenization).

The Anthropological model seeks to find God in the already-existing culture and extract God's message as reflected through cultural practice. Scripture and tradition play a role in this so far as they are ideal types that help to identify when and where God is speaking through a culture. This model also suggests that we take culture at face value, which for the purpose of this thesis, is that of being 'named,' and look for evidence of Scripture and tradition already alive within it. For Bevens, the main thrust of the anthropological model is to preserve the cultural identity of a person of Christian faith,

within a framework where it takes the reality of human experience seriously.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, this model is anthropological in two senses: the first is ‘centred on the value and goodness of *'anthropos'* the human person, and how it makes use of the insights of the social science of anthropology.’<sup>7</sup>

This model is duly reflected in the views of Ezra Chitando<sup>8</sup>, whose studies in African history revealed that there is evidence that the names were significant in the Shona society in Zimbabwe. Observations would also apply that many African names of people and places have meanings which are often religious, that marks their religious ideas and experiences and also reflect their cultural context. Chitando’s arguments somehow resonates with the arguments proposed in this paper, as it aims to explore and uncover the meanings and also the significances of both secular and biblical names.

### **1.3 The Process of Naming**

#### **1.3.1 Naming in the Bible**

The naming of certain individuals is a common feature of both Old and New Testament narratives. Therein we find that there are different reasons given as to how names are given, which subsequently declares the uniqueness and the individuality of a person. In essence, it literally distinguishes that person from another. According to Michael Barrett<sup>9</sup>, names are nothing more than just labels for identification, when he noted that *‘although our first names are in some way special, their use or non-use does*

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<sup>6</sup> Bevens, 54-69.

<sup>7</sup> Bevens, 54-69.

<sup>8</sup> Ezra Chitando, “The Theology from the Underside: The case of African Christian names in Zimbabwe,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 101 (July 1998): 23-34.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Barrett, “What’s in a Name: Illustrations of Old Testament Name Theology,” in *PRJ* 6, 1 (2014): 5–20.

*not depend on what the names may mean etymologically or historically. They're just labels. They can identify us, but they do not describe us*". We can argue that this statement is true or false, because there is so much in a name that we need to uncover before we make any claims about a person's name to describe who they are. Barrett has a contradicting belief between a given proper Name and a Nickname. He believes that the importance in a Nickname is that people use it to identify and describe a certain person: *'Not only do they identify an individual, but they also describe something about him'*. To me, those who are given nicknames by their peers or family members, is to describe them in a way that they are popular or famous for in a humorous way or not instead of using their real names.<sup>10</sup>

We also find from biblical history how some names came to be, either from events that occurred during that time or from people's connection to history and adventures. With these names, we can follow the historical progress of an entire nation. David S. Farkas commenting on the significance of names and their origins, believes that there are hidden etiologies within the names of people or places given specifically in the Tanakh, where the meaning is there but not visible to a simple surface reading. Some may come with different meanings and definitions where it can have two or more etiologies. If this is the case, then it is up to the reader to try and understand how these meanings are connected to one another.<sup>11</sup> This is vital information for anyone to know about names, because if we do not know the origin or meaning of a name or place, then

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<sup>10</sup> Barrett, 5.

<sup>11</sup> David S. Farkas, "Etiologies in the Bible: Explicit, Double, and Hidden," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* Vol. 45, No. 4 (2017): 229-236. Etiologies – derived from the word etiology which has the Greek root word 'aitiologia' translated as "to give reason for". Definition from Google search gives its older spelling 'aetiology' with its first meaning in medicine "the cause, set of causes". A second meaning "the investigation or attribution of the cause or reason of something". So in looking at the etiology of a name, we are to find the reason for that name and also its cause or origin.

how are we to understand what that name means to that person or even symbolizing a certain place.

On the other hand, Heriberto Haber suggests that one must also note an interesting ideology used by the Jewish people when naming a new born. The allusion of names built by using the two Hebrew denominations of God: *Elohim* and the Tetragrammaton, where some names take only the first two letters in the beginning of the name (Eliezer, Eliah, Elkanah), or at the end (Gabriel, Daniel, Raphael). The usage of the Tetragrammaton here is very intriguing and also interesting because it makes us wonder how the people of this era came up with such ideas in naming a person.<sup>12</sup>

Olga V. Khotskina<sup>13</sup> also looked at the system that structured the choice criteria and also personal name selection in various cultures and ethnic groups. For Khotskina, it is intrinsic to understand different cultural backgrounds and language elements, in order to understand how personal names are given and how the naming methods is acquired for such processes in different context. And with Khotskina's philosophy in naming, it portrays the picture that we are looking for in a name, especially in a particular context, for which in this case, the context that is found in the Bible.

Looking at the biblical narratives concerning Moses, and the Exodus story, with the name Moses, meaning "*to pull out/draw out of water*", reveals the actual events that happened in his life which gave birth to the name. Abraham's name as well, meaning "*father of many*", was actually lived up to as was promised by God. In the New Testament, the name of our Lord Christ Jesus, meaning "*to deliver/to rescue*" which was self-fulfilled when he gave his life and died for the whole world, to rescue them

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<sup>12</sup> Heriberto Haber, "Theophoric Names in the Bible," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* Vol. 29, No. 1 (2001): 56-59.

<sup>13</sup> Olga V. Khotskina, "Philosophy of Education and Education in Competences in the Context of the European Higher Education Area," *Philosophy of Education* Vol. 37, No. 4 (2011): 51-59.

from the power of sin. In Barrett's view, the names of God are not simply labels to identify him, but they are also to describe him. Because they reveal God's work and his person, this is also true about the names or titles of Christ which Barrett believes is an *appellative*.<sup>14</sup>

Other key figures in the New Testament such as the Apostles Paul and Simon Peter, had their names changed as recorded in the Bible. The significances of their name-changes contributed a lot in their ministries and were reflected throughout their lives and in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Halvor Moxnes reflected on this key issue, when he noted the importance of seriously 'considering people's names in relation to the places they belong to in the world, as another way of seeking understanding when reading a certain text.'<sup>15</sup> A relationship of time and space that is inextricably linked to one another in order for the name to be placed.

### **1.3.2 Naming in the Samoan context**

In the *fa'asamoa*, we have our own culture and tradition in the process of naming. We can trace it back to our ancestors before we were introduced to the Gospel and Christianity. Names already existed, and our people did not believe in the God of the Bible at the time. We had our own creation story and how everything was created in our indigenous religion that God "*Tagaloalagi*" was progenitor of all living things on earth, as Tui Atua writes about it in his book.<sup>16</sup> Everything in existence were given a name. Names were obtained from events happenings at specific times during a person's

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<sup>14</sup> Barrett, 5-7. Appellative is a common noun used as a descriptive name, since many of Jesus' titles were common nouns or expressions that are used for personal designation.

<sup>15</sup> Halvor Moxnes, *Putting Jesus in His Place: A Radical Vision of Household and Kingdom* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 12.

