

# Coach House Church BEACONS

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## WHAT'S IN A NAME

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Names are often important for us. It represents part of who we are. We relate people's names with who they are. It's how we remember them. They are also important in the bible. People were named for particular reasons or changed their name at a significant time in their lives. The new names meant something about their new purpose or personality.

I got married about a year ago now and therefore changed my name. This was strange at first and sometimes I still forget that my name is different. It means I'm part of a whole new family and me and my husband are now identified as one.

There are lots of examples in the bible of people being named for particular reasons. Sometimes it was to do with how they were born, or why they were born, or their parents' reaction to them being born. Sometimes it was to show family ties or something of God's message. Let's have a look at a few examples that we can find in the bible.

Let's start with John the Baptist. The prediction of his birth and his naming are recorded in Luke.

**Luke 1:5-22**

**In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. 6 Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. 7 But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.**

8 Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, 9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. 13 But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. 14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. 16 He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

18 Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

19 The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. 20 And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. 22 When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

Now the name John means "God is gracious". John went on to preach about Jesus and let others know who Jesus would be and why He was important. John opened the door to people understanding that God wanted to forgive them and that He was a

gracious God. Further to that his birth was an act of grace. His parents were old and couldn't have a child, save for the grace of God.

Another name that was given at birth was Jacob. His story is in Genesis, the first book of the bible. He was called Jacob because he came out of the womb holding onto his twin brother's foot. The name Jacob has a few different meanings. It means heel, to follow or deceiver. Now all of these applied to Jacob. He came out of his mother's womb following his brother and holding his heel, but as he grew up, he also became a deceiver. He fooled his brother, Esau, and his father into stealing the birth right and blessing that belonged to Esau.

However, later in Jacob's story, God changes his name. Jacob's name change is in a very strange story where Jacob wrestles with a mysterious man in Genesis 32: 24-28.

**24 So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. 25 When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. 26 Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."**

**But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."**

**27 The man asked him, "What is your name?"**

**"Jacob," he answered.**

**28 Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel,[a] because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."**

This was a pivotal moment in Jacob's life. He was returning to the land he grew up in with his family and belongings. He was going home to the place where his family would become a nation. God blessed him here. He was no longer a deceiver, but he was one that wrestled with God and survived. He could get through the struggles because God had promised him, he would be the father of a nation.

There are also examples of name changes in the new testament. Peter was one of Jesus' disciples. Peter is my favourite disciple because he's very relatable. He would often get himself in trouble by speaking before he thought. He struggled with spiritual discipline but was one of Jesus' closest friends. Peter was originally called Simon. This

means listen or hearing. He did a lot of listening and learning while he was following Jesus and heard what Jesus had to say. He understood who Jesus really was, even though he made many mistakes along the way.

In Matthew 16, Simon recognises who Jesus is. Verses 15-18 says:

**15 “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”**

**16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”**

**17 Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you that you are Peter,[b] and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades[c] will not overcome it.**

Simon Peter changed from someone who was just a hearer to someone who was the foundation of the church. This came more into fruition after Jesus had died and been resurrected and Peter had the Holy Spirit living in him. But Jesus saw what was inside him and who he could become.

Another example of a new testament name change was when Saul changed his name to Paul. Saul was one of the biggest persecutors of the church and met God in an amazing way on the road to Damascus. From then on, he changed to being one of the biggest evangelisers in the early church. He changed his name from Saul to Paul because this was such a significant moment. Paul had changed irreversibly.

God has names that show who He is too. He’s called **Jehovah-Jireh** which means God provides. He’s called **Jehovah-Shalom** which means The Lord Our Peace. He gives us peace when everything is turbulent. He is called El-Olam which means everlasting God. He will be there always and He is always the same. God has these names and so many more to help us understand His character and more of who He is.

Jesus name was also important. When Mary found out she was to be pregnant she was told to name her child Jesus. This is derived from the meaning to rescue/deliver. And that is exactly what he did. He rescued us from all our mistakes and sins to become children of God.

The amazing thing is that Jesus saved us from our original identity and moves us into a new identity with Him. This is the good news of the bible. He covers our flaws and our mistakes, and we become a new creation. We get the freedom to be able to become more like Him and adoption into God's family. We essentially get God's surname. So it doesn't matter who our earthly family is or what our name is because we are made righteous through Him.



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