

# WHO IS YESHUA?

## Part 4

# YESHUA IS SALVATION

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Many messianic Jews prefer to use the Hebrew name Yeshua rather than Jesus. But among the general population of Israel, his name is pronounced differently—Yeshu. This is a distinction that is much more significant than a mere abbreviation of a name like Steve from Steven or Deb from Debra. Yeshua and Yeshu are completely different names with unrelated meanings.

The name Yeshu is first found in the Talmud, which records the sayings of rabbis in the 2nd-5th centuries. It is there that the Hebrew phrase, *Yimach shemo vezichro*, is used in reference to Jesus. These words mean, “may his name and memory be obliterated.” So by taking the first letter of these words, they created the acronym Yeshu. It was an insulting term that expressed the contempt within the rabbinic community for this Jewish son of David from the tribe of Judah, born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth and crucified in Jerusalem. That is the memory that his opponents wanted to obliterate.

Later this term was branded deeper upon the Jewish culture by a medieval work called the *Toledot Yeshu*, or the “Generations of Yeshu.” This book contains folktales about Jesus that depict him as a misguided Jewish apostate. It is this perception that has carried forward to our modern day, so that the average Israeli considers Jesus to be a real Jewish man, but one who was either delusional or had a distorted reputation by his followers. And regardless of whether or not they understand the acronym that forms his name, they are comfortable using it. He is simply Yeshu to them.

But it is a real tragedy that they cannot know him by the actual name that his family and followers and even his opponents called him. For the name Yeshua means “salvation” in the Hebrew. And it is a name that invites us to ask, what exactly does that mean? Who can be so bold as to be called salvation? And what kind of salvation does this signify? These are the same kinds of questions that we need to be asking in our own part of the world. We need to know who this person is with such a remarkable name.

Some people like to say that Jesus can’t be the Messiah because you can’t find His name in the *Tanakh* (Old Testament). Well it is true that you won’t find Jesus there. But you will find several people named Yeshua in the *Tanakh*. This name is found thirty different times, typically translated as Jeshua.

So when we go directly to the original language, we discover that Yeshua is not an unusual Hebrew name after all. But there is a big difference between the many Yeshuas who lived in Old Testament times and the one whose life is detailed in the New Testament. For he is the only one who lived up to his actual name of salvation.

Now before we look at the way he did that, it is important to understand what salvation meant in ancient Hebraic thinking. The basic meaning of salvation for the people of Israel was

deliverance from enemies. We see this very clearly in passages like Exodus 14 and 15 where God delivered the Israelites from destruction by the onrushing army of Egypt by destroying them in the waters of the Red Sea.

But Moses said to the people, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever (Ex. 14:13).

The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation (Ex. 15:2).

Thy right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy (Ex. 15:6).

So in this time when Israel was being established as a nation, *yasha*, meaning "to save," had the sense of deliverance from an enemy that was seeking their destruction. In the centuries to follow, we see this concept applied time and time again. David, for example, said:

My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge;  
My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge;  
My savior, you save me from violence.  
I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised;  
And I am saved from my enemies (2 Sam. 22:3,4).

But the enemies of Israel were not limited to other nations who sought their destruction. Death was considered to be an enemy from which they could only be delivered by God. David makes that clear in Psalm 18. Later Paul would sum it up succinctly by saying, "The last enemy that will be abolished is death" (1 Cor. 15:26).

There was a sense that God would save the people from eternal annihilation just as He had spared them from physical annihilation on earth. By the Second Temple period this belief was well articulated and supported by many promises from God. There was an anticipation of God providing salvation in its ultimate sense by sending His anointed one—the Messiah—to bring this to pass. You can see an example of this anticipation by one of the godly men of that period named Simeon.

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, "Now Lord, let your bond-servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." (Luke 2:25-32).

Biblically speaking, the Messiah was considered to be God's agent of salvation. He would bring about the totality of God's salvation—both for Israel in an earthly sense and for all people eternally. Most people became focused on the earthly aspect and saw him as more of a political solution to their needs. But some, like Simeon, were spiritually focused, and as God's Word affirms, they were considered "righteous and devout" and could "depart in peace" from this world, knowing that they had a salvation that would endure forever.

Yeshua was born into this world in order bring salvation to the people of this world. He brought victory over sin by dying as our atonement, giving His life in place of ours to comply with the justice that was required. And He brought victory over death by resurrecting from the grave, and then proclaiming the promise of our own resurrection, as only He could do. In that way, he became the literal fulfillment of the phrase that is found a number of times in the Hebrew Scriptures—“the Lord has become my salvation.”

So from Egypt to Golgotha and even to this place and time today, that is the brief history of salvation. The Bible says “salvation is of the Jews” (Jn. 4:22). What a great gift to the world that we have through the Jewish people and the Jewish Messiah Yeshua.

