

“When Names Are Changed”

6/20/10

Father’s Day
9 & 10:45 am

Series, “*What’s in a Name?*”

INTRODUCTION

It is normal for us to hear of a new bride changing her last name to match her husband’s. But, other than that, changing your name is pretty unusual.

It was similar during Bible times. It wasn’t a frequent occurrence. So when it happened, it was a unique occasion. Sometimes name changes happened at God’s initiative and sometimes people did it.

In every situation it was significant.

This morning we’re going to look at a few of the most significant.

OPEN to Genesis 17:1

What do changed names signify?

I. Reminders of God’s Promises

A. “Abram” to “Abraham” (Genesis 17:1-5)

Genesis 17:1-5 **“When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, ‘I am God Almighty; walk before Me and be blameless.**

2 I will confirm My covenant between Me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.’

3 Abram fell facedown, and God said to him,

4 ‘As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations.

5 No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.’”

Abram: “exalted father”

Abraham: “father of a multitude”; “father of many”

The change in names reflects what God has promised to bring to pass through Abraham. He is going to make him a father of many nations. Israel is central, but there will be other nations as well—including the Arab nations.

B. “Sarai” to “Sarah” (Genesis 17:15-16)

Genesis 17:15-16 **“God also said to Abraham, ‘As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah.**

16 I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.’”

Sarai: Princess

Sarah: Princess

The name itself does not change *meaning*, but the speaking of the new name will daily remind them of *God’s promise*, especially since Sarah has never been able to bear a child.

C. “Isaac” (Genesis 17:17-19)

Genesis 17:17-19 **“Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, ‘Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?’**

18 And Abraham said to God, ‘If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!’ [*Ishmael was already born to Abraham and Sarah’s servant, Hagar*]

19 Then God said, ‘Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.’”

“Isaac” means *“he laughs.”*

All their lives, they would remember that God’s promises are fulfilled, even when they seem so outlandish that they make you laugh.

Changed names are Reminders of God’s Promises

What do changed names signify?

II. A Change in Character

A. “Jacob” to “Israel” (Genesis 25-32)

Isaac’s wife, Rebekah, was pregnant with twins:

Genesis 25:22-26a **“The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, ‘Why is this happening to me?’ So she went to inquire of the LORD.**

23 The LORD said to her, ‘Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.’”

24 **“When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb.**

25 **The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau [*rough*].**

26 **After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau’s heel; so he was named Jacob [heel catcher; replace, unseat, displace].”**

The boys grow, and we find the first instance of Jacob displacing or unseating his brother:

Genesis 25:27, 29-34 **“The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents.**

29 **Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished.**

30 **He said to Jacob, ‘Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I’m famished!’ (That is why he was also called Edom.)**

31 **Jacob replied, ‘First sell me your birthright.’**

32 **‘Look, I am about to die,’ Esau said. ‘What good is the birthright to me?’**

33 **But Jacob said, ‘Swear to me first.’ So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob.**

34 **Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright.”**

Birthright: At the father’s death, the firstborn became head of the family and responsible for the family property, including responsibility for his younger brothers, his mother and unmarried sisters. He also had a considerable amount of authority over the family.

Jacob wanted this, and took advantage of an opportune moment when his brother was weak. At the same time, Esau didn’t value his birthright, in fact, v. 34 says he **“despised”** it, selling it for a bowl of soup.

In a later situation, with the help of his mother, Jacob stole his Father’s blessing from Esau—a special blessing that was reserved for the first-born son. Jacob pretended to be Esau, and with the help of his mother, deceived his father.

Jacob, true to his name, **unseated** his brother, Esau. He deceived his father. Later, he received some of his own medicine when he was tricked and deceived several times by his father-in-law, Laban.

But eventually Jacob escaped from Laban’s control and returned to his homeland a rich man.

Jacob was the kind of guy who, if he was in business, would have deceived people and said, “Hey, business is business!”

After escaping from his father-in-law, as he was heading back to his homeland, he learned that his brother Esau was coming his way with 400 men. He knew that before he left home, Esau was planning to kill him. He didn’t know what to expect from him now, but he knew if Esau turned violent, he wouldn’t be able to protect his four wives and 12 children.

Genesis 32:9-11 **“Then Jacob prayed, ‘O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O LORD, Who said to me, “Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,”**

10 I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness You have shown Your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups.

11 Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children.”

Then, in the middle of the night, he sent his servants, wives and children, along with his herds and other possessions across a shallow place in the river.

