# “Jehovah is the Only Name of God!”

*Posted on Probe’s Facebook:*

**Having just been looking at several sites including Wikipedia for God’s name (which I already know from scripture) it never ceases to amaze me how wrong some people are. There is only one truth and God’s name Jehovah is in the original scriptures over 7000 times. Jesus said in His Model prayer “Let Your name be sanctified.” How can we sanctify it if we don’t use it, as sanctify means “make known.” God and Lord are just titles like king or judge or doctor. So unless you are going to be completely truthful then it would be better for none of these sites to say anything. People the truth is out there, it’s up to you to do your own homework like I did.**

The Name of God is not “Jehovah”! God revealed His Name to Moses in Exodus 3:14 as YHWH, popularly known as the Tetragrammaton or “the four letter name” which means “I AM” or “the eternal one” or “the self-existing one.” The exact pronunciation of this Name was lost to history with the destruction of the last Temple in Jerusalem. It was uttered only once a year on the Day of Atonement. Although the Name appears thousands of times in the Old Testament, it was never spoken; instead Adonai was used in its place, which was a generic reference to God. Many English translations use LORD to show where the Name appears in the Hebrew text. The word “Jehovah” was coined by scholars around the 17th century through combining the vowels from Adonai with the consonants of YHWH.

More importantly than the actual pronunciation or even spelling of the Name was its meaning; in revealing His Name as “I AM,” God declared that He cannot be identified with a name because that limits the eternal one to a finite and temporal

description. In ancient times a name denoted the character of its object, setting limits to it (Ecclesiastes 6:10), and gave the name-giver a particular power over the named, such as with the name God gave to the first human Adam which means man and positioned him at the pinnacle of creation; in turn Adam was responsible for naming all the animals which established his authority over them (Genesis 2:20). A proper name for God suggests a limitation to the finite world much like the pagan deities of Egypt. However, because God is eternal He remains outside of the cosmos and in control of it. A name sets a boundary to His eternal being. In other words, God's Name revealed to Moses was a Name that cannot be named or as it has been called "the ineffable Name." In the context of Exodus God was confronting and destroying the pagan Egyptians and their false gods, which all had names that represented particular aspects of the finite world: the sun, the moon, the underworld, the river, etc. God declared that He is different than those limited gods because He is Wholly Other, all powerful and eternal. He cannot be represented or personified by the cycles of nature.

Naming divinity in the ancient world made the gods personal, but extremely limited in their abilities and powers. The gods of paganism were personifications of nature; for example, Ra was the sun god that gave life, but his power did not reach to the underworld. Zeus controlled the sky, but not the sea which belonged to Poseidon. The gods did not ultimately rule the cosmos, but were subject to a universal principle of fate; not even the gods could escape their predetermined destinies.

YHWH declared Himself "holy" or different from the limited pagan gods. Yet, He was personal too in that He did not rule by caprice; His followers could pray to Him, reason with Him and even argue with Him as with any personal deity in the hopes that He would change His mind (Genesis 6:6; Numbers 11, 14:11-19). YHWH was both eternal and personal, a radical departure from the ancient pagan belief in limited gods and

unpredictable fate.

The New Testament embodies the fullness of this infinite yet personal God in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. God becoming man in John 1 was the equivalent of YHWH revealing His Name to Moses in Exodus 3. Just as the eternal one did the impossible by limiting Himself with a proper name, so through the incarnation God did the impossible in the minds of strict monotheistic Jews by becoming man (John 5:18; 10:33), a concept the Jews thought so blasphemous that they wanted to stone Jesus for claiming to be "the Son of God" a title he used to identify himself as God (John 10:36). Just as Jesus used "Son of Man" in order to show his complete identity with humanity, God chose self-limitation in emptying Himself and took the form of a man in Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:6-8).

Yet "Jesus" is not the Name of God and "Christ" (the chosen one) of course is a title. Jesus means "salvation" and although He was the incarnation of God, He was still limited and still a man, like us in every way except for sin (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus of Nazareth was not superman and had no special magic powers or abilities. All that He accomplished was through faith in his Father God and by the power of the Holy Spirit (John 14:10). Jesus is the name of a man, who identified himself as "I AM" (John 8:58). He was the God/Man who humbled himself in death, bringing salvation to humanity, and because of His suffering it is the name of Jesus that God exalts above every Name (Philippians 2:8-11). And only through calling on the name of Jesus does humanity experience salvation (Acts 4:12). The exaltation of Jesus Christ makes the whole debate over the proper Name of God a moot point, since it is the name of a man that is greater than even the Name of God.

It is therefore biblically inaccurate, linguistically mistaken and theologically impossible to make reference to "Jehovah" or "Yahweh" as the Name of God. It is best that we abandon the entire use of the name Jehovah and simply return to the word

LORD in our English translations wherever the Hebrew reads YHWH with the understanding that this is "the ineffable Name" that means "the eternal self-existing one," who is Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and who remains forever present with us through the Holy Spirit.

Lawrence Terlizzese, Ph.D.

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# "Why Did the Jews Not Say God's Name Aloud When He Never Said Not To?"

