

Yeshua vs. Jesus

A study on the transliteration of the Messiah's
Name from Hebrew to Greek to English.

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Many people in what is commonly known as the Sacred Name Movement¹ have taken the stand that the name which the current English versions of our Bible give as the name of the Messiah is in actuality a name of pagan or heathen origin. I have heard or read, by different people at different times, that the name Jesus is a derivative of names Zues or Dionysius; Zeus being the chief sky god of the Greeks, while Dionysius was the son of Zeus.

On the surface we may notice that there is a similarity, in some sense, between the sound of the name Jesus and the sound of the names above. The easiest similarity is found in the ending portion of the names with the "us" sound. What we need to ask ourselves is this: is the fact that the name Jesus sounds similar or looks similar in any way to the name of certain pagan deities throughout time evidence that this is where the name originated? That is the question we will attempt to answer in this article, looking at the original Hebrew name behind Jesus and discussing transliteration principles from various languages.

Yehoshua

I would like to begin our search with a Hebrew name, namely Yehoshua. This is the name that was given to the man who took the place of Moses after his death, to lead the children of Israel. It can be found in the book of Numbers 13:16 which reads:

These *are* the names of the men which Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Oshea the son of Nun **Jehoshua**.

Here Moses calls the name of the son of Nun - Jehoshua - or without the English letter J we have the name Yehoshua. Yehoshua's name beforehand was Oshea spelled in the Hebrew language – **וְהוֹשֵׁעַ**. The significance of this is that

¹ The Sacred Name Movement is a movement which began in the early 1900's. The main issue of this movement is that its adherents use the name Yahweh (or some variation of this name) for the Father and the name Yahshua for the Son. We do not wish to cause anyone using these names to discontinue after reading this article. This article is for the sole purpose of examining the names Yeshua and Jesus.

the name change made by Moses was a very minute name change. Moses actually added only one single letter to Oshea's name. This letter is the Hebrew letter *yod*. The name Yehoshua in the Hebrew language appears as follows: **יְהוֹשֻׁעַ** Once again, notice, that the letter at the beginning of this name (Hebrew being read from right to left) is a very small letter and this letter in Hebrew is called a *yod*. What Moses did was take a man's name that meant deliverer or salvation, and changed it to mean Yahweh delivers or Yahweh saves.

The name that Moses gave to the son of Nun in Numbers 13:16 can be directly transliterated from Hebrew to English quite easily, and we can come up with the name Yehoshua. This is done by taking each letter in the Hebrew name and bringing them down into the corresponding letters in the English language, and also bringing down the appropriate vowel pointing from Hebrew to English.

What we must first acknowledge is that the name Yehoshua itself is definitely not the name of a pagan deity at all, but rather a name which means Yahweh saves or delivers.² This is the name chosen by the man Moses for the son of Nun. We also need to understand that this Hebrew name can be directly transliterated from Hebrew to English quite easily.

Yeshua

Now that we have established Yehoshua as the name of the son of Nun we need to also establish that the son of Nun's name is Yeshua. "Wait a minute!" you may say, "That's a double standard!" Before you make such an assertion and accusation, please allow me to explain why I believe both Yehoshua and Yeshua is the name of the son of Nun. Let us begin here by quoting the text of Nehemiah 8:17:

And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of **Jeshua the son of Nun** unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness.

Notice that the **son of Nun** is mentioned in this passage. This is the same man mentioned in Numbers 13:16, spoken of as Oshea and Yehoshua. Here, the King James Version of the Bible refers to him as just - Jeshua. Once again, by removing the English letter J and replacing it with a Y causes us to get the name Yeshua. In the Hebrew language this name reads as follows: **יְהוֹשֻׁעַ**. This name in

² Strong's Exhaustive Concordance defines this name as follows: "H3091 יְהוֹשֻׁעַ yehōshūa' / yehōshūa' / yeh-ho-shoo'-ah / yeh-ho-shoo'-ah From H3068 and H3467; Jehovah-saved; Jehoshua (that is, Joshua), the Jewish leader:—Jehoshua, Jehoshuah, Joshua. Compare H1954, H3442."

