

How Yeshu'a Became Jesus

By

Anthony V. Gaudiano

In 1991 an article titled: *How Yeshu'a Became Jesus - history of Our Lord's Name* by Joseph Stallings, appeared in the January issue of The Catholic Digest magazine. The author explained how the Aramaic name of our Savior changed sequentially when brought into Greek, Latin, and English. It should have been transliterated (carry same sound) directly into each language.

Having explained the progression of the error, it was curious the author did not end his article advocating a return to our Savior's name. Attempts to contact him through the magazine and on the Internet have been unsuccessful. For those unfamiliar with the thrust of Stallings' article, it is paraphrased herein and additional information about the matter is provided.

In the following, read Aramaic-Hebrew from right-to-left; Greek and Latin left-to-right. Biblical languages were initially written without space between words, without upper/lower case, and without punctuation. An example of this can be seen in Appendix A where a reasonable facsimile of Pilate's words from John 19:19 is depicted.

Most people don't know that the name of our Savior is not *Jesus* as commonly seen in English bibles. It is the Aramaic name: ܝܫܘܥ, *Yeshu'a*; (Yeshua) pronounced: *yay-shoo'-ah*. In the first century in Judea and Galilee, the name Yeshua shared fifth place with *Eleazar* (Lazarus) as a name for Jewish men. The most popular male names then were: *Shime'on* (Simon), *Yosef* (Joseph), *Yehuda* (Judah or Judas), and *Yochanan* (John).

In Strong's Concordance - Hebrew dictionary, word 3442 ܝܫܘܥ, means: 'he will save.' It is the Aramaic version of the earlier, longer, Hebrew *Yeoshu'a* (Joshua), which means: 'Yahweh saved.' Our Savior would have been known as: Yeshua ben Yosef (Yeshua, Son of Joseph), as was supposed.

Many people also mistakenly assume the title given our Savior in the bible, is a last name. His title in Strong's Hebrew dictionary is משיח *'Messiah'*, and in the Greek dictionary it is Χριστός *'Christōs'* from which came the English word 'Christ.' Both words mean 'anointed,' which is occasionally preceded by the definite article 'the,' e.g., 'Yeshua the Anointed.'

At the time ܝܫܘܥ was born, Aramaic had replaced Hebrew in everyday conversation in the Holy Land. But Hebrew remained the language rabbis used in worship, prayer, and teaching. The two languages are closely related, as Italian is to Spanish, and both used the same alphabet.

Throughout Galilee, Samaria, and Judea, the name ܝܫܘܥ presented no problem to those who spoke Aramaic, read the Tanach, and prayed in Hebrew. But as the Good News spread outside of the Holy Land, it was different.

The Gentiles of the Roman Empire spoke Greek and Latin, and could not pronounce the name יֵשׁוּעַ . It contained a guttural sound that did not exist in their language. When the Gospels were translated into Greek, there were problems about how יֵשׁוּעַ might be transliterated acceptably.

The Aramaic-Hebrew letter *yod* (י) was an easy choice for the ‘Y.’ The Greek letter *iota*, written ‘I,’ was chosen since it was pronounced like the ‘y’ in *yet*.

The next sound was a vowel, so was a little more difficult. Unlike Greek, all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are consonants. The marks for vowels (עֲוֵי) were not invented until centuries after יֵשׁוּעַ died, and were simple dots and dashes, placed above or beneath the letters. At the time of יֵשׁוּעַ , the first vowel, an ‘e,’ apparently was pronounced like the ‘a’ in *gate*, which was sounded approximately like the Greek letter *eta* (Η).

Then followed the first of two problems with Aramaic/Hebrew word pronunciation. There was no letter in the Greek alphabet with an ‘sh’ sound like the Hebrew letter *shin* (ש),. A familiar name such as Solomon was *Sh’lomo* in Hebrew, Samson was *Shimson*, and Samuel was *Sh’mu-el*. Early Greek translators of Old Testament Hebrew names in the Septuagint, chose the Greek *sigma* (Σ) for the *shin*. This was done also when transliterating יֵשׁוּעַ .

The second problem was the letter *waw* (ו), which represents the sound ‘oo,’ as in *too*. It was easy to duplicate this sound in Greek, but to do so required two letters, the *omicron* (Ο) and the *upsilon* (Υ).

Then came the biggest problem of all: the final *ayin* (ע). In Greek, there was no substitute for the Aramaic-Hebrew letter *ayin*. Though the *ayin* has no sound of its own, it causes the vowel it controls to be pronounced deep in the throat. The Greeks couldn’t do that, and neither could the Romans who spoke Latin. Usually, a Greek or Roman would pronounce the *ayin*-controlled ‘a’ like the *a* in *father*.

But in both Greek and Latin, a final ‘a’ on a name commonly indicated feminine gender. At some point it was decided to drop the Aramaic-Hebrew *ayin* and replace it with the Greek *sigma*, which most often indicates masculine gender. The result was: ΙΗΣΟΥΣ (Iesous).

