

In the Name of God

In our culture, names are chosen for numerous reasons (the names of relatives, Bible names, distinctive or unique names, etc.), but rarely do people in this culture believe that the choice of a name dictates the future character of the child. But in many cultures, particularly that of Israel and surrounding nations in Biblical times, the name was an indispensable part of the personality. Hence, new names often were given in puberty rites or at religious induction. Further, only when people knew the name of a god could they call upon it. In many rites, knowing the secret name of a god allowed one to invoke that god's power, to control that god. In some societies, individuals are publically known by a common name (*e.g.*, by the day of the week on which they were born); knowing the true name of an individual implies power over that individual. A simple example is that, in the Middle East, one may command hospitality only by knowing the true name of the head of the house.

The great Greek philosophers exposed the contradictions of this cultural belief, but the general importance of names remained, especially in pagan religions. Finally, a compromise was struck; gods had names by which they were controlled, but only the gods (and perhaps an oracle or two) knew those names. So, devotees and priests would use multitudes of names in order to describe all the attributes of their gods and, perhaps, to chance upon the one that resulted in control over that god.

In the Old Testament:

The cultural understanding of naming something (what the ancient reader would imply, although that concept may or may not be in the context):

- Adam named the animals and Eve, implying dominion over them (Genesis 2:19 – 23)
- Renaming a city implied ownership (2 Samuel 12:28)
- Naming a geographical area after oneself is an attempt to live forever (Psalm 49:11)
- By naming Israel, God assumed control over it (Isaiah 43:1)
- To be called by the name of God implies ownership and dominion by God (2 Samuel 6:2, Isaiah 63:19, Jeremiah 7:10, 15:16, 25:29, Daniel 9:18)
- God knew Moses by name, meaning that God knew Moses' essential nature (Exodus 33:12 – 17)
- The name of a man lived on in his descendents (Genesis 21:12, 48:16, Numbers 27:1 – 11, Deuteronomy 25:5 – 10, 2 Samuel 18:15, and many more)
- Names are written in the Book of Life (Exodus 32:32 – 33, Psalm 69:28)

Knowing the Name was important to several Biblical characters:

- Jacob wanted to know the name of the angel with who he wrestled (Genesis 32:30)
- Manoah wanted to know the name of the angel who told him his wife would have a son (Judges 13:17 – 18)

God made a point of giving Moses His name (Exodus 3:13 – 15, 6:2 – 3) but specifically excluded using that name in magical rites (Exodus 20:7, Deuteronomy 5:11)

Invoking the name of God in oaths, curses or blessings implies faith in the attention of God, although the context reveals whether the faith was true or pagan (many places).

In the New Testament:

“Name” is also used in its common sense, *e.g.*, “His name was John.”

“Name” often represented the essence of the person:

- Acts 1:15 The number of names was about 120
- Revelation 3:4 You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments
- Revelation 11:13 About 7000 names were killed
- Father, Son, and Spirit are names that illustrate essential qualities of God
- John 3:18 He has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God
- John 12:28 “Father, glorify Your name.” Demonstrate the essence of your character.
- John 17:6 “I have manifested Your name to the men whom you have given Me.”
- John 17:11 – 12 “Keep through Your name...I have kept them in Your name”
- John 17:26 “I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You have loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”
- 1 Thessalonians 1:12 That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you
- Hebrews 1:4 He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they
- Acts 5:41 Counted worthy to suffer for the name
- 3 John 7 They went forth for His name’s sake
- 1 John 2:12 Your sins are forgiven for His name’s sake
- Acts 10:43 Through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins
- Acts 4:12 There is none other name given under heaven for men whereby we must be saved
- Philippians 2:9 – 10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow
- Revelation 2:14 You hold fast to My name

“In the name of Jesus” describes His essential qualities, not His authority. Our figure of speech, “in the name of the law,” arose from an authority-driven period of church history and is an incorrect application.

- Matthew 10:41 – 42 Whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple... (*c.f.*, Matthew 18:5)
- Matthew 12:21 In His name will the Gentiles trust
- Matthew 28:19 Baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- Mark 9:39 No one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me
- Luke 10:17 The devils are subject to us in Your name
- John 2:23 Many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did
- John 14:13, 15:16, 16:23, 26 The apostles were promised that they would receive whatever they asked while immersed in the character of Jesus (*c.f.*, James 4:3, Acts 4:30, James 5:14)
- Acts 2:38 Let every one of you be baptized into the name of Jesus Christ
- Acts 3:6, 16, 4:10 In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk (contrast 4:7, 19:13)
- Acts 8:16 They had been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus
- Acts 10:48 He commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord
- Acts 16:18 I command you in the name of Jesus to come out of her
- Acts 19:5 When they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus
- 1 Corinthians 1:13 – 15 Were you baptized into the name of Paul?
- 1 Corinthians 6:11 But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God.
- Colossians 3:17 Whatever you do in word or deed, so all in the name of the Lord Jesus
- 1 Thessalonians 4:1 We urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus