“When Did People Start Worshiping Yahweh?”

What is the history/origin of belief in Yahweh? I am being told that Yahweh was one of many gods initially believed in by the Canaanites, and eventually the followers were better at presenting Yahweh as the God of Israel?

First, let’s define worship. Worship is the act of expressing reverence, devotion and adoration towards God. Rituals, singing songs, prayers and ceremonies represent the act of worship.

Next, before answering your question, I’m convinced a critical explanation of scripture will suffice to help add credibility. The book of Nehemiah states that God made the heavens and the host of heavens (9:6). The heavens, in this passage, refers to the sky or the expanse that is above the surface of the earth. The term “heaven of heavens” refers to everything outside of the earth’s atmosphere. These are the planets, galaxies, etc. This passage also mentions the singular word host which means “the stars” or “celestial bodies.” Now, I do not want to confuse you, because the plural word “hosts” apply to God’s angel armies. With that, the passage of scripture concludes, “and the heavenly host bows down before You”{1}. Some translations state, “…the heavenly host worship You.” If we take this into account, we could say that according to Genesis 1:1, worship regarding nature started after Yahweh created it. According to Deuteronomy 33:27, the eternal attribution of the God of Israel indicates the worship of Him pre-exists the creation of the earth through the worship of the angels in heaven (Isaiah 40:28, Romans 1:20, Revelation 4:8).

The name YHWH (*Yahweh*) first appears in Exodus 3:14 when God made Himself known to Moses: “I AM WHO I AM. . . . Say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.”{3} This links to

"The Real Formal Full Personal Name of God"{3} in Exodus 6:2-3. The name reflects His redeeming acts regarding His chosen people. It parallels the need of the Hebrews during their captivity in Egypt thus largely translated as "I am/will be present."

Researchers have yet to conclude whether Canaanites worship paralleled the worship YHWH of the Israelites. The suggestions indicate the Canaanites may have used the name Yahweh in worship along with other deities, yet with no evidence of true relationship with the God of Moses—like using the word "god" today in a broad sense rather than using "The LORD God." We do know that the Yahweh of the Israelites responded to Moses and to the cry of the Israelites. We cannot say the same for the Canaanites. Because no evidence of Yahweh responding to Canaanite worship exists, this could indicate that Canaanite worship lacked value.

Notes

1. New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Nehemiah 9:6.
2. New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Exodus 3:14.
3. Martin A. Shields and Ralph K. Hawkins, "YHWH," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

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“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!”