<sup>16</sup> Tui Atua T.T.T.E. (2009), "Whispers and Vanities in Samoan Indigenous Religious Culture". World Parliament of Religions. Melbourne, Australia. See: <https://huia.co.nz/huia-bookshop/bookshop> website for online copy.

life. It tells us how names were originated and what they mean, and also the purpose behind those names. As we have heard from our ancestors about the Samoan stories, myths and legends, that is how most names originated, not only for people, but of living things and places, including the naming of villages in our country. It has become something of great importance today, how our people value our land and properties even our culture and traditions.

The “*Matai*” (titled man) is also one of the most valued Samoan notion which embodies the whole culture and our Samoan custom. Scholars over the years have been trying to study the word and where it originates from, to try and get a wider understanding of the *matai*-system being used in our culture in comparison to other cultures. Tcherkézoff Serge, who wrote on the significance of the roles of the *matai* and title-holders or *matai*-holders, believes that in his experience and understanding of the Samoan culture, the word *matai* is a base word of its own, and it cannot be decomposed. It comes with a lot of responsibilities, distinctions and also its values which is of vital importance in our Samoan heritage and culture. <sup>17</sup>

### **1.3.3 Naming in Samoan families**

There are many ideas and theologies behind the naming process in Samoan families. Some use biblical names because not only they have some holistic meanings and purposes, but they also have the analogy that by naming someone after an icon or a key figure, one will grow up to become like him/her or even live up to the meaning of his/her name on ones own circumstances. Some use events that happened in life as a source for names, and others, from experiences and adventures that are unforgettable.

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<sup>17</sup> Serge Tcherkézoff. “The Samoan Category Matai (Chief): A singularity in Polynesia? Historical and Etymological Comparative Queries,” *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 109, No. 2 (June 2000): 151-190.

So, for myself personally as well as my family, we all have different reasons and ideas behind our names. Starting from my parents, and then me and my siblings, each one of us has a meaning to his/her name. Some of us are named after our grandparents. Some of us are also named within the context where we were living in the past, and also the people that our parents met and adventures that they experienced in their journey in life. My immediate family are as shown in a table below:

<b>My Immediate Family's Names with meanings/reasons given.</b>		
<b>Names</b>		<b>Meanings of/reasons for given names.</b>
<b>Father (deceased)</b>	Ieremia	Name of maternal grandfather, his mother's father.
<b>Mother</b>	Misimasefili, I'asā	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miss Maxfield – lady missionary, Misi Tamaitai, who was the President of Christian Education Society of the time when my mother was born in 1957, while her father the late Rev Tu'u'au Sao of Vailoa was the representative from the Fa'asaleleaga district (Matagalueaga).</li> <li>• I'asā – a sacred fish in the village of Vailoa named 'atule', it has taboos and there is also a specific time of the year when it surfaces and used by the people for consumption.</li> </ul>
<b>Brother (eldest)</b>	Hesed, Toluiupeli	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hesed – Hebrew version of “the mercy of God”. From the Hebrew word ‘חסד’ that is related to <i>mercy, compassion, love, grace and faithfulness</i>. Not merely an emotion or feeling but involves action on behalf of someone.</li> <li>• Toluiupeli – Tri-jubilee, celebration of 150 years since the arrival of Christianity in Samoa. Our maternal grandfather was the Chairman of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa at the time in 1980 during the celebration of the Tri-jubilee of the Church in Sapapali'i.</li> </ul>
<b>Brother (2<sup>nd</sup> eldest)</b>	Tu'u'au, Rogan of Auckland Kiwi.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tu'u'au – name of maternal grandfather (Rev. Elder Tu'u'au Sao). Mother's father.</li> <li>• Rogan of Auckland Kiwi – name made up by our aunt. Rogan is the name of the street in Auckland New Zealand, where our mother's sister and brother in law resided for medical studies as a reminder that he was a Samoan born in New Zealand.</li> </ul>
<b>Brother (3<sup>rd</sup> child)</b>	Samuel, Christian.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Samuel – name of paternal grandfather. Our father's father.</li> <li>• Christian – he was born a week before Christmas, where all the Christians awaited the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, hence the name given.</li> </ul>

<b>My Immediate Family's Names with meanings/reasons given.</b>		
<b>Names</b>		<b>Meanings of/reasons for given names.</b>
<b>Sister (4<sup>th</sup> child)</b>	Shalom, Malologa.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shalom – a Hebrew word ‘שָׁלוֹם’ meaning “peace”. She is the first female born, with the hope to bring peace amongst the siblings.</li> <li>• Malologa – meaning “rest”. A term given to the ‘rest’ that a Samoan pastor gets for 3 months after 6 years of straight service in a parish. She was born during this time of rest that our parents got.</li> </ul>
<b>Me (5<sup>th</sup> child)</b>	Russell, Anderson, Veiuto.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Russell – name of a theological teacher in the Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji, who was my father’s supervisor in his Bachelor of Divinity degree thesis paper.</li> <li>• Anderson – Name of the maternity ward at the CWM hospital in Suva, Fiji, that I was born in.</li> <li>• Veiuto – Name of the area where the Pacific Theological College was located that my parents attended.</li> </ul>
<b>Sister (6<sup>th</sup> child)</b>	Makerita, Talalelei na valo’ia e Nafanua.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Makerita – Paternal grandmother’s name. Father’s mother.</li> <li>• Talalelei – She was born on the first Sunday of September where we commemorate the “Aso Sa o le Talalelei” in the EFKS in 1990.</li> <li>• Nafanua – name of a Samoan female warrior who prophesied the arrival of Christianity in Samoa.</li> </ul>
<b>Sister (7<sup>th</sup> child)</b>	Gogosina, Leufisa, Jemahetusashruma.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gogosina – name of maternal grandmother. Mother’s mother.</li> <li>• Leufisa – name of the village our parents were ministering in their EFKS parish.</li> <li>• Jemahetusashruma – a name made up of every first two letters of our immediate family’s names starting from our father to our sibling above her.</li> </ul>
<b>Sister (8<sup>th</sup> child, deceased)</b>	Misimasefili.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Misimasefili – named after our mother. She passed away before birth.</li> </ul>

We were given names and middle names based on our parents’ life journeys and experiences which hold a lot of meanings to them. Not only that, but their family names with biblical names as well, are for us to uphold and preserve or even live up to it. If any family member does not live up to his/her given name, maybe the whole family needs to be more vigilant and appreciative of what these names stand for. Personally, it is a privilege for me to actually grasp and understand fully what my name stands for. Most importantly, there is always the need to explore what the ‘name’ that was given to me, meant to my parents, given the reasons and the theological connections that is

behind it, so that going forward in this life's journey I would have the opportunity to study it and understand it more.

## **Summary**

In this Chapter, the importance of doing Contextual Theology whenever we experiment and explore the essence of theology has been discussed. In Bevans' view, there is no such thing as theology, unless an individual attempting to implement a theological point of view makes an honest challenge at contextualization an issue, then it becomes more meaningful and relevant for his or her audience. Furthermore, this Chapter has also delved into the different naming processes amongst different traditions, cultures and religions, such as those mentioned in the Bible, alongside their origins, meanings and significances. The aim is to highlight its importance in a person's life and whether or not they were self-fulfilled. Not only that, naming in our Samoan culture and context, and the roles played by the *matai*-system as well and our *aiga*, is also given significance, particularly with how names were given by my parents for me and my siblings. It not only represents and symbolizes our cultural context, but also religious ideas and experiences that comes along with it.

