

Nehemia Gordon is becoming well-known for arguing that the name יהוה should be read with the vowels יהוה so that *Yehovah* is the real name for God. In order for his position to be true, the following issues must be satisfactorily treated.

1. How can a Jehovist justify the *patach* under the prefixed prepositions?

When the four attached prepositions are placed on the Name, it should display the same changes that theophoric names do, which behave predictably and consistently. The same happens with all nouns that begin with י (yod-sheva).

יהונתן	<i>Jonathan</i>	ליהונתן	<i>to Jonathan</i>
יהושע	<i>Joshua</i>	ליהושע	<i>to Joshua</i>
יהוצדק	<i>Jehozadak</i>	ליהוצדק	<i>to Jehozadak</i>
יהואל	<i>Joel</i>	ליהואל	<i>to Joel</i>
ירושלם	<i>Jerusalem</i>	לירושלם	<i>to Jerusalem</i>
יהודה	<i>Judah</i>	ליהודה	<i>to Judah</i>

If “Jehovah” were original, we would expect to see ליהוה “to Jehovah.” Rather, we see ליהוה. Where does that *patach* come from?

אדני	<i>the Lord</i>	לאדני	<i>to the Lord</i>
אלהים	<i>God</i>	לאלהים	<i>to God</i>
יהוה	<i>YHVH</i>	ליהוה	<i>to YHVH</i>

The *patach* is present on the prefixed prepositions because the vowels that appear on יהוה do not belong to the word. Consider the preposition מן, which is often shortened to מ with a strong *dagesh* in the following letter. יהוה behaves like a word that starts with a guttural (like א) rather than with a yod-sheva.

ירושלם	<i>Jerusalem</i>	מירושלם	<i>from Jerusalem</i>
יהושע	<i>Joshua</i>	מיהושע	<i>from Joshua</i>
יהודה	<i>Judah</i>	מיהודה	<i>from Judah</i>
יהוה	<i>YHVH</i>	מיהוה	<i>from YHVH</i>
אדני	<i>the Lord</i>	מאדני	<i>from the Lord</i>
אלהים	<i>God</i>	מאלהים	<i>from God</i>

The name יהוה follows the vocalization of אדני and אלהים, words that begin with א. It does not follow the vocalization of words that begin with י (yod-sheva). We should expect to find מיהוה if the real vowels of the Name are יהוה.

In the case of every prefixed preposition, יהוה follows the vocalization of אדני. In no instance do we find יהוה following the vocalization of other words that begin with י (yod-sheva).

2. How do we get from *Yehovah* to *Yáhu* and *Yah*?

Whereas vowels are routinely shortened at the beginning of words, we easily expect *Yáhu* to lose its full *a* vowel when the name is lengthened (as in when it is attached to the beginning of another word to create a theophoric name). Observe:

לָקַח <i>he took, received</i>	לָקַחְתֶּם <i>you (pl) took, received</i>
דְּבַר <i>word, thing, matter</i>	דְּבָרִים <i>words, things, matters</i>

It is, then, completely understandable that when יהו is attached to the beginning of a name, it will lose its first vowel. If we assume *Yáhu*, we can easily predict that the *a* will become *sheva*. Thus, *Yáhu* when attached would become *Yehu* as the accent is shifted to the second word in the combination. The interplay of *u* and *o* is known in Hebrew.

לָמוּת <i>to die (infinitive construct)</i>	מוֹת <i>dying (infinitive absolute)</i>
מָוֶת <i>death (absolute)</i>	מוֹת <i>death of (construct)</i>
לָלוּן <i>to lodge, stay</i>	מָלוּן <i>inn, hotel</i>

Thus, we can easily expect *Yáhu* to become *Yeho* as a prefix.

However, the opposite is not the case. There is nothing that should make *Yeho* become *Yáhu* when it appears at the end of a name.

יְהוֹשֻׁעַ <i>Yehoshua (Joshua)</i>	יֵשַׁעְיָהוּ <i>Yesha'yáhu (Isaiah)</i>
יְהוֹאֵל <i>Yeho'el (Joel)</i>	אֵלִיָּהוּ <i>Eliyáhu (Elijah)</i>
יְהוֹנָתָן <i>Yehonatan (Jonathan)</i>	נֶתַנְיָהוּ <i>Netanyáhu (Nethaniah)</i>
יְהוֹצָדָק <i>Yehotsadak (Jehozadak)</i>	צִדְקִיָּהוּ <i>Tsidkiyáhu (Zedekiah)</i>

The same is the question regarding יה *Yah*, as in הללו־יהו *Hallelujah*. Why would יהו ever be shortened in the first place to יה? Where does the *a* vowel come from?

