

Where did the name Jesus come from? (2018 Revision of "Yeshua vs. Jesus")

Over the last 20 years I've heard people in the Sacred Name Movement¹ say that the name Jesus is a derivative of the name Zeus, the chief sky god of the Greek heathens. There is a similarity in the sound of the names Jesus and Zeus, but is this evidence of where the name Jesus originated?

Bible Dictionaries

When sharing with people about the original name of the Messiah, I often start by telling them to pick up a Bible dictionary at their local Christian bookstore. You'll soon find that the names Jesus and Joshua are related. Here's a few examples from my own home library:

JESUS, IESOUS (Ἰησοῦς) is a transliteration of the Heb. "Joshua," meaning 'Jehovah is salvation,' i.e., "is the Saviour,' a common name among the Jews, e.g. Ex. 17:9; Luke 3:29 (R.V.); Col. 4:11. (*Vine, Unger, & White; an Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, 1984*)

Jesus. This name in English is a transcription of the Latin Jesus, which represents the Greek form Ἰησοῦς, of the Hebrew name, yesua (Jesua), itself a late form, by vowel dissimilation, of yosua (Josue), a contracted form of yehosua, "Yahweh is salvation." (*Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible, 1963*)

JESUS... (Ἰησοῦς, Gr. form of Heb. יְהוֹשֻׁעַ [Joshua], *salvation of Yahweh*). (*The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, 1976*)

JESUS CHRIST... The name Jesus, or, as the Hebrews pronounce it, Jehoshuah, or Joshua, signifies, he who shall save... JOSHUA... son of Nun, by the Greeks called Jesus, son of Nave... His first name was Oshea, (Numb. xiii. 8, 16.) which some believe Moses changed, by adding that of God to it. Oshea signifies savior; Jehoshuah, the salvation of God, or he will save. In the New Testament he is called Jesus, which signifies the same, Acts vii. 45; Heb. iv. 8. (*Calmet's Dictionary of the Bible, 1843*)

JESUS... (Gk. Iesous; from Heb. yehosua "Yahweh will save")... JESUS CHRIST... The given name Jesus means "savior"; it is the Greek equivalent of Jeshua (Heb. yesua, from yehosua "Yahweh saves" [=Joshua])... (*Eerdman's Bible Dictionary, 1987*)

Jesus stems more from the Greek and Latin languages. Joshua stems more from the Hebrew language. But, the two names share an origin. This is why the King James Version uses *Jesus* in Acts 7:45 and Hebrews 4:8 in reference to Joshua in the OT.²

¹The Sacred Name Movement began in the early 1900's. Its adherents use the name Yahweh (or some variation of this name) for the Father, and the name Yahshua (or some variation of this name) for the Son. In this study, I'm not suggesting that anyone stop using these names. I'm only correcting what I see to be error concerning Jesus being a pagan name.

²In Acts 7:44-45 we see the author write of the fathers having the tabernacle in the wilderness, and prophet Moses. That's a reference to the wilderness wanderings of the children of Israel, back in the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy. The author goes on to mention Moses' successor, Joshua, who brought the next generation of fathers into the possession of the Gentiles that dwelt in Canaan land. Yet the KJV calls Joshua "Jesus." The fact is, they are the same name, we just associate Moses' successor with the name Joshua, because Joshua is an English transliteration directly from the Hebrew name Yehoshua. *The same holds true in Hebrews 4:8.*

What Prompted this Study

I've been using the name Yeshua (instead of Jesus) for over 15 years. When I found out that Jesus was a Hebrew man from the tribe of Yehudah (Judah; Hebrews 7:14), born to Hebrew parents that had him circumcised at 8 days old, and dedicated to the Most High at the temple in Yerushalaim (Jerusalem; Luke 1-2), it made sense to me that his given name would be a Hebrew name.

I always try to learn a person's name, and call them by it. I'm big on looking at nametags worn by cashiers and waiters, and then referring to them by their name. I figure, "That's their name; I want to call them by it, out of respect." Just the other day a middle eastern lady told me her name was "Fahtmah." I didn't try to correct her, or tell her, "No, I need your English name." I called her by the name she was given at birth, and I did my best to pronounce it properly.

I have much more respect for the Messiah, so why wouldn't I want to call him by his given name? Years ago I decided I would, so I began using the name Yeshua. That was the name I arrived at through studying all the Lexicons, Bible dictionaries, and Encyclopedias I could get my hands on.

This was back in the early 2000's, but just the other day (early 2018) I ran across a YouTube video where the pastor of a Baptist church in Arizona was saying that Yeshua was **not** the Messiah's name, but a fraud promoted by lying devils. He was saying it rather forcefully, even calling the name Yeshua unbiblical. I couldn't believe some of what I was hearing.

What I think is happening here is two-fold. I think some people who use the name Yeshua (or a variation of that Hebrew name) have trashed the name Jesus. In turn, some people who use the name Jesus have decided to trash the name Yeshua. Us humans have a tendency to pick extremes rather than looking at all the evidence and come to a balanced conclusion. The older I get, both naturally and spiritually, the more I am able to slow down and look at all the arguments. I try my best to give an honest ear to all the different angles people take.

