

# What's In a Name?

I'd like to talk about confusion and the source of confusion today.

*Gen 11: 1 And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.*

*2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.*

*3 And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.*

*4 And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.*

*5 And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.*

*6 And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.*

*7 Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.*

*8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.*

*9 Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.*

The name "Babel" comes from the verb meaning "mingled" or "confounded". "Babel" as such is not mentioned elsewhere in God's Word. We have the term "Babylon" and some people wonder why Babel is not otherwise mentioned. In Arcadian (a language that was once spoken in the Middle East) the name of this location is called "bab ilim" meaning "the gate of the god".

In inspiring Genesis, God used Moses to satirise some of the pagan beliefs that people had. These people took the spirit of Babel with them into the entire world. God said he would scatter them across the face of the earth. They took the spirit of Babel into the world. What was the real sin of the people of Babel?

*Gen 11: 4 And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.*

Is there anything necessarily wrong with a city? Seemingly not. God placed His name on the city of Jerusalem. He talks of New Jerusalem - a city exquisite in beauty. So the city was not a sin of and by itself. Perhaps the magnitude of the city? Reaching unto heaven? Elevating ourselves against God. A certain level of vanity was being expressed by these people. But the greater part of it was that there was an aspect of rebellion against God.

*... and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.*

The people ignored God's instructions. They were rebelling against what God had clearly indicated to them. In writing Genesis, Moses shows four different occasions where God tells the sons of Noah to do something - the type of life they were to live.

*Gen 9: 1 And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.*

*2 And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered.*

God was telling them "You have a responsibility to replenish the entire earth. Everything is there at your disposal - for your right and proper use."

*18 And the sons of Noah, that went forth of the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Japheth: and Ham is the father of Canaan.*

*19 These are the three sons of Noah: and of them was the whole earth overspread.*

This was God's intention, that they spread out and encompass the whole earth.

*Gen 10: 1 Now these are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth: and unto them were sons born after the flood.*

*32 These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations: and by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood.*

God gave an instruction as to what humanity was to do. But when we look at Babel we see humanity seeking to do the exact opposite. "Let us build a city lest we be scattered. We don't want to be scattered - we want to stay together." The building project was a deliberate attempt to thwart the express will of God. As a result it would be something that would interfere with the unfolding of God's divine scheme for the rest of humanity. It was an attempt to undermine what God was planning to do for humanity.

In Genesis 12 is the start of the story of Abraham and the patriarchs. The story moves from the descendants of Shem, Ham & Japheth, from a collection of people, to an individual or individuals. We now see God working with Abram and Sarai.

*Gen 12: 1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:*

*2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:*

*3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*

*4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.*

*5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.*

There was a willingness to do what God commanded. In the English language it all sounds nice and genteel. It's polite and English! But God is not restrained like the English people. The Hebrew instruction to Abram can best be described as "Get out of here!". It's a double repetition of the verb "to go". There's nothing polite about it. God was giving an unequivocal command to Abram.

Abram complied. He obeyed God's instructions. There was a willingness to do what God instructed, whether he understood it or not.

Haran, where Abram was, was one of the epi-centres of the world at that time. It was a great trading place in what we call today, southern Turkey. A place where all the trading caravans came and went receiving the minerals from Turkey and exchanging them with various commodities from other parts of the Middle East.

God said to Abram. "Get out of here. This is not the place for you. I'm going to scatter you". And Abraham said "Fine". But Abram wasn't perfect. He headed for the land, found it, and when it didn't suit him he headed off to Egypt. God had to drag him by the scruff of the neck and bring him back. Abram developed faith and learned something.

The very introduction of Abram as an individual, was that he was prepared to do the exact opposite of what the people at the Tower of Babel did. He was prepared to go where God said he should go. To be involved in God's purpose of replenishing and repopulating the entire earth without hesitation. Abram had to learn the hard way like most of us. God has had no compunction about recording the fact that Abram was human just like the rest of us.

The children of Noah wanted to avoid being scattered. Abraham was prepared to be scattered. The children of Noah wanted to make a name for themselves. God said "It is not for you to make a name for yourself.

*Gen 12:2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great ...*

"I will provide you with that which everybody else has been seeking for! I will provide you with that for which people will give all their productive effort. As a result of me giving it to you, you will be a blessing to all humanity." What a contrast!

On the one hand we have a group of people seeking to make a name for themselves. And in the process of doing this, they oppose and rebel against God. On the other hand we have a man, an individual whom God works with, who is willing to obey. And as a result of Abram's obedience God said He would give him a name that would be a blessing to all humanity. "Abram" means "exalted father". For a childless man it wasn't quite appropriate. His wife was called Sarai, which means "princess".

In terms of the people of her day, she was a marginalised person. Her position in society would be somewhat akin to a solo mother today. Someone who is considered not the greatest. To be childless was a mark against a woman at that time. We don't necessarily understand that in Western society today. Today people often delay having a family "because without children you can do so much more".

