

## The Proper Name and Title of Jesus Christ Messiah

The proper name “Jesus,” translated from the Greek name “Iēsous,” originated from the Old Testament Hebrew name of “Yēšua’.” The name Yēšua’ came into general use around the time of the Babylonian Exile.

Prior to the Exile, the ancient form of Yēšua’ was Y<sup>e</sup>hōšûa’; and the Greek Old Testament, LXX, translates both proper names as Iēsous.

Y<sup>e</sup>hōšûa’ is the oldest name containing God’s memorial name Yahweh, and it means “Yahweh is help” or “Yahweh is salvation.”

It is significant to note that the angel instructs Joseph and Mary to name their newborn son Jesus with a view towards the ancient meaning behind Y<sup>e</sup>hōšûa’.

She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. (Matt 1:21)

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.” (Luke 1:31-33)

“Christ” comes from the Latin “Chistus,” which is derived from the Greek “Christos.” As a Greek verbal adjective, “christos” is not a proper name.

The Greek root verb underlying “christos” is “chriein.” “Chriein” describes the action of rubbing or spreading something on. By itself, the verb carries a secular meaning. In extrabiblical uses, it characterized an object or person being rubbed or smeared with something like whitewash, cosmetics, or paint.

“Christos,” when used in the context of people, was never an expression of honor, and, it tended towards the disrespectful. It is in this context that Jews called Jesus of lowly Nazareth “christos.” By the end of the first century, because of this association of the name Jesus with “christos”, the name of Jesus was seldom given as a personal name among Jews.

However, “christos” was often confused with the Greek proper name “Chrēstos,” and it soon quickly acquired the character of a proper name!

The English term “Messiah” arises from the Greek “Messias” which is a transliteration of the Aramaic noun “mešîḥā’.” The Aramaic term is translated from the Hebrew noun “māšîaḥ” which means “anointed.”

Of the māšîaḥ word family, the verb “māšaḥ” is translated into “chriein” in the Greek Old Testament (LXX), because anointing involves the rubbing of oil upon a person.

In the Old Testament, there are only two Jewish leaders who are described as māšîaḥ, anointed with oil: the high priest (Ex 40:15) and the king (1 Sam 15:17). The anointing confers the authority appointed by God and associated with the office and makes the selection of that person legal before the nation of Israel.

Although the anointing gave authority and power, the anointed were dependent on God and responsible to Him. Understood properly, they were servants of God. Through this religious meaning of the Hebrew term māšaḥ, the equivalent secular Greek term chriein takes on a religious significance.

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When God made His covenant with David, an expectation for the Messiah and the sovereign kingly rule of God developed among the Old Testament prophets (Jer 23:5; Ezek 34:23; 37:24).

When your days are fulfilled that you must go to be with your fathers, that I will set up one of your descendants after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build for Me a house, and **I will establish his throne forever**. I will be his father and he shall be My son; and I will not take My lovingkindness away from him, as I took it from him who was before you. But **I will settle him in My house and in My kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever.**" (1 Chron 17:11-14)

David's success in establishing a powerful nation influenced the hope for the Messiah in subsequent generations as Israel declined and was subjugated by Gentile nations.

In the New Testament, the Messiah is no longer expected; the One who is awaited comes as the One who has already come. The Greek term "messias" is only found twice throughout the New Testament and only in the narrative provided by the apostle John. Many English translations may show Messiah elsewhere, but when examining the underlying Greek, the Greek term "Christos" appears.

John the Baptist establishes that Jesus Christ was the Messiah.

He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah (**Messias**) (which translated means Christ (**Christos**))." (John 1:41)

Jesus Christ is recorded as acknowledging that He was the Messiah.

The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah (**Messias**) is coming (He who is called Christ (**Christos**)); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He." (John 4:25-26)

Although the above established that Christ was the long awaited Messiah early in His ministry, His life on earth was not characteristic on the earthly king that was expected (Luke 24:18-21). The concept of Jesus' reign and kingdom was impossible to grasp (John 18:33-37), and the title "King of the Jews" was used to indict and mock Him (Matt 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:35-38; John 19:19-21).

It was not until His resurrection does the verbal adjective "christos," taking on the character of a proper name, becomes the title "Christos" in reference to the messianic majesty of Jesus.

Paul points out the significance of the name:

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Cor 1:18)

When one revisits the word of the cross, the duality of Paul's words becomes apparent:

Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written, "JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS." (John 19:19)

The ministries of the apostles make clear that the Messiah is both the anointed high priest and King. But it isn't until the book of Revelation when the supreme majesty of the Messiah is proclaimed:

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John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood— and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. (Rev 1:4-7)

#### References:

1. Brown C, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, (1979).