

Response to the Comments

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As stated at the end of my article, “new suggestions are always welcome” when working with the onomasticon of the Book of Mormon. Therefore, I appreciate very much the helpful suggestions of Jeffrey R. Chadwick, Dana M. Pike, and John A. Tvedtnes. Each has contributed in a significant way to making the study of the names more complete.

I am grateful that John Tvedtnes called my attention to Jeffrey Chadwick’s publication in the *Journal*,¹ in which Sariah is supposedly attested as a feminine personal name in the Elephantine papyri. The attestation is however contained in a restoration, and restorations cannot provide absolute proof but rather at best a suggestion. However, the very suggestion itself indicates that other scholars accept the possible existence of this feminine name in relative temporal proximity to the beginnings of the Book of Mormon.²

Sariah can mean “Jehovah is my prince,” contrary to Chadwick’s explanation, as well as “Jehovah is prince.” In Northwest Semitic languages, when the first person possessive suffix is attached to masculine singular nouns in the nominative, it is indicated by the long vowel *ī*, not by the consonant *yod*. (Feminine nouns and oblique cases are treated variously.) This long vowel is not usually represented in the script until fairly late in the history of the Hebrew language when *matres lectionis* (the representation of long vowels with a consonant) became the norm. In addition, personal names can be very conservative, often reflecting archaic forms. Thus, in personal names such as Sariah, the presence of a *yod* at the beginning of the second element in the word does not exclude the presence of the first person possessive suffix. In short, the *yod* that Chadwick mentions does not have to perform double duty in order for the name to mean “Jehovah is my prince,” even though there is evidence that some letters actually perform double duty.³

Professor Pike calls attention to the so-called Phoenician personal name *šlmllhy*, containing a possible analog to Lehi, namely the element *lhy*. In commenting on the text that contains this name, Joseph Naveh states “that we have here a Phoenician cursive script from the Persian period . . . [belong-

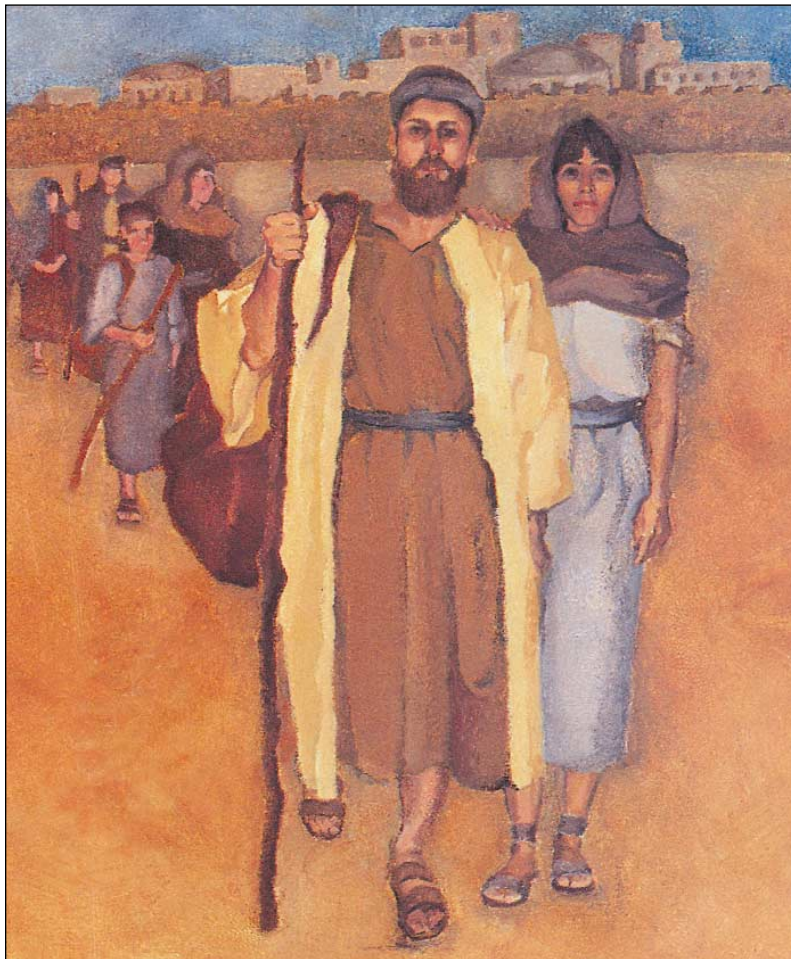
ing] to the late fifth or early fourth century b.c.”⁴ This would of course postdate Lehi but still be relatively close to the beginnings of the Book of Mormon. However, he also states that the element *lhy* is “an unusual component in the Phoenician onomasticon.”⁵ Nevertheless, he argues that since it appears in a list of other obviously Phoenician names and that the ductus is obviously Phoenician, the element, though unusual, is Phoenician. Frank L. Benz, in his classic study of Phoenician names published six years later, concluded that the element *lhy* is of Arabic derivation,⁶ perhaps because he can cite only Arabic parallels. Certainly there is some doubt about whether this name is Phoenician. In addition, from a strictly geographic point of view, Elath, where the text was found, is much more likely to be within the onomastic influence of Arabia than Phoenicia, though as Naveh points out, Phoenicians were certainly present there. What all of this means is that if *šlmllhy* is not Phoenician, then there is no unequivocal example of the element *lhy* in the Northwest Semitic onomasticon.