## **Chapter 2**

# **The Significance of Naming in the Biblical World and our Everyday context.**

### **Introduction**

We have talked about naming used in different contexts and ideas behind it. Not only that, but the use of contextual theology to try and understand the meaning behind some of the names that I have mentioned. With the methodology of the anthropological model that I have chosen, it seems appropriate and applicable in addressing the matter that is essential to this research. I will now shift focus to the significances of naming in the biblical world as well as our everyday life in today's world.

The aim here is to try and find the importance of naming in regard to the Bible, from the Old Testament and New Testament, to establish and find a connection that could expand our understanding with how names were being given in a specific manner and what their significances are. It can also expand or boost our interest in this area, because anyone who has been given a name, would want to know how that name came to be. Taking a theological trip to the past, not only culturally but religiously, will give us better understanding of what we have already learned. It will also paint a clearer picture of how we use these names in our everyday lives and contexts. Thus, we start this chapter with the significance of naming in the Old Testament.

### **2.1 Old Testament Names**

In deciding on what names that I could use from the Old Testament for this part of my research, I have decided to choose from some of the names that probably most of us have heard of in biblical stories from a young age. Since there are a variety of names

in different contexts to choose from, the names that I will choose have helped a lot in not only shaping the histories as given in the Bible, but have also changed the courses of history. These chosen names have also produced vital contents in the Bible not only for religious purposes, but also biblical studies.

**Abraham** and **Joshua** are some of the iconic figures found in the Old Testament. They were God-fearing men who not only had close personal relationships with God, but also with their obedience and perseverance enabling the establishment of the nation of Israel. Their names have been known throughout the history of the Jewish people. We still hear songs sung today by Christians and other religions in remembrance of their sacrifices made. They have contributed a lot in the existence and the survival of the people of God. Therefore, let us look at Abraham who was first known as Abram.

### 2.1.1 *Abraham's name and its significance*

The story of Abraham started in Genesis Chapter 11. His name at the time was not always Abraham. His original name was Abram as recounted in the Torah. The name Abram (Avram) in the Hebrew language meant "High Father": "av" (אב) meaning "father", and "ram" (רם) meaning "high". As the story goes, God called out to Abram to go to the land that he will show him. From there, God will bless him and will make his name so great, and he will also make a great nation out of him;

The Lord said, "Then Abram fell on his face, and God said to him, As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you." (Gen 17:3 – 6).

The story continued with the new experience for Abram with his name change because it brought meaning to his life which he had to fulfil. Abram obeyed everything

that God commanded him to do and was later rewarded with a land to possess and also a lot in his possession. God made a covenant with Abram because of his willingness and trust in walking before him and obeying him. From there, God changed his name from Abram to Abraham, which meant “*the Father/ancestor of the multitude of nations*”. This sudden change of name represented something much greater than just Abram himself. Not only is he blessed by God with this covenant made with him, but also blessing everyone that would be conceived by him. That tells us the truth about the nature of God; he creates something out of nothing, and Abram was lucky enough to have received and experienced this change, from a nobody to somebody. Abram’s name was changed, and so was his wife Sarai’s name. God changed her name to Sarah, which meant “*noblewoman*”, blessing her with not only bearing a son for Abraham, but also giving rise to new nations;

“God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her and also give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.” (Gen 17: 15 – 16).

In a book written by Jonathan Grossman<sup>18</sup>, on his analysis of the Abraham narrative in (Gen 11:27 – 22:24), he explores it through a literary lens leading to Abraham’s long journey to nationhood. Grossman sees a significant parallel in this narrative from the name change of Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah, which is before the circumcision and after the circumcision. Abram’s relationship with the ‘Lord’ before the covenant was made revealed a difference in motives with Abraham’s relationship with ‘God’ after the covenant was made. He believes it was dependant on the different sources for these two halves of the narrative, because with Abram, he was obedient to the Lord and was blessed accordingly; - and with Abraham, the Lord’s will

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<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Grossman, *Abram to Abraham: A literary Analysis of the Abraham Narrative* (Peter Lang AG: Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2016), 229 – 233.

was being fulfilled in the covenant. God prepared the path for his destiny which was to give birth to a nation that would succumb to his will.

As the narrative went, Abraham's wife Sarah was a barren woman, incapable of conceiving a child. But God later fulfilled his promise to Sarah and she bore Abraham a son who was named Isaac meaning: "*one who laughs / one who rejoices*", to remember Sarah's laugh when God first told them of this promise. Isaac, together with his father Abraham and his son Jacob, are the three biblical patriarchs revered by the Jews, Christians, and Muslims in their different religions. It all started where God's covenant with Abraham was fulfilled in the years that followed. The importance of names are showcased here in this part of the story of Abraham, his wife Sarah, and their son Isaac. Their names all connected to their relationships with God as seen in the covenant made between God and Abraham, the promise God made to Sarah that resulted in conceiving an heir for Abraham. These factors all signify the purposes of their names, which created a world that God led them to build in his almighty name.

### **2.1.2 Joshua's name and its significance**

The name Joshua in the Hebrew language is "Yehoshu'a" (יהושע), meaning "YHWH saves". It is the combination of "yeho" (יהו) which is a short form for "YHWH" (יהוה), and the verb "YShAh" (ישע) which means "to save", and therefore, having the meaning "YHWH/God saves". The translation of Joshua's name from the Hebrew language in to the Greek language, resulted in the Greek name "Iesou" (Ἰησοῦ). Since the Greek language does not have a "Y" and a "Sh", hence the result. Sometimes the transliteration of male names always include "s", thus, the name came out to be "Iesous" (Ἰησοῦς). We are now starting to see why this name is linked to Jesus' name in the New Testament. They are both spelt the same way, and since we know Joshua and Jesus are two different persons, we can now cross a line on that

subject. However, the connection that is evident here is the translation of the name, which links Joshua's name to that of Jesus. According to Britannica,<sup>19</sup> Joshua as we know from the story of Israel in (Exod 17:9), was a warrior who led Israel in the conquest of Canaan, after the Exodus from Egypt. He was involved a lot in various occasions that helped shaped the future for Gods people. He was also the appointed successor of Moses who continued to lead Israel into the promised land after Moses died, as recorded in (Deut 31: 1-8; 34:9). Joshua's name was well known, not only amongst the Israelites but also to their enemies, starting from when Israel left Egypt, until they entered Canaan, as was promised to them by God.

The meaning of Joshua's name tells a lot about how his story and the story of Israel went. God's guidance upon Israel provided salvation for the whole nation. It also provided a place for them to inherit and make it their own so that they may flourish and prosper. It is clear to see here that Joshua was fulfilling what his name meant with his actions, by delivering Israel safely to the land God promised for them.

The result of Joshua's actions can be seen as a self-fulfilling prophecy in relation to the meaning of his name. He obediently lived according to what God wanted for him, to be able to fulfil God's plan for his people in claiming a land for them and their future. It was not an easy task for Joshua, Moses has passed and now it was up to him to complete God's mission. It was a happy ending for Joshua, for he achieved salvation through his actions with God's help, thus another self-fulfilled prophecy in honour of his name.

