

of what they have to say, and don't follow their example.<sup>4</sup> This is similar to some of the other views presented, but it is based on a different textual reading.

While there is more scholarly support for some of these positions than others, each of them effectively refutes the very erroneous notion that, for all time, Jesus was commanding His Jewish followers to submit to Pharisaic-Orthodox-traditional Judaism. To the contrary, it was His *halakha* (i.e., legal principles and rulings) that was to be followed (see also #46), and with the dawning of the new covenant through Yeshua's death and resurrection (see Jeremiah 31:31–34; Luke 22:14–21; Hebrews 8:1–13), we have been given a new heart and a new spirit (see Ezekiel 36:26–27) by which we now live in the newness of the Spirit (see Romans 7:1–6; 8:1–4).<sup>5</sup>

38

### What is the original Hebrew name for Jesus? And is it true that the name Jesus (Greek *Iēsous*) is really a pagan corruption of the name Zeus?

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 Zechariah 3:3) and, more frequently, *yeshu'a* (see Ezra 3:2).<sup>6</sup> So, Yeshua's name was not unusual; in fact, as many as five different men had that name in the Old Testament.

Interestingly, this high priest, Yehoshua/Yeshua, was singled out in the book of Zechariah as being a symbol of the "man called the Branch" (see Zechariah 3:8; 6:9–15)—which was a distinct Messianic title (see Jeremiah 23:5). Even more significantly, in a

symbolic ceremony, this *priest* was put on a throne and crowned, with the words:

Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD. It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two [meaning the kingship and the priesthood]."

Zechariah 6:12–13

It is altogether fitting, then, that the Branch Himself should bear the same name as this high priest who symbolically prefigured the Messiah's royal priesthood, especially when the meaning of Yehoshua/Yeshua is "Yahweh is salvation" (see Matthew 1:21).

So, the answer to the first question is quite simple: The original Hebrew/Aramaic name for Jesus is *yeshu'a*.

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 (see #41) when they rendered Yeshua's name into Syriac (part of the Aramaic language family).<sup>7</sup> 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*.<sup>8</sup>

What about the alleged connection between the name Jesus (Greek *Iēsous*) and Zeus? This is one of the more bizarre claims

that has ever been made, but it has received some 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)."<sup>9</sup> 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, based on serious linguistic ignorance.

According to the Institute for Scripture Research,

Consider Iesus, rendered as 'Jesus' in English versions up to now. For example the authoritative Greek-English Lexicon of Liddell and Scott, under Iaso: The Greek goddess of healing reveals that the name Iaso is Ieso in the Ionic dialect of the Greeks, Iesus being the contracted genitive form! In David Kravitz' Dictionary of Greek and Roman Mythology we find a similar form, namely Iasus. There were four different Greek deities with the name Iasus, one of them being the Son of Rhea.<sup>10</sup>

Does this sound impressive? It is actually complete nonsense, as far as any connection with the name *Iēsous*/Jesus is concerned, and the citation from the authoritative lexicon of Liddell and Scott has *nothing* to do with the name *Iēsous* either. Of course, the author of this comment might be sincere, not intentionally trying to mislead, but the argument is absolutely worthless from

an etymological standpoint. (Etymology refers to the linguistic origins of words.)

Here is another, equally ridiculous 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." [Did you catch that? The correct name is now 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.<sup>11</sup>

Let me respond to these statements (which have as much support as the latest Elvis sightings): (1) 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 five thousand 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. (2) The Greek forms with *iaso* are completely unrelated to the name *Iēsous*. The word *iaso* has an *alpha* for its second letter, reflecting its derivation from the verb *iaomai*, "to heal"; the name *Iēsous* has an *ēta* for its second letter, showing that it is completely unrelated to the root for healing in Greek. (3) As noted on a website devoted to refuting the bizarre claims of the Sacred Name Movement, citation from the Liddell-Scott lexicon is also erroneous:

For Iaso, the genitive, as given by [Institute for Scripture Research], in Greek letters is Iasous. For Jesus, the genitive in Greek letters is Iesou. The impression the Institute desires to leave with us and certainly with avid Sacred Name converts who read their Bible and its notes is that the words are the same. However, the words are not at all the same. They are like the English words bell and ball. . . . One is not derived from the other. The Greek words Iasous and Ihsou to some may look alike and they, too, sound a bit alike. There ends their similarity. One is in no case derived from the other. The people at Institute for Scripture Research know this. Add to this the fact that Liddell and Scott's Lexicon, at least the one on my bookshelf, makes no mention of Iaso being Ieso in the Ionic dialect. Perhaps someone misread it.<sup>12</sup>

(4) 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, "Jesus is as much related to Zeus as Moses is to mic."<sup>13</sup> 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*.<sup>14</sup> 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 Yahushua—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.

All this is really quite straightforward and without scholarly dispute. There are, however, two interesting developments related to the Savior's name. First, in the Koran, Yeshua is incorrectly referred to as 'isa, which should most probably be traced to the Hebrew name Esau, rather than the expected form *yesu'a*. This is apparently due to the fact that when Mohammed heard the Gospel story from Arabic-speaking Jews, he did not realize that they disparagingly referred to Yeshua as Esau, thinking instead that this was His real name.<sup>15</sup> Second, in the Talmud and rabbinic writings (and in Israel, among the general population until this day), Yeshua is referred to as *yeshu*, without the final *a*. It is true that some linguists argue that the final vowel dropped out of pronunciation almost two thousand years ago, and so there is nothing derogatory meant by this pronunciation. Indeed, when a secular Israeli person refers to Jesus as *yeshu*, he or she means nothing by it at all. That is simply the way they learned His name. But when a religious Jew says *yeshu*—especially an ultra-Orthodox Jew—he means something very negative by it, the Hebrew letters *y-sh-w* being used as an acronym for the words *yimakh sh'mo w'zikro*, meaning, "May His name and memory be obliterated!"

None of this should surprise us, since it is written that "repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached *in his name* to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47, emphasis added), and "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is *no other name* under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12) and "God exalted him to the highest place and gave him *the name that is above every name*, that at the name of Jesus [Yeshua] every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ [Yeshua the Messiah] is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11, emphasis added).

Neither the Koran nor the rabbinic traditions nor modern false teachings can diminish its power in the least.

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“This is an amazing book, even for people like me who have walked with our Jewish brothers of faith for many years. Michael Brown’s own Jewish background, coupled with his years of fruitful ministry in the Church, make him singularly capable for the task. The book is astonishing for its background in Jewish thought, its presentation of modern-day Judaism, its challenges to the Church and its insights into the issues that confront believers today. This is especially helpful to the Church as she continues to awaken to her Jewish roots. We learn better how to be sensitive to Jewish people who have already come to faith in Messiah Yeshua, as well as to those who have yet to receive the revelation of Jesus. I pray the book will have a long and useful life. God bless Michael Brown!”

—**Don Finto**, director, The Caleb Company;  
pastor emeritus, Belmont Church, Nashville;  
author, *Your People Shall Be My People*

# What Do Jewish People Think about Jesus?

And Other Questions Christians Ask  
about Jewish Beliefs, Practices & History

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