When lower case Koine Greek came into use, as now, the result looked like Ιησους . Notice, the ‘final s’ (ς) is different from the other ‘s’ (σ). Although the ‘final s’ was only to indicate masculine gender, unfortunately it came to be included in the spelling of biblical male names in English translations of the bible (i.e., *Juda* became *Judas*, etc.).

The attempted transliteration of the given Aramaic name יֵשׁוּעַ (*Yeshua*), became the Greek: ΙΗΣΟΥΣ (*Iesous*), pronounced *yeh-SOOS*. It remained that way throughout the Roman Empire as long as Greek remained the dominant language. But as centuries past, Greek lost its place.

In the last quarter of the fourth century, Jerome completed a Latin translation of the entire bible. For the Old Testament he likely used available Aramaic-Hebrew manuscripts, a copy of the Greek Septuagint, etc.,. For the New Testament, he would have used copies of early Greek manuscripts and possibly a copy of Matthew and Luke in Aramaic-Hebrew.

Jerome had no trouble bringing the Greek ΙΗΣΟΥΣ (*Iesous*) into Latin. It became: IESVS (*Iesus*). The Romans, like the Greeks, initially had only sub-size capital letters in their alphabet. The Latin letter 'v' was used where Greek had the Upsilon (Υ), until the Roman letter 'u' evolved. Also, the Romans moved the accent to the first syllable since they liked to accent the second to the last syllable, resulting in the pronunciation *YAY-soos*.

The first three letters of ΙΗΣΟΥΣ, *iota, eta, and sigma* (ΙΗΣ), came to be used as an abbreviation in early Byzantine religious art. The equivalent letters in Latin, IHS, came to be an abbreviation and symbol in Western European religious paintings, church architecture, priest's vestments, etc.

But earlier, in the fifth and sixth century, some pagan Germanic tribes called the Angles and Saxons, invaded England. Augustine of Canterbury went to convert them to Christianity in A.D. 596. By then, Augustine had established Jerome's Latin bible translation as England's official Bible. It was how the Anglo-Saxons learned about *Iesus* (*YAY-soos*). Naturally, the Germanic Anglo-Saxons converted the sound of the initial Latin 'I' into the German 'J' which had the sound of 'y.' They pronounced *Iesus* as *YAY-zoos* because a single letter 's' between two vowels in Germanic languages is sounded like the English letter 'z.'

When the Normans invaded England in 1066, they brought with them the French language. Since neither the Anglo-Saxons nor the Normans would defer to the others' language, the two became wedded and eventually evolved into modern English. The Normans did influence the pronunciation of the first letter of *Iesus*, though. They brought the French pronunciation (zh) for the letter 'j', which evolved into its present sound in English.

About the 14th century, in monasteries where bibles were copied by hand, monks began to put a long descender on an initially occurring script 'i' if it started the first paragraph. It resembled today's script 'j.' The pronunciation remained the same, like the 'y' in *yet*. Perhaps the monks thought a 'j' looked better. German monks probably were the first to do this because the letter 'j' in that language sounds the same as the 'y' in English. Consequently *Iesus* evolved into *Jesus* by the 17th century. Everyone still pronounced the word *YAY-soos*, because the word was used in liturgical Latin.

However, the descender of an initial letter 'i' in a first paragraph protruded into lower lines. This caused a problem if the document were set in type. Dutch printers overcame the problem by using a reversed letter 'L.'

The hook shape of the letter 'J' came from French usage. The 'j' was the last letter to enter the English alphabet, occurring about the time of movable-type printing, only some 500 years ago. It was inserted into the 15th position of the alphabet, behind the 'i' from which it evolved.

When King James of England commissioned the first official English translation of the Bible, the Latin *Jesus* went unchanged into 1611 Edition King James Version Bible. The average English citizen of the day probably pronounced the name *JAY-zus*. However, at the next printing the letter 'I' was replaced by the 'J,' resulting in *Jesus*, with the pronunciation as *JEE-zus*.

Conclusion

Our Savior's given Aramaic name is יֵשׁוּעַ (Yeshua), pronounced *yay-shoo'-ah*. It means: 'he will save.' His name became changed into the Greek-Latin-English '*Jesus*', pronounced *JEE-zus*, which has no meaning.

Is worshiping the J-s error, a false deity, clearly a violation of the 1st Commandment? Why would anyone now perpetuate the J-s error, knowing its history? Isn't it time to correct the J-s error in bibles, hymns, and prayer, by using name and title of our Savior: Yeshua the Anointed?

Appendix A- Why Perpetuate the J-s Error?

From the author's article: *Anomalies and Aspects of Pilate's Words and INRI*, a facsimile of Pilate's words in John 19:19 are shown below. The language fonts approximate those used in CE 31. The actual letters would have been made free-hand.



References

Stallings, Joseph, *How Yeshu'a Became Jesus - history of Our Lord's Name*, The Catholic Digest, January 1991.

Strong, John L., *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible - with dictionaries of the Hebrew and Greek words of the original*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN 37203.

07/28/07