

ישוע (ישוע)

Jesus' Hebrew name was ye.SHU.'a, written ישוע . How did ye.SHU.'a change into Jesus?

Yod (י) is the first letter in ישוע (ye.SHU.'a), Jesus' Hebrew name.

Yod represents the "Y" sound in Hebrew. Many names in the Bible that begin with yod are mispronounced today by English speakers because the yod in these names was transliterated in English Bibles with the letter "j" rather than "y". This came about because in early English the letter "j" was pronounced the way we pronounce "y" today. All proper names in the Old Testament were transliterated into English according to their Hebrew pronunciation, but when the English pronunciation shifted to what we know today, these transliterations were not altered.

Thus such Hebrew place names as ye.ru.sha.La.yim, ye.ri.Ho and yar.DEN have become known to us as Jerusalem, Jericho and Jordan, and Hebrew personal names such as yo.Na, yi.SHAi and ye.SHU.'a have become known to us as Jonah, Jesse and Jesus.

The second sound in Jesus' Hebrew name, שוע (ye.SHU.'a), is a vowel which takes the form of two horizontal dots appearing under the yod, the first letter in ישוע. When unaccented, as here in the name of ye.SHU.'a, it is pronounced almost like the "e" in the word "net".

English speakers mispronounce the first vowel sound in Jesus' name as a long "e", as in the word "me".

Before this Hebrew name was transliterated into English, it was first transliterated into Greek. There was no difficulty in transcribing the tse.RE sound since the ancient Greek language had an equivalent letter which represented this sound. And there was no real difficulty in transcribing the same vowel into English. The translators of the earliest versions of the English Bible transliterated the .. of שוע with "e".

Unfortunately, later English speakers guessed wrongly that this "e" should be pronounced as in "me", and thus the first syllable of the English version of ye.SHU.'a came to be pronounced "Jee".

In a study by Rachel Hachlili ("Names and Nicknames of Jews in Second Temple Time," Eretz-Israel, Vol. 17 pp. 188-211) in which she surveyed the literary and epigraphical sources of Jesus' day, she found that nearly one out of every ten persons known from the period was named Jesus.

The first sound of the second syllable of שוע (ye.SHU.a') is the "sh" sound represented by ש (shin). This third sound also is mispronounced - as "z" instead of "sh". This happened because Greek, like many other languages, has no "sh" sound. שוע was transcribed to Greek as Ἰησοῦς (Jesus), the Greek sigma being the closest approximation of the Hebrew shin.

Translators of English versions of the New Testament transliterated the Greek transcription of a Hebrew name, instead of returning to the original Hebrew. This was doubly unfortunate, first because the "sh" sound exists in English, and second because in English the "s" sound can shift to the "z" sound, which is what happened in the case of the pronunciation of "Jesus".

Note that the "sh" sound is preserved by translators of the Old Testament in "Jeshua" and "Yeshua".

The fourth sound one hears in the name ye.SHU.a' is the "u" sound, as in the word "flu".

This fourth sound in $\gamma\psi\eta$, like the first three, has come to be mispronounced in English. We cannot blame translators in this case. They transcribed this sound accurately, but English is not a phonetic language and "u" can be pronounced in more than one way. At some point the "u" in Jesus came to be pronounced as in "cut", and so we say "Jee-zuhs".

The final sound one hears in the name ye.SHU.a' is represented by υ (A.yin).

The Greeks had no letter in their language which could represent the sound of the A.yin, and its helping vowel, the pa.TAH, seems to have been lost with it.

But where did the final "s" of the word "Jesus" come from? Masculine names in Greek ordinarily end with a consonant, usually with an "s" sound, and less frequently with an "n" or "r" sound. In the case of the name Ἰησοῦς , the Greeks added a sigma, ς , the "s" sound to close the word.

English speakers make one further change from the original pronunciation of Jesus' name. English places the accent on "Je", rather than on "sus". For this reason, the "u" has shortened in English to "uh".

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