Hebrew has the meaning of “he will save.”³ What we are looking at here is simply a contracted form of the name Yehoshua. Some comparisons may be found in the name Robert to Bob, Jonathon to John, Samuel to Sam, etc. The son of Nun was called Yeshua in Nehemiah 8:17, and because of that *Hebrew* rendering we know that it was an appropriate practice for people to call him by this name at the time of the restoration of Jerusalem upon the Judahites return from the Babylonian captivity, recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Evidently, when they said Yeshua, meaning “he will save,” they understood that the *he* had the meaning of *Yahweh* will save, as is the definition or meaning of the longer name Yehoshua. For those who may be skeptic of my saying that Yeshua is a contraction from Yehoshua, allow me to quote from *Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*.

יֵשׁוּעַ [Jeshua], a contracted form of the pr. n. יְהוֹשֻׁעַ used in the later Hebrew, Gr. Ἰησοῦς – (1) of Joshua, the leader of the Israelites, Neh. 8:17 – (2) of a high priest of the same name; see יְהוֹשֻׁעַ No. 2, Ezr. 2:2; 3:2; Neh. 7:7 – (3) pr. n. of other men, mentioned in the books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

Here we see that not only can we know that Yeshua is a contraction of Yehoshua from Hebrew Scripture, but we also see that much more learned men, such as H.W.F. Gesenius’ (A Hebrew Linguist) understand this as well. Therefore we see that Yeshua is simply a shortened form of the name Yehoshua, similar to as I stated before that Sam is a shortened form of the Samuel. We should also add that this name – Yeshua – is not a name of paganism, but rather a name used in Scripture that means “he will save,” Nehemiah 8:17. This is *truly* a Scriptural name.

Yehoshua & Yeshua in the Septuagint

We need to now turn to the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, which began to be accomplished around the middle of the third century B.C. A brief explanation of the reason for the Septuagint will now follow; being taken from the book entitled *How We Got the Bible*:

³ Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance defines this name as follows: “H3442 / יֵשׁוּעַ / yešūa / ‘yah-shoo’-ah / For H3091; *he will save*; *Jeshua*, the name of two Israelites, also of a place in Palestine:—*Jeshua*.”

The following seems either factual or plausible concerning the Septuagint. Aristeas describes the origin of the Septuagint with the translation of the Pentateuch. **This was done in Alexandria, where there was a large Jewish population and where a translation from Hebrew to Greek would be needed.** Ptolemy II in some way may have been connected with the translation; he was well known as a patron of literature. Demetrius likewise may have been involved. He may have suggested the translation to Ptolemy I, but the project may not have been completed until the beginning of the reign of Ptolemy II. There are other factors to consider. According to Aristeas, **the Pentateuch was translated in the third century B.C. This date is quite reasonable.** The names of the translators fit in with known names in the third century B.C.; and Philo reports that in his day, the first century A.D., an annual festival was still being held on Pharos to honor the place “in which the light of that version first shone out”.⁴

Basically, we see that around 250 B.C. in Alexandria, Egypt there was a mass of Judahite people who spoke Greek rather than Hebrew and therefore the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek would be very beneficial to these Greek speaking Judahites. Knowing this we should take note that those men who made the translation must have known both the Hebrew and the Greek language, and would therefore be scholarly men, able to make the translation. How did these men treat the names Yehoshua and Yeshua when transliterating them from Hebrew to Greek?

We will simply use both Numbers 13:16 and Nehemiah 8:17 to make the proper comparisons in the transliterations. In Numbers 13:16 where the name יהושע (Yehoshua) appears in the Hebrew Scripture, the Greek name Ἰησοῦς (Iesous) appears in the Septuagint. The only difference being that the last letter of this Greek transliteration is the Greek letter *nu*, which is simply the case ending of the name of Numbers 13:16. What we see here is that this is the transliteration that Hebrew/Greek scholars of the third century B.C., 250 plus years before the Messiah, chose to use in transliterating this particular name from Hebrew to Greek.

In looking at Nehemiah 8:17 where we find the contracted form of the Hebrew name of Numbers 13:16, we also find the Septuagint using the Greek name Ἰησοῦ, (Iesou) which is simply another form of the above Greek name with

⁴ *How We Got the Bible*, by Neil R. Lightfoot, Third edition – revised and expanded, 2003, pg. 147.

simply a different case ending because of its use in the grammar of the Greek language.

