

# What's in a Name?

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Among the Hebrews and early Christians, names had a special significance. A name was not merely a means to identify-it was a path to identity. When Moses is directed by God to return to Egypt and free the Hebrew slaves, he asks what is to him the central question, "Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?" God answers directly, "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM; and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." No clearer statement of identity through a name could be found. Yet, even the translation of this famous name is not without controversy: other Bibles than the King James Version give other suggestions. The Anchor Bible gives "I-will-be." Others have translated it, "I am Who I am." The very variety begs the question of the truth. Nonetheless, that same variety demonstrates the struggle to discern the meaning of these four Hebrew letters because the name of God is important.

Our Lord was born in a place and time where the tradition of naming was still held in high esteem and he was given the relatively common name of Yeshua, which means 'Yah [the Lord] saves'. Thus it was that Jesus never heard the name Jesus; this name is nothing but an English and Spanish misspelling of a Latin transliteration of a Greek translation of the Hebrew name. But it gets even more interesting. The identical Hebrew name is translated in the title of the sixth book of the Bible as 'Joshua'. One must wonder why we didn't call Jesus 'Joshua' or even Joshua 'Jesus'.

Actually, this isn't as silly a suggestion as it seems. The KJV does it. In Acts 7:45 we see the following,

"Which also our fathers which came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David;...."

This is not the Jesus of New Testament fame; this is the Joshua of Old Testament fame. Evidently the KJV translators thought that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews did the same, "For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day" (Heb. 4:8). Once again, Jesus is Joshua. In one case, the KJV translators actually confused the two:

"I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not" (Jude 5; underline added).

What is translated here as 'the Lord' is, in fact, the name Yeshua, which they misunderstood to refer to the Jesus of the New Testament; thus, they felt comfortable inserting the synonym 'the Lord'. The passage should read:

"But I desire to remind you, though once for all you have come to know all things, that Joshua, who saved the people from the land of Egypt, the next time destroyed those who did not believe."

Some versions do not accept this and insist on the KJV rendition of the passage; the structural ambiguity of the passage grammatically prevents a definitive translation, so you are under no expectation to accept my choice. Certainly, the Lord (through Joshua) saved the people and later destroyed those who did not believe.

In some ancient manuscripts the Name Yeshua (Jesus) is found in connection with the famous Barabbas-the one released instead of Jesus. The rendering of the name as Yeshua bar-Abbas (Yeshua, son of the father; which, coincidentally or not, is the actual designation of Jesus) has engendered much discussion. There is more or less general scholarly agreement that Yeshua was deleted by later scribes, offended that the name of their Lord should be associated with a mere robber and revolutionary. As early as the time of origin (ca. AD 240) most manuscripts of Matthew contained the full name.

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Update: July 11, 2014

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