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It Is OK Not to Have Every Answer: The Book of Mormon Onomastic Ending -(i)hah

Paul Y. Hoskisson


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In our search for understanding, it is often instructive to determine what something does not mean. This is the case with the ending on some Book of Mormon names, -(i)hah. Because one of the most common names ending with -(i)hah is Moronihah, the son of Moroni, it might be tempting to understand these names as patronymic; however, of eleven names with the suffix -(i)hah, Moronihah is the only occurrence in which the father is known. The case of the brothers Mathoni and Mathonihah also casts doubt on this interpretation. The suffix -(i)hah can also be interpreted as a shortened form of Jehovah, yhwh. For this to occur, however, -(i)hah would have to switch to -(i)hah through metathesis, which is extremely rare in Semitic languages. Among other arguments against this understanding are that there are no instances in the corpus in which -(i)hah is used as a shortened form of Jehovah and, with one possible exception, no geographical name compounds with yhwh, as -(i)hah does in the Book of Mormon. Although this leaves the question currently unresolved, the use of sound methodology has helped to settle what -(i)hah is not, which will ultimately aid in determining what it is.
often it is easier to define what something is not than to define what it is. for example, when trying to define what a strawberry is to someone who has never seen or tasted one, it is easy to say that a strawberry is a fruit, but, unlike most fruits, the seeds grow on the outside of the flesh. or a strawberry is red like a raspberry, but doesn’t taste like a raspberry. or the shape of a strawberry is somewhat like that of a thimbleberry, but strawberries do not grow on a cane. the point is that by saying what a strawberry is not does not define what a strawberry is. this is not to say that declaring what a strawberry is not is an exercise in futility. rather, it means that sometimes the most productive thing we can do is to declare what something is not, even if we cannot say what it is.
The rather infrequent ending on some Book of Mormon names, -(i)hah, falls into this category. Though it has been claimed that -(i)hah is the shortened form of “Jehovah,” one of the names of the God of Israel (in the Bible, the shortened form that can be attached to the end of personal names is usually rendered in English as -iah, as in Isaiah), I will demonstrate that such claims are tantamount to declaring that a strawberry is a thimbleberry. Unfortunately, I cannot define what -(i)hah really means, but I will explain why it cannot be a representation of “Jehovah.” I will begin by discussing what can be said about -(i)hah as a suffix on Book of Mormon names and end with a warning and an admonition.

In the Book of Mormon onomasticon, the combination -(i)hah occurs at the end of eight Nephite names, to wit, in the order of appearance, Nephihah, Ammonihah, Moronihah, Zemnarihah, Onihah, Mathonihah, Limhah, and Cumenihah. Four of the names to which the suffix seems to have been added already end in /i/, namely, Nephi :: Nephihah, Moroni :: Moronihah, Mathoni :: Mathonihah, and Cumeni :: Cumenihah. If the name Limhah is compounded with the suffix -hah (and this point can be debated), then, taken together with the previous four names, Limhah might suggest that the suffix is -hah and not -ihah. On the other hand, the presence in the Book of Mormon of Ammon and Ammonihah would suggest that the suffix is -ihah, even though there is no connection between the persons named Ammon (two different people) and Ammonihah. In other words, there may be only one suffix, -ihah or -hah, or there may be two, -ihah and -hah.

Onihah is attested only once and is the name of a city. Cumenihah is attested only once as a personal name, but Cumeni is attested several times but always as a city name. Ammonihah is the name of a city, but it was apparently named after a person (Alma 8:6-7). Nepihah and Moronihah appear as both personal names and as names of cities. Zemnarihah, Mathonihah, and Limhah are only attested as personal names denoting only one individual each. In addition, all the city names could have originally been personal names given by the founders of the cities (see Alma 62:43).

It might be tempting to posit that -(i)hah could mean “son of” since Moronihah was the son of Moroni (Alma 62:43). However, because no father is named for Nepihah, Ammonihah, Zemnarihah, Onihah, Mathonihah, Limhah, or Cumenihah, it cannot be concluded that these names are patronymic. The existence of both Mathoni and Mathonihah as names of brothers (3 Nephi 19:4) also works against the meaning “son of.” Otherwise, there would be one son called “Son of Mathoni” and the other son would be “Mathoni,” the same as his father’s name. In other words, Mathoni’s sons would be called “Son of Mathoni” and “Mathoni,” causing multiple confusion when referring to any one of the three.