On this issue, *I think both extremes are error*. While I do believe the name Yeshua is what our Messiah was called at birth, I do not believe the name Jesus is pagan or heathen in origin, and I do not believe people who use the name Jesus are calling upon some kind of false god or christ. Jesus has become the traditional, English name for the Messiah, based upon influence from the Greek and Latin languages, but Jesus is a *derivative* of the original, Hebrew name Yeshua.

Just the other day I was calling a customer of mine by a totally different name than his own, and he never corrected me until almost the end of the job. I was embarrassed that I'd been calling him "Mike" instead of "Jim." I'd gotten him mixed up with another customer. When he finally said, "My name's actually Jim," I didn't keep calling him Mike. That would have been disrespectful, and I would have probably gotten an odd look from him if I didn't stop calling him Mike.

My dad once had a customer of his call him "Erin" for years before finding out that his name was Erich. Did this customer's use of "Erin" mean that my dad's name became "Erin"? Of course not. My dad's given name is Erich. Erin is not my dad's name, even though it sounds similar to Erich.

I think all of this goes for our Messiah, but on a much higher level. No one called our Messiah "Jesus" until after the middle ages. Greek and Latin speaking people called him "Iesous" (Yay-sooce or Yeh-sooce), but in the first century his parents and his disciples called him *Yeshua*. I choose to call him by his original, given name.

To say though that people who called the Messiah "Jesus" are calling on a different Messiah, or calling upon Zeus, is just plain false. It's an extreme position that has no historical or linguistic basis.

Likewise, to say that the name of the Messiah **not** Yeshua, is also false. *The name Jesus came from the name Yeshua*. The name Jesus wouldn't exist if not for the older, Hebrew name Yeshua.

Doing the Research

When we look up the name Jesus in the Greek New Testament, we find it is taken from the name Iesous. I'll be using Strong's Exhaustive Concordance (SEC) throughout this article to simplify some things.

G2424 - Ἰησοῦς Iesous ee-ay-sooce'

of Hebrew origin (3091); Jesus (i.e. Jehoshua), the name of our Lord and two (three) other Israelites:—Jesus. See Hebrew 3091

Jesus is a name of *Hebrew origin*; a derivative that stems from the Hebrew language. SEC points us to #3091 in its Hebrew dictionary, and when we look up this number we find the Hebrew name *Yehoshua*, from which the Greek name Iesous is derived.

H3091 - יהושוע Yehowshuwa` yeh-ho-shoo'-ah

or Yhowshua {yeh-ho-shoo'-ah}; from 3068 and 3467; Jehovah-saved; Jehoshua (i.e. Joshua), the Jewish leader:—Jehoshua, Jehoshuah, Joshua. Compare 1954, 3442. See Hebrew 3068, 3467, 1954, 3442

Beginning with Yehoshua

Yehoshua is the Hebrew name that was given to the man who took Moses' place of leadership (after his death). It can be found in the book of Numbers 13:16:

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

Replacing the English letter J with a Y gives us *Yehoshua*. Yehoshua's former name was Oshea. The name change made by Moses was small. He added a single letter to Oshea's name, the letter Y (in Hebrew *yod*; Hebrew is read from right to left).

The names appear like this in Hebrew:

Oshea = הוֹשֵׁעַ
 Yehoshua = יְהוֹשֻׁעַ

Moses took a man's name (Oshea) that meant "deliverer" or "salvation," and changed it to mean "Yahweh delivers" or "Yahweh saves" by adding a single letter, *yod*.

The letters in the name that Moses gave to the son of Nun are transliterated³ from Hebrew to English as *Yehoshua*. This is done by bringing the letters in this Hebrew name down into the corresponding letters in the English language.

Surely we can acknowledge that the name *Yehoshua* is not derived from a pagan deity, but rather a name which means *Yahweh saves*.

Yeshua

In Nehemiah 8:17, we see that the short or contracted form of the name Yehoshua is *Yeshua*.

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.

This is the same "son of Nun" mentioned in Numbers 13:16, spoken of first as Oshea, and then re-named *Yehoshua*. Here he is referred to as *Jeshua*. Removing the English J and replacing it with a Y causes us to get the name *Yeshua*. In the Hebrew language this name reads as follows: יֵשׁוּעַ

Yeshua carries the meaning of "he will save,"⁴ and is the contracted form of Yehoshua. Comparisons may be found in the name Robert to Bob, Jonathon to John, Samuel to Sam, etc. This is seen in *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*.

יֵשׁוּעַ [Jeshua], a contracted form of the pr. n. הוֹשֵׁעַ 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.

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 Jews return from the Babylonian captivity.

³ "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

⁴ SEC: "H3442 / יֵשׁוּעַ yêshûa / 'yah-shoo'-ah / For H3091; he will save; Jeshua, the name of two Israelites, also of a place in Palestine:—Jeshua."

