

The Transliterated Sound and Spelling of Our Savior's Name

By

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It may come as a surprise, but our Savior's signature is not found on a document or artifact directly attributable to him. Accordingly, all names which one may hear pronounced or see spelled, are suppositions. However, the name and the spelling can be known by archeological and Semitic language linguistic research.

There are good, sincere people who passionately advocate a supposed name of our Savior. The support usually includes an assumption based upon the readily available James Strong's Exhaustive Concordance only, without also citing Semitic linguistics.

The commonly assumed name of our Savior, 'Jesus,' is a known transliteration error. How the sound and spelling of the name changed from language to language because of the error is proffered in a short article by Joseph Stallings. The title is: *How Yeshu'a Became Jesus - A history of Our Lord's name* which appeared in The Catholic Digest, January, 1999.

Stallings traces the error from Aramaic/Hebrew into Greek, from Greek into Latin, and from Latin into English. The error was further compounded in English because the first letter, 'J,' was not added to the English alphabet until the time of movable-type printing, only about 500 years ago. Stallings' article illustrates why our Savior's name should have been transliterated directly from Aramaic/Hebrew into English, instead of from language to language..

Enquiries to the publisher about how to contact the author were unsuccessful as was a search on the Internet. As a result, the author's linguistic credentials, and sources, are unknown. Informative as Stallings' article is, others would come to a different conclusion as to the how our Savior's name should be pronounced.

In the book *The Story of Letters and Figures*, by Hubert M. Skinner, Ph.D, Orville Brewing Publishing Company, Chicago, 1905, republished in 1971, the author discusses the pronunciation of 'Jesus' in Spanish. In the following Skinner initially seems to support Stallings' mention of 'Ya-Soos.' Then Skinner continues with a comment about the first letter of the supposed name. It is obviously made in regard to its original language, which he does not identify. He states:

“*Yod* is the initial of the name of *Jesus*. It is unfortunate that a name so dear and so sacred is pronounced in a manner so different from that of the original word. The latter sounded very much as if it were Ya' shoo-ah, and was agreeable to the ear”

Answer this question: What is the *earliest* instance of my hearing the transliterated sound and/or seeing the spelling of our Savior's name in English?

For those very early in the Sacred Name movement, the answer would likely be the restored-name New Testament edited by Angelo B. Traina and published in 1950.

Traina must have been a minister of some renown. He had a regular congregation and a bible school in Irvington, New Jersey. He must have been cognizant of the erroneous letter 'J' because his restored-name New Testament, the first ever, contained the name 'Yahweh' and 'Yahshua' instead of the erroneous substitutes: God, Lord, Jehovah, Jesus, etc.

After his restored-name New Testament was published, Traina started work on a restored-name Old Testament. When it was finished the two were joined into what is known today as *The Holy Name Bible*.

The Holy Name Bible version was based upon the King James Version (KJV) bible because the latter was familiar to most people. But, Traina took the opportunity to minimize archaic English and corrected some less than optimum translations. The bible was copyrighted in 1963 by the Scripture Research Association, Irvington, New Jersey and last published by the Scripture Research Association at 14410 South Springfield Road, Brandywine, MD 20613, in 1983.

The Holy Name Bible is unusual even today. It is small, light weight, bound in fine black leather, printed on quality thin paper, and has tabbed thumb indexes. Many people's knowledge of the name of the Father and Son can be traced to this bible. It has become the standard against which subsequent restored-name bible versions are compared.

The quantity of *The Holy Name Bible* printed were comparatively small. And, unfortunately, the original galley proofs have since been damaged by fire. The custodians of the remnants have no plans for a reprint. As a result, an owner of *The Holy Name Bible* treasures it greatly. Copies not marked-up are very rare.

The story of how A. B. Traina came to use the spelling 'Yahshua' is reported in an Internet article by Lee and Penny Warren titled: *Sacred Name Movement in America*, 1998 PLIM Report, Vol. 7, No. 3, Chicago, Ill.