Now it is helpful to us to know the key aspects of the Hebraic concept of salvation and how Yeshua fulfills them.

### **You can't save yourself**

There was no doubt about the prospects of survival for Israel as the army of Pharaoh was approaching. As a rag tag bunch of former slaves, they stood no chance of victory over their pursuers. They could not save themselves. But that is when God intervened. As Moses said to the people: “The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent.”

The same is true when it comes to our eternal salvation. God fights for us by delivering us from the enemy of spiritual death:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast (Eph. 2:8-9).

But that is not the way that many people look at spiritual matters. For them, salvation is a matter of being good enough that God will let them into heaven. But the problem with that belief is that it is really just wishful thinking. No one is that good. Or as the Scriptures remind us, “No one is good except God alone” (Mark 10:18).

One of the most prestigious rabbis in the history of the Jewish people was named Yochanan Ben Zakkai. The Talmud records that when he was on his deathbed he wept bitterly because he did not know if he had lived a sufficiently righteous life to get into heaven. He was learned in the Torah, a highly respected man, and very likely the kind of person that people around him would call him good. But he knew he was not good enough to meet God's standard of perfection (Ezek. 18:4).

One thing is certain, there is no record of any common human being ever having been perfect enough to earn his or her salvation. There is only one person who has ever lived a perfect life and that is Yeshua. And He had a little advantage since He was God. The rest of us never even come close.

So the bad news is that you cannot save yourself. But the good news is that God can do it for you. Just as He can wipe out certain death from Pharaoh's army, He can wipe out eternal death that comes from the consequences of sin.

### **Salvation is not to be taken lightly**

This has implications in terms of time and seriousness. It's been said, “Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today.” Or according to Mark Twain, “Never put off until tomorrow what you can do the day after tomorrow.”

### iii. – Laurie and Ella

Salvation is not to be taken lightly also because of the awesomeness and the serious nature of the issues of life and death and eternity. As Moses recorded, “Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore” (Ex. 14:30).

It’s a great joy when someone goes into glory having made peace with God and received His gift of salvation. But it is very sobering when someone dies having rejected God’s gift. I am very well aware of that personally, having known someone who, when given an opportunity to make peace with God as he was dying from a terminal illness, bluntly said no the day before he left this world.

We need to be asking ourselves what is our attitude like toward other people out there who are not in a right place with God. Do we care enough for people to express to them the hope we have in God?

### **There is only one way of salvation**

The Torah is very explicit in identifying who did the saving of Israel. Over and over again in the song that the Israelites sang after their deliverance, they recognize that there was only one Savior: “Adonai is a warrior; Adonai is His name” (Ex. 15:3).

As we saw earlier, God brought ultimate salvation to this world by dwelling among us as Yeshua. So later on when Peter stood before the leaders of Israel in his day, he could speak with great boldness because he understood the history of salvation. He declared about Yeshua: “There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

This is a statement that is not very politically correct. It won’t endear you to many people out there who say, “whatever you believe is fine.” In many ways, our world has adopted a Hindu saying in popular belief: “All paths lead to heaven.” Well, that sounds really nice and congenial. But can it be true? Does it really make sense when you look at it closely?

“All paths lead to heaven.” The path that says God is one and the path that says God is many and even the path that says God does not exist (so you get to the mountaintop and discover that God existed after all and now He is forcing you to be in heaven with Him). The path that says you must earn your salvation and the path that says you cannot earn it but receive it by faith. The path that says, “There is no God but Allah” and the path that says, “Is it not I, Adonai? And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except Me” (Is. 45:21).

I don’t know about you, but I don’t want anything to do with a God who can’t make up his mind. I want a God who makes it perfectly clear who He is and what He expects from us.

And He has done exactly that. He has made Himself known and declared His plan for all of us in His written Word. As for me, I am very thankful that He has made these truths known to us. When we hear these words of Yeshua: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me” (Jn. 14:6), we can know with utmost confidence that we don’t have to go looking anywhere else.

There is salvation in no other name than Yeshua. That statement is literally true because “salvation” is in Yeshua’s name. But it is also true that we can have no assurance of receiving the gift of salvation from no one else but Yeshua. No other name. Not even your own name, for you

cannot save yourself. Yeshua alone makes it possible when we believe in Him.

When you go somewhere in your car and then later return to the parking lot, you will approach your car and take out your keys. You will slip it into the lock and open the door. At that point it makes no sense to try that key on any other car parked out there. That's probably the last thing you would think of doing.

So it is when it comes to spiritual doors. When you find Yeshua and believe in Him, you need not look any further. Just like it was long ago when Andrew came running up to his brother Simon Peter and said, "We have found the Messiah" (John 1:41). We all need to know that our spiritual search is over.

Yeshua is indeed God. He is not just Jewish but the promised Messiah of Israel. And He has delivered us from the consequences of sin and the enemy of death. So because of that, we are able to know with great certainty that He can be our one and only salvation.