

The Nature of Yeshua in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts

speaking via the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in this scene, he would be either self-delusioned or demon-possessed. But, if John the Immerser/Baptist preparing the way for the Isaiah 40:3 “Lord” is to be regarded as him legitimately preparing the way for Yeshua, then this is only possible if Yeshua is integrated into the Divine Identity.

Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:10-11

“The Child Born as God With Us”

“Now the birth of Yeshua the Messiah was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Yeshua, for He will save His people from their sins.’ Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL’ [Isaiah 7:14], which translated means, ‘GOD WITH US.’ And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took *Mary* as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Yeshua” (Matthew 1:18-25).

“But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord’” (Luke 2:10-11).

Adherents of either a high or a low Christology should recognize the significance of the nativity narratives in the Apostolic Scriptures, associating the birth of Yeshua the Messiah with a critical Tanach passage such as Isaiah 7:10-16. Yeshua is conceived by supernatural means (Matthew 1:20c), which was important to stress to Joseph, Mary’s betrothed, otherwise he would have dismissed her or put her away (Matthew 1:18-20b).

Messianic people are quite keen to emphasize that the original name, that Joseph and Mary were going to name their Spirit-conceived son, is not the English “Jesus.” Anyone who enters into a Messianic congregation or assembly, in the English speaking world, will most frequently hear the Messiah referred to as “Yeshua” (or “Y’shua”). The name *Yeshua* (יֵשׁוּעַ) is a contracted form of the name *Yehoshua* (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ) or Joshua, and is used numerous times in the Tanach to refer to Moses’ successor, the transliteration *Iēsous* (Ἰησοῦς)¹⁵ being employed in the Greek Septuagint, and hence also in the Apostolic Writings.¹⁶ The proper name Yeshua is related to the improper

¹⁵ Cf. B.T. Dahlberg, “Jeshua,” in George Buttrick, ed. et. al., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 2:867-868; also also *Thayer*, 300; *BDAG*, pp 471-472.

¹⁶ In various parts of the broad Messianic community, it may be heard that the Greek transliteration *Iēsous* (Ἰησοῦς) is related to the name of the pagan deity Zeus (which notably has a different spelling, Ζεὺς).

Transliteration is the process where one tries to communicate, as closely as possible, the sounds of one language into another language, often by representing words of one language in a different alphabet. This is extremely difficult when taking proper Hebrew names and communicating them in Greek. How we get from *Yeshua* to *Iēsous* (pronounced *Ee-ay-sooce*) to ultimately *Jesus* is a challenge to understand if one is armed with nothing more than a concordance, does not understand the difficulty of transliteration, and most importantly has not studied **both** Hebrew and Greek. When transliterating the Hebrew name יֵשׁוּעַ to Greek:

- י (*yud* – “ye”) becomes Ιη (*iota-ēta* – “ye” or “ee-ay”)
- שׁ (*shin* – “sh”) becomes σ (*sigma* – “s” - there is no “sh” sound in Greek)
- ו (*vuv* – “u”) becomes ου (*omicron-upsilon* – “oo”)
- It is necessary for a final sigma (ς) to be placed at the end of the word to distinguish that the name is masculine and for it to be declinable from the nominative case (indicating subject)

noun *yeshuah* (ישׁוּעָה). The following statements on the name “Yeshua” are quoted from the glossary entries from Messianic Bible versions such as the Complete Jewish Bible and Tree of Life Version:

- **CJB:** “Variant of ‘Y’hoshua...In the *Tanakh* nine persons and a city have the name Yeshua, usually transliterated as ‘Jeshua’ or ‘Jeshuah.’ In the Septuagint and the New Testament the name was brought over into Greek as *Iêsous* and thence into English as ‘Jesus.’ It means ‘Y-H-V-H saves’ (Mt 1:21) and is also the masculine form of *yeshu’ah* (‘salvation’).”¹⁷
- **TLV:** “The Hebrew name of our Messiah, known in English as ‘Jesus.’ The name means ‘salvation.’ (Matthew 1:21; Mark 6:14; Luke 2:21; John 19:19).”¹⁸

What does the name *Yeshua* (ישׁוּעָה) specifically mean? The CJB/CJSB actually provides an interpretation in its slight paraphrase of Matthew 1:21: “She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Yeshua, [which means ‘ADONAI saves,] because he will save his people from their sins.”¹⁹ More generally speaking, examiners are prone to consider the original name of the Messiah, *Yeshua*, to mean “YHWH is salvation.” Given the fact that there were, indeed, many Jewish men in the First Century—other than the Messiah—who bore the name Yeshua (cf. Colossians 4:11), having a name that means either “salvation” or “YHWH is salvation” or even “H/he is salvation,” hardly makes anyone God. At most, the many human men who had the name Yeshua could have been perceived or thought of themselves as agents or facilitators of God’s salvation and deliverance purposes.