The article states that in the mid-1930s Traina's bible school had three students which are known to have been Paul Penn, John Briggs a Jew from Detroit, and a Czech by the name of August Sheffick. The PLIM Report has an account by two people early in the sacred name movement: Joel Bjorling and Richard Nickels (founder of the Giving and Sharing organization; died June 4, 2006). They state it was August Sheffick who proffered the construct 'Yahshua' to Traina.

Sheffick's rationale for the spelling is unknown, but it is assumed he joined the word 'Yah,' the shorten form of 'Yahweh' found in Psalms 83:18, to the word 'shua,' the Hebrew word for 'saves' or 'salvation' (Strong's 8668) i.e., Yah + shua (Yahweh saves, or Yahweh is salvation).

Sheffick may have known about Skinner's article of 1905 which advocated the phonic pronunciation of our Savior's name as *Ya' shoo-ah*, instead of *ee-ay-sooce'* (Strong's 2424), and proffered an English spelling which had logical support.

It seems that Traina studied and prayed about the construct 'Yahshua' for six months. In the interim, Briggs was asked to pray over a sick girl. He did so using the name Yahshua. The girl quickly recovered and the healing was taken as confirmation of the correctness of the name and was used thereafter.

The construct 'Yahshua' may have been buttressed at the time by a logical interpretation of John 5:43 "I come in my fathers name." However, there is no mention in the PLIM Report of anyone then having used that scripture as support for the construct, but it is commonly cited today by those who advocate the spelling.

Others maintain the verse: "I come in my fathers name" simply means our Savior came in his Father's power and authority, but, if indeed he had come literally in his father's name, both names would have been identical, thus our Savior would have had a name above all names, not having just a part of his father's name.

Using Luke 3:23 as a pattern: i.e., Yeshua ben (son of) Yoseph, our Savior's name would technically have been: *Yeshua ben Yahweh*, a name truly above all names. Had he called himself by any part of his father's name, (i.e., Yah...), it surely would have been considered blasphemous by the then religious establishment.

Nothing else was turned up by the Warrens in a search about August Sheffick. It is thought the history of the construct 'Yahshua' by Sheffick might be obtained from another student of Traina who came approximately thirty years later. That person is Jacob O. Meyer of the Assemblies of Yahweh, Bethel, PA, who met with Traina in the 1960s. Although an enquiry has been made to Meyer about his knowledge of the construct, he has not responded.

Meyer's strong belief in the correctness of the construct 'Yahshua' may be inferred from his early writings. But sometimes a sincere passionate belief can be so strong that one's thinking becomes biased. That bias can become justification for writing something not entirely accurate. Here is an early example:

In 1973, J. O. Meyer wrote an article titled: *What is the Messiah's Name?* יהושע In it he references an article which at first appears to be academic validation for a Hebrew spelling of the construct i.e., יהושע.

Meyer's cites an article titled: *Judaism and Professors of Religion*. by Dr. Solomon Zeitlin of Dropsie University, which appeared in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* (JQR), January 1970. In the article Zeitlin criticizes the poor scholarship in a book titled: *Jesus*, written by fellow professor David Flusser.

On page 12 of Flusser's book there is an illustration of a name in Aramaic. It is inscribed on an ancient ossuary (bone box) found in Jerusalem. Such ossuaries were used for a period of about one hundred years spanning the life of our Savior. The caption under the illustration in Flussers' book says: "This is how Jesus wrote his name in Hebrew." Zeitlin's critique of Flusser's caption, which is found on page 194 of the JQR, is:

”There are a number of illustrations in the book which have no place in a scholarly work on the life and mission of Jesus. The innocent reader would assume that this is the autograph of Jesus. ישוע is not Hebrew. In Hebrew the name is written יהושע.”