What can be concluded from this information? Nothing much. There does not seem to be a clear and/or overriding pattern to the use of -(i)hah. The lack of pattern is only compounded when the three Jaredite
names ending in -(i)hah, Ahah, Orihah, and Mahah, are included. All three names are only used for individuals, never as geographic names. Ahah was the son of Seth. Orihah and Mahah were sons of Jared. As far as I can determine, no Jaredite geographic names end in -(i)hah. Therefore, I am left where I started, with little positive to say. It would seem at this point that describing what -(i)hah is not would be easier than trying to describe what -(i)hah is.

The presumption has been made that -(i)hah represents a Hebrew/Nephite form of the name of the God of Israel, yhwh, יהוה. (The name has traditionally been pronounced “Jehovah” in English and is commonly called the tetragrammaton because it consists of four letters in Hebrew. In academic circles today it is nearly always pronounced “Yahweh.”) For example, it has been claimed that the “biblical -iah, -ijah, [shortened forms of the name of Jehovah attached to the end of personal names] . . . by a common metathesis also becomes the extremely common Book of Mormon name ending -i(h)ah.” I am not certain what metathesis is being suggested. That -(i)hah could become -(i)hah through metathesis is quite unthinkable. First of all, metathesis within any one Semitic language is extremely rare, even if it does occur occasionally between Semitic languages. Second, when metathesis does occur, it is always a metathesis of consonants. A consonant and a vowel, as far as I am aware, never switch places in Semitic languages. Thus, -iah becoming -i(h)ah through metathesis is not possible. But even if metathesis were possible, -iah could not become -i(h)ah or -hah without the addition of another consonant, /h/. In all Semitic languages, adding a consonant would change the meaning, even if the additional consonant were simply a grammatical marker.

Nevertheless, a limited knowledge of Hebrew might suggest that -i(h)ah, but not -hah, could be derived from yhwh. Beginning Hebrew students know that the Hebrew letter yod, י, is a half vowel, i.e., it can function in biblical Hebrew as the long vowel /i/ or the consonant /y/! Thus, the -i(h)ah on the end of English halleluiah represents the consonantal Hebrew shortened form of yhwh, i.e., -y(h)ah. Therefore, on the surface, the beginnings of yhwh and -(i)hah might seem to have much in common, even if the /i/ of yhwh is consonantal while the /i/ of -(i)hah appears to be vocalic. Then, if the traditional English pronunciation of the tetragrammaton, Jehovah, is ignored (most scholars today do ignore it) and the pronunciation yihwah is assumed, then deriving -(i)hah from yhwh might seem possible. In fact, if -(i)hah is to be derived at all from yhwh, then the vocalization yihwah for the tetragrammaton must underlie it.

However, a closer, more technical examination of possible vocalizations of the Hebrew tetragrammaton will show that the pronunciation yihwah is at best unlikely, and probably impossible. The explanation is rather complex and tedious and is supplemented with additional, more technical material in an appendix. Nevertheless, any explanation of why -(i)hah cannot come from yhwh necessarily includes grammatical details that are seldom covered in first-year Hebrew classes. I would recommend that readers who are not interested in some finer points of Hebrew grammar skip down to the summary at this point.