The child to be born of Joseph and Mary, however, has something very specific stated of Him in Matthew 1:21: *autos gar sōsei ton laon autou apo tōn hamartiōn autōn* (αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν), “for He will save His people from their sins” (TLV). Here, the salvation to be brought by the Messiah is one of **being saved from sins**. A created human being, a Jewish male, who bore the name Yeshua in the First Century, might be expected to save his people from the Romans, or Caesar, or the oppression, or the effects of the Exile. Would a human being, or even a created supernatural agent of God born as a human being, be expected to save mortals from their sins?

Messianic prophecy from the Tanach is, in fact, appealed to in Matthew 1:22-23, to substantiate the role that the Messiah is to fulfill: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and give birth to a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which means ‘God with us’” (Matthew

- Greek requires that the *ῥ* (*ayin* – “ah”) sound be dropped
- Hence, we get the name *Iêsous* (Ἰησοῦς), pronounced either *Ye-sooce* or *Ee-ay-sooce*, depending on the Greek dialect

The name *Iêsous*, surprisingly to some, is actually of Jewish origin. This name is used for the title of the Book of Joshua in the Septuagint (appearing as Ἰησοῦς), the Ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. This serves as definitive proof that *Iêsous* is not of pagan origin, but rather is simply a Greek transliteration of Yeshua developed by the LXX’s Jewish translators.

In Old English, the name *Iêsous* was rendered *Iesus* (pronounced *Yesus*). However, it was spelled with a beginning letter “I,” which in the Middle Ages had a “Y” sound. The I was used for letters beginning with both “I” and “J.” Early editions of the King James Version, for example, simply transliterate the Greek *Iêsous* into English as “Iesus.” Later in the development of the English language, J’s started being used in place of I’s, and the letter received the same sound that it has today. The name Jesus is less than 400 years old. However, its existence did not come about by some sordid conspiracy as some might errantly claim.

¹⁷ David H. Stern, trans., *Complete Jewish Bible* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1998), 1600.

Cf. Barry Rubin, gen. ed., *The Complete Jewish Study Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2016), 1856.

¹⁸ *Tree of Life Messianic Family Bible—New Covenant* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2011), 510.

¹⁹ Matthew 1:21a in The Amplified Bible actually reads as, “he will bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus [the Greek form of the Hebrew Joshua, which means Savior].”

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1:23, TLV). Obviously, there are significant discussions and debates which take place—particularly in debates over Yeshua’s Messiahship—involving the Isaiah 7:14 *almah* (אַלְמָה), rendered by the LXX as *parthenos* (παρθένος) or “virgin.” And, these are connected with some of the original setting issues of Isaiah 7. But for those who affirm that Isaiah 7 speaks of Yeshua of Nazareth, how are we to evaluate the Messiah being called or titled “Immanuel” (or the variant transliteration, “Emmanuel”)?

According to Matthew 1:23, *kai kalesousin to onoma autou Emmanouēl, ho estin methermēneuomenon meth’ hēmōn ho Theos* (καὶ καλέσουσιν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουήλ, ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνεύομενον μεθ’ ἡμῶν ὁ θεός), “and they will call the name of him Immanuel, which having been interpreted means with us – God” (Brown and Comfort).²⁰ The *Thayer* lexicon actually defines the transliteration *Emmanouēl* (Ἐμμανουήλ) with, “Immanuel (from *immanu* [מַנּוּ] and *ēl* [אֱל]; God with us), equivalent to *savior*, a name given to Christ by Matthew, Matt. 1:23, after Isa. 7:14. According to the orthodox interpretation the name denotes the same as *θεανθρωπος* [*theanthrōpos*], and has reference to the personal union of the human nature and the divine in Christ.”²¹

Many automatically assume that the Messiah possessing the title of “Immanuel,” must mean that Yeshua is God. Yet, recognizing how there were surely various Jewish males of the First Century who bore the proper name Immanuel/Emmanuel—and they, at most, simply bore God’s presence or favor within and around them—simply having the name or title Immanuel/Emmanuel is not enough to be regarded as “God proper with us, God manifested as a human being.” Terrence L. Donaldson, writing in *Contours of Christology in the New Testament*, actually concludes that the Messiah having the title Immanuel/Emmanuel is to be taken as designating God’s presence:

“In the citation of Isa 7:14 in Matt 1:23, the narrator provides an interpretation of the Hebrew word ‘Emmanuel,’ adding to the quotation the explanatory comment: ‘that is, God [is] with us.’ The christological force of the comment, however, depends on a decision about its form. Should it be rendered with ‘God with us,’ in which case the narrator was ascribing some sort of divine status to Jesus? Or, as is more likely, should it be rendered ‘God is with us,’ in which case the birth of Jesus is being understood simply as a sign that God is present.”²²

Bible readers who encounter the Messiah possessing the title Immanuel/Emmanuel—which it is to be conceded can mean either “God with us” or “God is with us”—do not read Matthew 1:23 isolated. The Messiah was to be named Yeshua for the precise reason, “for it is he who shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21b, HNV). If Matthew 1:21b had said something like, “he shall save his people from their oppression,” then the title Immanuel/Emmanuel appearing in Matthew 1:23 would regard God’s presence functioning via a human and/or supernatural agent, sent by Him to provide military and political salvation or deliverance for the Jewish people, from Rome. But this is not the salvation specified in Matthew 1:21b; the salvation specified is one of **being redeemed from the consequences of sin**, requiring the venue of the Messiah’s work to be decisively spiritual and Divine. Hence, it is right to consider that the Messiah possessing the title Immanuel/Emmanuel, in fact does make Him “God with us.”

There is a significant linkage of the Messiah to be named Yeshua, saving people from their sins (Matthew 1:21), as well as the Messiah being regarded as Immanuel/Emmanuel (Matthew

²⁰ Brown and Comfort, 3.

²¹ *Thayer*, 207.

²² Terence L. Donaldson, “The Vindicated Son: A Narrative Approach to Matthean Christology,” in Richard N. Longenecker, ed., *Contours of Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 107.

1:23). D.A. Carson, commenting on the scene of Matthew 9:5-7—where Yeshua both heals a paralytic *and* forgives him of sins, and is also accused of blasphemy²³ (discussed further)—regards this as a significant example of the Messiah being Immanuel/Emmanuel: “The healing...showed that Jesus truly had authority to forgive sins....This is the authority of Emmanuel, ‘God with us’ (1:23), sent to ‘save his people from their sins’ (1:21)...[T]he healing not only cured the paralytic (v.7), it also assured him that his sins were forgiven and refuted the charge of blasphemy.”²⁴

Stephen J. Wellum, noting this same scene (Mark 2:1-12; Matthew 9:1-8; Luke 5:17-26), makes the keen points, “all this takes place *outside* the temple so that Jesus is signifying that forgiveness of sin, now that he has come at this point in redemptive history, is found in him alone. After all, he is the one to which the entire old covenant pointed in its priesthood, sacrificial system, and entire temple structure. Jesus’ claim then, set within the storyline of Scripture, is an explicit claim of deity.”²⁵ His point should be well taken, as Yeshua claiming that forgiveness from sins would be available in Him, would be considered blasphemy not only against God—if He was just a normal human with God’s special presence in Him, and/or a created supernatural agent sent from Heaven as a human. The poignancy of Yeshua committing blasphemy is raised with an operating sacrificial service at the Temple in Jerusalem also present, for which some degree of forgiveness was accessible before God.

Yeshua saving people from their sins (Matthew 1:21), and being titled as “God with us” (Matthew 1:23), is something demonstrated in the significant examples of the Messiah offering a permanent forgiveness to people—and is something that no human agent or supernatural agent is capable of performing. **Only God can do this.**

Those of us who hold to a high Christology of Yeshua being God, though, should not just take it as blind dogma. We are bid by the angel who announced His birth, “A Savior is born to you today in the city of David, who is Messiah the Lord” (Luke 2:10, TLV). Who this Savior is, Messiah the Lord, is why we search the Scriptures, evaluating the testimony recorded of Him.

Matthew 2:1-12

“Yeshua the Child Worshipped by the Magi”

“Now after Yeshua was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.’ When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They said to him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: “AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL”’ [Micah 5:2]. Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, ‘Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found *Him*, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him.’ After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over *the place* where the Child was. When they saw the star,

²³ “And some of the scribes said to themselves, ‘This fellow blasphemes’...‘Which is easier, to say, “Your sins are forgiven,” or to say, “Get up, and walk”? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’—then He said to the paralytic, ‘Get up, pick up your bed and go home.’ And he got up and went home” (Matthew 9:3, 5-7).

²⁴ D.A. Carson, “Matthew,” in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. et. al., *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:222.

²⁵ Stephen J. Wellum, “The Deity of Christ in the Synoptic Gospels,” in *The Deity of Christ*, 88.