**Today I read an article on your website where a question was asked, "If Jehovah Isn't the Real Name of God, What Is?" Jimmy Williams explained that even prior to Christ, it was Jewish tradition to substitute Adonai for the Tetragrammaton due to their ancient practice of not uttering the sacred name of God. However, this tradition was man's tradition, the Jews' tradition. Am I correct in saying that it was not God's tradition? Did God ever command man not to vocalize his name? If He didn't want us to call on him by his name, why did He even mention His name to Moses? Why did he tell Moses what to say when inquired of who sent him if He didn't want people to know His name and use it? The Bible reveals to us that the Pharisees were corrupt even before Christ, so why do we carry on their tradition if we are followers of Christ? If He gave us His name in the ancient texts, what right does man have in taking it away?**

You ask a very good question! On the one hand, you are quite correct in noting that God never explicitly commanded man not to vocalize His name. This was, as you observe, part of Jewish tradition—and not the commandment of God.

So why did this tradition arise? Largely because of one of God's commandments! In Exodus 20:7 (one of the Ten Commandments) we read the following: "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name."

It was because the Jews were so concerned not to misuse the name of God that this tradition arose. The Jews wanted to be absolutely certain that they did not misuse the name of the Lord and so they read Adonai in place of YHWH. Thus, there was a good motive behind the tradition, even though the practice was never explicitly commanded by God. God's command was not to misuse His name—and clearly one can reverently speak (or pray) the name of the Lord in a way that does not constitute misuse. However, as we readily discern even in our own day, many people are only all too ready to misuse the name of the Lord. And this, I think, is partly why this Jewish tradition arose. It provides a "fence around the Law," which keeps people from violating God's commandment. But constructing the fence itself was never actually commanded by God.

I hope this is helpful.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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**See Also *Probe Answers Our Email*:**

- "If Jehovah Isn't the Real Name of God, What Is?"
- "Is It Wrong to Speak of God as Jehovah?"
- "Jehovah Is the Only Name of God!"

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# "If Jehovah Isn't the Real Name of God, What Is?"

**When the Bible was translated, the interpreter translated the name of God as "Jehovah." My main question is, What was the original name of God? Because I read that his name was translated wrong, and that his real name is YAOHU. Is this true?**

Thank you for writing. I will try to explain this to you with the following information:

God is referred to in the Bible by many names, but the primary three are:

***Elohim***
Translation: "God," as in Genesis 1:1: "in the beginning God created…"

***Yahweh***
Translation: "Lord," as in Psalm 23:1: "The Lord is my Shepherd…"

***Adonai***
Translation: "Ruler, Master, Lord," as in Psalm 35:23: "my God (Elohim) and my Lord (Adonai)."

We need to understand the rendering of these three names of

God as we find them in our Bibles today, whether in English, Spanish, and all other modern translations. But we must first understand some things about the development of the Hebrew language.

First of all, ancient Hebrew was distinctive, in that there were two traditions which were involved in the handing down of the Hebrew text as we know it today. One was written (Kethiv), and the other was oral, spoken (Qere).

Up until the Tenth Century A.D., all Hebrew written texts in existence and available (for study, worship) had one distinguishing feature: the text consisted of consonants only. In other words, there were no vowels! But since there was also an oral tradition, the Jews who spoke Hebrew knew what the vowels were and just supplied them as they read the text.

Examples in English: McDnlds=McDonalds; prkwy=parkway; frwy=freeway.

Around 906 A.D., a group of Hebrew scholars at Tiberias (on the Sea of Galilee) known as the Massoretes developed a system of little “dots” and “dashes” representing all of the vowel sounds. These were superimposed upon the written Hebrew text at that time. The Massoretes were concerned that the Hebrew language would be lost, as fewer and fewer people knew and spoke it. So these scholars took steps to make sure that all future generations of Jews would be able to speak the language accurately since they would now have a written record of the ancient vowel sounds. All of our modern Hebrew translations are based upon the work of the Massoretes.

Now let’s look back at our three names of God.

The term *Elohim* has always meant “God,” but is not germane to our discussion of your question.

The issue of *Jehovah* is derived from the other two primary names of God.

The term *Yahweh* is always translated by the word “Lord.” But we must understand that every time a Rabbi or any Jew was reading any portion of the Old Testament and came upon this written word “YHWH”, he orally said “Adonai,” not “Yahweh.” The reason for this is that the Jews considered the written term YHWH so sacred that it should never be spoken or expressed with the lips.

That is the reason why, when they were reading (speaking) and came to “YHWH,” they always substituted “Adonai” and spoke it instead. This has been practiced by the Jews back to Jesus’ time, and long before.

Now, where does “Jehovah” come from? Well, what were the Massoretes to do when they were adding their vowel-system to the written Hebrew text and they came upon the word, “YHWH?” Since no Jew had ever heard or known the true pronunciation of this most sacred of names for the Hebrew God, they put there the identical vowel-pointings which are rendered for Adonai!

In reality, the Jews were just doing what they had always done: they spoke “Adonai” every time they read “YHWH” in the text.

