

## FAQs on the Torah and Associated Subjects

4:21). "The prohibition against the pronunciation of the name of God applies only to the Tetragrammaton, which could be pronounced by the high priest only once a year on the Day of Atonement in the Holy of Holies...and in the Temple by the priests when they recited the Priestly Blessing" (*EJ*).<sup>20</sup> The Mishnah reflects these traditions that existed in the Judaism of Yeshua's day:

"And the priests and people standing in the courtyard, when they would hear the Expressed Name [of the Lord] come out of the mouth of the high priest, would kneel and bow down and fall on their faces and say, 'Blessed be the name of the glory of his kingdom forever and ever'" (m.*Yoma* 6:2).<sup>21</sup>

There was a protocol for using the proper name of God, which it is clear that Yeshua adhered to during His Earthly ministry. In the Gospels Yeshua actually spends more time calling His Father, "Father," than referring to Him as God or Lord. If Yeshua considered not speaking the name YHWH aloud to be an error of the Second Temple Judaism that His ministry existed in, then there would be plenty of evidence in the Apostolic Scriptures supporting this, including charges of blasphemy against Him for verbalizing the name YHWH. **But these things do not appear.** As Messianic Believers who are trying to return to the theology of the First Century Believers, who operated within the context of Second Temple Judaism, we must recognize that while our Heavenly Father has a proper name, it was not used by Yeshua or the Apostles. We must have the same kind of respect for the holiness of the name YHWH that they had.

**I have encountered many, many Messianic people who claim that the English name "Jesus" is of pagan origins. Does this have any substantial basis to it? I am an intelligent person, and I do know that the Messiah did not speak English, and that "Jesus" is not what He was originally called.**

The following entry has been adapted from the article "Sacred Name Concerns," by J.K. McKee

There is some controversy across parts of the Messianic movement, surrounding the name that history and the majority of English speaking people know Him by: **Jesus Christ**. Most Sacred Name Only advocates argue that the name "Jesus" is pagan because it has Greek linguistic origins, and some have even referred to our Savior insultingly as "Gee-Zeus." However, a study of Hebrew to Greek transliteration shows that there is no basis or justification for this.

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<sup>20</sup> Louis I. Rabinowitz, "God, Names of," in *EJ*.

<sup>21</sup> Neusner, *Mishnah*, 275.

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About three centuries before the Messiah's birth, the Jewish translators of the Septuagint had a similar problem. They were commissioned to translate the Hebrew Bible into Greek for Ptolemy's library at Alexandria and had extreme difficulty transliterating Hebrew proper names into Greek. Unlike Hebrew to English transliteration, which is easier because English offers most of the same sounds of Hebrew; Hebrew to Greek transliteration is not as easy because it does not share some of the same sounds. It is notable that many of our proper Biblical names in English come from Greek transliterations of Hebrew words (i.e., Moses, Phinehas, Caiphas).

*Young's Analytical Concordance* is one resource that easily confirms that the Greek name *Iēsous*, used for our Savior in the Greek Apostolic Scriptures, is a transliteration of His original Hebrew name *Yeshua*.<sup>22</sup> The name Yeshua is a contracted form of the name Yehoshua or Joshua, and is used numerous times in the Tanach to refer to Moses' successor.<sup>23</sup> Transliteration is the process where one tries to communicate, as closely as possible, the sounds of one language into another language, often by representing words of one language in a different alphabet. This is extremely difficult when taking proper Hebrew names and communicating them in Greek. How we get from *Yeshua* to *Iēsous* (pronounced *Ee-ay-sooce*) to ultimately *Jesus* is a challenge to understand if one is armed with nothing more than a concordance, does not understand the difficulty of transliteration, and most importantly has not studied **both** Hebrew and Greek. When transliterating the Hebrew name *Yeshua* to Greek:

- *yod* ("yay") becomes *iota-ēta* ("ye" or "ee-ay")
- *shin* ("sh") becomes *sigma* ("s"), as there is no "sh" sound in Greek
- *vav* ("u") becomes *omicron-epsilon* ("oo")
- It is necessary for a final sigma (*s*) to be placed at the end of the word to distinguish that the name is masculine and for it to be declinable from the nominative case (indicating subject)
- the *ayin* ("ah") sound gets dropped
- Hence, we get the name *Iēsous*, pronounced either *Ye-sooce* or *Ee-ay-sooce*

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<sup>22</sup> The exact reference in its entirety under the name "Jesus," specifically indicates "[*Iēsous*], from Heb. [*Yeshua*] saviour" (Robert Young, *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977], 541).

<sup>23</sup> Consult B.T. Dahlberg, "Jeshua," in *IDB*, 2:867-868. Note that this entry includes the Hebrew and Greek spellings. See also *Thayer*, 300; *BDAG*, 471-472.

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The name *Iēsous*, surprisingly to some, is actually of Jewish origin. This name is used for the title of the Book of Joshua in the Septuagint,<sup>24</sup> the Ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. This serves as definitive proof that *Iēsous* is not of pagan origin, but rather is simply a Greek transliteration of Yeshua developed by the LXX's Jewish translators.

