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UNUSUAL NAMES IN THE BIBLE

According to the Bible, NOAH was a woman!

This is a statement I have sometimes used to arouse the interest of an audience. The *ōNoahö* of ark-and-flood fame was, of course, a man. Not as well-known as this Noah, was the *woman* by this name. She was the daughter of Zelophehad who was the father of five daughters, but no sons. When he died, the question of inheritance came up. Normally an inheritance was passed on to sons, but since he had no sons, the inheritance was given to his daughters, one of which was Noah. It is all explained in Numbers 27:1-7.

Many think of GOMER as a man's name, which indeed it was (Gen. 10:2). But it was also a *woman's* name in the Bible. Gomer was the wife of the prophet Hosea (Hos. 1:3).

The name NUN causes us to think of a woman, one belonging to a religious order. But Nun was a *man*, the father of Joshua (Exod. 33:11). A *boy* named HEN seems strange (Zech. 6:14) *ö* like the boy name *ōSueö* in a classic Johnny Cash song.

Men's names outnumber women's names about 17 to 1 in the Bible. The names of men were commonly given in family trees. Today, it is a custom for a woman to take the last name of her husband at marriage, while her maiden name may become comparatively obscure.

The Bible mentions a man named HEMAN. (I wonder if he was a he-man?) *ō*And God gave to Heman fourteen sons and three daughters.*ö* They were a *musical* family. *ō*All these were under the hands of their father for song in the house of the Lord, with cymbals, psalteries, and harps*ö* (1 Chron. 25:5,6).

Three different men in the Bible were name DODO. There was Dodo, a man of Issachar (Judges 10:1), Dodo the Alohite (2 Sam. 23:9), and Dodo of Bethlehem (2 Sam. 23:24). It would have had a different meaning back then, but today, in English, if it is said someone is a *ōdodoö* it means a dull-witted, slow-reacting person. Not very flattering!

Names like HOD (1 Chron. 7:37), BUNNI (Neh. 11:15), MASH (Gen. 10:23), NON (1 Chron. 7:27), HUZ and BUZ (Gen. 22:20,21) are quite different.

There is also the case of BEHAD who was HADAD's dad. Or to put it another way, Hadad had a dad named Bedad (Gen. 36:35). This is only a play on words and not nearly as strange as the case of two women who were the mothers of their half-brothers and whose father was their children's grandfather! (Gen. 19:30-38).

The Bible mentions an Egyptian king named SO (2 Kings 17:4). Someone might have asked: *ō*Is that So?ö and the reply: *ō*Yes, that's So.*ö* There was a large city in Egypt named NO (Ezek. 30:14-16). I wonder if So ever went to No? I don't know. In addition to a city named NO, Egypt also had a city named ON (Gen. 41:45). In English, NO, reversed, is ON.

AI, a town about 12 miles from Jericho, holds the distinction of being the only city or town mentioned in the Bible which has to be *spelled* in order to be *pronounced* (Josh. 7:2).

We all know about the Garden of Eden. Not so well-known is that there was a man named EDEN in the Bible (2 Chron. 29:12). An uncle and cousin of mine were both given the name Eden. When we think of the Garden of Eden, we think of Adam, the first man. There was also a city named ADAM (Josh. 3:16).

Tarshish, the land to which Jonah sought to flee, is best-known as a *place*. But this was also a man's name (Est. 1:14).

Bible students are familiar with the prophet NAHUM and the book that bears his name. We are also familiar with CAPERNAUM where Jesus performed many miracles. But the linkage between the two is not as well-known: Capernaum [*Kaphar-Nahum*] means *ō*Town of Nahum.*ö*

A teacher in a Sunday School class used the Bible phrase *ō*from Dan to Beershebaö (1 Sam. 3:20, etc.). One member of the class inquired: *ō*Are Dan and Beersheba the names of *places*?ö *ō*Yes.*ö*

*ō*Oh,*ö* said the inquirer, *ō*I always thought they were husband and wife*ö* like Sodom and Gomorrah!*ö* ☺

One fellow supposed the *ō*Epistlesö were the wives of the *ō*Apostlesö!

Years ago a college survey asked the question: *ō*Who wrote the Bible?ö Among the answers were: *ō*Matthew,*ö* *ō*Mark,*ö* and *ō*Martin Lutherö!

The names of Joseph, Gideon, Solomon and Joshua are well-known. Not so well-known are their *other* names. Joseph (son of Jacob) was called ZAPHNATH-PAANEAH (Gen. 41:45). Gideon was called JERUBBAAL (Judges 8:35). Solomon was called JEDIDIAH (2 Sam. 12:25). Joshua's original name was OSHEA (Num. 13:16; 11:28).

We know the three young men who were thrown into the fiery furnace by the names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. But their original names were Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Being taken as captives to serve in the palace of the king of Babylon, they, along with Daniel, were made into eunuchs, and given Babylonian names (Dan. 1:3-7; cf. Isa. 39:6,7).

