

SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF NAMES

QUESTION

Joseph gave his first-born son the name Manasseh, which name was a reflection of Joseph's life journey and difficulties he went through. Many a parent are telling their life stories through names of their children. e.g. Nhamo/Shupikai/Hazvinei/Muranganwa/Muchazivepi/Pedzisai etc. Is there any spiritual significance in the names or even the surnames that we answer to or the names that we give our children from a Christian perspective?

ANSWER

This is a very good question and the answer will assist a lot of people and this write-up will address specifically the significance of direct names we answer to or we give to our children. A name is basically a label, tag, title, or designation given to a person or an object. Mostly out of ignorance, some of our parents gave us pagan names and sometimes names with negative connotations and influence on our lives. Did you know that the origin of the name Linda means serpent or snake! Sometimes children are given names of a dead ancestor and living relatives. The traits and characteristics of that dead or living person will manifest in the life of the child. These days parents are very keen to give their own parents' names to their own children, maybe as a way of showing how much they love their own parents. But we must be very careful when we give our children such names. We must always ask if those parents were born again Christians serving the Lord and take our own sentiments aside. Overseas, parents are very shy to give their children the name Adolf because of its association with Adolf Hitler who caused the death of millions of people during World War II. Noone in their right mind will give their child the name Lucifer, but it is very common and acceptable to call our children Michael or Gabriel, because the latter two are God's most prominent angels. We will see that the names that we answer to have negative or positive connotations on our lives. **We must also be careful about accepting the nicknames that people give us.**

The name Manasseh, given to Joseph's firstborn son, means **"God has made me forget" or "he who causes one to forget,"** signifying God's ability to help one forget past hardships and start anew.

Ge 41:51 Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: "For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house."

(NKJV)

The name reflects and summarizes the hardships that Joseph had gone through in his life including being sold into slavery in Egypt and spending time in prison. Thank God Manasseh did not have to go through what his father went through because Jacob (Joseph's father) adopted Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, so that the boys might share in Jacob's inheritance equally with Jacob's own sons.

Ge 48:5 "And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine.

(NKJV)

The God of the Bible is very clear about His Name as pointed out in the Scriptures below:

- Ex 3:13 And Moses said to God, Behold, when I come to the sons of Israel, and shall say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they shall say to me, What is His name? What shall I say to them? 14 And God said to Moses, I AM THAT I AM. And He said, So you shall say to the sons of Israel, I AM has sent me to you. 15 And God said to Moses again, You shall say this to the sons of Israel, Jehovah the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My title from generation to generation (MKJV).

I AM THAT I AM is a very broad and all-inclusive Name from which comes the attributes and character of God. From I AM THAT I AM, the Hebrew people have come up with names of God such as Yahweh, Adonai, Yahweh Nissi, Yahweh Shalom, Yahweh Tsidkenu, Yahweh Raphah, Yahweh Yireh and etc.

In Biblical culture, names were prophetic and often shaped a person's destiny. If a name is associated with pagan deities, negative connotations, or ungodly influences, it may not align with God's plans for your child.

KEY /ANCHOR SCRIPTURES ON NAMES GIVEN

Php 2:9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,

(NKJV)

The above Scripture talks about God giving Jesus Christ a Name that is above all other names. This passage highlights the supreme significance of Jesus' Name, showing how names in Scripture represent authority, identity, and destiny. The passage calls believers to recognize the power in the Name of Jesus Christ and to understand that names, in general, hold deep spiritual and personal significance.

Let's look at the significance of the Name of Jesus:

1. It carries Authority and Power

Jesus' Name carries ultimate authority and power. It is the Name with the Highest power and authority. All other names are below it. In Biblical times, a name was more than just an identifier—it represented character, authority, and destiny. By exalting

Jesus and giving Him the highest Name, God affirmed that all creation must recognize His supremacy. Jesus' name signifies salvation, as seen in **Matthew 1:21**, where the angel declares that He will save His people from their sins.

In many cultures and religious traditions, names hold power. A name can reflect one's purpose, identity, or calling.

2. Submission to the Name of Jesus

Philippians 2:10 emphasizes that **every knee will bow** at Jesus' Name, signifying universal submission. This shows that names, especially divinely appointed ones, demand recognition and respect. It also reveals that in spiritual realms, the Name of Jesus carries authority over all powers, whether in heaven, on earth, or below the earth. That is why we are able to cast out demons in the Name of Jesus and even heal people in the Name of Jesus:

Mr 16:17 "And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; 18 "they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

(NKJV)

Lu 9:49 Now John answered and said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us."

(NKJV)

So, Believers are encouraged to pray, rebuke, and proclaim things in Jesus' Name, understanding the power it carries.

Joh 14:13 "And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

(NKJV)

That is why when we pray, we always end with the phrase "In Jesus' Name " or as some would like to say "In Jesus" Mighty Name"

3. God's Elevation of Jesus' Name as a Model of Honour

Jesus humbled Himself, and God elevated Him. This principle shows that names can carry honour and influence based on the character and mission of the person who bears them.

