



Yeshua to Jesus

by Tim Kelley

As we draw closer to the end of the age, God has begun to restore a number of truths to those who are searching His word and drawing near to Him. Whereas God's people in the past were "destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6), it appears that at this time He is beginning to increase our knowledge as prophesied in Daniel 12.

Most of us came out of "the church". We were either a part of some protestant denomination or we were Catholic . . . it doesn't really matter. As we were drawn out of those organizations, we began to see that some of the things we were taught was simply untrue. We also came to see that, though we were never taught one way or the other, we simply began to believe certain things taken at face value. One of those things is that that the name of our Saviour and King is Jesus, or as some preachers might say . . . geeeee-zuss.

In all my years in a Christian church, I cannot recall a single sermon devoted to teaching how we came to call our messiah Jesus. I assumed that since Jesus is the name we read in our English Bibles, it must have been correct. I never really thought about it. But once I left the church and began to study on my own, I came to see that Hebrew names have meaning and that my Messiah's Hebrew name would have been Yeshua. This prompted me to tell others that we had been lied to. His name is not Jesus, it's Yeshua. And what's more, Jesus is a pagan name!

How did I come to this conclusion? Where did I find this "revealed knowledge"? Unfortunately, I came upon it in much the same way as I had my previous belief about the name of our Messiah – I read it and without much thought – accepted it as truth.

One such source of this "new truth" about the name "Jesus" is a very popular book entitled "Fossilized Customs" written by Lew White. Though this book is packed full of useful information, there are some areas where Mr. White's conclusions are questionable. On page 18 of his book Lew White offers a number of thoughts concerning the Greek language, and though he never comes out and says such, he all but declares that the name *Jesus* came about as a desire by the pagan Greek culture to include the name of their supreme god "Zeus" in the Messiah's name. This, of course, filtered down to the church and made its way into our English Bibles.

I understand his thinking. Many of the practices of "the Church" are rooted in paganism, and as we "come out of Babylon" we have a zeal to search out all the paganism and remove it from our lives. But not everything the church does is pagan, and those of us who want to spread the truth about our Jewish messiah must make the distinction between what is and what is not pagan in order to not stifle our efforts as we strive to reach those who are still in the Church and teach them a better understanding of our Messiah.

Paul, in his letter to the messianic converts in Colossi said ". . . we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (^{ESV} Colossians 1:9). Paul wanted these converts to be filled with wisdom and understanding, carefully weighing what they had been taught against the foundation of Torah, avoiding the desire to pass information along before it had been thoroughly checked out. Sometimes our zeal gets in the way of "spiritual wisdom". We should always search deeply for the truth before making bold and rash statements. Our "truth" must be truth.

What I'm offering in this teaching is a different understanding of how we got "Jesus" from "Yeshua". This information is derived from a number of sources including an article produced by the messianic ministry "First Fruits of Zion" (www.ffoz.org) as well as a teaching given by Frank Howtz at the Messianic Israel Alliance conference in Maryville, Tennessee in 2010 (www.messianicIsrael.com; www.drybonesrestorationcompany.com). So let's take a look at the name of our Messiah and see how it made the transition from Yeshua to Jesus.

In our 21st century American culture, most people give little thought to the meaning of a person's name. We inherit our last name and our first and middle names are often given to us to honor our relatives or simply because we like the sound of the name, but in the ancient Hebrew culture, names had meaning. Such is the case with our Messiah.

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

According to the text, the name of our Messiah has something to do with salvation. From our studies, we've seen that the Hebrew word for save is *yasha* as in Exodus 14:30. From that word, we get a number of Hebrew names including the name Yeshua which means "he is saved". We find this name used quite often in the Tnakh, one example being in the book of Nehemiah.

ESV Nehemiah 8:17 *And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths, for from the days of **Jeshua** the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so. And there was very great rejoicing.*

In this case, Jeshua (Yeshua – Strong's 3442) refers to Joshua, the one who brought Israel into the Promised Land. A similar name, though be it in Aramaic, is Yeshua (Stong's 3443). Both names are spelled the same.