The following is verbatim from Meyer’s article about Zeitlin’s comments. Notice the editorialization: bracketed word insertions and the parenthetical expression. Meyer wrote:

“Dr. Solomon Zeitlin says,“ ישוע . This is how [Yahshua] wrote His name in Hebrew.”
(The foregoing word and sentence is taken from a book under review by Dr. Zeitlin.)
“The innocent reader would assume that this is the autograph of [Yahshua]. ישוע
[Yeshua] is not Hebrew. In Hebrew the name is written יהושע [Yahshua].”

It was also inaccurate and biased for Meyer to have shown his bracketed word insertions without showing Zeitlin’s own word preceding it. Considering the circumstance, Meyer’s reason for the editorializing may have been his close proximity as a student to the construct ‘Yahshua.’ Zeitlin’s article must have appeared to be a conformation of the Hebrew spelling of the construct. Meyer disdains certain words in his publications such as: Jesus, church, God, etc., which, when they must appear for continuity, are shown with a hyphen between the first and last letter.

Although most believe that our Savior’s name is pristine Hebrew, facts indicate that the name could be Aramaic because of the close similarity of the languages, culture, and times. For example:

- (a) The scriptures tell us that our Savior’s earthly family was from northern Israel, the region called Galilee, and that he was raised in a small, somewhat remote village, called Natzerth. It is far from Jerusalem in the south.
- (b) The scriptures tell us that our Savior picked his disciples from that area, and that they were later identified by their language as being Galileans or Natzerians.
- (c) The common language spoken in Galilee and generally throughout Israel at the time was Aramaic, not Hebrew. Aramaic is closely related to Hebrew and at the time both shared essentially the same alphabet. Hebrew was spoken more in Jerusalem and exclusively by the priesthood in religious service, and in teaching.
- (d) Surely Pilate spoke to our Savior in Aramaic. It was the common language of the people in Israel at that time. Pilate would have known that the prisoner before him was from Galilee, a rural area compared to Jerusalem, and therefore not likely schooled in Greek or Latin. Pilate certainly would not have spoken to his prisoner in Hebrew, even if Pilate had known the language. Hebrew was the language of the troublesome Jewish religious establishment, but most of all, it would have been condescending to a Roman official to speak it.
- (e) The scriptures show the last words spoken by our Savior immediately before his death, as preserved in the Greek manuscripts, are Aramaic.

(f) There are instances in the Aramaic Bible which have the Savior's name in Aramaic.

It is the very reason Aramaic was the language used in the movie 'The Passion.'

Accordingly, Zeitlin could have clarified his one-line comment that "יְשׁוּעַ is not Hebrew," by adding "it is Aramaic." Indeed, one can refer to James Strong's Exhaustive Concordance - Dictionary of the Hebrew Bible and Dictionary of the Greek Testament, 1890, and see why this might be true.

The word which Zeitlin said "was not Hebrew," is shown in Strong's Hebrew dictionary as 3442 and 3443:

3442 יְשׁוּעַ Yêshûwa', *yay-shoo'-ah; he will save; Jeshua, the name of ten Isr., also a place in Pal.: Jeshua*

3443 יְשׁוּעַ Yêshûwa', (Chald.), *yay-shoo'-ah; corresp. to 3442: Jeshua*

Notice in 3442 the grammatical future-tense of the definition (*i.e., he will save*). It describes our Savior's mission.

We know the letter J in the spelling of any word in Strong's, such as *Jeshua*, is relatively modern because the letter J did not exist Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek, or Latin (and still does not), or even in English, until about five hundred years ago. As proof, the letter J is not seen in the 1611 KJV. The letter I is there, which was pronounced as the letter Y.

In both 3442 and 3443 the word, which if correctly spelled, would have had a 'Y' as the first letter, *i.e.* 'Yeshua. The word is pronounced, according to Strong's as '*yay-shoo'-ah*.' Also note in the definition of 3443 that the same word as in 3442, correctly *Yeshua*, is of Chaldee origin.