From the above, we noted that names have meaning and significance and they are tied to people's destinies. Just look around and see that names define who people are in life. For

instance, if one is called Nhamo, you will find that the person struggles in life. Jabez was given that name because his mother gave birth to him in pain.

1Ch 4:9 Now Jabez was more honourable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, "Because I bore him in pain." (NKJV).

So, when you name a child, you automatically define the child's destiny. So, let's choose the names of our children wisely. We must choose the names prayerfully because the names have a meaning which can shape the identity and destiny of the child.

We must also be very careful when we choose names for ourselves or for our children. We must not choose names that equate ourselves to God or share His glory. For instance, in certain countries today, they name their children **Jesus**, this is quite misplaced as this does not give reverence to the Name of Jesus. Jesus is the only Saviour and there is no other. The Bible warns us of not using the Name of God in vain:

Ex 20:7 "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

(NKJV)

We also know that God does not want to share His Glory with anyone.

Isa 42:8 I am the LORD, that is My name; And My glory I will not give to another, Nor My praise to carved images.

(NKJV)

Isa 48:11 For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do it; For how should My name be profaned? And I will not give My glory to another.

(NKJV)

Changing of Names in Life

So, can we change our names when we get born again and realize that they are pagan names or carry negative connotations for our lives? The answer is **YES** ! But it must be done after seeking the face of God. As previously discussed above, In the Bible, names hold deep significance, representing identity, destiny, and spiritual alignment. Changing a name can symbolize a fresh start and dedicating your child fully to God. Just as people were baptized and given new identities in Christ, renaming can be an act of rededication. If the name was given in a non-Christian or pagan ritual, it may carry negative spiritual weight. By renaming, you symbolically break any past connections and declare God's authority over the child's life or your own life if you are changing your own name.

Several biblical figures had their names changed to reflect a new divine purpose, such as:

- **Abram to Abraham** – God changed his name to signify his role as the "father of many nations."
 - Ge 17:5 "No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations (NKJV).
- **Sarai to Sarah**– Reflecting God's blessing on her to be a mother of nations.
 - Ge 17:15 Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name (NKJV).
- **Jacob to Israel** – A transformation from "deceiver" to "one who prevails with God."
 - Ge 32:28 And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed." (NKJV).
- **Simon to Peter** – Jesus renamed him, signifying his foundational role in the Church.
 - Joh 1:42 And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas" (which is translated, A Stone). (NKJV).
- In Acts 13:9 we learn for the first time that Saul of Tarsus was also known as "Paul"; and almost without exception he is known as Paul thereafter.
 - Ac 13:9 Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him
 - (NKJV)
- Jabez prayed that his life circumstances might change for the better and God granted him his request.
 - 1Ch 4:10 And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, "Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!" So God granted him what he requested. (NKJV).
- He is the same God that changed Jabez's identity and destiny for the better and he can change your life circumstances if you seek His face in prayer!

Even pagans also rename people as in the case of Daniel and the other Hebrew boys brought to Babylon. The Babylonians renamed Daniel and his friends after their gods, but Daniel and his friends remained faithful to their Hebrew names and identity.

Da 1:6 Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. 7 To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego. (NKJV).

Paul and Barnabas, while on their first missionary journey, performed a miraculous healing in Lystra. They called Barnabas "Zeus" (the chief Greek god) and Paul "Hermes" (the Greek messenger god, known for eloquence) because Paul was the main speaker.

Ac 14:11 Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" 12 And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. (NKJV).

Paul and Barnabas, however, tore their clothes in distress and ran into the crowd, telling the people that they were merely men, not gods, and urging them to turn to the true God.

The above scriptures show that names can carry spiritual significance both positive and negative.

Process of Changing Name

You must go through the following steps if you want to change your name or your child's name.

- **Prayer and Seeking God's Guidance** – Ask the Holy Spirit to confirm if a name change is necessary and what new name would honour God's purpose.
- **Legal and Practical Aspects** – If your children are older, consider how they will adjust to the new name and whether they are comfortable with the change. Also note that you might need to have affidavits and other legal documents that prove that the names on your birth certificates and educational certificates are aligned to the new name.
- **A New Name as a Prophetic Declaration** – Choosing a Biblical or godly name can serve as a blessing over your child's or your own life. You might need to go through a rededication or renaming ceremony at church with your Pastor.

We will also address Totem Names in another teaching.

Conclusion

We have seen that names carry a spiritual significance whether with positive or negative connotations on the life of the person that answers the name. Our parents like Joseph, through pain and ignorance, could have given us names reflecting their own struggles and challenges. We need to examine the spiritual meanings of our names and take steps to change them. It's never too late! If you feel led by God to change your names or the names of your children to something more spiritually aligned, you can do so. It can be an act of faith, identity renewal, and dedication to God's calling for you and their lives.