Mr (Harold) Jackson whom many of you will know married in 1978/79. He and his wife were both in their seventies. Almost the first question people in Africa asked them was "When are you going to have children?". Another couple - the Washingtons - whom we sent to Africa in 1976, already had children and grandchildren of their own in the United States. Yet people in Africa still asked them "When are you going to have children?" In Africa being childless is a stroke against someone. It is sad sometimes to hear the extent to which people will go to ensure they do have a children, and not just children, but in fact a son.

So here was a man, Abram, an "exalted father" and therefore on the periphery of society in his day, and a marginalised wife with a wonderful name called "princess". God said "I'm going to give you a new name"!

In Geneses 17, having gone through a number of experiences, both pleasant and unpleasant, Abraham is now ninety-nine years old.

*Gen 17: 1 Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless.*

*2 "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you, And I will multiply you exceedingly."*

*3 And Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying,*

*4 "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, And you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.*

In the preceding chapter, Ishmael had been born by Hagar. Abram was probably feeling contented. "At least I now have a son, and God can fulfil His promises through me."

*Gen 17: 5 "No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I will make you the father of a multitude of nations.*

Abraham means "a father - or chief - of a multitude". The AV translates it "A father of many nations have I made you."

*6 "And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you.*

A ninety-nine year old man was told he was going to produce children! It seemed to good to believe.

*7 "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.*

*15 Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.*

*16 "And I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her ...*

What greater blessing could she have in terms of that society! To give birth to a son.

*... Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."*

*17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"*

Here was a man who had been serving God for twenty five years, and he still had his lapses. I think God can forgive us for some of our shortcomings as well, because sometimes we find ourselves in a similar situation. We wonder whether God will fulfill His Word.

Abraham fell down laughing. We might think that was rather irreverent. Later, God said "You're always going to remember what you did to me- because you are going to call your son 'Laughter' - and it will always remind you of where this child came from."

This son came about not because of Abraham and Sarah, but because of the intervention of the Almighty God, and they were never ever going to forget that as long as they lived!

*18 And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!"*

*19 But God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name (Laughter) (Isaac); and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.*

God has a sense of humour! He makes us laugh at our own mistakes, and hopes that we in the process will also develop a sense of humour such as Him. New names were given to Abram and Sarai. Abraham was the "Father of a multitude" and Sarah was called "the mother of nations" and kings of people were to be of her.

*Gen 17:1 ... the Eternal said "Walk before Me, and be perfect" ...*

It was a requirement. The word "perfect" comes from a Hebrew word which means "to be without blemish or to be without spot". Abraham was called by God to walk before Him without blemish or spot. What is the goal of a Christian? To be perfect, without spot. (Revelation chapter 19 shows the Church is to be arrayed in clean white linen, for this represents the righteousness of the saints)

In Genesis 17, there is great importance on the making of a covenant. God gives them a new name. A name is very important. God names Abraham, Isaac, and when he's finished with Jacob he gives him a new name as well. Israel as he came to be known, on his death-bed blesses the sons of Joseph and said:

*Gen 48: 16 The angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; And may my name live on in them, And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."*

“Let Ephraim and Manasseh be named by My name.” Which name? Jacob. When we look at ourselves as people, we can see that as nations we are devious and supplanters etc. The name that God wanted to be named on Ephraim and Manasseh was not “Jacob” but “Israel”. The one who wrestled with God and prevailed. The God-given name. One of these days these nations will recognise and appreciate that.

Throughout God’s word this aspect of being named after someone takes on great importance. Coming down to the time of Christ, the religious leaders of the day placed a lot of emphasis on the fact that they had particular individuals as their fathers.

John was baptising in the River Jordan. They came out with the rest of the multitudes and wanted to be baptised. John told them. “You’re not ready. There's a prerequisite for baptism:

*Luke 3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.*

Their emphasis was “We are the physical descendants of Abraham, therefore God is ours - we own Him. Because of the promises He made to Abraham, He has to fulfil them whether He likes us or not. He is accountable to us as the descendants of Abraham.”

John the Baptist was telling them “Don't make such a claim, because God is able to raise up children for Abraham from stones. If you want to have the name of Abraham on you, be careful.”

*John 8: 39 They answered and said unto him,(proudly) Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.*

*40 But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham.*

That wasn't the attitude of Abraham. He didn't seek to destroy those who had the word of God.

*41 Ye do the deeds of your father ...*

Jesus was introducing an important concept. We are identified, and our father is identified, by the works that we do. If people want to claim Abraham as their father, and to use the name of Abraham, they have to show the works of their father.

*41 ... Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.*

*42 Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.*

*43 Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.*

They thought they could take their physical genealogy and demand that God bless them because of who they were. God said He would bless them, not for whom they were, but for what they did. “Are you living a life that is worthy of the name?”

*51 Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.*

*52 Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death.*

*53 Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead?...*

*56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.*

*57 Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?*

*58 Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.*

*59 Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.*

Being part of the descendants of Abraham is not based on physical genes. It is based on a relationship with God identical to that which Abraham displayed. It's based on being in a covenant relationship with God.

*Rom 8: 10 And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*

Jesus was saying that if people would heed and internalise His words they could have life.