It is generally assumed that the tetragrammaton yhwh is a third person singular prefix verbal form from the triconsonantal root hwy (or hyy) with the meaning “to be” or “to exist.” To be more precise, for -(i)hah to be derived from yhwh, the vocalization would have to conform to a Hebrew Qal third person masculine singular prefix stative verbal form. Evidence for the existence of this yihwah pronunciation comes from the Leningrad Codex. In passages such as in Exodus 6:2 and 3, it supplies the vowels y’hwah for the tetragrammaton, which may be, but does not necessarily have to be, derived from an original *yihwah. On the other hand, the Leningrad Codex presents compelling evidence that yahweh, not y’hwah, was the original pronunciation of the tetragrammaton. (See the appendix.) Therefore, few if any scholars today defend y’hwhah (<*yihwah), the only pronunciation that would yield -(i)hah as the pronunciation of the tetragrammaton. For this reason alone, yhwh most likely is not the source for Book of Mormon -(i)hah. But there are other reasons to reject the connection between -(i)hah and yhwh.
The second reason to doubt that -(i)hah represents the Hebrew divine name yhwh comes from studies of biblical-period (roughly 1200 to 333 BC) Hebrew names. Most ancient Semitic personal names, including Hebrew, are composed of at least two elements, a theophoric part (the name of a deity) and a noun or verb. Often the theophoric element was shortened or omitted altogether. In the latter case, the name of the deity, though missing, is understood to be present. In biblical period Hebrew personal names, the tetragrammaton is the most common of the theophoric elements in personal names. Yet the divine name never occurs in its full form, yhwh, as the theophoric element in these personal names. As far as I am aware, it also never occurs in biblical period Hebrew names outside the Bible. When yhwh does appear as the theophoric element, it only occurs in the standard shortened (hypocoristic) forms or is left off entirely. If -(i)hah stands for yhwh, it would be an exception to all known biblical period Hebrew naming practices. For this reason alone, equating Book of Mormon -(i)hah with the full form of the tetragrammaton should be viewed with extreme skepticism if not outright rejection.

The third reason for rejecting a connection between -(i)hah and yhwh is actually a corollary of the previous reason. If the full form of the tetragrammaton is never used as the theophoric element with biblical Hebrew names, could one of the shortened forms that are often used in the biblical onomasticon be the basis for -(i)hah? The answer is no. None of the known shortened affixes of the tetragrammaton would yield -(i)hah. The shortened forms that are used as affixes are the prefixed forms yhô- (יִהוָּ) and yô- (י), and the suffixed forms -yah (יָה), -yâhû (יַֽהַּ), and, exclusively in extra-biblical names, -yô (י). All of these shortened forms have at least one vowel, and most have two, and/or a missing consonant that cannot be reconciled with -(i)hah. In addition, there is the question of equating the apparent vowel /i/ in -(i)hah with the consonantal nature of /y/ in yhwh.

The fourth reason to doubt that -(i)hah can be equated with the tetragrammaton has to do with geographic names. As mentioned above, one of the Book of Mormon names with -(i)hah, Onihah, is attested exclusively as the name of a city and is not attested without the supposed suffix. Ammonihah also is known only from a city name, though Ammon does occur as a personal name. Two other names, Nephihah and Moronihihah, are attested as the names of cities and of individuals. In contrast to this Book of Mormon usage, no city names in the Bible contain the tetragrammaton in any form, plene or shortened. In fact, among all the geographic names in the Hebrew Bible that are compounded with a theophoric element, such as Bethel and Baal-perazim, none occur compounded with the tetragrammaton, with the one possible exception of Jehovah-jireh in Genesis 22:14, the place where Abraham almost sacrificed his son.

However, it should not be overemphasized that, with one exception, the Bible does not compound geographic names with the tetragrammaton, and not just because of the unusual exception. Contrary to the popular English saying, exceptions neither prove nor disprove the rule. That is, it is fairly certain that Ammonihah, and most likely the case that Nephihah and Mathonihah, were named after persons bearing that name and were not originally geographic names. If -(i)hah really does derive from the tetragrammaton, then the three Book of Mormon examples could be construed as a Nephite departure from standard biblical Hebrew practice. Nevertheless, I am unaware of a single instance in the Hebrew Bible of a personal name compounded with yhwh that also became a geographic name. While this reason by itself would not disprove a connection between yhwh and -(i)hah, it should certainly raise warning flags that must be taken seriously.

**Summary**

What -(i)hah does mean is not clear to me. But four reasons make it equally clear to me that -(i)hah cannot be derived from the tetragrammaton yhwh. First, the conjectured pronunciation of the tetragrammaton, either as Jehovah or as Yahweh, would not support the derivation -(i)hah. Second, none of the shortened forms of yhwh can account for -(i)hah. Third, there are no instances that
I am aware of in which a Hebrew personal name is compounded with the full form *yhwh*. And fourth, city names and, with one unusual exception, geographic names are also not compounded with any form of the tetragrammaton.