Now we need to better define how this particular Greek name is pronounced. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* of the Bible gives **ee-ay-sooce** as the pronunciation of this Greek name. Most other Greek lexicons give **Iesous** as the exact English transliteration of the Greek name. The most proper pronunciation we could give would most likely be pronounced **yey-sooce** (Yesous). Notice particularly that this transliteration does not come from someone transliterating with the Messiah in mind, but from Judahite scholars of the 3rd century B.C. which transliterated the name of Moses' successor. These scholars weren't trying to pull some kind of "switch-a-roo" with the text of Scripture when they came to such passages as Numbers 13:16 or Nehemiah 8:17; they were simply transliterating the Hebrew name into the Greek language, using the corresponding Greek letters in the best possible way. **Why would Judahite scholars transliterate the name of the leader of Israel after Moses incorrectly?** It may be needful at this point to define what exactly transliteration is. Here are the definitions of transliteration in a couple of English dictionaries:

Transliterate... 1: to represent or spell (words, letters, or characters of one language) in the letters or characters of another language or alphabet... {*Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, 1981}

Transliterate... to represent (a letter or word) by the alphabetic characters of another language... {*Funk & Wagnalls Standard Desk Dictionary*, V2, 1984}

Here we see that transliteration consists of taking a word in one language and spelling it with the corresponding characters of another language. Nothing is stated in these definitions about the sound of the original word being retained as some would suggest, only the letters as best as possible. There is nothing in the meaning of the word transliterate showing that the sound has to be retained from one language to the next. Many times the sounds from one language to the next do remain the same or similar, but this is not always the case for all languages do not contain the same sounds. Such is the case with the name at hand. How did the name Iesous come from the name Yehoshua? It did so by the process of transliterating the short form of the name Yehoshua – **Yeshua** – from Hebrew into Greek. The process would go like this:

יְ - יִ / η / ψ - σ / י - οῦ

Here we see the transliteration into Greek as Ἰησοῦ but we are missing the final letter of the Greek name. This is known in Greek as the final *sigma*, and is placed often on the end of male names as it is a Greek ending for masculinity. Thus we get the name Ἰησοῦς. Mr. John K. McKee in his article entitled *Is the Name of Jesus Pagan*⁵ explains the transliteration process thusly:

- y (*yod* – “ye”) becomes Ih (*iota-eta* – “ye” or “ee-ay,” Koine or Attic dialect)
- v (*shin* – “sh”) becomes s (*sigma* – “s” [there is no “sh” sound in Greek])
- w (*vav* – “u”) becomes ou (*omicron-epsilon* – “oo”)
- It is necessary for a final sigma (ς) to be placed at the end of the word to distinguish that the name is masculine
- Greek grammar rules require that the (*ayin* – “ah”) sound be dropped

Mr. McKee goes on to write the following:

It is important to note that this same name is used for the title of the Book of *Joshua* in the Septuagint, which serves as definitive proof that Iesous is not of pagan origin, but rather *is indeed* a Greek transliteration of Yeshua *developed by the Jewish translators!* For, Iesous is also the Greek transliteration of Yehoshua [יְהוֹשֻׁעַ] as demonstrated by the Septuagint.

In Old English, “Iesous” was rendered “Iesus” (pronounced *Yesus*), which is remarkably close to Yeshua. However, it was spelled with a beginning letter “J,” which at the time had a “Y” sound. Later, when the “J” began to have a harder sound, the name became “Jesus.”

Transliteration is not an exact science. However, it does prove that the Greek name Iesous from whence we derive the name “Jesus” is not pagan. Ἰησοῦς is the Greek transliteration of [יְהוֹשֻׁעַ], and the English transliteration of Ἰησοῦς is Iesous, which became Jesus.

⁵ This article can be found at:

www.biblicallifeassembly.org/library/pdf/Is_The_Name_Jesus_Pagan.pdf

Another author, Dr. Daniel Botkin, in an article entitled, *The Messiah's Hebrew Name: "Yeshua" or "Yahshua"*⁶ writes the following in association with the issue at hand:

The English form Jesus is derived from the New Testament Greek name Ἰησοῦς, pronounced "Yesous." According to the *Strong's*, Yesous (Strong's #2424) is "of Hebrew origin" and can be traced back to Joshua's Hebrew name, *Yehoshua* (#3091, יהושע). But how do we get the Greek *Yesous* from the Hebrew *Yehoshua*? Someone armed with nothing more than a Strong's Concordance may have difficulty answering that question. Someone who reads the bible in Hebrew, though, knows that the name *Joshua* sometimes appears in its shortened form, *Yeshua* (ישוע). In Neh. 8:17 it is apparent even in English: "**J**eshua the son of Nun." (The letter J was pronounced like a Y in Old English.) Strong's does not tell the reader that the Greek *Yesous* is actually transliterated from this shortened Hebrew form, *Yeshua*, and not directly from the longer form *Yehoshua*. The process from "Yehoshua" to "Jesus" looks like this:

Hebrew Yehoshua – Hebrew Yeshua
Hebrew Yeshua – Greek Yesous
Greek Yesous – English Jesus

There is no "sh" sound in Greek, which accounts for the middle "s" sound in Yesous. The "s" at the end of the Greek name is a grammatical necessity, to make the word declinable.

In Neh. 8:17, Joshua's name is 100% identical to the name which today's Messianic Jews use for the Messiah, *Yeshua*... Strong's confirms this pronunciation, and tells us that there were ten Israelites in the Bible who bore this name (#3442). Therefore the shortening of Yehoshua to *Yeshua* predates the Christian era by at least 500 years, and cannot be the result of a Jewish conspiracy to hide the Savior's true name. To claim that the shortened form *Yeshua* is the result of a Jewish conspiracy is to ignore the facts of history and the facts of the Hebrew Scriptures. The form *Yeshua* existed for several hundred years before the Messiah was even born. Even in the pre-Christian Septuagint we see the Greek

⁶ This article can be found at: www.yashanet.com/library/Yeshua_or_Yahshua.htm

form... (*Yesous*) in the title of the Book of Joshua. (This is also proof that *Yesous* has no connection to the pagan god Zeus.)

We can now conclude that this Greek name Ἰησοῦς is not of pagan origin, but was developed by Judahite scholars in the third century B.C. as a **transliteration** of the Hebrew name Yehoshua or Yeshua into the Greek language. While I do not believe that *Iesous* (*Yesous*) is the Messiah's given name, I do believe that it is a transliteration of the Hebrew name Yeshua into the Greek language. The name that the Messiah was given in Matthew 1:21 in Hebrew is Yeshua. Obviously a Hebrew family would give their Hebrew child a Hebrew name. The Greek transliteration of this name would be *Yesous*, and the English transliteration of the Greek name is legitimately *Jesus*. This name originally means "he will save" with the "he" referring to Father Yahweh.

I feel inclined at this point to show the similarity of the transliteration in the Hebrew name for Moses. In Hebrew this name is *Moshe*, but when transliterating it from Hebrew to Greek you must drop the "sh" sound and then add an "s" at the end for masculinity and/or declinable purposes. This allows us to get the Greek name Μωϋσῆς and in turn from Greek to English the name *Moses*. Even though we do not see a complete and exact pronunciation in English as in Hebrew we do see that *Moses* is a proper transliteration from Hebrew to Greek to English. The same applies with Yeshua, to *Yesous*, and finally to *Jesus*.

Zues

We should also note that in the Greek language the name *Zues* is spelled entirely different than the name *Jesus*. According to Thayer's Greek Lexicon the name *Zues* in Greek is spelled Ζεύς and Strong's Exhaustive Concordance defines it as follows:

G2203 / Ζεύς / Zeus / *dzyooce* / Of uncertain affinity; in the oblique cases there is used instead of it a (probably cognate) name Δίς *Dis deece* which is otherwise obsolete; *Zeus* or *Dis* (among the Latins *Jupiter* or *Jove*), the supreme deity of the Greeks:—*Jupiter*.

We might also note that the name *Dionysius*, which some believe *Jesus* is a derivative of, is also spelled differently than *Jesus* in Greek. It is spelled - Διονύσιος. Thus we see that the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name Yehoshua or Yeshua is not associated with either the Greek name *Zues* or *Dionysius* and did not stem from either, but like we have stated before, is an

accurate transliteration (carrying the letters of one language into another) from Hebrew to Greek (Yesous). From the Greek Yesous we get the Old English Yesus or Iesus, and then the English Jesus.

Was the Messiah Given the Name Yahweh in Matthew 1:21?

Now that we have established that the name of Jesus is not derived from Zues, Dionysius or any other pagan deity, we need to examine the name that the Messiah was given at birth. Some have claimed that Jesus' true name was exactly the same as his Father's. Is this the case? Is the Messiah's name Yah or Yahweh?

