



### Sariah

As indicated by Paul Hoskisson, there can be little, if any, doubt that the name Sariah is a Hebrew compound theophoric name: *śar* + *yah*, “Jehovah is prince,” or *śariy* + *yah*, “my prince is Jehovah.” A theophoric personal name is one in which one of the elements is a divine name or title (such as in the name just cited). This type of personal name was very common in ancient Israel and in the ancient Near East in general (e.g., Elijah, Isaiah, Nebuchadrezzar). Note, however, that Hoskisson states that the name Sariah “would be related to the masculine biblical personal name Seraiah, ‘Jehovah is prince.’” Several people mentioned in the Bible bear the name Seraiah, *śērā* + *yah(u)* (see 2 Kings 25:18; Jeremiah 51:59), but it is usually interpreted as consisting of a verbal form of *śrḥ* plus the divine name: “Jehovah prevails/rules.”<sup>1</sup> Thus the first elements in the names Sariah and Seraiah derive from related linguistic roots but should be grammatically distinguished. Of course, these observations are based upon the preserved vocalizations—Sariah as found in the Book of Mormon, and Seraiah in the Masoretic Text (the traditional, vocalized text of the Hebrew Bible). While it is possible that the name *śryh(w)* found on Israelite stamp seals could be vocalized *śariyyah*, Sariah, it is usually vocalized Seraiah, following the pronunciation of the biblically attested form because it is thought that one of these seals belonged to Seraiah, the brother of Baruch, Jeremiah’s scribe (see Jeremiah 51:59–64).<sup>2</sup>

*Response to*  
*Paul Hoskisson’s*  
*“Lehi &*  
*Sariah”*

Dana M. Pike



### Lehi

Professor Hoskisson has done a good job of reviewing what are the most likely explanations of the name Lehi. And he rightly observes that we cannot, at present, be certain about which option is the correct one. This is not because we don’t know the languages of the ancient Near East, but because close onomastic parallels from ancient Israel are lacking. In our efforts to find similar forms elsewhere we must always weigh the differences in time, place, and linguistic relationship (e.g., is a name from the same time as Lehi but from a more distant relative of the Hebrew language “better” evidence than a name more chronologically removed but more proximate to the language family tree?). One example Hoskisson did not mention is the Phoenician name *šlmḥy* found at Elath.<sup>3</sup> The element *šlm* is understood to be a divine name or appellative, and the element *ḥy* is generally connected with the Arabic element to which Hoskisson made reference in discussing his second option (see his comments on Qatabanean). Thus it makes sense to regard the name Lehi as a shortened version of such a form, but again, as Hoskisson notes, if we accept the *vocalization* of the name Lehi as presented in the Book of Mormon, then the element preserved in the Phoenician name and later in Arabic—if we can assume consistent pronunciation—is more challenging phonetically. At present, I tend to favor the first option identified by Hoskisson, the Hebrew word *ḥy*, as the most likely explanation of the meaning of the name Lehi. This word is employed



several times in the Bible with the sense of “cheek” (e.g., 1 Kings 22:24; Psalm 3:8; Lamentations 1:2).

### General Comments

First, discussing the names Sariah and Lehi provides an opportunity to comment on the challenge of doing onomastic analysis on ancient non-English names when only an English form is available. This is one of the great challenges in working with the names in the Book of Mormon. For example, the Hebrew letters *he* (h) and *het* (ח) are both usually rendered in English by the letter *h*. In the case of the name Lehi we are confident that the middle letter in the original form was *het*, not *he*, because the combination *l-h-y* does not occur in Hebrew, but the combination *l-h-y* does. Unfortunately, we are not always able to be so certain regarding several letters. We are thus dependent on the vocalizations that have come to us from Joseph Smith and his scribes, primarily Oliver Cowdery. Can we be certain that these vocalizations reflect ancient pronunciation? Do we know enough about the translation process from reliable, informed sources to be confident about this matter? I am not sure that we know enough to eliminate all questions.<sup>4</sup>

Second, I have some concern about the way Hoskisson closes his comments on the meaning of the name Sariah and all three of the suggested meanings for the name Lehi. To label the meaning of these names as “suitable” or “appropriate” or “fitting” for the prophet and his wife is fine as a casual comment from hindsight. But I hope that readers do not think that our assumed appropriateness of a name has any bearing on analyzing the meaning of a name. This should never be a determining factor. Unless we are notified in the text that a person’s name was changed as an adult (e.g., Jacob to Israel) or a name was divinely indicated for a newborn child (e.g., Hosea’s children), then we must assume that the parents chose a name for the child that seemed suitable to them. Many, if not most, of the names given to newborns in ancient Israel were of a religious nature; such names were often chosen for

the sentiment they contained, such as the parents’ expression of gratitude for their infant, devotion to Jehovah, and so on. This means that many names would qualify as being “appropriate” for prophets, their wives, and righteous Israelites in general. But the vast majority of ancient Israelite children were not given a name that their parents *knew* would be appropriate to some *particular* function or office their child would fill as an adult. I don’t think Hoskisson was implying that this was the case, but I don’t want anyone to misunderstand his remarks.