Hananiah [the LORD has been gracious to me] was changed to Shadrach, "The inspiration of the Sun." Mishael [He who comes from God] was changed to Meshach, "He who belongs to the goddess Sheshachö (a Babylonian deity mentioned in Jeremiah 25:26). Azariah [the LORD is my helper] was changed to Abednego, "The servant of Negoö (a Babylonian god). Daniel's name [God is my judge] was changed to Belteshazzar, "The treasure of Bel, a Babylonian god (Jer. 50:2).

Everyone has heard of "Herod." Not so well-known is that this title means *hero*, as even the spelling implies. Unfortunately, Herod was no hero in the true sense of the word. Oddly enough, the name "Jezebel," according to *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon*, means *chaste*. This very wicked woman did not live up to this name either!

The names Job gave to his daughters had distinct meanings. One was Kezia or Cassia, a highly cherished and fragrant spice of antiquity. One was name Keren-huppuch, meaning "Horn of eye paint," a name linked with the custom of marking a dark color around the eyes. Another was called Jemima, meaning "fair as the day" or a "dove." If her brothers or sisters had a child, she could have been called *Aunt Jemima!*

Probably the strangest name in the Bible is also the longest is the eighteen-letter name of Isaiah's son MAHERSHALALHASHBAZ! It also has a distinct meaning. "Then said the LORD to me, Call his name Mahershalhashbaz [make haste to the spoil; fall upon the prey]. For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria" (Isa. 8:3,4).

This symbolic name indicated that within a short time the king of Assyria would conquer Damascus and Samaria, which found fulfillment within three years when Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, took Damascus and other peoples, leading them into captivity (2 Kings 15:29; 16:9; 1 Chron. 5:26).

What [human] person's name appears in the Bible more times than any other? Adam? Eve? Noah? Abraham? Isaac? Jacob? Moses? Jeremiah? Peter? James? John? Paul? Mary? None of the above! The person's name that appears more than any other in the Bible is DAVID! While the number can vary slightly from translation to translation, "David" (including "David's") appears 1,154 times in the KJV.

I had not been in the ministry too long when a woman quite enthusiastically showed me why she believed Judas Iscariot was the *son of Simon Peter!*

She quoted John 6:68-71 (KJV): "Then Simon Peter answered...we are sure that thou art the Christ...Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spake of Judas Iscariot *the son of Simon.*" We note that Simon Peter is mentioned in the context, and two other verses refer to Judas as *the son of Simon* (John 12:4; 13:26).

However, there were a number of men with the name Simon in the Bible: two apostles, also Simon of Nazareth, Simon the leper, Simon of Cyrene, Simon the Pharisee, Simon the sorcerer, and Simon the tanner. Being a common name, the statement that Judas was the son of Simon could have referred to any number of men. (Also, for whatever reason, most translations do not include the phrase "son of Simon" in the passages we have cited from the King James Version.)

In time, better clarification became possible as *last* names were added to first names. My last name "Woodrow" has the meaning, I am told, of *a row of trees*. Perhaps a family lived in a house where there was a row of trees planted, possibly to mark a property line or simply for decorative purposes. As last names developed, these people, identified by this row of trees, evidently came to be called by the name Woodrow.

Anyhow, that's my name "Woodrow" not Wilson. Occasionally someone has confused my name with Wilson, because of President Woodrow Wilson. A couple times I received mail that was addressed to the "Woodrow Wilson Evangelistic Association" and though the box number was not included, the workers at the post office knew who was intended. Years ago I heard Billy Graham say he had received mail addressed to Billy Sunday!

You won't find the name Woodrow in the Bible, however, or Wilson or any other name beginning with the letter "W." Most other letters of the alphabet are represented in biblical names, however, as may be seen by the following list (KJV):

Aö Adam, Bö Benjamin, Cö Cain, Dö David, Eö Elijah, Fö Festus, Gö Gideon, Hö Hosea, Iö Isaac, Jö Jacob, Kö Keturah, Lö Lot, Mö Mary, Nö Nicodemus, Oö Obadiah, Pö Paul, Qö Quartus, Rö Ruth, Sö Sarah, Tö Timothy, Uö Uriah, Vö Vashti. W, X* and Y are exceptions, but not Z! [* Note: some translations have Xerxes].

We, today, do not commonly use names which begin with Z. But in the Bible there are 87 different names beginning with Z representing 188 individuals! There are 27 Zechariahs, 12 Zichris, 9 Zebadiahs, 9 Zedeks, 7 Zabads, 7 Zaccurs, 7 Zerahs, and 5 Zedekiahs. One of Jonathan's sons had the name Zaza (1 Chron. 2:33).

Finally: *What name in the Bible is above every name?* JESUS! "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name *which is above every name*, that at the name of JESUS every knee should bow...and every tongue confess that JESUS Christ is Lord, to the glory of God" (Phil. 2:9-11).

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