In practical terms, this lengthy and technical excursion into the intricacies of the Book of Mormon onomasticon, while not producing any conclusive results, should lead the reader to a warning and an admonition. The warning is that uncritical attempts to trace Book of Mormon names and parts of names back to an ancient Near Eastern precedent can lead to false conclusions. This does not mean that searching for Near Eastern *Vorlagen* should not be pursued. The admonition is that those of us who propose such etymologies need to use caution and sound methodology. And we still need to learn much more about the Nephite language, its phonemes, its lexemes, and its syntax. How much, if at all, was the Nephite language influenced by non-Nephites? If elements of the Jaredite onomasticon began showing up in Nephite contexts only after King Mosiah, had fled the city of Nephi and moved in with the Mulekites, and if the Mulekites had at least one personal contact with a living Jaredite, what influence did the Jaredite onomasticon have on the Nephites? Additionally, since the days of King Mosiah, the Nephites had some contact with Jaredite written records (Omni 17–21). For example it may be pure serendipity, or maybe not, that the first -(i)hah name, Nephihah, does not occur in the Nephite record until long after the first tentative Nephite contacts with Jaredites names. How much, if any, deviation from standard biblical Hebrew came through Mulekite influence? Were there also other groups besides the Jaredites and Mulekites that might have influenced the Nephite onomasticon?

At our present state of knowledge, these questions can only be broached. I for one am willing to admit that I do not have the answers. That not all questions can be answered in our present state of knowledge has proven to be true also in my readings of the Old and New Testaments. I am comfortable living with the hope that some day we will get all the answers, and I am equally comfortable living with the feeling that we may never get scholarly answers to all the questions that the texts of sacred scripture raise. Perhaps I find it easy to live with these hopes and feelings because my love, respect, devotion, and appreciation for the Word of God are not dependent on the kinds of academic lucubrations with which I indulge myself. In other words, I can enjoy strawberries and cream without dissecting the strawberries.

**Appendix: Technical Data in Support of Reading the Tetragrammaton as Yahweh and Not Yihwah.**

Though this is not the time or the place for a full discussion of the tetragrammaton, I do want to mention some additional facts relating to the divine name that add more (admittedly less than compelling) evidence that *yahweh* and not yihwah was the pronunciation of the tetragrammaton. But first I need to explain a few fine points of Hebrew grammar. In all the Semitic languages, the third person masculine singular prefix verbal forms have both a prefix vowel and a theme vowel. The prefix vowel is the vowel between the subject marker (in the case of the tetragrammaton, *y*, a third person masculine marker) and the first radical of the root (in this case *h*). The posited original prefix vowel in the Qal in proto-Hebrew is /a/. The theme vowel in the Qal is the vowel between the second and third radicals of the root (in the case of the tetragrammaton, between *w* and *h*). In all forms except the Qal, the prefix and theme vowel are fixed by the verbal conjugation, i.e., Niphal, Piel, etc. But in the Qal, the original theme vowel can in theory be either /a/, /i/, or /ai/. Thus, in *yihwah* the prefix vowel is /i/ and the theme vowel is /a/. In *yahweh* the prefix vowel is /a/ and the theme vowel is /e/. The /e/ vowel comes through vowel reduction from /i/.

Over a hundred years ago, however, it was determined that in the Hebrew Qal, if the theme vowel was /a/, then the prefix vowel dissimilated from /a/ to /i/23. That is, before biblical Hebrew was fixed with vowel markings, the original Hebrew form *yaqtal* dissimilated to *yiqtal*. The picture is complicated even more because in the Qal the
theme vowel originally indicated whether the verb was active or stative, or, more particular to Hebrew, transitive or intransitive.24 Thus, *yihwah* would be a stative-intransitive.25

All of this somewhat lengthy and technical discussion here is important because if -(i)hah is to be derived from the tetragrammon, then its vowels match up only with the hypothetical Qal stative-intransitive form *yihwah*. But, as we shall see, the prefix vowel of the tetragrammon is almost certainly /a/ and not /i/. If the original prefix vowel is /a/, then *yihwah*, the only possible source for -(i)hah, would be specious.

