

Bite Size Bible Study

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The Importance of Names is not recognized by most of us in the Western Culture. We are named a cute or sometimes family name our parents think up when we are born, and we are stuck with it for life.

In many other cultures a persons name is much more important. In the Hebrew culture a persons name represents their identity within the community. Family names are very important and to shame the family name is unthinkable.

In Hebrew the word most often used is *shem*. But it means more than just a handle (a name or nickname), it is a representation of your reputation, authority, and honor.

In Biblical times God sometimes changed a persons name. Abram (meaning a withered wander) became Abraham (a father of nations). His wife Sarai (a barren old woman) became Sarah (the mother of princes).

All of our English Bible translations tell us of the birth of “Jesus”. But was that His name? Is that the name He was known by? No. His name was Hebrew and He was called Yeshua (yeh-SHU-ah), meaning God’s Salvation. It is actually a contraction of the name Yehoshua (which is often translated into English as Joshua). It is much like my first name, Leland but I most often go by Lee.

Jesus is known in other cultures by different sounding names. In Hungarian He is called *Jézusnak*. In Maori He is called *Ihu*. In Haitian Creole they call Him *Jezi*. But the power in His name is not about pronouncing a certain set of sounds; it is in His Character and Supreme Authority. In other words who He is, not His handle.

All of the above goes for “God the Father” as well. What ever handle or name you use, it should be in recognition of His Character, Supreme Authority and Suzerainty.

One of the Commandments tells us; *“You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.”* Deu 5:11 (NIV)

Are we talking about the word we use for God or his Character?

In the prayer outline Jesus gave us we are told to keep his name holy; *You, therefore, pray like this: ‘Our Father in heaven! May your Name be kept holy.’* Matthew 6:9 (CJB)

So we are to not misuse His name and to keep it holy. How is that done? The Hebrews call this *kiddush hashem* (sanctifying God’s name). It means to live in such a way as to bring Glory to God among those who you associate – live a life of integrity.

The opposite is *hillul hashem* (profaning the name). This is any action that is taken that is against the instructions God has given us. It can be (but not limited to) dishonesty, rude or slanderous talk or actions, using God’s name in a useless or crude way, using his name in an oath, etc.

“To avoid a sin or to obey a command, not from fear or ambition but purely out of love of God, is to sanctify His name in public.” Maimonides

So as you see the word “name” in your Bible reading or in the songs we sing; give some thought as to whether it’s meaning is 1)a handle or 2) an identity, reputation, authority or honor.

Here are some scriptures that might mean more to you now that you have a fuller meaning of the word “name”.

*Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his **name**?’ Then what shall I tell them?”* Exodus 3:13

*A good **name** is better than fine perfume,* Ecclesiastes 7:1a

*I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, **in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.*** 1 Corinthians 1:10

*He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his **name is the Word of God.*** Revelation 19:13

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