ESV Ezra 5:2 *Then Zerubbabel (sown in Babylon) the son of Shealtiel (I have asked of God) and Jeshua (he is saved) the son of Jozadak (YHVH is righteous) arose and began to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem, and the prophets of God were with them, supporting them.*

If you were to look up the word "Jesus" in the Strong's dictionary, it states that "Jesus" means "YHVH is salvation". But is that really the case? Not necessarily. Jesus is an English word, not Hebrew. It has no real meaning, it is simply a name. In fact, the name "Jesus" is quite common in the Hispanic community. Strong's, knowing that His HEBREW name had that meaning simply implied the meaning based on the scriptural text. Why can "Yeshua" have meaning, but not "Jesus"? Because of the transition the name made through the languages.

So how did we get the English *Jesus* from the Hebrew *Yeshua*? To see the transition, we must understand a few things about language and translation.

1. Although most words are *translated* from one language to another, names are *transliterated*. When you transliterate a word from one language to another, you give no regard to the meaning of the word. You are only concerned with conveying the sound of the word's letters and syllables from one language to another. Thus, when *Yeshua* was transliterated into Greek, the meaning of the name was lost in the transliteration.
2. A sound that is common to one language may not be available in another. For instance, the guttural sound of the Hebrew letter *chet* (ח) is not available using English letters. The closest we come to the sound is by saying the name *Bach*. This also holds true for the Hebrew letter *ayin* (ע), one of the letters in *Yeshua*. Another example is the English "j", which has no phonic counterpart in many other languages such as German and Spanish (even though these languages do have a "j" in their alphabet, it is pronounced with an "h" sound). Thus some names cannot be accurately transliterated from one language to another.
3. Whereas some languages have only one sound per letter, other languages, particularly English, have multiple sounds for the same letter. The English letter "c" can have an "s" sound (as in *certain*) as well as a "k" sound (as in *car*). The English letter "t" can have a hard "t" sound (as in *target*) as well as "sh" sound (as in *condition*). Therefore, a letter used one way in one language may be applied differently in another.
4. Some languages can make the same sound from different letters, particularly the "s" and "z" sounds (these are called *sibilants*). The English "s" sound can be made using the letters "s, z, c, t, and x". Hebrew is another language with *sibilants*. For instance, the "s" sound can be made using the letters "ס samech, צ zayin, ש shin, ז tzadee, and ת tav". The Greek language also has sibilants, Σ

sigma, Ζ zeta, Ξ xi, and Ψ psi. This causes some to mistake the sound of a letter in one language with the incorrect letter in the other.

Though there are more language rules that come into play in regards to this study, we can understand from these examples that transliteration is not a science. Words – names especially – cannot always be transliterated with 100% accuracy from one language to another. It's hard to represent a sound in one language by a particular letter in another. To make matters worse, in the case of *Yeshua* to *Jesus* the transliteration passes not directly from Hebrew to modern English, instead it comes from Hebrew and passes through Greek, Latin, and old English before coming to our modern English Bible.

Now let's go through the process of transliterating *Yeshua* through the Greek, the Latin, and finally to English.

Yeshua is spelled יֵשׁוּעַ. When you include the vowel points, the letters are yud – tzere – shin – shuruk (the vav is part of the vowel) – ayin – and patah. Remembering that we're trying to match sounds, we:

- Find that Greek has no letter to represent the "y" sound of the Hebrew Yud, thus we represent the Yud with its closest Greek counterpart, the Iota (Ι - pronounced "ee-o-ta") which makes a long "e" sound.
- Represent the sound of the Hebrew vowel tzere (ey as in obey) with the Greek lowercase Eta (η – pronounced eh-tah) which is roughly equivalent. Now we have the long "a" sound.
- Use the Greek lowercase Sigma (σ) to represent the Sheen because there is no letter or letter combination (diphthong) in Greek that will make the "sh" sound. Thus, instead of the "sh" sound, the Greek transliteration will have an "s" sound.
- Represent the vowel shurak with a lowercase Omicron (ο) which makes a comparable "oo" sound as in "tune".
- Discard the Hebrew Ayin since it's a near-silent guttural and has no equivalent in Greek
- Strengthen the "oo" sound of the Omicron by representing the Hebrew patah with a Greek lowercase Upsilon (υ - which makes an "oo" sound as well).

So now we have the Greek letters Ιησοϋ, pronounced "ee-ay-soo". These are the same letters used in the Septuagint to represent the Hebrew name *Jeshua* in 1 Chronicles 24:11 where we see the courses of the priests listed. In this case, it is spelled without a final "s" sound because in this verse the proper name *Jeshua* is not the subject of a verb. In Greek, most masculine names that are the subject of a verb end with the lowercase Sigma (ς).

