

# What is Jesus's actual name?

**Juliet:**

'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;  
 Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.  
 What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot,  
 Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part  
 Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!  
 What's in a name? That which we call a rose  
 By any other name would smell as sweet;  
 So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,  
 Retain that dear perfection which he owes  
 Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,  
 And for that name which is no part of thee  
 Take all myself

**Background:** I and J were different forms of the same letter at one time. In Roman numerals the J was a typological flourish and served as a swash variant of I. The number twenty-three could be written as XXIII or more stylistically as XXIIJ. The letter J proper was not invented until around the year 1524. Gian Giorgio Trissino is reputed to be the first to distinguish between I and J representing their different modern sounds. Jesus with a J did not appear in the Bible until 1629 in the Cambridge 1<sup>st</sup> Revision of the KJV. So, long before the letter J was added, long before his name was transliterated into Latin from Greek, long before his name was transliterated into Greek from Hebrew, what was the name given to Jesus at birth by his parents? That is a question I hope to unpack and address in this article.

I have also been noticing more and more irreverence for the name God and Jesus in society. It is used constantly by people and in movies as an exclamation ("Jesus Christ!" or "oh my God!"). This lackadaisical and irreverent practice stands at odds with our scripture and the teachings of Jesus. Psalm 8:1 and 111:9 tell us how majestic, holy and awesome the name of God is:

**Psalm 8:1:** O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! NRSV

**Psalm 111:11:** Holy and awesome is his name.

The very next line of Psalm 111 tells us "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." When Jesus taught his disciples how to pray (Matthew 6:9-13) he started the Lord's prayer with recognition and reverence: "Our Father in heaven, *hallowed be thy name.*" Similarly in Luke (11:24) we find the prayer begins with: "Father, may your name be revered as holy." Rather than using the name shallowly or in vain, prayer starts with the exact opposite. The name of God has gone from hallowed to hollow in some circles and instead of wondering "what is man that God is mindful of him" along with the author of the 8<sup>th</sup> Psalm, this has been reversed by society into "what is God that man is mindful of him?" Even Christians sometimes use the name conventionally or colloquially as it comes natural in our speech. I do it but I am not proud of it. I often catch myself and say a quick prayer. It is a habit I much desire to break even if God

can see into each of our hearts and knows who is purposefully or irreverently profaning his name and who is just habitually doing so. Watching a movie where the Lord's name is used nonchalantly or as a figure of speech or to express astonishment never used to bother me as much as it does now. I am not sure if it is happening more or I am simply noticing it more often. But it sticks out now like a sore thumb to me and feels like God is being watered down and diluted. So I want to focus this article solely on the birth-name of Jesus and do so sheerly out of reverence for God the Father and God the Son.

One caveat is in order before beginning. In English we are all familiar with the term *water* and we know what it means. In Spanish it is called *agua* and to a Chemist it goes by  $H_2O$ . In all three cases we are referring to the same substance and its nature does not change based on our nomenclature or naming conventions. It will boil at 100°C, freeze at 0°C and have the same density, reactivity with alkali metals and a host of other identical chemical and physical properties regardless of what we call it. So the name *Jesus* refers to the same person regardless of what language we use or what phonetic sounds we specifically make when addressing Him. Yet it should be noted that in the Old Testament names have meanings associated with them. If a name is phonetically translated into another language, that is then transliterated into another language, this rich etymological history can be lost. The Hebrew name for Jesus was not only transliterated into Greek, the Greek name for Jesus was transliterated into Latin which only much later distinguished between I and J. In fact, if Jesus's name was transliterated straight from Hebrew into English today, He would be known as Joshua. The New Testament was originally written in Greek which does not have an *sh* sound (as in *shoe*) so an *s* sound was substituted in with another at the end to make the word masculine. The original name *Jesus/Joshua* in Hebrew means "the Lord saves" or "God is salvation"—a very appropriate title. We also all know that a person's name is important and so is getting it right. As a teacher every year I try to remember my student's names as soon as possible. This is the first step to building rapport and establishing a work environment conducive to learning. How can my students feel they are in caring hands in a safe space if their instructor doesn't even know their name?

### What Does Scripture Say?

In Acts 4:12, Peter the prisoner was filled with the spirit and said this of Jesus "There is salvation in no one else, for there is **no other name under heaven** given among mortals by which we must be saved." In Matthew 1:20-21, "Joseph has resolved to divorce Mary quietly but an angel of the Lord appears before him and changes his plans. "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, **and you are to name him Jesus**, for he will save his people from their sins." There can be no confusion here because the angel Gabriel also appeared to Mary and told her the same thing. In this case Jesus was named by an Angel (and therefore God) before He is even conceived (Lk 1:30-35, Lk 2:21) by the Holy Spirit to all this Mary gives her consent (Luke 1:38).