All the forms are predicable from יהוה *Yahveh*. If the final syllable is lost for whatever reason, we would certainly expect *Yahveh* to become *Yah* (easily explained). The final vowel could drop out, too, which would produce the theoretical *Yahv*, which would convert to *Yáhu* in the same way that verbs can drop their final *hev* in some situations, which produce vocalic changes. Consider:

יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה <i>he will bow down</i> [yishtachaveh]	וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה <i>he bowed down</i> [vayishtáchu]
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When *yishtachaveh* loses its final vowel, it becomes *yishtachv*, which resolves itself as *yishtáchu*. The same situation is created when *Yahveh* loses its final syllable. It becomes *Yahv*, which resolves itself as *Yáhu*. Again, all of the forms (*Yáhu*, *Yah* and *Yeho*) are explicable on the basis of *Yahveh*.

This is discussed by Gesenius in his grammar, §24d, in which he says the following:

(b) When ו and י without a vowel would stand at the end of the word after *quiescent Š^ewâ*, ... ו is changed sometimes into a toneless *u* (e.g. תהו from *tuhw*).

This is the situation when *yishtachaveh* loses its final vowel. We end up with a *vav* sitting at the end of the word with a silent *sheva* (“*quiescent Š^ewâ*”) and would theoretically look like יִשְׁתַּחֲוּ *yishtachv*. That combination of the *sheva* before a vowelless *vav* resolves as יִשְׁתַּחֲוּ *yishtáchu*, just like the theoretical תהו *tuhv* undergoes two changes: the shift of the first vowel from *u* to *o* and the resolution of the final *vav* into a vowel. It becomes תהו *tóhu*.

When יהוה *Yahveh* is shortened to יהו, the final vowel is dropped. This leaves the theoretical יהו *yahv*. When the *vav* resolves itself as a vowel, the first syllable becomes open (whereas it had been closed), which results in the lengthening of the vowel from *patach* to *kamats* (יהו < יְהוּ* < יֶהוּ* < יִהוּה). The reduction of יהוּ to יְ is perfectly normal and predictable.

None of this can be explained, however, on the proposition that *Yehovah* is the original pronunciation of the Name.

3. What about the *Ktiv-Qere* of *Adonai YHVH*?

In his paper “The Pronunciation of the Name” (2003), Nehemia Gordon makes the following concession:

Another point worth noting is that in the Aleppo Codex, the most precise manuscript of the biblical text, the name YHVH gets the vowels Y^ehovih when it is juxtaposed to the word *Adonai*. It seems that the “i” (chiriq) in Y^ehovih is a reminder to the reader to read this word as *Elohim* (God), since reading it *Adonai* would result in *Adonai* twice in a row.

In this comment, which he doesn’t seem to have thought out to its conclusion, he admits that the Name is read as *Adonai* and that having it follow the actual word *Adonai* would result in the expression *Adonai Adonai*.

If יהוה is to be read as *Yehovah*, we would have the following combinations:

אֲדֹנָי	<i>Adonai</i>
יְהוָה	<i>Yehovah</i>
יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים	<i>Yehovah Elohim</i>
אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה	<i>Adonai Yehovah</i> (this does not appear)

There would be no need to change the vowels at all if we are intended to read it as *Yehovah*. However, if it is to be read as *Adonai* and if it underwent no alteration, we would have the following:

אֲדֹנָי *Adonai*
יְהוָה *Adonai*
יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים *Adonai Elohim*
אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה *Adonai Adonai* (this is avoided)

To avoid the final case, the word יהוה is pointed either as יְהוָה or יְהוֹה to tell the reader to read it as *Adonai Elohim*. If *Yehovah* were the actual pronunciation, there is no sense in changing the vowel to *chirik*. We would simply read it as *Adonai Yehovah*, and there would be no need to change the vowel at all. It is the avoidance of reading *Adonai Adonai*, as Gordon confesses in his paper, that is effected by the change of the vowel. This is predicated on the premise that יהוה was read as *Adonai*.

Conclusion

Until Jehovahists tackle these issues, their argument remains untenable. On the basis of the phenomena of the Hebrew language, the vowels on יהוה in the Bible are *not* the vowels of the name. All the forms of the name (*Yáhu*, *Yah* and *Yeho*) are predictable on *Yahveh* and all prepositions attached to the word behave as if they were being attached to אֲדֹנָי. The switch to *chirik* in the final syllable of יהוה when it follows אֲדֹנָי is explicable only if the scribes were trying to avoid *Adonai Adonai*, which itself assumes that the Name was being read as *Adonai*.