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<sup>19</sup> T. Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, ed., *Joshua* (Encyclopaedia Britannica, July 27, 2010), <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Joshua>.

## **Significance of Naming in the New Testament**

### **2.2 New Testament Names**

Different from that of the Old Testament, the New Testament focuses on a different scope where salvation is now the centre of attention in a Christian's life. It is through Jesus Christ, the promise of salvation has been fulfilled in his death and resurrection for the world of sinners. Jesus' name was praised and exalted thereafter. Throughout the course of events recorded in the Gospels, there was an obvious climb in the acceleration rate of the spread of the gospel of Jesus, and his name and messages reached all corners of the world, in different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. With Jesus' name being the pillar of it all, one other name stood out for me in the expansion of the Good News about Jesus Christ, and what he has done for us.

#### **2.2.1 *Simon-Peter's name and its significance***

What interests me in the story of Simon, who was among the first called by Jesus to be one of his disciples, was when Jesus changed his name to Cephas (which is translated to 'Peter') meaning 'a rock'. He was known by many names then, but he was commonly known as Simon Peter. It is easier to differentiate in that sense in knowing both the original name and the changed name, mashed together. He was the first disciple claimed by the Roman Catholic Church to be the successor of Christ. Known to be impetuous and rushed to speak out when it was his time to listen and was commended for being able to perceive the truth. However, he was a man with many mixed emotions. One time he wanted to do well and right by Christ, and the next he was afraid of being hurt by authorities. This later resulted in him rejecting any association with Jesus on three counts. He was marked a coward according to his actions, but all changed when he went about doing God's work, as recoded in Matthew:

“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” (Matt 16:18).

This was Jesus’ reply to Peter in answering his question on who people thought the Son of Man was. These sayings by Jesus, gave so much purpose for Peter’s journey and mission in his ministry. His name has a contrasting sense to it with the rock that Jesus referred to which some scholars believe to be two distinct and separate words. Peter’s name in Greek is *Petros*, meaning ‘a shifting, rolling, or insecure stone’, while *petra* is ‘a solid rock, immovable rock’. So with these separate meanings, we can view Jesus’ saying to Peter as the rolling stone who will build his church on a solid and immovable foundation that cannot be dismantled by any outside force. This was evident in Peter’s life in serving Christ, as he was beaten and imprisoned, but he never gave up in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the whole world. In a paper by Scott MacFeat Jr<sup>20</sup>, at a Bible College Seminary, he explains the text presented in Matt 16:18 between Peter and rock as an ‘Alliteration’; meaning this occurs when two or more words are grouped closely together that sound similar because they begin with the same letters, but do not mean the same thing. This has been an ongoing debate among many scholars claiming that the rock Jesus referred to was Peter. It is also evident here that it is very important to understand what a name means, so that you do not get the wrong meaning or idea behind it. There is a whole world that revolves around a name, and so to get the wrong meaning and ideology behind it, would just be as a meaningless name. Therefore, with better understanding into these depths of researching a name, like Peter, we can paint a definite picture of what it means and signifies theologically. It means that he was a solid rock in the ministry of Jesus Christ,

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<sup>20</sup> Scott MacFeat Jr, ““Petros” and “Petra”: Ancient Alliteration of Something Else?,” (paper presented at the Capital Seminary at Lancaster Bible College, 29 July 2019), 1-13.

in upholding the faith for Christianity to survive. His sacrifice in doing the work of the Lord, has not been in vain. As we witnessed in the Christian world of today how his hard work is being credited and recognized for the future of Christianity.

### **2.2.2 *Jesus' name and its significance***

I have decided to use the name *Jesus* in this section of my research, because anyone who is Christian knows who Jesus is and what he did for humankind. There are some conflicts over the meaning of the name Jesus, as asserted to by Steve Reece<sup>21</sup>: where the author of Luke-Acts attaches the thematic significance to the etymologies of proper names. This method when used by an author, can cause a lot of confusion and misunderstanding to its proper meaning and where the name actually originated from, because it can make sense if we define the name of someone by using their traits or place in a society, but it cannot reach its full meaning if we impose a meaning on to it from the original meaning of that name.

As every Christian believes, Jesus is the Son of God, the saviour and Christ, the Messiah who came to save not only the chosen people of God, but the whole world from sin and suffering. So if we think of a name that is filled with significance, it would be the name Jesus.

Firstly, let us look into the name of Jesus and what it means. The Greek translation of the name Jesus is “Iesous” (Ἰησοῦς), and it can go back to some of the Hebrew variants that might have resulted in its translation, where “Yeshua” is the most common meaning, “Yahweh is salvation”. This is similar to the meaning of the name Joshua that we discussed earlier from the names of the Old Testament. This translation

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<sup>21</sup> Steve Reece, “Jesus as Healer: Etymologizing of Proper Names in Luke-Acts,” *ZNW* 110/2 (2019): 186-201.

of the name of Jesus is believed by many as the original name. It was later shortened by the Jews and Christians for various reasons and has been misread by followers of Christianity, leading to different understanding from its original form, thus taking away what the name really means and stands for. This is of considerable importance in any language to rightfully define the names and pronounce them properly. The factor that contributed a lot in this misunderstanding is the translation methods used for translating the names. When incorporating an idea or agenda on any translated word or name, it will steer the original meaning of that word or name further away from its original meaning, causing problems for this specific topic.

In this case, the name of Jesus is featured prominently as recorded in the New Testament, not only for the Jews but also the Christians, especially in the messianic expectations of that time in Palestine. Jesus' name was popular in his time, and with it he held many titles to his name given by the people who knew him or have associated with him, he was Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, Christ and many more. All these titles described him in significant ways, his humanity and also his divinity. There are similarities in his name with that of Joshua. The English spelling of the Hebrew "Yeshua" is Joshua, but in the original language of the New Testament (Koine Greek) that translated this Hebrew name, it was "Iesous" which meant Jesus in English. Therefore, the corresponding names of Jesus and Joshua have the same meaning of "Yahweh is salvation" or "the Lord is salvation". But despite the similar meaning in these names, Jesus' name was remarkably significant in every sense of the name.

In Paul Ladouceur's view,<sup>22</sup> there were conflicts over the name of God which stemmed out of a doctrine known as "Name-praising" or "Name-glorification". I have

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Ladouceur, "The Name of God Conflict in Orthodox Theology," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 55:4 (2012): 415-436.

mentioned this here because with different theologies in understanding a name, it can cause a lot of disagreement and tensions between different beliefs, especially in an Orthodox Church. For it is argued here that the name of God is God himself, because we have limited understanding to completely know who God is, and that no theology can describe or define him, but it is through our spiritual connection with him that we know who he is and understand him. Barrett also argues that God's names are means by which God reveals to us something about his person, perfections and his work.<sup>23</sup>

Since God's purpose for Jesus on earth was to lead his people into victory over sin, he ended up saving the whole world over sin as reflected in his life, death and resurrection. His name bears witness to that mission he was sent to complete. That was the prophecy about his name, which was self-fulfilled when he gave his life for the world in order for them to qualify for salvation and everlasting life. He fulfilled the purpose and meaning of his name, just like Joshua did with his calling in the Old Testament. It shows the connection which links the Bible from the Old to the New Testament to achieve salvation through their names. With both names achieving the aim of this study, it ensures us that our names are also liable to have that sort of purpose in our lives, for us to seek and find the true purpose in our names and reflect it in our every decision and action.

