

23T04c What's in a Name? Nicknames

Hello my friends. Thanks for joining me today for an @ the PUNLA coffee table.

What's in a name? Names. Names are important, they help us picture the person we are talking about. The Bible is full of names, many of these names we struggle to pronounce. Belief it or not, most of these names have meaning which is important to their story. Over the past couple years, I have discussed some of these, but more questions keep coming in.

In this series, I'm going to look at many prominent names to determine how the name matches the behavior, are there other names used for this character, why is the name so important. Then we will ask the tough question. Is this really their name or maybe only a title or description? Should be interesting.

Today, I want to take a look at nicknames.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father please guide our discussion today. Help me to stay out of the way, so you can use me. If I say anything wrong, please don't let them remember my errand words but remember what you want them to hear regardless of my words. We trust you and we know you have promised the wisdom we need to understand your word in the Bible. Help us to let the Holy Spirit lead us and guide us. Bless our time together and I pray all these things in your name Lord Jesus. Amen.

Okay, Nicknames. These are monikers, aka, whatever you want to call them, they are names used to refer to a person that is different from their real names.

I have one of these. Most people that know me call me Kip but that is not my real name. My real name is Ken. But most people refer to me as Kip. It's my aka or moniker. It's my nickname.

Often a nickname is given to someone because of their behavior or appearance. An example would be a big strong guy named John. Because he is so big and strong, he got the nickname Ox. When people talk about Ox, they use his nickname Ox. Here is where it can get complicated. Listen to this. Ox went out to plow a field. He hooked up an ox and plowed, then Ox plowed the field. The ox got loose and ran away from Ox.

Do you get my point, when a real word is used as a nickname, we have to be careful when it's the person, the nickname, and when it's just the thing, attitude, behavior that the word means. Not every place in my previous story did the word ox refer to the person, sometimes it was just the animal ox not the person Ox. Get it?

In the bible we have many characters like this. We know their real names, but they are given a nickname or maybe several nicknames. Often both are used in the Bible, maybe even in the same text interchangeably. But we need to be very careful to not

assume it's the person everywhere the word appears, it might just be the word being used for what it represents.

I'd like to look at three of these to make my point. Paul & Saul, Simon & Peter, and Jacob & Israel.

First the Apostle Paul. Church tradition often tell us that Jesus changed the name of Saul the accuser to Paul the apostle on the road to Damascus. As with many church traditions, they sound good and even logical but are not based on Biblical fact.

The first mention of Saul of Tarsus is during the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7:58. If you are not familiar with this story it begins in Acts 6 where we learn about Stephen, the accusation against him, trial and stoning. And this story ends with Acts 7:58 (NKJ). Let's read it. *⁵⁸and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.*

The story of Saul continues in Acts 8:1-3 with Saul persecuting the Church, then the believers are scattered due to this persecution by Saul and others. Saul enters the story again in Acts 9. Let's read the account of the Damascus Road, Acts 9:1-9 (NKJ) *¹Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ²and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. ⁴Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" ⁵And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." ⁶So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." ⁷And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. ⁸Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.*

So, okay this is the big event. Jesus literally stops Saul in his tracks. We know Jesus is calling Saul by name. Saul, Saul, Jesus says. No mention of a miraculous renaming here. Later in Acts 9:10-19. Jesus tells Ananias to go find Saul not Paul. So according to the bible Saul is still Saul in Acts 9 after the Damascus road. The Story of Saul continues in Acts 9:20-30 with more about Saul, ending with Saul being sent from Jerusalem to his hometown of Tarsus. Please read this, Saul is called Saul throughout this story there has been no mention of Saul having his named changed to Paul, in fact there is no account of changing his name to Paul in the Bible. Saul is still Saul in Acts 11:19-26 some twelve years later when Barnabas and Saul go on the 1st missionary journey. So how did Saul become Paul, well it happens in Acts chapter 13 during Paul's 1st missionary trip. Let's read Acts 13:1-12 (NKJ) *¹Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and*

*Saul. ²As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. Preaching in Cyprus ⁴So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. ⁵And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as their assistant. ⁶Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, ⁷who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. ⁸But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. ⁹**Then Saul, who also is called Paul**, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰and said, “O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? ¹¹And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.” And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. ¹²Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.*

So did you see it. Acts 13:9 is the moment in the bible that Saul becomes Paul to us. From this point forward Saul is called Paul. Paul writes and signs his letter, Paul. And throughout the remainder of Acts, Paul is Paul, not Saul. So, what happened and when. The bible does not say Jesus changed his name. It is simply not in the bible. In fact, Luke the writer of Acts of the Apostles changes his name in the text at this point with a purpose. The text literally says Saul was also called Paul. The Greek says it more like Saul who was also Paul, meaning also known as Paul. This leads us to believe Paul has been Paul and Saul for some time. A hint is in the names themselves; Saul is a Hebrew name meaning prayed for or asked for. Also, Saul was the name of the first King of Israel, so it was probably a common name. Pa. or Paulus is a Latin name or Roman name. Remember Paul was a Roman citizen and as such he probably had a Roman name. It is far more likely Paul was always named Paul probably from birth. Saul may have been an assumed Hebrew name when he went to study with Gamaliel in Jerusalem.