Though there is no conclusive evidence on how the tetragrammon was pronounced in biblical times, there are some fairly compelling reasons to pronounce it as *yahweh*, that is, not from a Qal stative *yihwah* (> *y*rchwah)26 pronunciation, but from an original Qal or Hiphil *yahwih* vocalization.27 In every instance where a shortened form of the tetragrammon is preserved (the only forms that consistently supply the vowels in the Masoretic text), the vowelizing would exclude the *yihwah* and support the *yahweh* pronunciation.28 Thus in verses like Isaiah 26:4, the Hebrew reads *yah yhwh*, which is commonly taken as a repetition of the tetragrammon, i.e., *yhw h yhwh*.29 The first of the Hebrew words representing the tetragrammon, *yah*,30 has the vowel /a/, thus suggesting the prefix vowel of the prefix verbal form, /a/. If the prefix vowel of the tetragrammon is /a/, then the theme vowel cannot also be /a/, as -(i)hah would require.

That the prefix vowel of the prefix verbal form *yhw* was /a/ and not /i/ can be confirmed by the fact that in every case where a vowel is provided by the Hebrew text for a hypocoristic form of *yhw*, it is always /a/ or /i/ (the latter coming from the shortening of *yaw*).31 This is also true where the shortened form of *yhw* does not form part of a name, as in the example above and in Psalm 68:4, “Jah” (/y*ah/), and in forms such as “halleluiah” where the English -iah represents the Hebrew /yah/ (< הילליה = hal’i*yah).32

In nearly all other instances of *ayin-yod* and/or *ayin-waw* verbs,33 the theme vowel in the Qal prefix form is either /i/ or /a/, and not /a/.34 In the Hiphil prefix verbal form it is /i/. In other words, neither the Qal nor the Hiphil of the root *hw* would have as its theme vowel /a/. The Hiphil theme vowel can only be /i/. Indeed, the closest analog for how to pronounce the tetragrammon, however, comes from the forms of the root *khw*, נב. In the shortened form of the third person singular prefix the pronunciation is *yishtakhû* (2 Samuel 14:33), which is probably why the shortened forms of *yhw* at the beginning of personal names are often pronounced *y*hô- (יָּהוּ) and at the end of words is pronounced -yûhû (יָּהוּ). The unshortened form of the third person singular prefix form, however, is pronounced *yishtakh*<sup>ı</sup>veh (2 Samuel 15:32). The latter form yields the correct theme vowel for the unshortened Hiphil form (and no doubt the Qal form also) of *yhw*, i.e., *yahweh*.35

For all of the above reasons, the pronunciation *yihwah* would be highly unlikely if not impossible. The evidence, including Hebrew, Amorite, and Egyptian, clearly points to *yahweh* as the pronunciation.36

Notes

1. There are actually two nonbiblical names in the Book of Mormon that contain this ending, Sariah and Amalakiah. I thank Ann Coulis, of Gaithersburg, Maryland, who reminded me of this fact in an e-mail on 21 April 2009.

2. I do not include in this list the exclusively Jaredite names Orihah, Mahah, and Ahah because the Nephite language is too recent of a language to have influenced Jaredite. However, I do not exclude Jaredite influence on Nephite language. See the short discussion in the section titled “Summary” below. Also excluded is the obvious gentilic Ammonihahite. Ann Coulis, in the same e-mail, noted the suffix -(i)hah is only attached to names ending in /l/, /s/, and /ph/.

3. This is true unless the ending -hah requires the /i/ before being suffixed to a name ending in a consonant, somewhat like a hiriq compaginis in Hebrew. Limlah would not fit this pattern.

4. Not too much should be made of either point except to say that two possibilities exist. If Hebrew orthographic practice can be posited, it would not favor one over the other. That is, Nephi-ihah and Nephi-hah would both yield Nephihah. The former would not yield Nephihah.


6. Originally, in biblical Hebrew *yod* was only a consonant, never a vowel letter. With time, the *yod* began to be used as a mater lectionis to mark the presence of the long vowel /i/.