## **Significance of Naming in Our Everyday Context**

### **Significance of Naming in 'Baptism' in the EFKS**

The Sacrament of Baptism in its general meaning is; "the Christian religious rite of sprinkling of water on to a person's forehead or of immersing them in water,

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<sup>23</sup>Barrett, 6.

symbolizing purification or regeneration and admission to the Christian Church.” In other denominations, baptism is performed on young children and is accompanied by name-giving just like it is performed in the EFKS. Growing up around the EFKS environment and being raised in it, a lot of questions arise into what baptism is to us as Christians, and also what its main purpose is in the life of a Christian is. These questions and many more will be clarified as we go deeper into its theological significance and how followers of Christ ground their trust in him. The gospel of John tells us of John’s area of expertise in baptism and ended up baptizing Christ. A discussion on the sacraments of the Church<sup>24</sup>, is another important element in this part of the research. It points to the clarification of the theological argument that salvation is relevant through faith alone, and it is a must to be included in the teachings of the Church in the sacrament of Baptism. As explained by the World Council of Churches, Baptism is the sign of new life through Jesus Christ. It is also our participation in Christ’s death and resurrection. This is similar to how Baptism is carried out within the Samoan Churches, as the same idea is obtained.

In a paper by Brandon C. Jones on baptism as the sacrament of the new covenant, he believes that it was Jesus’ commandment to his people to observe baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The two sacred rites in the Jewish context that brings blessings when respected and carried out.<sup>25</sup>

In our Samoan context, I speak from my own point of view, an infant is born and given a name, then baptized in the midst of a congregation for its approval and

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<sup>24</sup> See World Council of Churches, *Baptism Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: Faith and Order Paper No. 111, WCC, 1982). It explains more about the sacrament of Baptism that is used in this paper.

<sup>25</sup> Brandon C. Jones, “Believer Baptism: Sacrament of the New Covenant,” (paper presented at the Annual meeting of the ETS, 19 November 2014), 1-18.

acceptance of the infant's admission into the Christian Church and the community. This is the congregation of people that will help raise the infant in ways of the Christian Church. Through this process, the infants inherit faith through their parents, with the hope that they will follow the Christian traditions and faith to self-fulfil their purpose in the Church. The significance of the infant's name is conveyed here. Because without a name, the rite cannot be completed. So our names are important for our spiritual lives, as well as for our everyday lives.

## **Summary**

In this Chapter, we have come across the significances of names found in the biblical world within the Old and the New Testaments. The names of Abraham and Joshua in the Old Testament proved to have had great significances not only to themselves, but also in their relationships with God. They contributed a lot in outlining the existence and the formulation of history for God's people (Israel) who were descendants from Abraham himself through the covenant made with God. Moreover, Israel's survival through Joshua delivering them to the Promised Land as was promised by God. Their involvement in creating these courses of events for God's people opted them a reward of inheriting God's blessings for them and their future offsprings due to their obedience to God's will. So not only they have inherited a fulfilment to their names through their courses of actions, but they have also set a great example for those who followed.

The same mood is reflected in the names that were chosen from the New Testaments. The aspect of Identity became a very crucial element in the life of any individual and by understanding your true identity affirms your sense of belonging in this world, no matter what the context or cultural backgrounds. Naming in our everyday

context, is your identification within a community or society, because when people know your name, they will know who you are. So baptism in correlation with name-giving plays an essential role in the lives of all Christians, either EFKS or not. To be accepted in the Christian Church, the Christian faith and doctrines must be upheld.

## Chapter 3

# Theological Significance of Naming in the Samoan context and its Fulfilment

### Introduction

This chapter has two parts. Firstly, I will explore the significance of naming in the Samoan culture and context, extending the interpretation that I initiated in Chapter one. I will be looking at naming in the *Fa'amatai*, the *'Aiga*, and the *Fa'asinomaga*, with how they are inter-connected with one another and important in the Samoan culture. Secondly, I will extend the significance of naming and names by identifying some of the challenges that an individual might face in this matter.

### Significance of Naming in the Samoan context

#### 3.1 The *Fa'amatai* (*matai*-system)

The word "*fa'amatai*" or the Samoan chiefly system is comprised of a prefix and one word, "*fa'a*" meaning "in the way of" and "*matai*" meaning "chief/chief title". The way of a chief has already been constructed by our ancestors with certain guidelines and rules to follow and abide. It is a system that is central within societies which holds an indigenous form of governance in Samoa. The chief or the *matai* is the holder of a chiefly title in a family, and this title comes with roles and responsibilities as well. This includes looking after the family and representing them in village councils, even so on political grounds. They are the decision makers and are also responsible for the well-being of the extended family, as well as the protection of their family properties and assets. Thus, a *matai* plays a very major and significant role in the Samoan culture and

tradition, because the *fa'amatai* is what holds the culture together and everything that it stands for, not only in the motherland, but also to the diasporic Samoan people who are scattered and residing around the globe.

In the study of the Samoan *matai* system, Serge Tcherkézoff is of the view that

the *fa'amatai* is for everyone, it is a social system of belonging, and that every person in every social situation acts with reference to a 'place' that he sees himself as occupying with respect to the others present in this situation. This connection between matai-system and place points us to where we actually belong in our own cultural context, whereas the talking chiefs belong to carrying out their obligations as the ones who carry out the oral traditions and are regarded as mouthpieces for the high chiefs who talk on their behalf. Different chiefs have different roles, and all belong in different places.<sup>26</sup>

In essence, the matai carry the significance of the faa-Samoa with them wherever they go, because the Samoan culture was born out of this system. It is in their DNA, it is in their biological system, it is their identity. Another important factor in this chiefly system is that the titles/names are ranked and classed in a hierarchical order. And there are two types, the "*Ali'i*" which is the "high chief", and the "*tulāfale*" which is the "orator or the talking chief". Each type has names that represents them in every family and village. The high chiefs are known as sitting chiefs, they are mostly responsible for a lot of important facets of Samoan culture. Whilst the talking chiefs are the ones who carry out the oral traditions and are regarded as mouthpieces for the high chiefs, speaking on their behalf. These are some roles that the different types of chiefs have.

It is a complicated system to understand if you are not Samoan, because this aspect of their cultural identity is what makes the Samoans who they are. There are lots of associated factors to know and understand about this chiefly system, but the main

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<sup>26</sup> Serge Tcherkézoff, "CULTURE, NATION, SOCIETY: Secondary Change and Fundamental Transformations in Western Samoa Towards a Model for the Study of Cultural Dynamics," in *The Changing South Pacific: Identities and Transformations*, eds. Serge Tcherkézoff & Françoise Douaire-Marsaudon (245–302. ANU Press, 2008), 245-301.

focus for us here are the names involved in it. Every family has a title/name that belongs to it, and that name pinpoints its place and status in the Samoan community. The whole family must decide on who to choose to be the holder of a title. The personality and qualities of a person is important in these situations because it affects the name that they will be carrying and also their roles. It is a huge load to carry once chosen, and it tests the limits of how much that person values his/her family, as well as its identity and culture. One wrong decision and it will be the family's downfall, bringing shame to the family name and dishonouring it. These effects elevate the awareness of the holder of each title, to be mindful that they do not represent just themselves, but the whole family. The same goes for village matters or even political matters as well.