Dr. Chadwick argues that Book of Mormon “Lehi” and the KJV “Lehi” “must necessarily represent the same Hebrew term.” This bothers me a little because it assumes that Joseph Smith was dependent on the KJV for pronunciation. While this may be the case with some recognized biblical names, such as “Sarah,” it cannot be maintained across the board. For example, it is not the case with the Book of Mormon “Isabel,” which certainly is the same name as “Jezebel,” the name of the Phoenician wife of the Israelite king Ahab.

With regard to body parts appearing in personal names, I stand by my original statement: there is only one possible example in biblical Hebrew, and even that example is metaphorical. If, however, denominatives (nouns that have become verbs and therefore lost their nominal character) are counted, as Chadwick has done, but which I must reject, then there are a few examples. The example of *תקן* that he raises needs more comment. While it may have originally meant “beard,” the word became denominationalized (in Hebrew, Arabic, and Akkadian), coming to mean “to grow old.” In its adjectival (i.e., stative) form derived from the verb it came to mean “old” and in the nominalized adjectival form, “elder.” In these secondarily derived meanings, it is also used to describe women (see Zechariah 8:4), which probably rules out the meaning “beard.” Neither is *ימין*, *yamīn*,

a valid example. While “right” can be used *pars pro toto* for “right hand,” the original meaning is directional rather than anatomical. That is why some modern scholars translate “Benjamin” as “Son of the South.” It cannot be assumed that “right” is always used synecdochically for “right hand.” Therefore, I state once again, there are no unequivocal examples in biblical Hebrew of a body part being used in its strictly nominal form in any Hebrew name.

With regard to geographic names becoming personal names, there is not a single example that I am aware of in the Old Testament. (I would be delighted if someone could supply an example.) On the other hand, there are numerous examples of personal names becoming geographic names. Such is the case with all of the examples that Chadwick cites.



Lehi and Family Leaving by Sue Hansen. © Courtesy Sue Hansen.

However, my argument here is basically an argument out of silence: in all instances where a personal name and a geographic name coincide, the personal name always appears in the Hebrew text in a context prior to the context of the geographic name. I would welcome a clear example of a geographic name becoming a personal name.⁷

Professor Pike correctly perceived that my mention of the suitability of certain etymologies does not mean that suitability points to an etymology or even that suitability is an important factor in looking for meaning. When looking for possible meanings, suitability does not equate with etymology. However, the suitability of a name to an individual does come into play when the proposed etymology of the name would seem to be inappropriate. For example, it would be unlikely that “Hater of Jehovah” would be possible for an Israelite of the tenth century b.c. Before accepting such an etymology, no matter how tempting it might be, most scholars would certainly ask many questions and have grave doubts. Nevertheless, some names seem, from their etymology and from the context in which they occur, to be suitable for that individual, even if we would find it hard to believe that someone would legitimately carry that name. For example, Chadwick cites in his critique the example of Nabal, which does mean “fool.” If it were not for the context of the story, which makes it clear that the name is entirely suitable to the person who bears it, we would have to doubt the meaning, because no parent would give such a name to their child, nor would any sane person take such a name upon themselves. We are left to conclude that the name is probably a dysphemism à la Nebuchadnezzar for Nebuchadrezzar. As a dysphemism, the name suits the person.