For all our factual knowledge, capacity for trivia, interest in Jeopardy style games and being enamored by celebrity gossip, why would most Christians not even recognize the name of Jesus if they saw it written in Hebrew or heard it spoken? Why would they also not recognize it

in Greek in either capacity? Sure, we must defer to Juliet's famous proclamation: "That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." Ultimately, the label we give to "Jesus" doesn't matter or change the substance of who He is. In fact, He has many titles and labels: emmanuel, Word of God, Only begotten Son, the Christ or Messiah, Lord, Rabbi, Savior, Prophet, Priest, King, Redeemer, Sacrificial Lamb, Good Shepherd, Bread of Life, True Vine and the Alpha and the Omega. All wonderfully accurate and true in regards to Jesus. But still, we are talking about God incarnate. The creator of heaven and earth became flesh and dwelt among us yet many people don't know his *actual* name. If you feel inclined to ask, "why should I care about the Hebrew name given to Jesus,"-- his actual birth name--this might not be the article for you. I do so out of piety and reverence for a God who chose to empty or condescend himself and be found in human form. The incarnation is the greatest love story ever told in my opinion.

**Hebrews 2: 9, 17-18:** "but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. . . . he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

**Philippians 2:4-7:** "Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death even death on a cross.

The latter passage above goes on to tell us "God exalted him even more highly and gave him the name that is above every other name, so that at the name given to Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." The geographical region we grew up in and the language we learned largely dictates what name we refer to *Jesus* by. Yet Jesus is the central character of the Gospel which is not just one door amongst many. It's the hinge of all doors. His name is not just one name among many names. It is special because He is special. For all the states and capitals we might know, movie quotes we could recognize, sports highlights we could jubilate over, song lyrics we memorized, general world history we can recite or useless facts and knowledge we might possess, I feel strongly we should be aware and recognize the actual God-given name of the incarnate Word of God. Not as a matter of salvation or proper doctrine. Just simply out of respect, reverence, love and awe for what happened 2,000 years ago in Galilee. God became man and dwelt among us, he died for our sins and He needs to be our priority in all things. For many Christians the incarnation is unordered yet perfectly timed climax of human history, the penultimate event of all creation. Why should we not know what Jesus was actually called? A name the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke both indirectly to God. A name that is the only name under heaven by which salvation is achieved. It should give us shivers. Push our eyes to the ground. Bring hope

and inspire us to do good. God's is awesome and majestic and His name should be handled with the respect and adoration due to Him.

### What was Jesus's name?

The closest phonetic transliteration into Greek from Hebrew was Iesous (pronounced yay-soos). As previously noted the *us* at the end was added to make the name masculine and Greek did not have a *sh* sound so an *s* sound was used in place. In English today it is pronounced Jesus (Gee-zus). The J sound was a late development as I and J were eventually split into separate letters. The birth name given to Him by God is pronounced Yeshua (YEH-shoo-ah with the first syllable being emphasized more than the following two.) This is the same name as Joshua in the Old Testament though it is the shortened Aramaic form of the original Hebrew Yehoshua. When Jesus was named before his conception by an angel this is what he would have been called. There might have even been a play on words evident in the Gospel of Matthew if the Greek text has historical Hebrew roots. "You shall call him Yeshua for he will save (*yoshia*) his people from their sins. The angel would not have spoken Greek to Mary or Joseph! Likewise, when his mother Mary called to him this is the name she would use. The apostles knew him as Yeshua as well--Yeshua ben Yosef.

### Writing the Name Jesus:

Yeshua and Iesous are written in English letters as phonetic transliterations. But what would Jesus's name actually look like in Greek and Hebrew/Aramaic? The following two pages have a Greek and Hebrew Alphabet. Following them are a listing of the letters in Jesus's name in both Greek and Hebrew. Use the information in the bullet points and the alphabet to practice writing Jesus's name not only as it appeared in the Greek New Testament, but also how it would have been actually written by Jesus or someone contemporaneous with him in Hebrew. I find it to be spiritually powerful to meditate on the name Jesus if it is done out of love and reverence. The name God and the name Jesus are holy and majestic. They should not be used in vain or as an idiom expressing shock. Instead we must always be humble and grateful and ask: "What is man that God is mindful of him?" I encourage you to read Psalm 8 below in full noticing the bookends, and to always be mindful of God and thankful for his Grace. Be mindful of Jesus and thankful for His sacrifice. Learn how to pronounce, write and recognize His actual name!