So, without any other information we can see that our Savior's name could be considered as being either Aramaic or Hebrew because those languages were so closely related.

Next we have the Gospels where the name to be given to our Savior is mentioned. In *The Interlinear Bible* by J. Green, the name in Matthew 9:24 is Strong's 2424 Greek dictionary. The letters shown are {Iota, eta, sigma, omikron, upsilon, sigma}: Ἰησοῦς. It says: "Iēsōus pronounced '*ee-ay-sooce*'; of Hebrew origin [3091]; *Jesus* (*i.e. Jehoshua*), the name of our Lord and two (three) other Israelites: *-Jesus*."

It is not commonly known, but if the last letter of a name in Greek ends with the letter 's,' it denotes masculine gender. So, in the English bible 'Judas' is actually 'Juda' or 'Judah.' The 's' is not part of the name. Similarly, the letter 'e' at the end of a Greek name denotes feminine gender.

Often one hears that 'Joshua, son of Nun' had the same name as our Savior. Acts 7:45, Hebrews 4:8, and Strong's 3091 are commonly cited as support. But is this accurate?

The Greek manuscripts containing the aforementioned verses have the exact same word transliterated into English as ‘Joshua,’ spelled both as ‘Yoshua’ and ‘Yeshua.’ That name was translated into English in the 1611 KJV as ‘Ioshua.’

But Strong’s 3091 shows two words in the Hebrew. Each must be examined:

Strong’s 3091 is יהושוע Y^ehêwshûwa’, *ye-ho-shoo’ah*; or יהושע from 3068 and 3467; *Jehovah-saved*; *Jehoshuä* (i.e. Joshua), the Jewish leader:- Jehoshua, Jehoshuah, Joshua. Compare to 1954, 3442.

Utilizing the letter Y, instead of the erroneous J, makes the word read correctly: *Yahweh-saved*; *Yehoshua* (i.e. Yoshua) the Jewish leader - Yehoshua, Yehoshuah, Yoshua.... The grammatical past-tense of the definition: *Yahweh-saved*, fits Joshua the person (whose name was changed by Moses from Hoshea) and also the Israelites entering the promised land. Hoshea in Hebrew was changed to Joshua by adding only the Hebrew letter ‘yod’ to the front of his name.

Of the two words in Strong’s 3091, Zeitlin stated the latter, יהושע, was the name of the Savior in Hebrew. Yet none of the bracketed words which Meyer inserted into Zeitlin’s statement are spelled with a ‘Ye...’ prefix as in 3091. So, up to now the word Jeshua, correctly spelled Yeshua, has the best etymology and the same pronunciation as does the spelling of the supposed: ‘Yahshua.’

The most detailed research on the variations of the name which some suppose as that of our Savior, along with reproductions of inscriptions from documents and artifacts, are found in the detailed sixty three page book titled: *Name of the Messiah: יהושע ? יהושע ?* It is by Larry Acheson and his wife June, at Truth Seekers, 1416 Fairfield Drive, Plano, Texas 75074-6010. This and their other publications can be downloaded at: www.ponder scripture.org.

Acheson references the source of several inscriptions found on ossuaries (bone boxes) as being from: *A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries in the Collections of the State of Israel* by L. Y. Rhamani, The Israel Antiquities Authority, Jerusalem, 1994. Other books on ossuaries are also referenced.

These sources establish that several old ossuaries from tombs in Jerusalem have been reliably dated from about 25 BCE to CE 100. Several ossuaries contain the inscription: ישוע (Yeshua). Perhaps the most publicized and controversial example of an inscription where ישוע is used is in *Bible Archeology Review*, Nov/Dec., 2002 issue. The Aramaic inscription shown on an ossuary has been translated as: ‘yehuda son of yosef brother of yeshua.’

