

What is the original Hebrew name for Jesus? And is it true that the name Jesus is really a pagan corruption of the name Zeus?

I am continually amazed by how many people write to our ministry and ask us questions like this one, which came in last week: “Some Christians say we have to use the Hebrew name, Yashua. They say calling on the name of Jesus is calling on Zeus. That Jesus is a disguise name for Satan. What answers do you have for this? Where can we prove the name of Jesus is correct to use in its English translation and pronunciation?”

As bizarre as these questions are, the fact that they keep coming up means that they need to be addressed, so here are some simple responses (for more details, see [*What Do Jewish People Think About Jesus*](#), question #38).

The original Hebrew-Aramaic name of Jesus is *yeshu 'a*, which is short for *yehōshu 'a* (Joshua), just as Mike is short for Michael. The name *yeshu 'a* occurs 27 times in the Hebrew Scriptures, primarily referring to the high priest after the Babylonian exile, called both *yehōshu 'a* (see, e.g., Zechariah 3:3) and, more frequently, *yeshu 'a* (see, e.g., Ezra 3:2). So, Yeshua's name was not unusual; in fact, as many as five different men had that name in the Old Testament. And this is how that name came to be “Jesus” in English: Simply stated, this is the etymological history of the name Jesus: Hebrew/Aramaic *yeshu 'a* became Greek *Iēsous*, then Latin *Iesus*, passing into German and then, ultimately, into English, as Jesus.

Why then do some people refer to Jesus as Yahshua? There is absolutely *no* support for this pronunciation—none at all—and I say this as someone holding a Ph.D. in Semitic languages. My educated guess is that some zealous but linguistically ignorant people thought that Yahweh's name must have been a more overt part of our Savior's name, hence YAHshua rather than Yeshua—but again, there is no support of any kind for this theory.

The Hebrew Bible has *yeshu 'a*; when the Septuagint authors rendered this name in Greek, they rendered it as Ἰησοῦς (*Iēsous*, with no hint of *yah* at the beginning of the name); and the same can be said of the Peshitta translators when they rendered Yeshua's name into Syriac (part of the Aramaic language family). All this is consistent and clear: The original form of the name Jesus is *yeshu 'a*, and there is no such name as *yahshu 'a* (or, *yahushua* or the like).

What about the alleged connection between the name Jesus (Greek *Iēsous*) and Zeus? This is one of the most ridiculous claims that has ever been made, but it has received more circulation in recent years (the Internet is an amazing tool of misinformation), and there are some believers who feel that it is not only preferable to use the original Hebrew/Aramaic name, Yeshua, but that it is *wrong* to use the name Jesus. Because of this, we will briefly examine this claim and expose the fallacies that underlie it.

According to the late A. B. Traina in his *Holy Name Bible*, “The name of the Son, Yahshua, has been substituted by Jesus, Iesus, and Ea-Zeus (Healing Zeus).”

In this one short sentence, two complete myths are stated as fact: First, there is no such name as Yahshua (as we have just explained), and second, there is no connection of any kind between the Greek name *Iēsous* (or the English name Jesus) and the name Zeus. Absolutely none! You might as well argue that Tiger Woods is the name of a tiger-infested jungle in India as try to connect the

name Jesus to the pagan god Zeus. It is that absurd, and it is based on serious linguistic ignorance.

Here is another, equally absurd statement:

Basically, to keep it simple, “Jesus” is a very poor Roman translation from Latin, that was also poorly translated from the Greek, which IN NO WAY resembles His Hebrew name, “Yahshua.” Whew! Get all that? Moreover, according to the *ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA*, the name Iesus (Jesus) is a combination of 2 mythical deities, IEU and SUS (ZEUS, a Greek god). In Gnostic and Greek mythologies they are actually one and the same pagan deity. So, it appears the name “Jesus” has some documented pagan origins. That's not good! In fairness, some Messianic believers disagree and state that there is no definitive evidence to connect “Jesus” to “Zeus.” However, I disagree with them. (<http://www.wwyd.org/>)

The response to this statement (which has as much support as the latest Elvis sightings) is quite simple: We know where the name *Iēsous* came from: the Jewish Septuagint! In other words, this was not some later, pagan corruption of the Savior's name; rather, it was the natural Greek way of rendering the Hebrew/Aramaic name Yeshua at least two centuries before His birth, and it is the form of the name found in *more than 5,000 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament*. This is saying something! The name *Iēsous* is also found in Greek writings outside the New Testament and dating to that same general time frame.

Although it is claimed that the *Encyclopedia Britannica* says that “the name Iesus (Jesus) is a combination of 2 mythical deities, IEU and SUS (ZEUS, a Greek god)” it actually says no such thing. This is a complete fabrication, intentional or not. In short, as one Jewish believer once stated, “Jesus is as much related to Zeus as Moses is to mice.”

Unfortunately, some popular teachers continue to espouse the Jesus-Zeus connection, and many believers follow the pseudo-scholarship in these fringe, “new revelation” teachings. Not only are these teachings and practices filled with error, but they do not profit in the least. So, to every English-speaking believer I say: Do not be ashamed to use the name JESUS! That is the proper way to say his name in English—just as Michael is the correct English way to say the Hebrew name *mi-kha-el* and Moses is the correct English way to say the Hebrew name *mo-sheh*. Pray in Jesus' name, worship in Jesus' name, and witness in Jesus' name. And for those who want to relate to our Messiah's Jewishness, then refer to him by His original name Yeshua—not Yahshua and not Yahshua—remembering that the power of the name is not in its pronunciation but in the *person* to whom it refers, our Lord and Redeemer and King.