Let me first say in answer to this question that the Messiah does have the name Yahweh attributed to him in Jeremiah 23:5-6 and Matthew 28:19. It is understood that sons generally carry their father's name, and such is the case with Yeshua carrying the name Yahweh. The question we must answer is this: was the name Yah or Yahweh the name given to the Messiah at his birth in Bethlehem? Was this the name he was called by others at the time he walked the earth? To this question we must answer in the negative. The reason for this answer will now follow.

People who believe in and use the name Yahweh in reference to the heavenly Father do so because the Hebrew text of Scripture often refers to the Father by using the following Hebrew Characters, יהוה. These characters, from right to left, are in Hebrew a *yod*, *he*, *waw*, and finally a *he*. The letters transliterate into the English letters as Y-H-W-H, and are most likely pronounced Yahweh. Those who seek to remove the English words LORD, GOD, or Jehovah where the underlying text reads YHWH are completely correct in doing so. The inspired text reads YHWH and therefore we should have no problem reading this name when we come across a Scripture where it has been improperly or incorrectly substituted. We have no authority to remove from Yahweh's Word what He inspired to be there.

There are some, however, who make a gigantic leap when attempting to call Messiah by the name Yah (Yah-shua) or Yahweh, that is, they say that this is the name he was given in Matthew 1:21. While we can look up a Hebrew text of Scripture, such as Exodus 3:15, and find the name YHWH there, we do not find this name in the text of Matthew 1:21 or Luke 1:31, the two Scriptures showing us what the angel told Miriam and Joseph to name the Messiah child. What name do we find in Matthew 1:21 and Luke 1:31? Allow me to quote both passages of Scripture, inserting the proper Greek name that appears for the Messiah in each Scripture.

And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name **Ἰησοῦς**, for He will save His people from their sins. {Matthew 1:21}

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name **Ἰησοῦς**. {Luke 1:31}

The above name is taken from the actual Greek text of New Testament Scripture. There are no textual variants of the name for Messiah in the two Scriptures quoted; all Greek New Testament documents agree that this is the name the angel told Miriam and Joseph to name their son. You should by now be aware from reading this article that this name squares perfectly with the name of the son of Nun, and is the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name יֵשׁוּעַ (Yeshua). Thus we could say that the Messiah's name was Yeshua ("he will save") or in the longer form Yehoshua which has the meaning of "Yahweh will save". We have no warrant or authority to disregard the text of Scripture here in the respective books of Matthew and Luke. There is no reason to believe they are forgeries or are not to be trusted. The angel spoke by direct inspiration from Yahweh and told the parents to name their child **Yeshua** which in the Greek language transliterates into *Iesous* and then in turn into the Latin and Old English *Jesus* to the modern English name *Jesus*. We cannot say that the child's name *was* Jesus for quite simply it was not. What we can say is that when going through various languages we do come up with the spelling J-e-s-u-s as an English transliteration.

Although the above evidence appears to be solid there may be some who insist that the Messiah's name should instead be Yah (Yah-shua) or Yahweh. However, the name **Iesous (Yesous)** appears in the New Testament in relation to other people than the Messiah. For us to say that Yesous should be fully Yahweh in Matthew 1:21 would cause us to have to say that it should also appear in other texts of Scripture such as Acts 7:45 in reference to the son of Nun, in Luke 3:29 in reference to an ancestor of Messiah, in Acts 13:6 in reference to a man name Bar-Jesus, and to another man – Jesus called Justus - in Colossians 4:11. Each Scripture just given contains the name Ἰησοῦς in it. Should all of these Scriptures use the name Yahweh instead? Not at all; the earthly name given to the Messiah was a name that was quite common in the 1st century A.D. as each of the aforementioned New Testament passages show.

What has happened is that the name Jesus came about in going from Hebrew to Greek to Latin to Old English and then to English; while the name Joshua or Jeshua came about in going from Hebrew to English. English has pretty much

the same sounds in its language as the Hebrew language does for the son of Nun's name, while the Greek language is lacking to a degree in having the same sounds. All that being said, we can forthrightly say that the Messiah's name in Matthew 1:21 is Yeshua. Seeing we can say Yeshua in English there is no need for us to try to say Iesous (Greek) or Jesus (transliteration from going through many languages). While these names are not pagan (they did not originate with pagan gods), these are still not the name of the Hebrew Messiah. We should honor our Messiah by calling him Yeshua, his original, given, Hebrew name.