In Old English, the name *Iēsous* was rendered *Iesus* (pronounced *Yesus*). However, it was spelled with a beginning letter "I," which in the Middle Ages had a "Y" sound. The I was used for letters beginning with both "I" and "J." Early editions of the King James Version, for example, simply transliterate the Greek *Iēsous* into English as "Iesus." Later in the development of the English language, J's started being used in place of I's, and the letter received the same sound that it has today. The name Jesus is less than 400 years old. However, its existence did not come about by some sordid conspiracy as some might errantly claim.

As Messianic Believers, we prefer the richness of our Savior's original Hebrew name of Yeshua. But because we prefer Yeshua over Jesus **does not mean** that we believe that those who pray in the "name of Jesus" are not praying in the authority of the same Savior that we are praying to in the "name of Yeshua." Our Heavenly Father looks at our hearts, and we need to understand. We encourage people to use the name that was originally given to the Messiah, **Yeshua**, but also must realize that "history happens" and the pronunciation of names can change from language to language via transliteration.

Those who have a problem with the Greek name *Iēsous* need to direct their criticism to the Jewish Rabbis who translated the Septuagint. We would challenge them to provide their own transliteration of the name *Yeshua* into Greek, understanding the linguistic barriers that exist, and ask them to tell us what names the Messiah was designated as having in the sign above His cross which appeared "in Hebrew, Latin and in Greek" (John 19:20).

In Old English, *Iēsous* was rendered *Iesus* (pronounced *Yesus*). The Geneva Bible and the 1611 King James Version left all proper names in their Greek forms, so in the New Testament you will see names like *Iesus* and *Noe* (Noah) and *Esias* (Isaiah), rather than their more customary English forms. There was no capital "J" until later on. When this letter began appearing in English Bibles it adopted the "j" sound that we know today, and the English name "Jesus" was formed.

But the debate does not end there. Does the Greek name *Iēsous*, as some have claimed, mean "son of Zeus"? No. First of all, *Iēsous* and *Zeus* have two totally different Greek spellings. Second, Zeus in Ancient Greek is *not pronounced* as Zoos. Its first letter, *zeta*, actually has a "dz" sound. A more accurate transliteration of *Dzeus* is better for the layperson who has not studied Greek. Third, the diphthongs "ou" in *Iēsous* and "eu" in *Zeus* are pronounced differently.

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<sup>24</sup> Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979), 1:354-405.

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"Ou" is pronounced as "oo," and "eu" is pronounced as "eh-uh." Fourth, the term "son of Zeus" in classical Greek would probably appear as *ho huios tou Dios* and not *Iēsous*. Anyone who claims that the name *Iēsous* is even remotely connected to *Zeus* is exhibiting poor, sub-standard scholarship, and should be immediately dismissed.

Transliteration is not an exact science. However, it does prove that the Greek name *Iēsous* from whence we derive the name "Jesus" is not pagan. Those who believe that "Jesus" is another god and declare that they "reject Jesus" need to examine the facts of Hebrew to Greek transliteration. They need to realize just who they are rejecting. Those who believe that "Jesus" is someone else and proclaim that "We reject Jesus!" need to do more scholarly work.

When going out into the Ancient Mediterranean to declare the good news of the Messiah to Greeks and Romans, not only did the Apostles preach in the name of *Iēsous* to diverse audiences—but we encounter at least one Diaspora Jew who was given the name *Iēsous* by his parents. In the closing greeting of the Epistle to the Colossians, we see a man who has a very intriguing name: "Jesus who is called Justus" (Colossians 4:11). This is a prime attestation of how in ancient times, and even frequently today, Jewish people commonly had two names: one from their Jewish heritage, and one from the environment in which they were living. Paul or *Paulos*, otherwise known as Saul or *Shaul*, also had two names (Acts 13:9). What makes this so intriguing for us as Messianics is that this Jewish man, also with the name Justus (Grk. *Ioustos*), was actually named *Iēsous*. The following is what the *ABD* entry has to say about this man:

"Jesus Justus, a Jewish Christian who sent greetings to the Colossians along with Paul from his place of imprisonment (Col 4:11). Jesus (the Greek form of Joshua or Jeshua) was his Jewish name. It was common for Jews to have this name (cf. Acts 13:6) up until the 2d cent. C.E. Justus was his Latin surname, which denoted loyal observance of the law, and was probably given to him because of his reputation."<sup>25</sup>

What makes Jesus Justus significant is that it points to the fact that the name *Iēsous*, the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name *Yeshua*, was in fact used among Greek-speaking Jews as an acceptable male name.

The CJB renders Colossians 4:11 with "Yeshua, the one called Justus." A commentator like F.F. Bruce recognizes how "Jesus is the Greek/Latin form of Joshua or Jeshua; Justus was a common Latin cognomen."<sup>26</sup> Peter T. O'Brien also recognizes that for this man "'Jesus' ([*Iēsous*]) was his Jewish name (the Greek from of 'Joshua' or 'Jeshua') and this was common among Jews (Acts 13:6) until

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<sup>25</sup> John Gillman, "Justus," in *ABD*, 3:1135.