This aspect of the Samoan culture is a prime example of names being self-fulfilled when everything goes according to its purpose. Whether the focus shifts from fulfilling the meaning of a name to the chiefly roles and responsibilities, it is the same objective applied that needs to be achieved. In this case, it aligns with the aim of our study, that naming in the *fa'amatai* is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

### **3.2 The Aiga (Family)**

The *Aiga* (family) is considered to be a substantial aspect of socialization in the Samoan context, because the family has a crucial role in social development within a society. Every Samoan family has a genealogy that is passed down from generation to generation. For Tcherkézoff, every Samoan belongs to a family, and often to several families, where each family is like a culture group, defined around the preservation of one or several ancestral names.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Tcherkézoff, "CULTURE, NATION, SOCIETY," 256.

This is true in this context, because *aiga* also gives us our sense of belonging. Back then before these were written down and documented, it was only through verbal transmission that these genealogies were passed down. I experienced this in my family, with how my parents verbally told us about what they heard from their parents concerning the information about our family's bloodline and where our family names originated from. This method of relaying information is not always accurate, because when crucial information is left out or being misheard, it can cause a lot of misunderstanding and confusion within the immediate or extended family. This is because other branches of the same family also have their own source of information on the same topic. The accounts may vary when there are simple mistakes like these. I believe this is why there are lots of court cases in the Lands and Titles court on family names and genealogies as we see today, because the information received by later generations is not authentic, while others can also fabricate this information to work in their favour on whatever agenda they have.

So now that the world has evolved into the advancement of technology to obtain, attain and document certain information, it is our duty as family oriented people to authenticate the information that we have on our family names and genealogies, to preserve and honour it not only for ourselves, but for generations to come. Names are very important to a family because they carry its deep, personal, familial, identity and historical connections. For the family names to survive and be recognized, the task falls on the bearer/holder alone, because they have already known the importance and responsibilities that come with the names they are given, and it is up to them to fulfil its meaning and purpose. The influence of the names on an individual can change the whole perspective of that person in life, and contributes a lot in his/her behaviour.

For William F. Murphy<sup>28</sup>, names have important significances in the development of individuals, and often give clues to their attitude towards themselves and others with whom they have been closely associated. This is a classic explanation as to how our names impact our lives in many ways, because a person acts according to the meaning of his/her name. In the case of chiefly titles and the purpose of those names in the Samoan context, it is reflected on the decisions the holders make and the actions they take. This is why naming and names are very essential and also very significant in the context of *'aiga* in the Samoan culture. That is where self-fulfilling of a name comes in. A person's name when given comes with a prophecy or a purpose, and to self-fulfil it in the person's own will and conditions, this single act and decision making answer the aim of this study.

### **3.3 The *Fa'asinomaga* (Identity)**

The "*Fa'asinomaga*" or the identity is the fact of who you are or what a person is. In this section of the chapter, my focus would be on the identity in the Samoan culture and context. Thus, identity in general is part of a person's self-conception and self-perception that is related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class or any kind of social group that has its own distinct culture. In the Samoan culture, it is governed by various customs, all in line with core values within the Samoan way of life like the *matai*, family, language, the environment and more. The *fa'asamoa* in its essence of the word is slowly changing due to their exposure to the western lifestyles and modern ways of living.

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<sup>28</sup> William F. Murphy, "A Note on the Significance of Names," in *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 26:1 (1957): 105.

The wisdom which our ancestors put into the founding of our culture and traditions, revolved around family and religious values, was a genius idea. We have now seen it and have experienced it within our own Samoan families and also with the nation being founded on God. Not only it is now a Christian country, but the culture also exerts a large amount of respect for others, especially the elders and boosting self-respect. It teaches us about true respect and trust, about knowing God, and about communal living and sharing with each other. It also teaches us about love, family and knowing who we are.

How we define ourselves is a self-representation of our culture, relationships, and the will to do the things that matter to us. It is also how other people define us. As a Samoan knowing all these things now and knowing who you are, means knowing your identity. No one, no matter what ethnicity and nationality or whether it be your own, can take that away from you. Our sense of identity and belonging in this world is impacted by many factors, which includes our characteristics that we have inherited from our parents and ancestors, and also our experiences within our households and communal involvement.

According to Clarke Stowers, *fa'asinomaga* as a way of identifying a family member in and through his or her social and cultural links to a family and village in a Samoan society, is an honoured identity.<sup>29</sup> Honouring that identity will direct that family member to complete his or her role in the family or community, and solidify the relationships that it produces. Leaupepe Pita Leaupepe also elaborated on the primary connection of the family '*aiga*', to our Samoan cultural identity '*fa'asinomaga*', of which it is portrayed and reflected in the way we act and behave towards others. It is the

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<sup>29</sup> Clarke Stowers, "Names as Hermeneutics to Read Texts: Fofogaolevai and John the Baptizer (Mark 1:1-15)" (BTh Thesis, Malua Theological College, 2017), 4.

essence of the *fa'a-Samoa* which links these two aspects to the importance of the *matai*-system in the Samoan cultural context.<sup>30</sup>

Another important aspect to consider here is the interconnection between a place (land) and our identity. Saili Lilomaiava-Doktor explains this identity connection with the changing morphology of graves. In here, we can see that all Samoans have rights to these lands in their ancestral villages because it is in their identity claims. It comes not only with name privileges, but also with land to make it all complete.<sup>31</sup> Understanding the importance of identity in our cultural context, therefore, helps us immensely in shaping the way we think of ourselves, making positive changes in our decision-makings and our lives. It also empowers us to utilize our rights accordingly and helps us to be more aware and conscious of our responsibilities that gives purpose to our identities.

With that awareness in mind, it does not cause any role confusion for us within our cultural context, for we now know who we are and where we belong. Thus, to know where we belong, is having a solid identity to fit in the environments and societies that we were brought up in. In order to fulfil the purposes of our names, we should learn to accept all that is related to it, which is what makes us who we are. Therefore our names play a very significant and vital role in our lives, by showcasing not only our identity, but also our culture and background.

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<sup>30</sup> Leaupepe Pita Leaupepe, *Samoa i ona soifuaga i ana Aganuu* (Auckland: Pacific Books Producers Limited, 1995), 13.

<sup>31</sup> Saili Lilomaiava-Doktor, "CHANGING MORPHOLOGY OF GRAVES AND BURIALS IN SAMOA," *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 125, no. 2 (2016): 171–86.