7. Even with the aforementioned warning, in my explanation that follows I have greatly simplified a complex subject. For example, I will ignore the presence of the /w/, i.e., the *waw*, in the tetragrammon when explaining -(i)hah as coming from *yhw*. If space allowed I could have given a lengthy explanation of why the *waw* being a “seemivowel” in Hebrew, can become a full...
vowel, elide altogether, color the juxtaposed vowels, or remain a consonant. Suffice it to say that the waw does not affect the lines of reasoning I am developing. Nevertheless, for an example of how the waw might affect the pronunciation, see the last argument in the appendix.

8. Hebrew dictionaries list the root under hyh. But nearly all final he verbs in Hebrew come originally from final yod roots, the he being a mater lectionis for the long vowel occasioned by the yod. Unless Exodus 3:14–16 is playing with two separate roots, hwy and hyy, then hyh ("I AM") and yhw (Jehovah) are from the same triconsonantal root. Wolfram von Soden, "Jahwe 'Er ist, Er erweist sich,,'" Welt des Orientalisten 3/3 (1966): 183, considers hyh to be a secondary form of hwy.

9. For the interpretation as a third person masculine singular prefix verbal form, see Karel van der Toorn, "Yahweh," in Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible, ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. Van der Horst (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 1718. See the entire article "Yahweh," 1711–30, for a succinct overview of the divine name. For a contrary opinion see Josef Tropper, "Der Gottesname "Yahwa," Vetus Testamentum 51 (2001): 81–106, where he takes the divine name to be a nominal qal form from the root yhw. If Tropper’s treatment is correct, it would make the derivation of -iyah from yhw even more difficult to maintain.

10. In Hebrew there are seven major verbal paradigms: Qal, Niphal, Piel, Pual, Hiphil, Hophal, and Hithpael. (There are several additional minor paradigms that need not detain us further.) Within each of these paradigms there are suffix, prefix, participial, infinitive, and imperative verbal forms, most of which have masculine, feminine, singular, dual, plural, and first, second, and third person conjugations. The vowels of *yihwah are the only ones that can be matched up with the vowels of -(i)hah, and these vowels can only be from a Qal third masculine singular prefix form from a stative verb (an active verb would usually be voiced *yashwih, assuming of course that the Hebrew Qal *yihyeh comes from an original *yihwah. Niphal would be *yehwah < *yihwah; Piel, *yihwah; Pual, *yihwah; Hiphil, *yihwah; Hophal, *yashwih; and Hithpael, *yashwih.

11. All of the vowellings in the Leningrad Codex seem to be dependent on the vowels of "dóniy or "dóniy, with the composite schwa thereof becoming a simple schwa (except in four instances) in ywh or being dropped altogether. In 98.8% of the vowellings of ywh there is no vowel between the first and second root letter, while 1.2% do contain a holom. The final vowel of "dóniy or "dóniy is represented by a hireq (4.5%) or a qames (95.5%) in ywh. About 85% of the occurrences of the tetragrammaton in the Leningrad Codex are voiced yhwah. There are nine other vowellings in the Leningrad Codex. The next most common vowelling, at about 11.5%, is ywhah, i.e., without the schwa as the prefix vowel. The vowelling yhwah occurs about 44 times, or about 0.6%. I thank my student Ryan Davis for supplying me with these statistics, which he gleaned from the FARMS Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Library version of the Leningrad Codex.

It is possible that yhwah, which belongs to the 98.8% that do not have a vowel between the he and the waw, lacks the vowel because the Masoretes wanted to indicate that the original vowelling of ywh also did not have a vowel between the first and second radical of the root. This would be consistent with reading ywhh as a prefix verb. The opposite argument could of course be made, namely, that the 1.2% that do have a holom represent a Masoretic hint to the presence of the tetragrammaton. This vowelling with a holom would be consistent with the traditional English pronunciation Jehovah but would not support the derivation of -(i)hah from the tetragrammaton.


14. Fowler, Theophoric Personal Names, 32.

15. See Noth, Israelitischen Personennamen, 104: "In the personal names, which always have a tendency to be shortened, the name for God is never preserved in its full form" (my translation). On the surface there appear to be two exceptions to this rule, both found in Elephantine Hebrew names. The names, ייהויה and ייהויה, are in reality variants of ייהויה and ייהויה. The second ה in each name is a mater lectionis for /i/, a traditional scribal conceit of the Iron Age. The names in either spelling were pronounced y’hôram and y’hôd’ı’r respectively. Thus, neither name can be appealed to as a justification for reading -(i)hah as the tetragrammaton. For both variants and their pronunciation, see Bezalel Porten and Jerome A. Lund, Aramaic Documents from Egypt: A Key-Word-in-Context Concordance (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 360b and 358b respectively.


