

Is the Name "Jesus" Pagan?

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As more and more of Ephraim come out of the church system, Messianic Israel is having to answer some serious questions, the foremost being: "How much Christian theology do we reject?"

Obviously, some valid teachings to reject would be dispensationalism (depicts our God as One Who is doing first one thing and then another), antinomianism (lawlessness), and the pre-tribulation rapture (leads non-Jewish Believers to feel they have nothing to do but to wait for the "Rapture Bus"). But what of issues such as, *what name of the Messiah do we use?*

Some claim to be offended if one even speaks the name "Jesus." Others use the names "Jesus" and "Yeshua" interchangeably. So, we ask:

Is the name "Jesus" pagan?

Some say Jesus is pagan because of its Greek linguistic origins. Some have even called our Messiah "Gee-Zeus," implying that those who call on Him are actually called on the Greek god, Zeus.

However, a study of Greek grammar, or more specifically, Hebrew to Greek transliteration, shows there is no basis for this conclusion.

Almost 300 years before 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. And many of our proper Biblical names in English come from Greek transliterations of Hebrew words (i.e. Moses, Phineas, Caiphas).

For example, Young's Analytical Concordance confirms for us that the original name of the Messiah is indeed "Yeshua" (יֵשׁוּעַ), and this Hebrew name, when rendered in Greek, is "Iesous" (Ἰησοῦς).

How we get from Yeshua to Iesous (pronounced *Ee-ay-sooce*) is a challenge to understand if one is armed with nothing more than a concordance and does not understand the difficulty of transliteration.

When transliterating the Hebrew יֵשׁוּעַ to Greek:

- y (*yod* – "ye") becomes I (iota-eta – "ye" or "ee-ay," Koine or Attic dialect)
- V (*shin* – "sh") becomes S (*sigma* – "s" [there is no "sh" sound in Greek])
- W (*vav* – "u") becomes ou (*omicron-epsilon* – "oo")
- It is necessary for a final sigma (β) to be placed at the end of the word to distinguish that the name is masculine
- Greek grammar rules require that the [ayin – "ah"] sound be dropped

Hence, we get the name "Iesous" (Ἰησοῦς), pronounced either *Ye-sooce* or *Ee-ay-sooce*.

It is important to note that this same name is used for the title of the Book of *Joshua* in the Septuagint, which serves as definitive proof that Iesous is not of pagan origin, but rather *is indeed* a Greek transliteration of Yeshua *developed by the Jewish translators!* For, Iesous is also the Greek transliteration of Yehoshua (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ) as demonstrated by the Septuagint.

In Old English, "Iesous" was rendered "Iesus" (pronounced *Yesus*), which is remarkably close to Yeshua. However, it was spelled with a beginning letter "J," which at the time had a "Y" sound. Later, when the "J" began to have a harder sound, the name became "Jesus."

Transliteration is not an exact science. However, it does prove that the Greek name Iesous from whence we derive the name "Jesus" is not pagan. Iesous is the Greek transliteration of יֵשׁוּעַ, and the English transliteration of Iesous is Iesus, which became Jesus.

Those who believe that "Jesus" is another deity 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.

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