## **Challenges of Naming for Certain Individuals in the Bible**

There are various reasons why someone would face difficulties with naming and also with names. It might be that they are not satisfied with the names given to them due to their meanings or what they symbolize, or it may be that they are not proud of the heritages and nationalities or ethnicities that these names represent. If we look into the scope of the Samoan context, for me personally, I do not know of anyone nor have I come across someone that does not have a name. In any Samoan family, parents tell their children their genealogies of whom they are descended from.

From experience, a new-born child was given his or her name, with the given-names that have been orally passed down from one generation to another, in order for the one being named to know his/her roots and cultural identity. There were no records of names being kept, until sometime later when Christianity entered our shores. Even though these genealogies do not have that much of authenticity, they have become the most valuable possessions in Samoan families in order for them to claim and uphold their rights to titles, lands and properties.

Challenges with names go a long way, and without names, then I believe that we are purposeless in any cultural context or within our households for that matter. In today's world, it is impossible to go anywhere or do anything without a name to identify yourself. It would be an unimaginable feeling. Speaking about being nameless, the Old Testament tells of many unnamed women in their narratives, with many considering this approach as portraying the authors' agendas and also the context in which they were living in at that era. For Koplowitz-Breier, despite the presence of such nameless women in the Hebrew Bible, she feels that a proper name individualizes a person, and the lack of it makes him or her less noticeable and less important. A figure who does not

bear a name is not a full person.<sup>32</sup> Likewise with Noah's and Job's wives, their names were not specifically mentioned, though a common name given to Noah's wife in Genesis according to Jewish traditions is Naamah - the sister of Tubal-Cain, meaning "beautiful". Tubal-cain is a descendant of Cain, the son of Adam and Eve, a brother to Naamah who is Noah's wife here. Her name is not specifically mentioned in Genesis and is still unknown, but Naamah is a common name given to her by the Jewish writing.<sup>33</sup>

In Jopie Siebert-Hommes' view, a person who is given a name is granted a role, as in Abram becoming Abraham, Sarai becoming Sarah, individuals whom were granted roles through the names they were given, and that was very important. But for the names not to be mentioned in a narrative where they play an important role, their importance lessens to a point where they are not recognized.<sup>34</sup> A similar situation is seen in Hananel Mack's view of Job's wife, according to the apocryphal account of '*Divrei Lyov*' meaning "*Satan maltreated Uzit*." Mack believes that the assigned name transforms the wife into a central character of the whole plot, portraying her as more unfortunate and afflicted than Job himself.<sup>35</sup>

Now, though the significance of names and their assigned roles have been positively noted above, one cannot escape the fact that in Hebrew society at the time, women were classed and labelled as assets in their households. There was no gender

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<sup>32</sup> Anat Koplowitz-Breir, "Commemorating the Nameless Wives of the Bible: Midrashic Poems by Contemporary American-Jewish Women," *Religions* 11, 365 (2020): 1-20.

<sup>33</sup> Tim Chaffey, "Who was Noah's Wife?," *Answers in Genesis*. <https://answersingenesis.org/bible-characters/noah/who-was-noahs-wife>. [accessed 4/10/22].

<sup>34</sup> Jopie Siebert-Hommes, "The Female Saviors of Israel's Liberation: Twelve "Daughters" in Exodus 1 and 2," in *Torah*, eds. Irmtraud Fischer & Mercedes Navarro Puerto (Atlanta Georgia: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 295-312.

<sup>35</sup> Hananel Mack, "Wife of Job: Apocrypha," *Jewish Women's Archive*. <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/wife-of-job-apocrypha>. [accessed 4/10/22].

equality, for it was a male-dominated society and women's voices were unheard and silenced. To quote an example from Exodus 2:16:

“The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water and filled the troughs to water their flocks” (Exo 2:16).<sup>36</sup>

The author does not give the names of the daughters of Reuel who went to draw water from the well. It showcased how the women were viewed as having no connection or limited roles in society through being nameless. We have privileges and honour in our given names, but having no name is of major concern to us. Reuel had seven daughters, and none of them was named until one was offered as Moses' wife (Zipporah). Women in the Hebrew Bible are only known with their relationships with men as given by the histories recorded, but Siebert-Hommes points out the importance and significance of the “Twelve Daughters” in this Exodus story, as either equally or even more important than the main male characters, and also made the history of Israel possible to go on.<sup>37</sup>

Even women with major roles to play in the Torah remained unnamed. This takes away their privileges as human beings, and also their importance to humanity. The agenda behind the women here is crystal clear, patriarchal masculinity was very strong and common. Speaking of ancient Egyptian women being dominated by kings, and scarcely getting any mention in political histories, Gay Robins says that when a woman is to be married for diplomatic reasons, her fate depends on the interest of her homeland. Such women were little more than commodities to be treated for peace and alliance.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Holy Bible, NRSV.

<sup>37</sup> Siebert-Hommes, 298.

<sup>38</sup> Gay Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (Atlanta: Harvard University Press, 2012), 11.

Despite these shortcomings accorded to women being unnamed, there are indeed positive stories noted within the biblical narratives, where women had public roles, such as prophetesses (Judges 4-5; 2 Kgs 22:14; Ezek 13:17), mediums (1 Samuel 28),<sup>9</sup> served at the tabernacle (1 Sam 2:22), involvement in public expressions of piety (Exodus 15; Ezek 8:14) and recognized as wise women (2 Sam 14:2; 20:16; c.f. 1 Sam 25:3). Epigraphic remains from archaeological excavations also suggest that women in ancient Israel may have had public roles.<sup>39</sup>

In this day and age, however, women now have a voice and are exercising their human rights in almost everywhere around the world, not only religiously, but also politically and socially. Gender equality has become an interesting and major topic being debated in almost every country. The feminists are now taking their stand to maintain their honour of not only as human beings, but also as recognized human beings who matter just as much as anyone else no matter what gender, so that their voices may be heard and their names be recognized.<sup>40</sup> They are now speaking up out of the ill-treatment of women in the Bible and also being nameless. In order for women to fulfil their purposes in what they stand for to make meaningful names for themselves, let them remember and gaze upon the importance of the heroic mothers and women who kept Israel's liberator (Moses) alive to fulfil his purpose.<sup>41</sup>

With much respect to this very sensitive topic and those that pose these challenges about names, we should now understand the importance of what our names represent

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<sup>39</sup> Edward J. Bridge, "A Mother's Influence: Mothers Naming Children in the Hebrew Bible," in *VETUS TESTAMENTUM* 64 (2014) 391.

<sup>40</sup> Renee Reimer, "The story of a modern-day Red Tenant: Empowering women through Bible reading" in *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 22.2 (Fall 2021), 35. For Reimer, the hope is there to give voice to the women of the Bible—those named and unnamed, those whose stories we know and whose stories we are now discovering—our voices will help these women's stories to find their rightful place in the church and continue to speak to generations to come. We read the Bible from a feminist perspective in order to reclaim it for ourselves.

