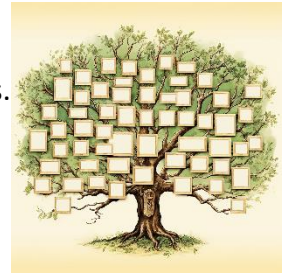


One of my hobbies is researching my Family Tree. I am very interested in changes of customs and names over the years. A thousand years ago there were no surnames. Children of wealthy parents were known by the names of their parents. My father's name was George so I would have been known as 'Doris daughter of George'. Children of working class parents were usually known by the occupation of their parents. As the first thing my father kept on his smallholding was pigs, I would have been known as 'Doris pigs'. What an awful thought, to be known all my life as 'Doris pigs'!



I think that people's names are really, really important and I make a special effort to try and get to know everyone's name in the church. Sometimes it is rather a challenge as many of them are from other countries so their names are unfamiliar to me and it can be a bit of a struggle to be able to spell or pronounce them correctly. It is much more personal to be able to say, 'Hello Mary' than just plain 'Hello' and it helps to make people feel more welcome.



We can read in the Bible where people's names were changed, often for a specific reason. Abram's name meant, 'Exalted father'. God told him that he would be the father of a multitude of nations if he was obedient to Him. God then changed his name to 'Abraham', meaning, 'Father of a multitude'. Jesus was a descendant of Abraham so Abraham became the 'father' of all those who would become Christians.

God changed the name of Abraham's wife from 'Sarai' to 'Sarah' because He said that she would be a mother of nations and that He was going to bless her and that she would have a son. As Sarah was ninety years old, she laughed when God said that she would have a son. I am nearly as old as Sarah and I think I would laugh too if I was told I was going to have a son. It sometimes takes all my effort to look after myself, let alone a child!



Jacob is another person who's name God changed. He changed his name from 'Jacob' to 'Israel' and God's people became known as 'Israelites'.

Daniel and other nobility were taken into exile by the King of Babylon. The exiles were made to serve in the king's palace and were given another name; so Daniel became 'Belteshazzar'. They could make him a servant and take away his personal identity, but, they could not take away from him his strong belief in his God. It is interesting that he was so honoured that he again became called by his own name of 'Daniel'. Even the threat of being thrown into a den of lions did not deter him from kneeling down in full view in front of a window and praying to his God. His astounding delivery from being killed by the lions resulted in the king making a public decree for everyone to honour the living God of Daniel.



I wonder what we would have done in Daniel's position. Would we have prayed openly knowing that the den of lions was going to be where our lives on earth would end or would we have closed the window and prayed out of view of everyone?



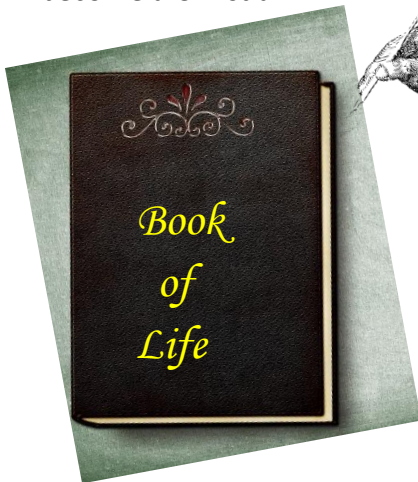
Saul was a terrible man who really persecuted Christians. He went out of his way to imprison them or even have them put to death. 'Saul' was his Hebrew name, but he was also known as 'Paul', being his Latin name, so he did not actually have a change of name. It was normal at that time for Jews to have both a Hebrew name, with being a Jew and a name that was common in the Roman community. As Paul was a Roman citizen it is quite likely that he was normally referred to as 'Paul' and in his letters to the churches he called himself 'Paul'. After he met the risen Jesus on the Damascus road, he spent the remainder of his life preaching the gospel. His name was not changed but his life was certainly drastically changed after he had become a Christian.

Jesus changes lives

Here is a question for you to answer:- Which of the following two options would you choose?

1. Write down the two words 'All Christians'.
2. Write down the name of every Christian whom you know.

I am pretty certain that you would all have chosen the first option. Are you aware that God chooses the second option? It is recorded in the Bible that God writes our names in the 'Book of Life' when we become a Christian.



I do not understand what sort of book this is since it contains the names of billions of Christians from all over the world, but I know that our names are important enough to God to cause Him to write down each one individually. Why does He do that as He knows us all anyway? I believe that He does it, not for His own information, but to tell us that we are so precious to Him that He goes way beyond what is necessary in order to show His love for us. God knows each one of our names and we are all individuals to Him.

Is your name in God's 'Book of Life'?