Or his family being Hebrew may have given him this name. I’ve even heard his name may have been Paul Saul or Saul Paul. One being the surname. No one really knows but there is a hint in the Bible. Every time Paul is arrested, the authorities address him as Paul. Even when he appeals to Ceaser, he is called Paul. In a Roman court, as a Roman citizen, your proper name would have been used. This makes you think Paul was probably always named Paul. And Saul makes perfect since as well. Whether an assumed name or given name, Saul was a Hebrew name not a Roman name. It was common for people to assume a name which the culture would relate to.

Of course, I can’t be certain, what is certain is the Bible does not say Saul was renamed Paul after his meeting with Jesus on the Damascus Road. Also, why would Jesus

rename a Jewish man with a Roman name. Just think about it. So, I think it is best to follow Luke's example, The apostle Paul also known or called Saul.

Next what about Simon or Peter. Now we know him as the apostle Peter, Jesus literally gave Peter this nickname in Matthew 16:17-18 (NKJ) *Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.* Peter which comes from the Greek word *petra* or *petros*. But did you know that every place you see the English word *stone* or *rock*, it's the same Greek word *petra*, *petros*, *petran*, *rock* or *Peter*. Now in the case of Peter, I think we all understand this was a nickname. That's why many places in the gospels Peter is called *Simon* or *Simon Peter*. Because that was his name. I doubt his wife started calling him Peter, she probably called him by his name *Simon*. But of course, the New Testament writers know *Simon* better as *Peter*. Just like my friends call me *Kip* instead of *Ken*.

What about Jacob or Israel. If you know the story, in Genesis 32, God gives Jacob the name *Israel* which means *people of God*. Because his children would become the *people of Israel*, the *people of God*. So, his name is changed to *Israel*, right? Well *Jacob* is used 108 up to Genesis Chapter 32 in the Bible when God renames *Jacob*. Yet, the name *Jacob* is used for *Jacob* another 63 times in Genesis alone. Another 256 times in the rest of the Bible. So was *Jacob* renamed or given a nickname or moniker by God. Well, he never stopped being *Jacob*, in fact the two terms are used interchangeably through out the Bible. Now for the very tough question, is *Israel* only used to refer to the descendants of *Jacob* in the Bible. Well, no, *Israel* or in Hebrew *yis-ra-'el*; meaning *People of God*. It is actually very difficult to determine when *yis-ra-'el*; is referring to the nation of *Israel*, the descendants of *Jacob* or just generally the *people of God*. Remember, the descendants of *Jacob* are not the only godly people in the world. Let me give you one example from the New Testament. Romans 9:6-7 (NKJV) *But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham;* This one bothered me for years until I recognized, name and meaning. Not all *Israel* is God's people. Or not every descendant of *Jacob* is God's people. Of course, we as Christians already know this. We are God's people. Jews and gentiles who follow Jesus are God's people. Jesus says there is only one way and that is following Jesus. No other group can be God's people, only the followers of Jesus. People can use the name, *Israel* the nation. The only people of God are followers of Jesus.

Let's Pray

Father God, thank you for giving us the resources and sources to answer these tough questions. We know you know all things. When we see how things fit perfectly in your plan. Wow. Only with God is this possible Thank you for giving us the Holy Spirit to guide us and help us. Help us to open the Bible and look into history to answer our questions. I pray these things in your name Lord Jesus, Amen

Okay. Name, nickname. Name, description, title or what. It can be difficult for us to determine what the Bible authors meant sometimes.

So why is this important. We need to be aware that names are used not only to identify a specific person or group but can and are used to describe behavior or future events that will be like what happened to the group or person we associate with that name.

So next time you read a name in the Bible, take the time to find out what it means and consider is it a name or is it a description. Thank you for joining me @ the PUNLA Coffee Table today, I hope you'll join us for the rest of the series What's in a Name?

If you liked the message, please share the link with a friend. Send me comments, my email should be on the screen.

Until next time @ the PUNLA Coffee Table. God bless.