<sup>41</sup> Siebert-Hommes, 312.

not only for ourselves, but how others view and identify us. Whether a male or female, no one wants to be nameless or be alienated from this matter of existence. It becomes a bigger challenge for us in this type of situation when we are not appreciative of our given names. Our actions give meanings to our names and when we leave this world, we want our names to be remembered and echoed in time and leave our legacies behind. This notion is duly reflected in an inspirational quote penned by Shannon L. Alder, who noted that, “Carve your name on hearts, not tombstones. A legacy is etched into the minds of others and the stories they share about you.”<sup>42</sup>

## Summary

The significance of naming and the names in the Samoan context play a major role not only in their cultural context but also in the life of any Samoan. With a name being the bridge that interconnects the three given aspects of the *fa'asamoa* which are the *Fa'amatai*, the *Aiga* and the *Fa'asinomaga*, operating and functioning together to construct a complete Samoan who values his/her name and what he/she represents, especially to have that sense of belonging in knowing who you are and your significance in this world. The challenges that the names give rise to are what make naming more interesting, because if you are not challenged to make a meaning for your name, then it would be a meaningless name. Thus, since we have names to tell our stories, let us set good examples for ourselves with the hope that it would have an impact on the lives of the coming generation, to make something about their names on their own terms. That would be the fulfilment of this journey we have with our names.

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes> [accessed 3/10/22].

## Conclusion

The conclusion of this research paper is the analysis of naming as self-fulfilling prophecies in different aspects of life with its significances in different contexts as given in the assorted chapters. It was in two parts. Firstly, the overview on the process and the significance of naming in the Samoan context and the Biblical world as prophecies being self-fulfilled. Lastly, was the theological significance of naming with its relation to a cultural context and explaining the overall purpose of this study on naming as a self-fulfilling prophecy inclusively for everyone. Names as we have learned from this research has a lot of functions for a person. It acts not only as an identifier, but also as a determiner. In understanding these functions and roles then, it is not that hard to understand its importance to each one of us. Its function as a prophecy, enacts a purpose upon the carrier of a specific name to fulfil that purpose willingly in respect to its meaning.

As far as naming is concerned, and its significance in our Samoan context, as well as in the biblical world as prophecies being fulfilled, this thesis has duly highlighted the theological connections. As noted in Chapter 1, and the process of being named in a Samoan family, families have different methods and reasons as to why and how names are given to a person. Some have religious views and reasons, others have personal or purposeful reasons that makes the names more meaningful to them and the bearer of that name. It is for the same purpose that I have decided to use the different ideas and methods that my parents used to name me and my siblings. We all have different back stories as to why my parents gave us our names, but I know for a fact that it is not the same case with every other Samoan family because we may be given the same names, but we differ on many grounds and reasons as to why we were given those names. As far as our family is concerned, my parents named me after a theological

teacher who helped out a lot with my father's studies at the Pacific Theological College, in Fiji, supervising his thesis and influencing them on many positive factors in life. In order for me to live out my name "Russell" to fulfil a purpose or maybe a prophecy as to why my parents gave me this name, I shall first accept my name as it is given and then work my way into imitating my namesake with the hope that I fulfil this purpose on my own terms.

In situations such as these, one hardly thinks about it, but it is that connection we have with our names that eventually leads us down that path. I cannot say the same for others, because we all have different morals and principles that guides us to whatever path we choose to take in life. Naming in the Biblical world as I have specified in the second chapter, we see some of the names that have lived out to fulfil their purposes and meanings for that matter. It is on those grounds that I believe naming can also be a prophecy to some but not all. For most of the people in the Bible, they had achieved this self-fulfilling acts through the guidance of God. Therefore, with God leading the way for us, we would not be confused or disappointed with whatever name we are given, because God's name itself is present and dwelt everywhere. As John Briggs Curtis noted,<sup>43</sup>

The name of Yahweh is a hypostasis of God, identical with God in every way. Where Yahweh's name is, there Yahweh is. And the dwelling of Yahweh's name in any chosen place does not diminish the anthropomorphic conception of God.

It is very clear that the name of God is divine itself. It is present everywhere, and it does not choose or favour a significant place to dwell. That is the nature of God. No wonder why there have been a number of name changes in the Bible, so that God can set these people on the right path in order to carry out his will on earth. To be named by

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<sup>43</sup> John Briggs Curtis, "Some Observations on D's "Name-Theology"," *EGL & MWBS* 13 (1993): 23-29.

God, it would be a divine honour because it comes with that divine purpose and blessing. So who wouldn't want to be named by God? The names used were chosen specifically for this reason, and if it wasn't for the limitation of words for this paper, I would have included some unusual names that are in the Bible and research on it. Remaining true to the aim of this project, naming can be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Furthermore, the theological issues surrounding the cultural manifestations of being 'Named' has, therefore, warranted the use of the anthropological model as its guiding mechanism throughout this thesis.

The second point of contention which I have duly emphasized in this thesis is that of the overall purpose of naming as a self-fulfilling prophecy for all. There is no doubt of God's involvement in the process of naming because the reason for it stems from inside the person who is doing the naming. I believe that God is working miracles there, causing people to feel and know what name to choose from. In the Samoan cultural context, we have discussed the interrelationship of the *fa'amatai*, the *'aiga* and the *fa'asinomaga* and how they are all connected to a person through a name. That tells us why name is a major topic to consider, because it is predominant in the life of an individual, as it is in the Samoan context. The three aspects presented are monumental and treasured by all Samoans who value their heritage and culture, and in allowing these three aspects to have meaning to our existence, we have accomplished therefore, the basic significance of naming in our context.

Theologically speaking, we have seen changes nowadays with our culture being merged with our Christian beliefs, so that they can function in unity with one another. Samoa as a Christian nation founded on God has embraced the close partnership and resonance between the various cultural values and traditions, and the message of the gospel. Though possessing different priorities and with different focuses, the merging of

gospel and culture has indeed helped in people coming to grasp the meaning of the gospel furthermore.

Thus, it is a must to see our culture being merged in a hybrid sense as far as religion is concerned, to boost not only the spiritual lives of people, but also for people to appreciate and value their culture at the same time. This is because when one becomes uncertain about a situation in the cultural side of things, then there is the religious side that we can look to for solutions and answers. So that the names not only have a significance and a self-fulfilling objective in the cultural context, but also on the religious side as well. God works in mysterious ways, ways that a person cannot fathom or even comprehend because that God's nature, and he is present in everything that we do and everywhere we go.

Naming as a result in this study is an inclusive topic that applies to every one of every race and every age. No matter how much we try and detach ourselves from it or even try to ignore it, it is always there and it will always be there for us to know and understand who we are as persons, citizens, leaders or Samoans, etc. It does not point to a particular culture or religion, but it affects every culture, ethnicity and religion. To know God is to know ourselves first, so what better way is there? Let us start with our names. This research is also a timely reminder for us all that naming as a self-fulfilling prophecy is not just finding out what the meaning of our names are or whether they are prophecies or not. Naming is bigger than any of us, because it defines and identifies us individually, and it also reflects the unseen connection that we have with other people and everything in God's creation. Our names are our passports and tickets anywhere in this world. Likewise, our names also determine the place and space that we belong to. It is surely a gift from God. So let us appreciate it, value it, take good care of it and give meaning to it, and most importantly make the most with it.

## Glossary

*Aiga* – family, relations, home

*Fa'a-matai* – chiefly system in village, oratory roles of titled men

*Faa-Samoa* - Samoan culture, traditions, values

*Faasinomaga* – identity

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