

The Messiah's Hebrew Name: "Yeshua" Or "Yahshua"?

by Dr. Daniel Botkin

Dr. Daniel Botkin explains the Hebrew linguistics of the names "Yeshua" and "Yahshua" and how "Yahshua" is a mistransliteration by Sacred Name advocates to fit an erroneous interpretation of John 5:43 and how "Yeshua" is far more accurate. He also clearly establishes the fact that the English name "Jesus" has absolutely no pagan connection and is simply a derivation of "Yesous," the Greek transliteration of "Yeshua." Most important, Dr. Botkin addresses that slander and criticism surrounding the name controversy in entirely non-Scriptural and not glorifying to the Holy One of Israel.

The Messiah's Hebrew name is usually transliterated as either *Yeshua* or *Yahshua*. Under normal circumstances I would not bother to write an article about something as trivial as the difference between the vowel sounds "e" and "ah." There is a need to address the subject, though, because some people who use the *Yahshua* form say untrue things about those who use the *Yeshua* form. The opponents of the *Yeshua* form claim that this pronunciation is the result of a Jewish conspiracy to hide the Savior's true name. Those who call the Messiah *Yeshua* are accused of perpetuating a Jewish conspiracy and "denying His name" or "degrading Him" by their use of the *Yeshua* form. If you have never read or heard these outlandish accusations, you probably will eventually. From time to time I receive personal letters to this effect.

The proponents of the *Yahshua* form claim that the Messiah's name was the same as Joshua's, written [vwhy or [wvwhy (Strong's #3091). The only problem is that neither of these Hebrew spellings of Joshua's name can possibly be pronounced "Yahshua." The third letter in Joshua's name (reading from right to left) is the letter *vav*(w) and a *vav* cannot be silent. The letter *vav* must be pronounced as either a "v" or an "o" or an "u." (In the case of *Joshua*, it takes an "o" sound, giving us "Ye-ho-SHU-a." Strong's confirms this pronunciation.) For a name to be pronounced "Yahshua," it would have to be spelled [wv--hy, and no such name exists anywhere in the Hebrew Bible. You don't have to just take my word for it, though. Dr. Danny Ben-Gigi says of the *Yahshua* form that "there is no such name in Hebrew" and that "people invented it to fit their theology." [1] Dr. Ben-Gigi is an Israeli and the former head of Hebrew programs at Arizona State University. He is the author of the book *First Steps in Hebrew Prayers*, and he designed and produced the "Living Israeli Hebrew" language-learning course. Dr. David Bivin, a Christian, says that the *Yahshua* form "is rooted in a misunderstanding." [2] Dr. Bivin is a renowned Hebrew scholar and teacher and author of *Fluent Biblical Hebrew*.

I do not know of a single individual that knows Hebrew well enough to actually read it and understand it and converse in it who uses the *Yahshua* form.

Please do not misunderstand. A person does not need to know Hebrew and Greek linguistics in order to be spiritual. However, if a person is going to take it upon himself to instruct others about subjects of a linguistic and Hebraic nature, he should know the Hebrew language and he should know some basics about linguistics. This is especially true if he is going to use his Hebrew-based linguistic teachings to accuse his brethren of being part of a "Jewish conspiracy" to "deny the true name of the Messiah."

To people who actually know Hebrew – people like Dr. Ben-Gigi, Dr. Bivin, and others – it is very obvious that those who insist on the *Yahshua* form know very little about the Hebrew language. The only Hebrew that most of these self-appointed scholars know is what they can learn from a Strong's Concordance. [3] Strong's is a great study tool and a fine place to start, but it is not a means by which a person can learn the Hebrew language.

The English form *Jesus* is derived from the New Testament Greek name *Ihsouß*, pronounced "Yesous." According to Strong's, *Yesous* (Strong's #2424) is "of Hebrew origin" and can be traced back to Joshua's Hebrew name, *Yehoshua* (#3091, [wvwhy). 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* ([wvy]) in Neh. 8:17 it is apparent even in English: "Jeshua the son of Nun." (The letter *J* was pronounced like a *Y* in Old English.) Strong 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* à Hebrew *Yeshua*

Hebrew *Yeshua* à Greek *Yesous*

Greek *Yesous* à 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* ([wvy]). 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.[4] 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 form *IHSOUS* (*Yesous*) in the title of the Book of Joshua. (This is also proof that *Yesous* has no connection to the pagan god Zeus.)

So where did the transliteration *Yahshua* come from? This form of the name can be traced back to the beginnings of the Sacred Name movement, a movement that grew out of the Church of God, 7th Day, in the late 1930s. I have in my files an article entitled, "A Brief History of the Name Movement in America" by L.D. Snow, a Sacred Name believer.[5] According to this article, "John Briggs and Paul Penn were the FIRST to pronounce and use the name *Yahshua*" (emphasis Snow's). This was in 1936 and in 1937, the article states. No information is given about how Briggs and Penn came up with this (mis)translation.

Later Sacred Name literature appeals to the Messiah's statement in John 5:43 as "proof" of the *Yahshua* form: "I am come in My Father's name," He said. In the minds of Sacred Name believers, this means that "*Yah*," a shortened form of *Yahweh*, must appear in the name of the Son. However, the Messiah did *not* say "My name contains My Father's name" or "My Father's name must appear inside My name" or any such statement. He said absolutely nothing here about His own name. The only "name" mentioned here was the Father's name. He said, "I am come in My Father's name," which simply means that He was coming by His Father's authority, on His Father's behalf. If we take *Yeshua*'s statement "I am come in My Father's name" to mean that His own name must contain the Father's name, then we ourselves cannot do anything "in the Father's name" unless our own personal name happens to contain the syllable "*Yah*." The folly of this interpretation is also evident if the same line of reasoning is applied to the rest of *Yeshua*'s statement: "...if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive." If the logic of Sacred Name believers is applied to this half of the verse, it would be saying "a person's name must contain his own name," which is meaningless. If, on the other hand, "in his own name" means "by his own authority," then the statement makes sense.

Why is the *Yahshua* form used by no one but Sacred Name believers and people who have been influenced by Sacred Name believers? Probably because no such name exists in the Hebrew Bible and, to my knowledge, no such name exists in any extra-Biblical Hebrew literature. It appears that Dr. Ben-Gigi is correct when he says that people invented the name *Yahshua* to fit their theology.

I have read a lot of literature from writers who seek to expose the "errors" of those who refer to the Messiah as *Yeshua*. The only thing these writers actually expose is their lack of knowledge. I could give several examples of statements which are absolutely ridiculous. I do not have the space in this publication to give all the examples I have in my files, and I do not wish to embarrass sincere people for their honest but misguided efforts. There are some examples, though, that grossly misrepresent the facts, and some of these examples need to be exposed.

In one popular booklet published by a well-known Sacred Name organization, the anonymous author makes this statement: "Most reference works agree with Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the NT* statement on page 284, which states that the name Yahoshua was shortened after the exile to the short form *Yahshua*." This statement makes it sound like Kittel uses the forms *Yahoshua* and *Yahshua*. I went to the library and looked at this page in Kittel's. The words *Yahoshua* and *Yahshua* do not appear even one time on this page. This can be verified by going to a library and looking up this page. (It's in Volume III.) If your library does not have Kittel's, I can send a photocopy of this page to any skeptics.

This same Sacred Name organization which misrepresents Kittel's also misrepresented a Jewish author. In a magazine article written by this organization's main leader, a lengthy segment is quoted from a book published by KTAV, a Jewish publishing house. When copying this quotation for his magazine article, this Sacred Name author freely used *Yahshua*, making it appear that the Jewish author used that transliteration in his book. I got the book from the library, though, and discovered that "Yahshua" did not appear in the book. I wrote to this Sacred Name leader asking for an explanation. I told him that unless he had some other explanation, I could conclude one of three things: either he deliberately misrepresented the facts, or he did it accidentally, or the book I got from the library was a different version from his, in which case I would owe him an apology. My letter was sent September 1, 1997, and I am still waiting for a reply. I will not embarrass this man by mentioning his name or the name of his ministry. It is not my intention to embarrass anyone.

I am not writing this article to persuade people to quit saying "Yahshua." If people want to continue using a mistransliteration that was erroneously contrived by early Sacred Name pioneers who didn't know Hebrew, it really doesn't matter to me. I don't think that the substitution of an "ah" sound for an "e" sound matters much to the Lord, either. What does matter, though, is the spreading of false accusations against Messianic Jews and others who called the Messiah "Yeshua."

Paul warned Timothy about "doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmising [suspicions]" (1 Tim. 6:4). Unfortunately, this is an accurate description of what goes on among many people in the Sacred Name movement. Personally, I would rather fellowship with non-contentious people who call the Messiah "Jesus" than with contentious people who insist that everyone call Him "Yahshua."

NOTES

[1] *Love Song to the Messiah* newsletter, March 1999, p. 1.

[2] "The Fallacy of Sacred Name Bibles," *Jerusalem Perspective* Nov.-Dec. 1991, p. 12.

[3] These teachers very heavily rely on Strong's Concordance, yet when Strong proves them wrong, as he does with the pronunciation of *Yehoshua*, they insist that Strong's rendering is erroneous! I have a Sacred Name publication which actually claims that Strong wrote down incorrect pronunciations because "his understanding of the Name was lacking." Anyone who wants to disprove this ludicrous assertion can simply look at Joshua's name in a Hebrew Bible and see that Strong used the very same vowel marks that are used in the Bible.

[4] There is some debate over whether or not the Jews' final shortening of Jesus' name to *Yeshu* (wvy) was a deliberate attempt to avoid acknowledging Yeshua of Nazareth as Savior.

[5] This article first appeared in a publication called *The Elijah Messenger* in May-June 1966, and was reprinted in 1975 in *World Today Analyzed*, a publication of the Assembly of Yahvah in Tahlequah, OK.