*11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.*

*16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:*

The indwelling of God's Spirit identifies us as being the children of God. The children of Abraham, the father of the faithful. Christ has to be *in* us.

*Phil 2: 9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him **a name** which is above every name: (a name of such magnitude and importance that ...)*

*10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...*

Every knee should be in subject to that name. The name is important because it shows the allegiance of a person to what it is he is obedience to. Why was Jesus given a name? Because of His obedience to God's Plan. He was prepared to take on Himself the form of a servant and empty Himself of His godliness, become a human and subject Himself to death. He was prepared to subject Himself to the Father in a remarkable manner.

*10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;*

*Col 3: 17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.*

Our whole lives are to be lived according to a whole new basis. Not that which is established by humanity but that which is established by God Almighty. That is part of our calling. We can be sure of one thing. If something is acceptable to Jesus it is also totally acceptable to the Father, because their outlook is identical. They don't have great debates. For instance their outlook on the use and understanding of music is absolutely identical. Doing something that is in the name of Jesus, to His honour and glory, is doing it to the honour and glory of the Father at the same time.

Paul told the Thessalonians that we exist for a reason:

*2 Thes 1: 12 That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

We don't exist to glorify ourselves. We exist to glorify Jesus Christ - and the Father. As a result, if we live our lives to glorify the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we're also going to be glorified as well.

*Acts 11: 26 ... And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.*

The word "called" in this verse does not relate to what human beings do. The only use of that word "called" throughout the entirety of the New Testament relates to what God has done and what He instructs. This was a name that was placed on the church: that identified them as to who they were - Christian. It was not pejorative or negative at all.

In Revelation chapters 2 & 3 (talking of the 7 churches) we find this aspect of a name takes on a sense of importance

### **Ephesus:**

*Rev 2: 3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for **my name's sake** hast laboured, and hast not fainted.*

You have laboured for the name of Christ. You've upheld that name.

### **Pergamos :**

*13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast **my name**, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.*

*17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone **a new name** written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.*

"I will give you a new name because you have upheld The Name that is above all other names."

### **Sardis:**

*Rev 3: 1 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast **a name** that thou livest, and art dead.*

- You think you have a name but you are dead.

*5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out **his name** out of the book of life, but I will confess **his name** before my Father, and before his angels.*

### **Philadelphia:**

*8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied **my name**.*

*12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him **the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God**, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him **my new name**.*

We're going to have an identity that is linked to the identity of Jesus Christ. Contrast this with:

*Rev 17: 5 And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.*

The term “Babylon” in the Greek, comes from the Hebrew “Babel”. When I said to you earlier today that the term “Babel” doesn’t appear in the Bible after Genesis 11, it does - but every time it is used after then, it is translated as “Babylon”. The translators took the term “Babel” and inserted “Babylon”. In reality all of the references throughout the Old Testament in the Hebrew are to “Babel” and not “Babylon”. That's a Greek rendition.

The same mindset exists at the end time in this world as confronted God's plan following the flood. Where we will make a name for ourselves - we seek to make a name for ourselves - a name that is contrary to God. The same mindset exists - one that is hostility to the mind of God. It is vainglorious - wanting to elevate itself above God.

How do we find Jesus Christ being referred to as His return?

*Rev 19: 12 His eyes were as a flame of fire ...*

Jesus Christ comes to do battle with this system.

*Rev 19: 12 ... and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.*

And Christ said He is prepared to share that name with the church of Philadelphia.

*Rev 19: 13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.*

*16 And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.*

*Rev 22: 4 And they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads.*

- Those who have a place in the Book of Life.

Where does all this discussion of “the name” lead us today? What does it demand of us? Tomorrow is the Day of Pentecost. It’s the day that portrays the giving of God's Covenant to His people. Not only of what we call the Old Covenant at Mount Sinai, but the giving of what was essential for us to become New Covenant people. It’s a day that portrays the identification of ourselves with our brother Jesus Christ - so that we can seek that spotless perfection that the Father seeks.

It’s a day that portrays the identification of ourselves as God's people as distinct from the system of this world. It’s a day as well, in which we can understand our calling to share and be identified as the children of the father of the faithful, Abraham, the one who was called to provide a blessing to all humanity. Our calling is a calling to be different - to be named by a new name. A name that respects the fact that we seek God's will and not our own. It’s a concept that is totally and absolutely diametrically opposite to that which drives the society around us. It’s mind boggling.

It's interesting that it is all encapsulated in a Holy Day that we keep to the honour and the glory of God.

*Prov 22: 1 A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.*

To have God place His name upon us is worth more than anything that the rest of society can provide us with. It’s the most valuable thing that exists for a human being. Abraham set us the example. As a result of his example he is referred to as being the friend of God. A very intimate relationship. We can become the sons of Abraham linked in with that whole system and that whole name.



*Eccl 7: 1 A good name is better than precious ointment ...*

That's what we're called to. That's why we keep the Feast of Pentecost tomorrow. That's what our life is all about - the seeking of a new name that God is prepared to give us as we respond to Him.

... Peter Nathan

30-May-98

Basingstoke

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