When we do have a proper name which is the subject of a verb, it is customary to add the final Sigma. Thus, in Ezra 3:2 where we see *Jeshua* the son of Jozadak standing up to build the altar. *Jeshua* is the subject of the verb "build" and thus the Greek spelling of *Jeshua* (*Yeshua*) is Ιησοϋς with the final Sigma (s) and is thus pronounced "ee-ay-soos".

Adding the "s" at the end of the proper names is not unusual in Greek. There are many other examples in the Septuagint:

^{KJV} Judges 17:1 And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah (Μιχαίας).

^{ESV} Exodus 24:13 So Moses (Μωϋσης) rose with his assistant Joshua (Ιησοϋς), and Moses went up into the mountain of God.

In this second passage, we know that the Hebrew pronunciation of Moses is Moshe, and that Joshua is Yehoshuah, but look how it appears in the Septuagint . . . they both end with an "s" sound. Keep in mind that the Septuagint was written between 200 and 300 BCE for the purpose of giving a translation of the Tnakh to the Greek speaking Jews living in Egypt and other Greek speaking areas of the Middle East. The translation was done by Jewish priests and rabbis – not by Christians. The priests and Rabbis who did this work would have had no desire to discredit or represent the prophets of the Tnakh in a bad way – especially not Moses and Joshua. Adding the "s" to their names was not an attempt to associate them with pagan gods, it was simply proper Greek.

Now let's look at the next step, getting "ee-ay-soos" into Latin. Latin has the same alphabet as English with a few exceptions. Since the Latin speaking Romans of the 2nd and 3rd century CE had little or no contact with Hebrew speaking Jews, they had no concept of how to pronounce the Hebrew letters, thus they reverted to the Greek. Here again, they took the sounds, this time the Greek sounds, and tried to match them. Here's what happened:

- The Greek Iota simply became an "I". It just so happens that in Latin, the "I" can represent a number of sounds (just as in English), and it can be represented by the letters "J" and "Y" as well as "I". In this case it makes a somewhat shorter "eh" sound.
- The Greek Eta (long "a") is replaced with the vowel "E" which is a very close match.
- The Sigma sounds like an "S" and is used in both cases
- The Omicron and the Upsilon (both similar in sound) are replaced by a "u".

Now we have the Latin word "Iesus" which is pronounced "ea-soos" or if you slur the "ea" together, you get "yay-soos". Since in Latin the "J", "Y", and "I" all made the same sounds, the name could be written with either a "J", "Y", or "I" as its first letter and still be correct.

There was no transliteration between the Latin and the English since both languages use the same letters. A person who could read English could read a name in Latin as well (remember, the names had no meaning, they were just sounds). It was not until the Norman conquest of England in the 11th century CE that the "jay" sound began to be associated with the letter "J" and thus became a separate letter from the Latin "Y" and "I". The Normans spoke French and made a number of changes to the English language, including adding their aristocratic "jay" sound to the language.

So, by the time of the printing press, the English language had changed and the Hebrew name "Yeshua" had become "jay-soos" in English. As the English language continued to change, so did the pronunciation of the name till we eventually got "gee-zuss".

What about the name Zeus and the last syllable in Jesus? Was there an intent to make them similar in order to honor the supreme god of the Greek culture? Not likely. There is a vast difference between the spelling of Jesus and Zeus in Greek –

- Zeus = Ζεύς
- Jesus (Iesous) = Ἰησοῦς

If it had been the intent of the translators to slip in the name Zeus, they did a very poor job of it. We simply cannot make that assumption based on the sound of the last syllable; we have to consider the spelling of the name.

Thus, based on the evidence of the language requirements and the pattern of Greek transliterations throughout the Septuagint, it is apparent that the name Jesus is not the name of a pagan Greek god. It is simply a transliteration problem, not an evil motive on the part of the translators or the church.

Though today we are able to transliterate directly from the Hebrew, we still struggle with the correct pronunciation of the Messiah's name as well as that of His Father. May we all be merciful to those of us in the Hebraic walk as well as those YHVH has yet to draw out of the churches and into the joy of walking in the ways of Messiah Yeshua – the Living Torah!

Shalom Alechim