When an Old Covenant Israelite said *Yeshua*, meaning “he will save,” they understood that the *he* had the meaning of *Yahweh* will save, as in the longer name *Yehoshua*.

It should be easy to see that *Yeshua* is not a name of paganism, but rather a name used throughout Hebrew Scripture. It is a very Biblical name.

Yehoshua & Yeshua in the Septuagint

Let's turn now to the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, which began around 250 B.C. in Alexandria Egypt. That area contained a mass of Jewish people who spoke Greek rather than Hebrew, and therefore a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek would be beneficial. The men in charge of the translation knew both Hebrew and Greek. How did these men treat the names Yehoshua and Yeshua when transliterating them from Hebrew to Greek?

We will use both Numbers 13:16 and Nehemiah 8:17. In Numbers 13:16, where the name יְהוֹשׁוּעַ (*Yehoshua*) appears in the Hebrew Scripture, the Greek name Ἰησοῦς (*Iesous*) appears in the Septuagint (Numbers 13:17). The only difference being that the last letter of this Greek transliteration is the Greek letter *nu*, which is an alternate case ending for the name. This is the transliteration that Hebrew and Greek speaking men, approximately 200 years before the time of Messiah, chose to use for the name of the son of Nun in Greek.

In looking at Nehemiah 8:17, where we find the contracted form of Yehoshua (*Yeshua*), we also find the Septuagint using the Greek name Ἰησοῦ (*Iesou*). This is another form of the Greek name Iesous, with a different case ending.

Greek lexicons give **Iesous** as the exact, English transliteration of the Greek name. The most proper pronunciation we could give would be pronounced **yey-sooce or yeh-sooce** (Yesous). If we remove final sigma from this Greek name we get the pronunciation *Yeh-soo* which sounds almost exactly like the Hebrew *Yeshu* in Yeshua. The only difference being the "s" sound instead of the "sh" sound.

This *transliteration* from Hebrew to Greek does not come from someone transliterating with "Jesus Christ" in mind, but from Jewish scholars of the B.C. era transliterating the name of Moses' successor. They were transliterating a Hebrew name into the Greek language, using the corresponding Greek letters in the best possible way. **Why would Jewish scholars transliterate the name of Moses' successor incorrectly?**

Transliteration is taking a word in one language, and spelling it with the corresponding letters of another language. At times, the sounds from one language to the next do remain the same or similar, but this is not always the case, because all languages do not contain the same sounds. Such goes for the name at hand. How did the name Iesous come from the name Yehoshua? It comes by transliterating the short form *Yeshua* – from Hebrew into Greek. The process would go like this:

י - 'Ιη (yod - iota, eta)

ש - σ (shin - sigma)

ו - οῦ (waw - omicron, upsilon)

The transliteration into Greek is 'Ιησοῦ. By adding the final *sigma*, often placed on the end of Greek masculine names, we get the name 'Ιησοῦς (Yeh-sous).

The Greek name 'Ιησοῦς is not of pagan origin, but was developed by Jewish scholars in the third century B.C. as a **transliteration** of the Hebrew name ישוע (Yeshua) into Greek.

Consider the similarity in the name *Moses*. In Hebrew this name is pronounced *Moshe*, but when transliterating it from Hebrew to Greek you must drop the “sh” sound and then add a final sigma at the end. Thus we get the Greek name Μωϋσῆς, and in turn the English name Moses. Even though we do not see a complete and exact pronunciation in English from the Hebrew, we do see that Moses is a proper transliteration from Hebrew to Greek to English. The same applies with Yeshua to Yesous to Jesus.

Zues

In the Greek language, Zues is spelled entirely different than the name Jesus. In Greek the name Zues is spelled: Ζεύς, and SEC defines it as follows:

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

Iesous is not associated with the Greek name Zeus, but is rather an accurate transliteration of Yeshua from Hebrew to Greek. From the Greek Iesous we get the Latin and Old English Iesus, and then the modern English Jesus.

We cannot say that the Messiah's name *was* Jesus. What we can say is that when going through various languages we do arrive at Jesus being an English transliteration from the Greek and Latin.

The English name Jesus came about in going from Hebrew to Greek to Latin to English. The English name Joshua came about in going from the long form of the Hebrew name (Yehoshua) directly into 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.

Conclusion

I believe the Messiah's given Hebrew name in Matthew 1:21 is Yeshua. It's even defined there in the verse as given to the child, "because he will save his people from their sins." Yeshua means "he will save."

We can say *Yeshua* in English so why settle on the derivative Jesus (a transliteration of a transliteration of a transliteration)? While Jesus is not pagan (it did not originate with pagan gods), it is *not* the given name of the Hebrew Messiah. I believe it honors our Hebrew Messiah when we call him Yeshua, the name he went by when he walked this earth.

At the same time, it is incorrect to tell people who use the name Jesus, that they are calling on a pagan deity. That claim has no scholarship backing it. We should explain to these people that Jesus is a derivative of the original, given name for our Hebrew Messiah. I think if people are approached in this manner, they will be more apt to receive the original name, Yeshua.