

World Kids

Fun for kids! True stories!



PAL Project

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Have you ever wished that your name were different? Many of us have at some time - maybe we have an uncommon name that people have difficulty spelling and we would prefer a more popular name; or maybe there are 5 or 6 others in our class with the same name and it gets confusing! Some people dislike their name so much that they pay a lawyer to change it legally when they are an adult! Most of us have two or three names - at least one SURNAME or "family" name, and at least one "given" name or "Christian" name (because early Christians changed their pagan first names to Christian names at baptism). But that is not always the case in other parts of the world, and in fact was not even the custom in some places in the West until the past century or so!

The first known people to use surnames were the **Chinese**. Legends suggest that the Emperor Fushi decreed the use of surnames, or family names, about 2852 BC. The Chinese customarily have three names. The surname is placed first and comes from one of the 438 words in a sacred Chinese poem. The family name is followed by a generation name, taken from a poem of 30 characters adopted by each family. The given name is then placed last. In early times, the **Romans** had only one name, but later changed to using three names - to show their clan and family. Surnames were not used in **Britain** until after the Norman Conquest in 1066. Until then, most people were known only by their first name. People started to add extra names in order to tell one William from another.





Some surnames came from where a person lived or the person's father's name - so the son of someone called John was known as Johnson. Others were based on a person's occupation (a blacksmith would be called Smith) or their appearance (a brown-haired person might be called Brown). Some most common surnames in UK are Smith, Jones and Williams. Beginning in the 15th and 16th centuries, family names gained in popularity in **Poland** and **Russia**. The **Scandinavian** countries, bound by their custom of using the father's name as a second name, didn't begin using family surnames until the 19th century; and **Turkey** waited until 1933, when the government finally forced the practice on its people.

Most surnames in **Denmark** end in -sen. Until the late 1860's these surnames were not hereditary, but changed with each generation. The son of Jorgen Petersen would be known by the surname Jorgensen and so on, but in 1904 the Danish Government began to encourage the use of surnames other than the traditional. Most **Greek** names are based on the father's name or a place name, and the most common Greek name is Pappas, meaning "descended from a priest". Although **China** has over a billion people there are about 1000 surnames but only 60 of these are common. Most are only one syllable and have descriptive meanings, such as Wong (field) and Chan (old) and the most common surname is Wang held by 93 million people!. Since almost all Chinese names are one syllable and easy to pronounce, and because of strong family and ancestral ties, few names have been changed. The Chinese still place their surnames first, although Chinese people living in Western countries usually change that.

While there are now MANY choices for given names, that has not always been the way. In 1545 the Catholic Church ruled that a saint's name MUST be chosen for the official naming at baptism, so for centuries first names were confined to those such as John and Mary. In fact, in all western countries during the Middle Ages, there were only about twenty common names for infant boys and girls, and John and Mary were most frequently used. In the 1600's the Protestants rejected anything associated with Catholicism, so names from the Bible such as Elijah, Priscilla and Joshua began to appear. Some Puritan families coming to **America** chose new names for their babies, such as Charity, Joy or Hope; and in some cases they wanted to send a clear message through their child's name choosing "Fear-God," or "Jesus-Christ-Came-Into-The-World-To-Save," and even "Through-Much-Tribulation-We-Enter-The-Kingdom-Of-Heaven"! Aren't you glad you weren't born back then?!



See if you can pick the **FOUR** names from this list that are **NOT** names of people found in the Bible!

	FELIX	NATHAN	GRACE	JASON	
	CHRISTIAN	JAEI	CALEB	PENELOPE	
	SUSANNA	ETHAN	FRANCIS	SALOME	

Nowadays in **Europe** and the **USA** parents often consider hundreds of names before choosing the "right" one for their baby. Names such as Jacob, Michael, Emma and Isabella were most common in the **USA** in 2008; in **England** the most common were Jack, Thomas, Grace and Ruby; and in **Austria** the most common names were Lukas, Tobia, Lena and Leonie! But some parents still want to give their child a name that is REALLY unforgettable! How would you like to be named "Superman", "Sparkle", or "Number 16 Bus Shelter"?? There are actually SEVERAL girls in the **UK** named "Unique", and one baby boy a few years ago was even named after all the members of a football team!! But in several countries there are laws that limit the choice of names - **German** law forbids the names Hitler and Osama and says that first names must be gender-specific. **New Zealand** is considering making a list of accepted names since some, such as "Fish" and "Chips" for twin boys, were denied. **Denmark** has an approved list of 7,000 names mainly Western European and English; while in **Portugal**, there's a 39-page list of permitted names, and 41 pages of banned names including "Maradona" and "Mona Lisa". The **Mexican** state of Chihuahua enforces strict rules on baby-naming. Names such as "Lluvia" (meaning rain) and "Azul" (blue) are not considered proper, and if a child has a Western first name, she must be given a Spanish middle name. Parents in **Morocco** have to choose from a mostly Arabic list, but can pay a fee for using certain off-list names, such as Adam.



In **Nigeria**, children are given at least three names - one by the mother, one by the father, and a third and sometimes fourth by close relatives, such as grandparents. When the child grows up, he chooses to keep two of these names, and adds his father's, grandfather's, or great-grandfather's name. In many parts of **Africa** a baby is given a temporary name at birth such as "Haidar" - considered a good name for a boy who looks "strong and stout".



Later an adult name is chosen by the parents - such as "Mwanajuma", meaning "Born on Friday" in Swahili. In some **Asian** countries babies are called "small mouse" until they are 6 months old when they start to develop their own personality and so then receive a name often describing that. The names given to a baby can represent many things, such as nature, aspects of the environment, and even gods of their religion (especially the Hindus in **India**). In **China**, parents sometimes give their boys plain or meaningless names to trick evil spirits into overlooking them, but girls get more elaborate or graceful names, depicting beauty and virtuous qualities. When we lived among Aztec Indians in **Mexico**,

sometimes a baby was not named until reaching the age of 1 or 2 years old - we felt it was possibly due to the fact that so many sadly died in infancy.

No matter in what part of the world you live though, choosing a name for a baby is a very important decision, and most parents spend much time considering the meaning of the names. Do you know the meaning of YOUR name? Maybe you can ask your family about why you were given your name. And always remember that the most important name of all is JESUS!

'Til next time,

Your friend, Shirley

Remember - even if you aren't happy with your name, JESUS knows it and if you follow Him your name will be written in His Book of Life! Revelation 21:27



Facts from various websites including www.mayrand.org; www.babynamemap.com; www.babycenter.com; <http://ukfamily.co.uk>
 Answers: Grace; Christian; Penelope; Francis. [Felix is found in Acts 24:24; Nathan in 2 Samuel 12:1; Jason in Acts 17:5; Jael in Judges 4:21; Caleb in Numbers 13:30; Susanna in Luke 8:3; Ethan in 1 Kings 4:31; Salome in Mark 15:40]

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