17. For a succinct discussion of hypocoristic forms, see Dana M. Pike, "Names, Hypocoristic," in Anchor Bible Dictionary, 4:1017–18.

18. Fowler, Theophoric Personal Names, 35. Anson Rainey has remarked that "the northern Israelite theophoric suffix (written -’YW) was pronounced -yav! The final W was not used for long ‘O’ until the post-Exilic period. The northern Israelite orthography yw was actually pronounced very much like the Judean orthography: Judean -yahu and northern yau. See his letter to the editor in Biblical Archaeology Review 27/6 (November–December 2001): 64.

19. Ziony Zevit, The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallact Approach (London: Continuum, 2001), 587. Jehovah-jireh is exceptional not only because it is unique, but also because it is not really the name of any recognizable geographic feature.

20. There are two altars that receive names compounded with ywhh, Jehovah-nissi in Exodus 17:15 and Jehovah-shalom in Judges 6:24. Notice that both of these names and Jehovah-jireh of Genesis 22:14 all occur in premonarchal texts, that is, very early in Israelite history, several hundred years before Lehi left Jerusalem. The fact that none occur nearer to Lehi’s time would suggest that by his day the practice of compounding geographic and/or physical object names with the tetragrammaton was no longer practiced. In other words, the fact that only three early examples of such names exist in the Hebrew Bible is quite telling.

21. For a different opinion, see recently Elitzur Avraham Bar-Asher, "The Implicative Forms of Proto-Semitic and a New Perspective on Barth’s Law," Journal of the American Oriental Society 128/2 (April–June 2008): 233–55. In biblical Hebrew, most prefix vowels are now /i/ or /a/. The reason for the /i/ vowel can also be explained by the proximity of
22. The rule is commonly called “Barth-Ginsberg” and is operative in Hebrew, Ugaritic, and the Canaanite material in the Amarna texts. See Cyrus H. Gordon, Ugaritic Textbook (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), 71. See also Bar-Asher for a different explanation. As Herbert B. Huffman, Amorite Personal Names in the Mari Texts (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1965), 64, points out, Barth-Ginsberg does not apply to Amorite names. Thus, the early cuneiform names that Wolfram von Soden connects with the tetragrammaton, such as ia-(ah)-wi-DN in the Mari archives, clearly show a yaqtal pattern, and not yaqtal. Only yaqtal, which does not exist in Amorite for this root, could change into yaqtil (by Barth-Ginsberg), the form that would be necessary to produce yihwah. This what means is that yihwah is not attested in Northwest Semitic and Hebrew and therefore could not possibly be the source for “yihwah,” compare von Soden, “Jahwe ‘Er ist,’” 182.

23. See Bar-Asher who convincingly argues that yaqtil is original and not a dissimilation.

24. See Gesenius §47–f for a discussion of transitive prefix verbs generally taking a /l/ theme vowel, while intransitive verbs generally take a /a/. Such changes in vowel quality as “of emergent empirical reasoning about theological matters.”

25. Frank Moore Cross, Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 64. For his somewhat dated but still valuable and succinct discussion of the tetragrammaton, see pages 60–75.

26. As Huffman pointed out, in the Amorite names there are no yaqtil forms, only yaqtil forms, because Amorite did not follow Barth-Ginsberg’s law. Therefore, for example, in the Mari onomasticon the ia-(ah)-wi (+ theonym) forms represent either the Qal or Hiphil yaqtil of hwy and cannot represent the Qal yihwah form. Thus, the oldest attestation of the third masculine singular prefix verbal form of the root hwy exhibits an /l/ theme vowel and not an /a/. The theme vowel that belongs to a root often remains constant across time and within larger language groups. That is, if Amorite, a Northwest Semitic language, has the /l/ theme vowel for the prefix of hwy, it is most likely that the theme vowel is also /l/ in all the other Northwest Semitic languages in which the verb for “to be/exist” is hwy, e.g., Hebrew and Aramaic.

