

# What's in a Name?

Stephen was a precious child with a special name. He was named after Dr Stephens who had helped to save his life at birth. Stephen's parents doted on him and were offended if anyone shortened his name, which became a problem as he grew up and his friends called him 'Steve'. Their sensitivity caused a few chuckles! Names can be really important. By comparison, it has become so common nowadays to use the name of Jesus when emotions are raised, that many people no longer realise that they are doing it. However, it is a very serious matter and one of which we need to be aware.

## Bible Names

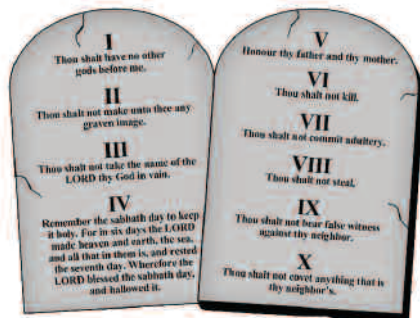
Stephen was named after a doctor. In the Bible many names have special meanings. For example, God changed the name of Abram, meaning 'exalted father', to Abraham, meaning 'father of a multitude' (Genesis 17:5). He also changed the name of Jacob, meaning 'supplanter' or 'usurper', to the name Israel, meaning 'prince with God' (Genesis 32:28).

## The Name of God

Even more importantly, in the Hebrew Bible God is referred to by several different names and they all reflect His character and purpose with us. An important example is when Moses asked to see God's glory. God said that He would make all His goodness pass before Moses and proclaim the name of the LORD (Hebrew: 'Yahweh') before him (Exodus 33:18-19). God then passed before Moses and proclaimed:

*"The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation"* (Exodus 34:6-7).

So the Jews were commanded to revere the name of God, and the third of the ten commandments is *"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"* (Exodus 20:7).



Consequently many of the psalms talk about the glory of God's name, and of men giving glory to His holy name, for example: *"Give unto the LORD, O you mighty ones, Give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness"* (Psalm 29:1-2). See also Psalms 34:3, 111:9 and 148:13.

People call on the name of the Lord (Psalm 99:6), they trust in it (Psalm

9:10), it is associated with forgiveness (Psalm 25:11; 54:1) and God does wonderful things because of His name (Psalm 23:3; 31:3; 79:9).

*“But I acted for My Name’s sake, that it should not be profaned among the Gentiles...” (Ezekiel 20:9; and also Ezekiel 20:14, 22, 44; 36:22).*

## **Jesus’ Name is Very Special**

Jesus’ name was chosen by God as announced to Mary by the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:31, 2:21). The name Jesus means ‘Saviour’ and this was explained to his step-father Joseph. *“And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).* Just as God’s name is special, so is the name of Jesus.

Believing in the name of Jesus allows human beings to become ‘children of God’ (John 1:12), in fact we are condemned if we do not believe in his name. Jesus said *“He who believes in him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).*

We can have eternal life if we do believe in Jesus’ name: *“...that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).*

People who are converted are described as believing in Jesus’ name (John 2:23) and are baptised into the name of Jesus (Acts 19:5). It is the only name under heaven by which we can be saved (Acts 4:12). The apostles were able to do miracles using the name of Jesus (Acts 3:16), and asked prayers in his name (John 14:13–14).

Preaching the gospel was described as bearing Jesus’ name (Acts 9:15) and Paul suffered for the sake of Jesus’ name (Acts 9:16) while others risked their lives for it (Acts 15:26).

## **Our Responsibility**

Without doubt the names of God and Jesus are holy and most certainly not to be banded around or used as swear words. Jesus asked *“Father glorify Your name” (John 12:28).* The name ‘Jesus’ declares the supreme mercy of God in offering us salvation. It is awful that in these days of ‘political correctness’ society is so careful about how people are described but pays little or no regard to the holy names of God and Jesus. We do well to take heed, because the inspired apostle Paul wrote:

*Therefore God also has highly exalted him and given him the name which is above every name, 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, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9–11).*

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