

What Are the Names of God?

Crucial Questions

R. C. SPROUL

What Are the Names of God?

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Chapter One

The Many Names of God

The Bible ascribes many names and titles to God. In Scripture, the name or title of a person often says something important about the person's character. In our culture today, we don't name people on the basis of outstanding characteristics or attributes. But in the ancient world, naming a person after a desired attribute was commonplace. In Israel particularly, a name often had tremendous significance and gave deep insight into one's character.

What Are the Names of God?

Sometimes when a person underwent a life-changing trauma, his name would be changed. We remember, for example, how Jesus assigned a new name to Simon at Caesarea Philippi after the great confession when Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do people say that [I am]?” They responded, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” Then Jesus asked, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon gave this magnificent confession of faith: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus then said to Simon, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah!” He called him by name. “For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter [*Petros*], and on this rock I will build my church.” The rock on which Christ would build His church was the rock of Peter’s confession. The church would be built on the foundation of Christ’s entire life, His whole ministry. Thereafter Simon was called Peter (Matt. 16:13–18).

Perhaps the most dramatic name change in the Old Testament took place when Jacob’s name was changed to *Israel*. Today there’s a nation called *Israel*; it isn’t called *Jacob*. It is called *Israel* because it traces its roots to the twelve tribes that came from Jacob, whose name was changed to *Israel*.

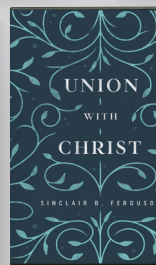
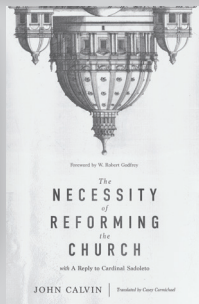
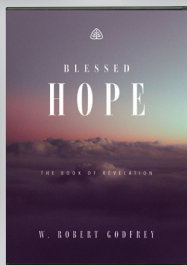
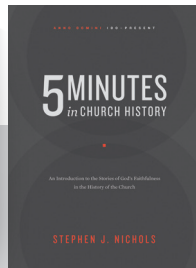
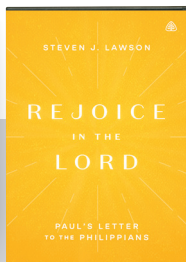
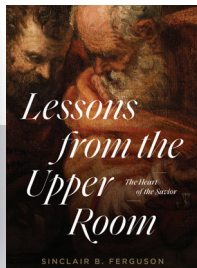
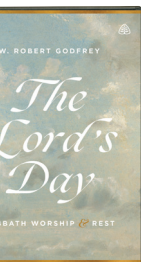
The Many Names of God

Let's look briefly at that moment in history when Jacob's name was changed.

He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." (Gen. 32:23–30)

This event at Peniel records a struggle, a conflict, between a human being, Jacob, and a representative from

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