

## INTRODUCTION

What is in a name? A lot. Especially when we talk about knowing God through His names. Getting to know God by His names is more than simply learning a new word or discovering a new title, He goes by. Learning to know God by His names opens up the door to knowing His character more fully and experiencing His power more deeply.

In Scripture, God reveals Himself to us through His names. So, to fully grasp the significance and power of God's names, we first need to understand the importance of names in ancient cultures. In Old Testament times, a name was more than simply a lexicon. Rather, it revealed important information about the individual or thing itself.

A name is so important in biblical settings that Scripture frequently mentions God Himself changing someone's name to reflect a new reality. Abram, which means, "exalted father," was changed to Abraham, meaning "father of a multitude." Jacob, whose name meant "grabber of the heel" and "deceitful," received a new name after wrestling with God. His new name, Israel, means "one who prevails." In the book of Hosea, God changed the names of Hosea's son and daughter to signify changes in His relationship with His people.

Moving to the New Testament, we see Jesus telling Simon, His new disciple, "'You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter)" (John 1:42). The significance was that the Greek word translated Peter is Petros, which means "rock."

In Scripture, a name often implies purpose, authority, makeup, and character. In fact, a person's name is frequently seen as an equivalent of that person.

When Jesus said, "I have made your name known to them, and will continue to make it known" (John 17:26), He was referencing more than just sounds put together in a word. In Jesus, God came to earth in the flesh and unveiled His heart, mind, will, character, and being through the revelation of His name.

In the Bible "name" is a translation of the Hebrew word *Shem* (in the Old Testament) and the Greek word *Onoma* (in the New Testament). Together, "name" appears more than 1000 times in Scripture and routinely carries with it the idea of power, responsibility, purpose, and authority. A name not only expresses the essence and significance of what is being named but also, when properly authorized, accesses the quality it conveys.

Because of the depth of God's character, He has various names that reflect the many ways He relates to humanity. For example, God is called *Elohim* when revealing Himself as the all-powerful Creator. He is *Jehovah Nissi*—the Lord's banner of victory (a name you need to know when seeking victory in your life). God is also known as *Jehovah Rapha*, or the Lord your healer. When you are in need of provision, get to know the name *Jehovah Jireh*—God, the provider.

God has a name for every situation we find ourselves in. We need to learn the names of God because when we know His character and His capacity, we will find rest and discover peace and power in His covenantal care of us.

## The Majesty of God's Names

Names are important. Place names often identify the historical significance of locations. For instance, you probably know that the name Philadelphia means “the city of brotherly love.” Jerusalem means “the city of peace.” Current events in these cities may not reflect the meaning of their names; however, the names are significant when looking to the past or the future.

The same is true with people's names; names can offer insight into their identity. When a newly married woman changes her surname to match the name of her husband, she is agreeing to align herself and the very essence of her identity with the man she loves. A child who is adopted assumes a new identity by taking on the new parents' surname as his or her own.

Today, parents often choose baby names because of their sound rather than their meaning, so a nickname is often added later that reflects the person's character. If someone has a nickname of Slim, you can pretty much be guaranteed that this person is slender. Thus, nicknames often reflect more about people than do given names.

Names are so potent that parents will avoid attaching some names to their children. For example, we do not see anyone naming their kids Hitler or Benedict Arnold because those names represent something so negative that no one would want to associate an innocent child with it. Names do matter. In fact, they matter so much that we will often feel dishonored or disrespected if someone calls us by something other than our name or fails to pronounce our name correctly again and again.

While names do matter, it must also be said that a person can have a name and not have the quality attached to it. For example, throughout the past decade, many parents have named their sons Michael Jordan, hoping to somehow tap into his great basketball prowess. Some have named their child Bill Gates in an attempt to associate with his great wealth.

But, does having that person's name really transfer anything of value? Not at all. A child may bear a famous person's name, but that does not mean the child will exhibit the qualities of that person. A boy named Michael Jordan may be clumsy and uncoordinated. Or he can be named Bill Gates and be as poor and unimaginative as can be. The name alone contains no special power. Classification does not equal substance. However, when that name is connected to the quality it represents, the result is powerful.

We should not be surprised that, from Genesis to Revelation, the Bible demonstrates the power of a name. And much of that has to do specifically with God's names. If we were to write a chapter on each and every name of God that appears in Scripture, the book would be several volumes long.

God reveals many of His names to us so we can gain several different perspectives on who He is. One name by itself cannot fully represent God's majesty and power. One name alone cannot fully tell us all we need to know about this person we refer to as God.

God longs for us to know Him more fully. He desires to be known for all of who He truly is. When we truly know Him, when we understand and experience the depth of His goodness and power, our hearts are open to worshipping Him.

Knowing God's names is critical to our comprehension and application of the strength and victory that come through His multidimensional nature. God wants us to come face-to-face with His significance and substance.

Yet to do so requires knowing His names. In fact, throughout the Bible, when God revealed a new aspect of His character to His people, He often did this by revealing a new name. God has a name to meet the needs of any situation we may face in life. Whatever our present situation, God has a name that fits it.

When God asked Moses to lead the Israelites out of a difficult and challenging situation, He empowered Moses by revealing one of His names. Moses knew he could not go to the Israelites in the authority of his own name. "Moses said to God, 'Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you." Now they may say to me, "What is His name?" What shall I say to them?' " (Exodus 3:13). Moses needed to know God's name. He knew God's power and authority were attached to His name.

It was at this point that God unveiled one of the great names of Scripture. "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM'; and He said, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you"' (verse 14). God, the great I AM, showed up in Egypt to bring freedom to the captives and overpower the enemies who sought to keep God's people from their destiny.

## The Key to Unlocking the Treasure

My hope is that as we study this, that you will be introduced to God as if for the first time—through His names. You will come to know Him in ways you have not previously known. My hope is not simply, that you will learn how to pronounce some of His names, but rather that you will truly grasp the nature behind each one. When you identify and understand which name relates to your particular situation, you will be able to connect with God's power to deliver you in that situation.

God's name is like a key that unlocks the treasure God has in store for you. Scripture tells us, "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe" (Proverbs 18:10). His name alone is a fortified place offering freedom, security, and peace. The psalmist tells us, "He has sent redemption to His people; He has ordained His covenant forever; holy and awesome is His name" (Psalm 111:9).

God is so awesome that He has a name for whatever you are facing. And His names communicate specific attributes or characteristics of God that can strengthen and empower you in your situation. When you discover the name of God that applies to your situation, you will fully uncover the power, potency, privilege, and productivity that comes with that name.

## His Majesty

Psalm 8 begins with the well-known and often-quoted phrase, "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth." The names of God convey His fundamental majesty and glory. His name is nothing short of pure majesty! Discovering and experiencing the manifestation of His names in your own life will usher you directly into the presence of our majestic God.

When David pens Psalm 8:1, “How majestic is Your name,” he doesn’t merely say, “God, I know Your name.” Rather, he says, “Your name is excellent.” “Majestic” means “full of splendor and magnificence.” He follows this up with, “[You] have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!”

To know God’s names is to experience His nature, and that level of intimacy is reserved for those who humbly depend on Him. God will not share His glory with another. We must humble ourselves if we really want to know Him. We must realize our insignificance before we can recognize the significance that comes only through Him. We are to hallow His name and His name alone. You cannot know His names until you forget your own.

## Hallowed Be Thy Name

In fact, the Lord’s Prayer begins, “Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name” (Matthew 6:9). The term “hallowed” and the word “holy” comes from the same root word. It means “apart, or sanctified.” God’s name is hallowed. In other words, we are not to mix up God’s name with anyone else’s name. We are not to lump Him in with others or to toss His name out lightly. God’s names are hallowed. They are to be honored, respected, and treated with the reverence they deserve.

For example, if president Obama or Mayor Castor were to walk into a room, you would not address them by their first name. The position demands a certain level of recognition. You would not say, “Hey, what’s up?” You would place the title in front of the name and speak it with respect.

God’s names are to be treated with more respect than we would show to anyone else. We are to hallow not only the verbalization of His names but also the characteristics they convey. His name carries weight. He is the one and only true God who operates from heaven, and we must treat Him accordingly in order to fully actualize and experience the power He longs to provide.

The opposite of this is found in the Ten Commandments, where we read, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain” (Exodus 20:7).

Taking God’s name in vain is the opposite of hallowing it. The word “vain” means “empty, or without meaning.” It describes something as having no substance or even having an impairment. It has to do with using God’s name in a way that is inconsistent with His personhood. It involves stripping away the value that belongs to His name.

Unfortunately, today many people strip God’s name of its meaning. They will joke about God’s name, or they may even forge it. A forgery is an unauthorized use of a name. It is appealing to the benefits and provision that come with a name without the permission or authority to utilize that name. People today will often invoke God’s name without having a relationship with Him. They fail to give Him the honor due Him, all the while expecting to receive the blessings that come through Him.

We will sometimes use God’s name at the beginning of an event (in an invocation) or at the end (in a benediction) but leave Him out of the program in between. When God is not understood, valued, and appreciated for who He truly is, using His name is like an identity theft. Yet God is fully aware of who He is and His own personal dignity. He lacks nothing in the area of self-esteem, and He is not confused about His identity.

When God is not treated as He rightfully should be treated, He does not take that lightly. He will not conform to your interpretation of Him or manifest His presence in a situation where His worth is lessened or His character cheapened.

God is anything but cheap, and He demands that we recognize the value of who He truly is. He is who He is (the great I Am), and all honor is due Him. Through the revelation of His names to us, God tells us who He is, not who we think He is or want Him to be. He is the great I Am Who I Am, not the great I Am Who You Want Me to Be.

Too many people attempt to conform God to their own desires, yet God will not be defined by anyone outside of Himself. If you want to uncover and unleash the true power of God in your life, you must get to know His names as He reveals them. You must experience Him in the purity of His presence.

## Taking God's Name in Vain

Have you ever had anyone try to define you? This is the person who tries to tell you who you are without truly getting to know you first. Many people attempt to do this very thing with God. They use His name, yet their use is inconsistent with His nature. This equates to using His name in vain. That is why if you place your hand on the Bible in a court of law and swear to tell the "truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," and you tell a lie, you perjure yourself. What you have done is inconsistent with God's character and God's name. You have used God's name in vain.

For a good biblical illustration of using God's name in vain, consider the serpent in the Garden of Eden. He asked Eve, "Has God really said...?" (Genesis 3:1b). The devil did not have any problem bringing up God's name. In fact, he knew he would not get very far with Adam or Eve if he left God out of the discussion altogether. However, he used God's name in vain. He used it falsely.

From Genesis 2:4 through 3:1a, God is referred to as "the LORD God" (Jehovah Elohim). As we will see later, Elohim references God's creative powers, and Jehovah references God's relational authority to mankind. Satan omitted the name that referred to God's authority over humanity and just used the term God. This is because he aimed to use God's name for his own purposes and not God's.

People will often do the same with God and the Bible. They will attribute various sayings to Scripture, such as "God helps those who help themselves" or "Cleanliness is next to godliness." Taking God's name in vain goes much further than a sailor swearing or a teenager saying "Oh my God" every few moments. To take God's name in vain is to apply revisionist history methods to the definition of who God is. It is to define God by our own wishes and desires rather than to know Him as He defines Himself.

We want a God we can easily understand—a God we can neatly display on a bumper sticker or a coffee mug. However, God will not be confined to our little genie bottles. His names reflect His power, and His power is accessed only by knowing who He truly is, not by affirming who we want Him to be. To know God's names is to know His power. However, you only get His power when you know the great I Am Who I Am.

Many people use God's name today the same way the devil did in the garden—in vain. If we do not attach His name to His character, we will only perpetuate the chaos that the devil ushered in when he made his first attack on humanity. Like Satan, we will be trying to redefine God by misusing His names.

## Fearing God's Name

God desires to be more to you than just a subject in a theology book. He wants to be real to you right now. To accomplish this, sometimes He allows you to get in what seems like a hopeless situation (or even puts you in one). This is what He did with Martha and Mary when their brother, Lazarus, died. He allows something you love to die so that you can experience a resurrection. He does this because He knows that when you see Him for who He really is—when you discover the character embedded in His name—you will never view life the same again.

With this new understanding of who God is, based on His names, you will view all of life differently, even your ordinary daily experiences. God wants you to view them through spiritual eyes and not just your physical eyes.

Many people rarely experience resurrections in their hopeless situations because they are too earthbound, seeking to define God falsely by who they want Him to be. They are so tied to their physical definitions and expectations of God's names that they wind up missing out on the true, spiritual revelation of who He is.

Many people do not overcome the issues in their lives because they simply do not know the power of God's name in the midst of their crisis. They may try to use God's name all the time, but they do not know God's name as God defines Himself.

I want to assure you that regardless of what you are facing today, God is a God of hope, and He will provide a way for you to experience victory in your life. However, the hope and victory you experience must be rooted in the truth of who God is.

When you fix your eyes on God's character and believe with all your heart that what God has said about Himself and what He has said about you will come to pass, He can bring you out of even the darkest of scenarios. Unfortunately, too few people come to know the fullness of His hope simply because they fail to know, fear, and reverence God's name. They fail to take Him at His Word.

David wrote in Psalm 86:11, "Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name." Fearing God's name empowers us to walk in His way and in His truth. Fearing His name is the key to living the abundant life and fulfilling our destiny.

When we fear God's name, honoring Him with our lives, we can ask whatever we wish, and it will be given to us. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full" (John 16:23-24).

God's name and subsequently Jesus Christ's name bring protection and provision. But the key to accessing that protection and provision is to know His character and esteem the person behind the name.

For example, the better you know a person, the more effectively you can use this person's name in your life. If you do not know the person very well, people quickly discern that you are just name-dropping when you speak of him or her. The same is true with God. If He recognizes that you know little of His

character and do not align your life's thoughts and choices under His all-encompassing rule, you can toss out His name all you want, but you will simply be name-dropping.

To fear and reverence God's name is to fear and reverence God. It has to take Him seriously. David writes, "Ascribe to the LORD, O sons of the mighty, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to His name" (Psalm 29:1-2). The better you understand God's names, the more you will worship Him. The better you see and experience God's manifestations of His names in your life, the more you will attribute glory to Him.

As we begin our study of God's names, be prepared to discover God in ways you've never imagined and to get to know and experience Him through His powerful and majestic names.