<sup>26</sup> F.F. Bruce, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 180.

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the second century A.D. when it disappeared as a proper name, no doubt because of the conflict between the synagogue and the Church.”<sup>27</sup> Douglas J. Moo further observes, “Jesus’ was a popular name among the first-century Jews, fading in popularity only in the second century because of growing Jewish/Christian tensions.”<sup>28</sup>

What this all points to is the fact that when people like the Apostle Paul went out into the Greek speaking world, to Greek speaking Jewish synagogues, referring to the Messiah with the name *Iēsous* would not at all have been something strange to them—even if they and their adherents knew it was a transliteration of *Yeshua*. The negative reaction that we often find in today’s Messianic movement to the English name “Jesus,” would not have been mirrored among the First Century Jewish Believers to the name *Iēsous*—because just as there were normal Jewish men in Judea who bore the name *Yeshua*, so were there normal Jewish men in the Diaspora who bore the name *Iēsous*. The name *Iēsous* may not have been the original name that the pregnant Mary was instructed to call her unborn child (Matthew 1:21), but it was by no means something concocted in later centuries by Greeks and Romans so that they could somehow continue to worship their pagan deities.<sup>29</sup>

The ***biggest evidence***, of course, against the claim that the name “Jesus” is pagan is that people have been saved, delivered from demons, and prayers have been answered through the name of Jesus Christ. It is ironic, of course, to find out that many SNO advocates will admit to being saved in the name of “Jesus.” But it is often these same people who will slander, harass, and unfairly criticize others who likewise say they were saved in the “name of Jesus,” telling many Christians that they cannot be saved. Anyone who says that the name Jesus is pagan (while it may not be the Messiah’s original name) in light of this evidence, we should believe *is guilty of blasphemy* (cf. Matthew 12:31).

As Messianic Believers, we prefer the richness of our Savior’s original Hebrew name Yeshua, and we do not overly encourage usage of the name Jesus. But because we prefer Yeshua over Jesus does not mean that we believe that those who pray in the “name of Jesus” are not praying in the authority of the Same One who we are praying to in the “name of Yeshua.” *We must reflect a Lord and Savior who embodies ultimate love and compassion.* Our Heavenly Father looks at our hearts and we need to be understanding. We should encourage people to use the name that was originally given to the Messiah, but

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<sup>27</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians, Philemon*, Vol. 44 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 251.

<sup>28</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 340.

<sup>29</sup> This section includes some embedded quotations from the commentary *Colossians and Philemon for the Practical Messianic* by J.K. McKee.

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also must realize that "history happens" and the pronunciation of names changes from language to language via transliteration.

### Why does your ministry use the terms "God" and "Lord" for YHWH, when these are well documented terms used in ancient paganism?

It is notable that many people who use the Divine Name in sectors of the Messianic movement tend to forget that our Father has many titles that are used complimentary *and independently* of the name YHWH/YHVH. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the most notable titles that are used are *Elohim* and *Adonai*. In the Greek Scriptures, their counterparts are *Theos* and *Kurios*. These titles in English correspond to "God" and "Lord."

Sacred Name Only advocates often have a field day in attacking people who use the titles God and Lord. It is often said that these words are of pagan origin and should have no place whatsoever in the vocabulary of a Believer. This claim is made on the basis that God and Lord have also been titles of pagan deities. This claim is made even more so for the Greek titles *Kurios* and *Theos*, which were used in Ancient Greek as titles for the deities of Mount Olympus. However, arguments against *Kurios* and *Theos* significantly lose weight when we see that the Jewish Rabbis who translated the Hebrew Tanach into Greek had no problem using them in reference to the Holy One of Israel. In fact, when the Apostles went into Greek-speaking lands, this is **exactly** what they called the God of Israel.

It is not uncommon at all for many in today's Messianic movement to perceive the Hebrew language as being the "holy tongue." This is based on a misunderstanding of Zephaniah 3:9, where the Prophet says "I will give to the peoples purified lips" or *safar beruah*. To assume that this means that the peoples will be given an ability to speak Hebrew is not an honest assessment of the Book of Zephaniah, as the previous verses tell us exactly what the problem of Ancient Israel has been:

"Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled, the tyrannical city! She heeded no voice, she accepted no instruction. She did not trust in the LORD, she did not draw near to her God. Her princes within her are roaring lions, Her judges are wolves at evening; they leave nothing for the morning. Her prophets are reckless, treacherous men; her priests have profaned the sanctuary. They have done violence to the law. The LORD is righteous within her; He will do no injustice. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He does not fail. But the unjust knows no shame. I have cut off nations; their corner towers are in ruins. I have made their streets desolate, with no one passing by; their cities are laid waste, without a man, without an inhabitant. I said, 'Surely you will revere Me, accept instruction.' So her dwelling will not be cut off *according to* all that I have