#### Psalm 8:1-11

<sup>1</sup>O Lord, our Sovereign,

**how majestic is your name in all the earth!**

You have set your glory above the heavens.

<sup>2</sup> Out of the mouths of babes and infants

you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,  
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

<sup>3</sup>When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars that you have established;

<sup>4</sup>what are humans that you are mindful of them,  
mortals that you care for them?

<sup>5</sup>Yet you have made them a little lower than God  
and crowned them with glory and honor.

<sup>6</sup>You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;  
you have put all things under their feet,

<sup>7</sup>all sheep and oxen,  
and also the beasts of the field,

<sup>8</sup>the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,  
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

<sup>9</sup>O Lord, our Sovereign,

**how majestic is your name in all the earth!**

## GREEK ALPHABET

By Ben Crowder • [bencrowder.net](http://bencrowder.net) • Last modified 2 May 2012

|                   |                  |                    |                    |                       |                   |
|-------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Αα                | Ββ               | Γγ                 | Δδ                 | Εε                    | Ζζ                |
| ALPHA [a]<br>ἄλφα | BETA [b]<br>βῆτα | GAMMA [g]<br>γάμμα | DELTA [d]<br>δέλτα | EPSILON [e]<br>ἒψιλόν | ZETA [dz]<br>ζῆτα |

|                 |                    |                  |                    |                      |              |
|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Ηη              | Θθ                 | Ιι               | Κκ                 | Λλ                   | Μμ           |
| ETA [eː]<br>ἦτα | THETA [tʰ]<br>θῆτα | IOTA [i]<br>ιώτα | KAPPA [k]<br>κάππα | LAMBDA [l]<br>λάμβδα | MU [m]<br>μῦ |

|              |                |                        |              |               |                    |
|--------------|----------------|------------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Νν           | Ξξ             | Οο                     | Ππ           | Ρρ            | Σσς                |
| NU [n]<br>νῦ | XI [ks]<br>ξεί | OMICRON [o]<br>ὀμικρόν | PI [p]<br>πί | RHO [r]<br>ῥῶ | SIGMA [s]<br>σίγμα |

|                |                       |                 |                 |                 |                     |
|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Ττ             | Υυ                    | Φφ              | Χχ              | Ψψ              | Ωω                  |
| TAU [t]<br>τάυ | UPSILON [ɥ]<br>ὕψιλόν | PHI [pʰ]<br>φεΐ | CHI [kʰ]<br>χεΐ | PSI [ps]<br>ψεΐ | OMEGA [ɔː]<br>ὀμέγα |

# Hebrew Alphabet

א ב ג ד ה ו ז ח ט

Chet  
(Ch)

Zayin  
(Z)

Vav  
(V)

He  
(H)

Dalet  
(D)

Gimel  
(G)

Bet  
(B/V)

Alef  
(silent)

י כ ל מ נ ס ע פ

Ayin  
(silent)

Samech  
(S)

Nun  
(N)

Mem  
(M)

Lamed  
(L)

kaf  
(K/Kh)

Yod  
(Y)

Tet  
(T)

ק ר ש ת פ צ ק פ

Tav  
(T)

Shin  
(Sh/S)

Resh  
(R)

Qof  
(Q)

Tsadeh  
(Ts)

Peh  
(P/F)

## Yeshua/Jesus

### Jesus in Greek: Iota, Eta, Sigma, Omicron, Upsilon, Sigma

- Put an apostrophe before the Iota (9 shaped not 6).
- Put a tilde over the Upsilon
- Early Greek Manuscripts were written entirely in Uppercase (practice both)

### Jesus in Hebrew: Yod, Shin, Vav, Ayin

- The letters are given right to left so start on the right if writing left to right
- What would Jesus have said in Matthew 5:18? What letter?

Handwriting practice lines consisting of solid top and bottom lines with a dashed midline, repeated ten times.

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# Tetragrammaton: God/YHWH

**God in Hebrew:** Yod, He, Vav, He

- The letters are given right to left so start on the right if writing left to right

The page contains ten sets of horizontal lines for handwriting practice. Each set consists of a solid top line, a dashed middle line, and a solid bottom line, providing a guide for letter height and placement.

ישוע

Ἰησοῦς

Dot over the third prong of the shin means sh sound

יהוה



Ryland's Fragment: a small credit card sized portion of the Gospel of John which might be the earliest NT manuscript evidence there is (Ca. 100-200 CE). It was found all the way in Egypt, a place the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel is not thought to have been written in.