Genesis 32:24-28 **“So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.**

25 When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.

26 Then the man said, ‘Let me go, for it is daybreak.’ But Jacob replied, ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me.’

27 The man asked him, ‘What is your name?’ ‘Jacob,’ he answered.

28 “Then the man said, ‘Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.”

Jacob: heel catcher; replace, unseat, displace

Israel: lit., “*God prevails*”

“It is clear that the picture of Jacob’s struggle with God is meant to characterize Jacob’s entire life. He had struggled with his brother (Genesis 25, 27), his father (Genesis 27), his father-in-law (Genesis 29-31), and God (Genesis 32). Here we see a graphic picture of Jacob wrestling for another blessing, struggling with God (v. 28). (EBC)

The “man,” likely an angel, wrestles with Jacob through the night. The angel is more powerful, as shown when he touches Jacob’s hip and throws it out of socket. Jacob’s hanging-on is a picture of his realization that he needs the blessing of God. Up to this point, he manipulated situations to gain his brother’s birthright, his father’s blessing and freedom from his father-in-law. He cannot manipulate God, so he hangs on and asks for a blessing.

In this situation, God prevails. He prevails because Jacob is in a situation w/ Esau that he cannot manipulate his way out of. He needs God. He asks for God’s blessing. He realizes that he needs it so desperately that he won’t let go until he is blessed. So he is named, Israel, “*God prevails.*”

Jacob prevailed by hanging on to God in desperate faith, which means God prevailed in Jacob’s life.

And his new name, **Israel**, becomes the name by which his descendents will be known, even to this day.

B. “Simon” to “Peter” (John 1:41-42)

Character change is also the point when Jesus changes Simon’s name to Peter.

Simon: “*he has heard*”

Peter: rock

By re-naming Simon, Jesus is telling him that he will become a different man. And after Jesus’ resurrection Peter becomes a rock; a powerful preacher and leader. He isn’t perfect, but, empowered by the Holy Spirit, he becomes a spiritual rock.

Changed names signify a change in character.

What do changed names signify?

III. A Passion for the Gospel (Acts 13:1-13, 1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

“Saul” to “Paul”

In Acts 13:1-5, Barnabas and Saul are sent by the church in Antioch to proclaim the Gospel to Gentiles in Europe and Asia. Their first stop was the island of Cyprus.

Acts 13:6-13a “They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus,

7 who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God.

8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith.

9 Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said,

10 ‘You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?’

11 Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun.’ Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand.

12 When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

13a From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga ...”

From this point forward, he is always referred to as “Paul” and always uses this name in his letters to the churches.

Saul: “asked for,” or “prayed for”

Paul: The Greek/Roman equivalent of “Saul.”

Paul stops using the Jewish form of his name and starts using the Roman equivalent.

Why would he do that? The only apparent reason is because his primary ministry was to non-Jews in the Roman territories. He doesn’t want to be viewed as a Jew bringing Jewish religion to Gentile people.

He is adapting to the people of the culture to which God has sent him ... to remove any misconceptions or stumbling blocks to the message.

This was a pattern in his life:

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 “Though I am free and belong to no man, **I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.**”

20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.

21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.

22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

23 I do all this for the sake of the Gospel, that I may share in its blessings."

This passage has been confusing to many. Is it saying that it's OK to compromise with the world? Or is it teaching that Christians should join non-Christians in whatever worldly activities in which they're involved?

It says neither.

v. 19: voluntarily serving others by meeting them where they are, to win to Christ as many as possible; just like Jesus did when He became human (Philippians 2).

v. 20: He met the Jews where they were: in the synagogue (where he preached Christ), following their customs.

Those under the law, those following the detailed scruples of the law: diet, vows, etc. He met them where they were without violating the law of Christ: loving God and loving people.

v. 21: those not having the law; Gentiles, non-Jews. He ate whatever food they served, didn't insist on Jewish washings and customs.

v. 22: the weak; maybe the socially outcast, poor, needy. He met them where they were. He didn't demand that they come meet him where he was so he could be more comfortable.

"Paul voluntarily did this in order to gain the widest possible hearing for the Gospel and so to share in its blessings as God's fellow worker, reaping the joyful harvest of some won to Christ." (BKC)

And this is the singular reason we are changing the name of this church ... that by all possible means we might save more.

"Father in Heaven, I desire to have a name of character, and a name that expresses trust in Your promises. I desire to be someone who will adapt to different people to meet them where they are, just like Jesus did for us. Thank You for your willingness to work in me

and use me! I surrender my life to You, trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection for my forgiveness and my relationship with You! In Jesus' name, Amen."