The vowel sounds in Adonai are “OH” and “AH.” Thus, “Yahweh” becomes “YHO VAH” (rendered in English as “Jehovah”).

Most scholars have concluded that the term “YHWH” is actually based upon the “to be” verb in Hebrew, “HYH” (HAYAH). The future tense of this verb is YHWH (Yahweh). They refer back to the passage in Exodus where God is actually asked His name. Moses says, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I shall say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now, they may say to me, ‘What is His Name?’ What shall I say to them?” And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM;” and He said, “Thus you shall say to the Sons of Israel, I AM has sent me to you.'”

I hope this answers your question. You can see from this

explanation that the issue was not that someone translated it wrong. It was done with reverent intention. I hope this answers your question adequately.

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

*This e-mail also came in with a similar question:*

**This message is in reference to using the word "Jehovah" to mean the God of the Bible. I assume you know that it is YHWH with the vowel points for "Adonai" added. This was to remind the Torah reader to say "Adonai" instead of YHWH, which was (and is) considered sacred to the Jews. I do not see how one can use a hybrid of two names for God and still be correct. If someone were to call me "Jasen" with different vowels inserted, I probably would not respond. I understand God is an omniscient, compassionate God that knows our shortcomings and misunderstandings, but if we can do it right, shouldn't we?**

Your questions about the relationship of YHWH, Adonai, and Jehovah have to do with the tradition of the Jews and their reverence for the name of Yahweh, which comes from Exodus 3:13 when Moses asked God to tell him what he should say when Pharoah and the Egyptians inquired as to who had sent him (Moses) on his mission of deliverance. Remember, the Lord told Moses to take his shoes off because he was on "holy ground."

God's answer was, "I AM THAT I AM." Actually, the word YHWH is a form of the "to be" verb in Hebrew, "eyeheyeh." It ties into the idea in the New Testament where Jesus said to the Pharisees, "Before Abraham was (existed), **I AM** (that is, I continually exist)" (John 8:58-59). The Hebrew translation is "underived existence."

*Unger's Bible Dictionary* says that "this custom which had its origin in reverence, and has almost degenerated into a superstition, was founded upon an erroneous rendering of Lev. 24:16, from which it was inferred that the mere utterance of

the name constituted a capital offense. According to Jewish tradition, it was pronounced but once a year by the high priest on the Day of Atonement when he entered the Holy of Holies; but on this point there is some doubt." (p. 565).

This reverence carried over into the Jewish thinking about the awe, fear, and reverence to which God was entitled. The Jews scrupulously avoided every mention of it. The true pronunciation of it was known to the Hebrews, but has been entirely lost. They continued to write YHWH in the text, but when pronouncing the text always substituted another name for God, usually Adonai.

You are right in your explanation that the Jews used the vowel pointing of Adonai to YHWH, from which we get the English word, "Jehovah," hence the form Yehowah and name Yehvh. There is a strong possibility that the name Jehovah was anciently pronounced as Yahweh, like Iabe of the Samaritans. But I must remind you that the entire vowel pointing system did not come into use until the 10th century A.D. This was designed by the Massoretes located at Tiberius on the Sea of Galilee, and their desire was to weld together two traditions of the Old Testament text at that time: the KETHIV (written text) and the QERE (spoken, oral tradition).

Let me explain it this way. Until the tenth century A.D., the written Hebrew text contained only consonants. The reason for this is that those who spoke Hebrew knew what the vowels were. The Pharisees of Jesus' day knew the Old Testament by heart, from Genesis to Malachi. This had nothing to do with literacy or education. This is the oral tradition. Even today many Muslims can quote the entire Koran by memory. Since the Jews had this oral tradition, they knew the Scriptures and they knew what the vowel sounds were.

Let me give you an example: Read these modified English words: blvd=boulevard; pkwy=parkway; McDnlds=McDonalds, and so on.

What the Massoretes did was to devise a vowel pointing system which was superimposed over the written, consonantal text. The reason for doing this was to bring these two traditions together and stabilize the text for perpetuity so that the language would not be lost. Amazingly, this same Hebrew is now in operation in Israel. And when you seen modern Hebrew written, the vowels are again omitted as in ancient times, because Jews who read and speak Hebrew know what vowels are to be supplied.

My point with all this is that long before the vowel pointings (which seem to be hanging you up) were created, the Jews were *already* referring to YHWH as "Adonai." This goes way back in the Jewish tradition, even before the time of Christ. The Qumran community (Dead Sea Scrolls) also had this practice.

In summary, the action of substituting Adonai for YHWH had little to do with the vowel pointing you mention, and everything to do with an ancient practice of the Jews (in respect or perhaps superstition) not to utter the sound of the "ineffable Tetragrammaton" (YHWH cf. *Websters Dictionary*). The practice is not, in reality, a "hybrid" of the two names, as you suggest, but rather a substitution of the one for the other. Your analysis of the vowel pointing is accurate as a means of reminding/warning the reader not to utter "YHWH" after the 10th century A.D. , but we have no knowledge or of any such indicator provided in the written Hebrew text giving such a warning prior to the Massoretic tradition.

I hope this answers your question.

Sincerely in Christ,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

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