The Scriptures Bible has Matthew 13:55 as: “...and his brothers Ya’aqob, and Yoseph, and Shim’on and Yehudah?” which, although common names, show the ossuary might have been that of the half-brother of Yeshua (whose supposed father was Yoseph).

Some who suppose other names for our Savior, contend, without offering any proof, that the spelling 'Yeshua' is a Jewish conspiracy to remove 'Yah' from our Savior's supposed name 'Yahshua.' This is fallacious. In the front cover of Acheson's book there is an illustration of an inscription where both 'Yah' and 'Yeshua' are inscribed on the same ossuary.

Acheson's book discusses the *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, a thirteenth century polemic against Christianity titled *The Touchstone*, written by Shem Tob ben-Isaac Ben-Shapurt. It was translated by George Howard, Mercer University Press, 1995. Howard examined the seven existing copies of the document, which were in various condition and completeness. The best shows the name of our Savior as: י'שׁוּ, which Howard translated 'Jesus.' Acheson thinks the document is a polemic because it does not show the letters יְשׁוּ as one would expect.

In the final analysis the matter gets down to linguistics, the study of languages. Is there an unbiased linguist in Semitic languages who can validate the most likely of the names which have been supposed? That person surely must be Anson Rainey, Professor of Ancient Near Eastern Cultures and Semitic Languages, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel.

Rainey is known worldwide for two articles which contained a detailed explanation of the transliterated sound and spelling of the name of our Father Yahweh. The articles, which appeared in Bible Archeological Review (BAR) magazine in the July/August 1985 and the Nov/Dec 1994 issue, are separated by nine years. A copy of the original articles, which are seen in Acheson's book, have been retyped verbatim by this author into letter format for electronic transmission.

Larry Acheson enquired of Professor Rainey about the pronunciation and spelling of supposed names of our Savior beginning with either 'Yah' as in Yahweh, or 'Yes' as in Yeshua.' It is emphasized that Professor Rainey has no religious interest in the matter of a given pronunciation or spelling. His articles also show the fine points of Semitic grammar which non-linguists are surely unaware.

Acheson says: "Curious to see exactly how Professor Rainey regards the pronunciation of the Messiah's name, I sent him an e-mail asking for his insights. His reply is shown below:"

"The two names are not related. Yahweh is one name, Yehoshua'/Yeshua' is another. The latter is actually vocalized with a sere, i.e. lengthened "i" vowel. It was apparently a standard variant in the second temple period.

But the Septuagint writers used the same Greek spelling for both the name of the hero of the book of Joshua and also for some later priests mentioned in the Book of Chronicles. You should consult a concordance of the Septuagint.

Yahweh as a name has nothing to do with Yeshua' or Yehoshua' except that the first component of the latter is *Yeho*, shortened from *Yahaw*. The 'a' in 'ya' became a *shewa* because the accent on the word moved to the end. A short vowel of any kind became a shewa in an open syllable. When this shift took place in the Hebrew language is not at all clear. But the fact that the Greek transcriptions of the two names are both Iesous means that the sere was already pronounced. The eta of the Greek (instead of epsilon) proves that. Therefore, the first vowel in Yeshua' is surely a sere, not a shewa that came from 'a.'

As Acheson points out, the *sere* to which Rainey referred, can be found in Strong's Concordance in the Hebrew Articulation section, where it is spelled *Tserey*, and also in Hebrew Grammars. It

is defined as a vowel pronounced as the "e" in *they*.

This gives a name which is spelled *Yeshua*, and has the pronunciation of 'YAY'shua.

In a subsequent email to Achesion, Professor Rainey adds:

"Any good Bible dictionary should have the details on the personal names in the Hebrew Bible, namely Yehoshua' and the late periods Yeshua' found in the Books of Chronicles. This later was a later variant of the former. It seems to be that was the form that stands behind the Greek spellings in the Septuagint and the New Testament."

Achesion calls for tolerance if people use a different supposed pronunciation and spelling of our Savior's name.

It is fitting for all to do so.

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