

Biblical Names

Verses about names in general

- Judges 13:18 “And the angel of the Lord said to him, ‘Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?’”
- Proverbs 22:1 “A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.”
 - A person’s name signified their reputation and standing in the community. We can express the same idea today by saying of a person that “their name is mud.”
- Secret names in Revelation
 - Revelation 2:17b “To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.”
 - Revelation 19:11-12 - “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself.”

Names of God

- El/Elohim (Theos)
 - “EL” -- God.
 - “el-oh-HEEM” -- First name used for God in the Bible. Normally, the “-im” ending is a plural (cherubim, seraphim, etc.) but in this case the plural ending is used to emphasize the word (compare the “Royal We” in English).
 - “THAY-os” -- God (in Greek).
- YHWH
 - Known as the Tetragrammaton (“four letters”). Its etymology is unclear. Sometimes vocalized as Yahweh or Jehovah, but the correct pronunciation is not known, since religious Jews do not say it. When reading the Bible, they substitute “Adonai” (Lord) or sometimes Elohim if YHWH follows Adonai (hence Lord God). In modern Bibles, the word is written as LORD (in all caps), and Adonai is written as Lord.
 - Also abbreviated as “Yah”, especially in names (Elijah -- “Yah is my god”), also in “Hallelujah” (Praise Yah).
- Adonai (Kyrios)
 - “ah-do-NYE” -- plural of *adon*, “lord”. Pluralized for the same reason as Elohim.
 - “KOO-ree-os” -- lord (in Greek). Often combined with “Iesus Khristos” into the phrase “Lord Jesus Christ”.

Old Testament

- Adam & Eve

- “ah-DAHM” -- red or ruddy
- “chav-VAH” -- life-giver.
- Cain, Abel, Seth
 - “ka-YEEN” -- metalworker. Also a pun on “kanah”, meaning “gotten” (Gen 4:1).
 - “HEH-bel” or “HEH-vel” -- breath, vapor
 - “Shayth” -- substituted
- Abram → Abraham, Sarai → Sarah
 - “av-RAHM” -- high or great father
 - “av-ra-HAHM” --father of many
 - “sa-RYE” -- uncertain, possibly “princess” in Chaldean
 - “sa-RAH” -- “princess” in Hebrew.
 - The original meanings of both of these names are uncertain, but they may be Chaldean in origin, while their new names are Hebrew. God changed their names to demonstrate separation from their old homeland and a connection to the new land that God had promised them.
- Isaac
 - “yees-HAWK” or “yeets-KHAK” -- laughter
- Jacob/Israel & Esau
 - “ya-ah-KOVE” -- heel-catcher (Gen 25:24-26)
 - “yis-rah-ALE” -- one who strives with God (Gen 32:24-30)
 - “ey-SAHW” or “ey-SAHV” -- rough or hairy
- Benjamin
 - “bean-yah-MEEN” -- son of the right hand, son of the south. Originally named Ben-oni, meaning “son of my sorrow,” by Rachel as she died giving birth to him. Jacob changed his name to Benjamin.
- Moses
 - “mo-SHEH” -- unclear. The verse links the name to the Hebrew verb *mashah*, meaning “to draw out,” but how the Egyptian princess knew Hebrew is not told. Scholars are divided on the origin of this name.
- Naomi/Mara
 - “no-oh-MEE” -- pleasant
 - “ma-RAH” -- bitter
- Absalom
 - “ah-bee-sha-LOME” -- father of peace. Ironic, for the leader of a violent revolution.
- Solomon (Jedidiah)
 - “she-lo-MO” -- peaceful
 - “ya-dee-da-YAH” -- beloved of Yah. A symbolic name given to Solomon by the prophet Nathan.
- Michael & Gabriel, the only named angels
 - “meey-kaw-ALE” -- who is like God?
 - “ga-vreey-ALE” or “ga-bree-ALE” -- man of God

- Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego -- Old names all mention God, new names all incorporate the names of Babylonian idols.
 - “dah-nee-YALE” -- God is my judge. Changed to Belteshazzar (“bale-teh-shah-SSAR” or in Akkadian “bale-too-shar-oo-SUR”) -- Bel, protect the king.
 - Hananiah (“kha-nahn-YAH”) -- favored by Yah. Changed to Shadrach (“shad-RAHK”) -- possibly means “command of Aku,” named for the Babylonian god of the moon.
 - Mishael (“mee-shah-ALE”) -- who is like God? Changed to Meshach (“may-SHAWK”), meaning “who is like Aku?”
 - Azariah (“ah-zar-YAH”) -- Yah has helped. Changed to Abednego or Abed-nego (“ah-BADE neh-GO”) -- slave of Nebo/Nabu.
- Shibboleth (Sibboleth)
 - This is an interesting example of identifying people by their accents in the Bible. The Ephraimites could not pronounce the “sh” sound, so when asked to say “Shibboleth”, they said “Sibboleth” which gave them away to the Gileadites who were hunting them. This word is still used today to mean a custom or tradition, usually a word or phrase, that distinguishes one group of people from another.
 - Peter was also given away by his accent as a Galilean, though we don’t know what that sounded like.

New Testament

- Jesus
 - “ee-yay-SOOCE” -- from Hebrew *Jehoshua* or *Joshua* (“yeh-ho-SHOO-ah”) meaning “God is salvation”.
 - Matt 1:21 “She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”
 - Eph 1:20-21 “...that He worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.
 - Phil 2:9-11 “Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
- Simon/Peter/Cephas
 - “SEE-mone” -- from Hebrew *Shimon* (“shee-MONE”) meaning “heard” (Genesis 29:33). The name *Simeon* is from the same Hebrew root.
 - “PEY-tros” -- a small stone or rock. The word used in Matthew 16:18 is “petra”
 - “kay-FAS” -- the Aramaic translation of Petros (John 1:42). Given this name by Jesus (John 1:42).
- Saul/Paul

- “SOW-los” -- from Hebrew *Shaul* (“shaw-OOL”) meaning “Asked.” The same as the first king of Israel.
- “POW-los” -- a Latin name meaning “little.”
- The name change in this case did *not* come from God. Probably Saul was his Hebrew name and Paul his Greek name from before his conversion. Luke begins to call him Paul in Acts 13 when he begins his missionary work outside Judea, where the people he spoke to would have called him Paul.
- John the Baptizer (Ioannes)
 - “ee-oh-AHN-ace” -- from Hebrew *Johanan* (“yo-khah-NAWN”) meaning “God is gracious”. This name was given to John’s father by the angel Gabriel.
- Barabbas
 - “bar-ab-BAS” -- son of the father. Possibly a pseudonym, taken because he was a robber or, some suggest, a revolutionary.

A Few Linguistic Notes

- You’ll notice that in a lot of these New Testament names, the “shh” sound from the original Hebrew is changed to an “s” sound. This is because the Greeks had no “sh” sound and couldn’t pronounce it. They also added an “s” to the end of most of these names, because it was common for masculine names to end in an “s” in Greek (sort of like how most words end in “-o” or “-a” in Spanish).
 - This can be seen in the KJV Bible, where the name “Isaiah” is written as “Esaias” in the New Testament.
 - The original name of the Philistines was “Palishti”, which became “Palesti” and then “Palestine”, the Roman name for the land of Israel.
- The Greeks also had no “y” sound, so they used an “iota”, which makes an “ee” sound and looks like a letter “i”.
- The phrase “Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior” in Greek is written as Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ, which becomes the acronym ΙΧΘΥΣ, meaning “fish”. This is where the fish as a symbol of Christianity originates.
 - Pronounced “ee-yay-SOOCE KHREES-tos THAY-oh HEU-yos SOH-tare”
- The first two letters of the Greek word “Christ” are *chi* and *rho*, which look like an X and a P. This is the origin of a symbol commonly seen in Catholic churches that looks like this:

