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FROM THE AUTHORS

"I AM THE LORD; THAT IS MY NAME"

(Psalm 42:8)

It is delightful realizing that someone knows us by name. We would much rather be called by name than, "that guy", or "her." That's because our personal name stands for who we are. It brings the conversation onto a personal plane. It stands out for others to hear, and maybe take to heart and remember. It is even more wonderful when we realize that we are on a first name basis with our God. Little children love to sing that Jesus "Even calls me by my name."

The Lord wants us to know him by name too. But what do we call him? On christiananswers.net we read that there are an estimated 950 names and titles for God. That's a lot of names to learn. We frequently use the name of God in a general sense. We say we meet in the name of the Lord, we gather in his name, and we pray in his name. But what if we wish to get more personal?

Here is where the lay person is at a clear disadvantage. Without the ability to read Hebrew, there are many beautiful names of God that go unnoticed. To the worshiper in the pew, God has only two names in the Old Testament: "God" and "Lord." And who knows the difference between them?

But there are names, many of them, that detail God's character. These are beautiful names like The Lord My Shepherd, God Provides, The God Who Sees, and The Lord Our Peace. Each name brings God's people closer to him. Each builds a deeper intimacy and friendship.

The purpose of this study is to point out many of the wonderful Old Testament Hebrew names of God. Without becoming bogged down in Hebrew semantics, each page and a half session is intended to show the awesome love that God has for us through his names. Each segment adds another dimension that strengthens our relationship with our Lord.

Because of the length of each segment (1 1/2 pages), the leader may cover as many names per session as time will allow being certain to provide plenty of time for discussion at the end of each segment. At the end of each segment, each class member is asked to write a sentence reflecting his or her thoughts about that name followed by a closing silent prayer.

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SESSION 1: THE IMPORTANCE OF A NAME

Proverbs 22:1 tells us, “A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.” Solomon continued that thought in Ecclesiastes 7:1, “A good name is better than fine perfume.” What’s so important about a name? It’s true that today names have lost much of the importance and meaning they once had. Often parents choose their children’s names simply because they sound good or they just like the name. Some parents even make up names for their children that have no real significance.

Regardless, names do mean something. Names reveals who we are. They leave an image and legacy of us long after we die. Every gravestone gives the person’s name. Today most wives still take their husband’s name. Some surnames in our culture reflect an occupation from years past like Baker, Taylor, or Miller. Others reflect one’s heritage such as O’Brien, Juarez, or Yang. Many people have nicknames that remain throughout their lives. While parents do the most naming, lovers, friends and enemies assign names as well.

In Bible times names held much more significance than they do today. Esau was named “hairy” for his birth appearance. First Samuel 25:25 tells us that Nabal lived up to his name: “His name means Fool, and folly goes with him.” Leah, the unloved wife of Jacob, named her children according to her circumstance. Genesis 29:32-35 says, “She named him Reuben, for she said, ‘It is because the LORD has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now.’ She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, ‘Because the LORD heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too.’ So she named him Simeon. Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, ‘Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.’ So he was named Levi. She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, ‘This time I will praise the LORD.’ So she named him Judah.”

We know there were times in the Bible when God also saw fit to change names such as Abram (exalted father) to Abraham (father of a multitude), Jacob (supplanter or deceiver) to Israel (one who struggles with God.) At other times God provided nicknames as with the “sons of thunder” (James and John). In the New Testament we find names with the prefix “bar” meaning “son of” as in Bar-Jonah, Barnabas, Bartholomew and Bartimeus.

In Jewish tradition, the mother usually named the child. When Rachel was on her death bed, she named her newborn Ben-Oni, “son of my trouble.” But her husband Jacob renamed him Benjamin, “son of my right hand.” In the New Testament boys were not named until they were eight days old at the rite of circumcision. Naming them at that time tied them to the Abrahamic covenant with God. So it was when Jesus was born.

Having children to carry on the family name for many generations was quite important. When Absalom realized he would not have anyone to carry on his name, he built a monument to himself lest he be forgotten. Second Samuel 18:18 records, “Absalom had taken a pillar and erected it in the King’s Valley as a monument to himself, for he thought, ‘I have no son to carry on the memory of my name.’ He named the pillar after himself, and it is called Absalom’s Monument to this day.”

Removing one’s name from history was a terrible thing to imagine. Although we do not know why, we do know that the name of Joseph was all but forgotten in Egyptian history. Exodus 1:8 says, “Eventually, a new king came to power in Egypt who knew nothing about

Joseph or what he had done,” (NLT). Some names have been forever tarnished such as Hitler, Judas, and Benedict Arnold.

The Good Shepherd calls us each by name. We even teach our children to sing “I Am Jesus’ Little Lamb” where they proclaim that he, “Even calls me by my name.” But we have also received another name. Acts 11:26 says, “The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.” What a wonderful name that is. We are Christ’s people, his sheep, his bride, his Christians. We wear these names proudly as it says in 1 Peter 4:16, “If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.” Since Christians bear the name of God, we can be certain we will be hated because of that name. John 15:20,21 tells us, “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name.”

This course is not about our names but rather God’s names. Before we look at particular names, we must begin with the oft used phrases “the name of God”, or “the name of the Lord.” Psalm 148:13 says, “Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.”

We call on the name of God or gather in his name. We say we fear his name, love his name, and of course we pray in his name. What do we mean when we claim these things? These terms refer to the general greatness of God, the perfection of God and all that God is.

God’s name represents everything he stands for. It is a name we are to revere and respect. God takes great exception with those who abuse, mistreat, or misuse his name. Exodus 20:7 says in the Second Commandment: “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.”

The name of God is many things. In Psalm 52:9 we learn that it is good, “I will hope in your name, for your name is good.” Psalm 8:1 tells us it is majestic, “LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” Psalm 115:1 declares it is glorious, “Not to us, LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.” In Matthew 6:9 Jesus tells us that it is holy, “This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.’”

The many names God ascribes to himself are for our benefit. The more names we learn, the more we appreciate his essence, his character, and his distinct personality. His names tell us who he is, what he has done, what he does, and what he wants to do in our lives. God’s names are filled with meaning and intimacy.

Names are important! One day “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father,” (Philippians 2:10,11). We confess that “there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

1. Is there a history behind your name?
2. If you are a parent, how did you choose your children’s names?
3. Have you noticed a trend in increasingly taking God’s name in vain? Discuss.
4. How important is it that you bear the name “Christian?”

*Holy God, we praise Your name; Lord of all, we bow before You!
All on earth Thy scepter claim, All in Heaven above adore You;
Infinite Your vast domain, Everlasting is Your reign.*

From “Holy God, We Praise Thy Name” by Ignaz Franz

SESSION 4: JEHOVAH NISSI

The LORD Is Our Banner

We see flags, banners, and pendants everywhere today. We fly the American flag as a sign of loyalty to our country and in thanks for the many blessings we enjoy as citizens. We even sing about it in the “Star Spangled Banner.” In many school gymnasiums we see banners hanging from the ceilings recognizing past victories or outstanding athletes. Even our churches display banners to remind us of the season of the church year or a special day. In wartime many flag-bearing soldiers perished attempting to keep their country’s flag flying high. Those flags were important because they served as a rallying sign to the soldiers.

The name Jehovah Nissi is found only once in the Bible. It is in connection with a very important story. Not long after leaving Egypt, the Israelites were attacked at Rephidim by a band of marauding nomads called the Amalekites. God’s people were in no way prepared for this fight, since they hadn’t seen battle for more than 400 years. Now with Joshua as their new leader, they were pressed into service.

Moses stood atop a hill overlooking the battle. In his hand he held the rod that was used when he parted the Red Sea. Exodus 17:11-13 gives us the narrative, “As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses’ hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.” The hands and rod that Moses lifted up served the same purpose as the flag soldiers held up in their battles.

At the end of the day, Israel prevailed. God showed his people that he was willing to fight their battles. It was God who led them into battle, who was with them throughout, and who earned the final victory. He was their banner, their focal point. There was no way the Israelites would not know it was God who orchestrated the entire victory. Although Joshua, Moses, Aaron and Hur could have received well-deserved medals that day, Moses built an altar to the honor of God and named it Jehovah Nissi, “the LORD is my Banner.” That monument stood as a constant reminder of God’s victory for his people.

The naming of that altar Jehovah Nissi is also intended for all believers today. It shows us that we can be victorious over our enemies if we honor the name of the Lord and rally behind him, our Banner. It stands as a declaration of not only what God does for us, but who we are as God’s people. The victory will always be ours when we enter our battles with the Lord’s banner in full view.

David spoke of something similar when he met Goliath face to face in 1 Samuel 17:45, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty.” And again in 1 Samuel 17:47, “The battle is the LORD’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.”

Isaiah mentions that Jesus is our banner-bearer. In Isaiah 11:10 we read, “In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.”

Dr. F.E. Marsh writes, “The Lord in his death for us is our Banner in victory—our Standard in life—our Ensign in testimony—our Sign to all that he is the Triumphant Lord.”

We pray that God will give us wisdom to realize that we do not fight our battles alone, and the confidence that we will be victorious. Not only does the Lord provide necessary armor for us, but he stands beside us throughout our battles. We need to constantly look to the banner waving above us as a reminder that our battles are not in our hands but in the Lord's. David said it so well in Psalm 60:4, "For those who fear you, you have raised a banner to be unfurled against the bow."

The lesson we learn from the battle at Rephidim is that God's purpose stands firm. He will not be shaken. God is with us through every battle we face. We rejoice that his protection always brings victory.

Our Jehovah Nissi has never lost a battle. The victory will be ours. We rejoice with the psalm writer who said in Psalm 20:5, "May we shout for joy over your victory and lift up our banners in the name of our God."

1. Give some instances in your life when you discovered that you were helpless to fight a battle alone and then realized that the battle was the Lord's.
2. Read Psalm 18:32 ("It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure.") and Zephaniah 3:17 ("The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves.") How do these references give us strength to face any situation?
3. Discuss the meaning in this verse:

*Thrice blest is he to whom is given
The instinct that can tell
That God is on the field when he
Is most invisible.*

4. Read Isaiah 18:3. What should we watch for on the last day? ("All you people of the world, you who live on the earth, when a banner is raised on the mountains, you will see it, and when a trumpet sounds, you will hear it.")
5. Why is it so hard for us to realize "The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still?" (Exodus 14:14).
6. At the bottom of this page write a sentence explaining what Jehovah Nissi means to you.
7. Close this session with a silent prayer.

*Stand up, stand up for Jesus, Ye soldiers of the cross;
Lift high His royal banner, It must not suffer loss.
From victory unto victory His army shall He lead,
Till every foe is vanquished, And Christ is Lord indeed.*
From "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus" by George Duffield, Jr.