27. The original Qal yahweth and the Hiphil yahweth would be virtually indistinguishable for ayin-yod verbs. See Huffman, Amorite Personal Names, 68–69. Most scholars today follow Cross’s explanation and favor the Hiphil. Von Soden in 1966 preferred the Qal on the grounds that, among other less convincing reasons, Hebrew does not otherwise have the Hiphil form for the root hwy. Von Soden, however, clearly demonstrated that the prefix vowel of this verb was originally /a/, not /l/. Therefore, even though von Soden vocalized the tetragrammaton as yahwe, he took it as a Qal, meaning “Er erweist sich” (182–83). William F. Albright wrote that the Qal, meaning “‘He is’ or ‘He will be[,] makes no sense” in the then contemporary context of “emergent empirical reasoning about theological matters. On the other hand, a causative explanation was perfectly intelligible and has hosts of parallels.” See Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 169.

28. In the Masoretic text the wording of the personal names with shortened forms of ywhh can be substantiated through the transliteration of the Hebrew names into Greek in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Since Greek does contain vowels, Septuagint spellings of the Hebrew names would in theory preserve the pronunciation of the names as they were pronounced 300 to 400 years after Lehi left Jerusalem. In nearly all cases the Septuagint and the Masoretic vocalizations support each other. In no cases that I am aware of does the Septuagint contradict the argument I am making here, though not all of the examples that I present can be corroborated in the Septuagint.

29. The King James Bible translates “LORD JEHOVAH,” indicating that the translators understood the expression to be a repetition of the divine name. This is still the consensus understanding today. For many more examples of yah as the divine name, see Ziony Zevit, “The First Halleluyah,” in Milk and Honey: Essays on Ancient Israel and the Bible in Appreciation of the Judaic Studies Program at the University of California, San Diego, ed. Sarah Malena and David Miano (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 157–64. I thank my colleague Dan Belnap for calling my attention to this informative article.

30. The Hebrew has a mappiq, not a dagesh, in the final he of yh. The /a/ as the prefix vowel contradicts passages like Exodus 6:2 and 3 (discussed above), where the prefix vowel is a schwa, /ə/. Such changes in vowel quality in Hebrew and in all Semitic languages are usually phonemic.

31. As noted above, Anson Rainey has said that the pronunciation of ́ as yô is post-Exilic. In Lehi’s day, it would have been yaw or yau. Also, the point that ywhw was the original and the shortened forms were derived from it and not the other way around was made by von Soden: “One cannot imagine how from an older form Jahi later a form Jawesome could have arisen, while the opposite course is easily understandable” (“Jahwe ‘Er ist,’” 181–82).

32. I thank my colleague Professor Dana Pike for these examples.

33. In Hebrew, the roots that have y as their middle radical are called ayin-yod roots; roots with w as the middle radical are called ayin-waw roots.

34. The theme vowel in the Qal of middle weak verbs with waw or yod is naturally (and respectively) /a/ or /i/ because of the inherent sound of the waw and the yod. This means that the prefix vowel of the prefix Qal form will be /a/. Additionally, if the Amorite names with ya-(ah)-wi- as the verbal element in the Middle Bronze Age city of Mari can be reflections of the same root as ywhh, then it would seem the divine name has /a/ as the prefix vowel. (See van der Toorn, “Jahweh,” 1719, for a short discussion of the relevance of the Mari names.) The same prefix vowel /a/ is conjectured for a supposed Late Bronze Age appearance of the prefix verbal form as part of a personal name in an Egyptian text. See Thomas Schneider, “The First Documented Occurrence of the God Yahweh? (Book of the Dead Princeton ‘Roll 5’),” Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions 7/2 (2007): 117.

35. I am indebted to Anson Rainey of Tel Aviv University for informing me that the pronunciations of the various forms of ywhh can be determined analogously from the long and short hishtafel forms of ויהיה, ויה. We chatted about the topic on 22 July 2008 while attending the 54th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale in Würzburg, Germany.

36. I have presented the Hebrew evidence above, with literature. For the Amorite evidence, see the articles by van der Toorn and von Soden and the book by Herbert Huffman cited above. For possible Egyptian evidence, see Schneider, “First Documented Occurrence.”