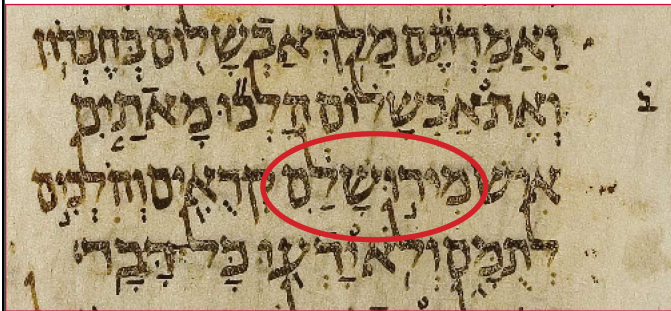


Why Nehemiah Gordon is Wrong about the Tetragrammaton

In his teaching on the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton, יהוה, Nehemiah Gordon contends that a number of times the scribes of the Aleppo Codex mistakenly wrote the actual vowels of יהוה. They did this, according to Gordon, when ever the Tetragrammaton appears with three vowels, i.e., יהֶהָ, and from this Gordon concludes that the ancient pronunciation must be Yehovah.

What is telling about Gordon’s proposal is the fact that he has disregarded a grammatical rule to which the Masoretes adhered, and we see this clearly in the Aleppo Codex. That grammatical rule is this: when a particle, such as an inseparable preposition or the *vav* conjunction, is attached to a word that begins with a *yod* and the *yod* has the vowel *sheva* (ְ), the vowel of the *yod* is dropped and the vowel attached to the inseparable preposition is *chiriq* which combines with the *yod* to form *chiriq yod*.

Consider the Hebrew word “Jerusalem,” which in the Aleppo Codex (and all Masoretic texts) is spelled מִירוּשָׁלַם. When we find an example of a preposition attached to the word “Jerusalem,” we can see how the initial vowel beneath the *yod*, the *sheva* vowel, disappears and the *yod* combines with the *chiriq* vowel of the attached preposition. Here is one example:

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| <p>2Sam 15:11</p> <p>וְאֶת־אַבְשָׁלוֹם הֶלְכוּ מֵאֲתַיִם אִישׁ מִירוּשָׁלַם קְרָאִים וְהֵלְכִים לְתַמָּם וְלֹא יָדְעוּ כֹל־דָּבָר:</p> | <p>2Sam 15:11</p> <p>Then two hundred men went with Absalom from Jerusalem, who were invited and went innocently, and they did not know anything.</p> |
|  | <p>This is 2Sam 15:11 in the Aleppo Codex. “from Jerusalem” is circled in red. Notice that there is no <i>sheva</i> vowel under the <i>yod</i> (second letter from the right) and that the <i>chiriq</i> under the <i>mem</i> has combined with the <i>yod</i>, the first letter in “Jerusalem”.</p> |

This same phenomenon occurs over 200 times in the Tanach, in which a preposition is attached to the word “Jerusalem,” and every time this same rule is followed. The *sheva* under the *yod*, the first Hebrew letter in the name Jerusalem, is taken away, and the *yod* becomes part of the *chiriq* vowel of the attached preposition. Further, this same grammatical rule is applied to any word that begins with a *yod* having a *sheva* as its vowel, when an inseparable preposition or *vav* conjunction is added to the word.

Now, if Nehemiah is correct, that when the Tetragrammaton has three vowels applied to it, i.e., יהֶהָ, the vowels written are the actual, ancient vowels of יהוה itself, then when an inseparable preposition or the conjunction *vav* is added to יהוה, the initial *yod* with *sheva* should lose the vowel and should combine with the vowel of the inseparable particle (*vav* or preposition) to form a *chiriq yod*. We have seven examples in the Tanach in which either a *vav* conjunction or an inseparable preposition is attached to יהֶהָ, so this will be a valid test to see if this is indeed the case. If so, then this would prove that the first actual vowel of the Tetragrammaton is a *sheva*.

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| Gen 18:17 וַיְהוָה אָמַר הַמַּכֶּסֶה אֹנִי מֵאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה: | And the LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do... |
| Exod 13:12 לַיהוָה וְכָל-פֶּטֶר שֹׁגֵר בְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה לְדֹ הַזְּכָרִים לַיהוָה : | you shall devote to the LORD the first offspring of every womb, and the first offspring of every beast that you own; the males belong to the LORD . |
| Lev 23:34 דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר בַּחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי הַזֶּה חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת שִׁבְעַת יָמִים לַיהוָה : | Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘On the fifteenth of this seventh month is the Feast of Booths for seven days to the LORD . |
| Jer 3:23 אַכֵּן לִשְׁקֹר מִגִּבְעוֹת הַמּוֹן הָרִים אַכֵּן בַּיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ תִּשׁוּעַת יִשְׂרָאֵל: | Surely, the hills are a deception, a tumult on the mountains. Surely in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel. |
| Jer 4:4 הַמְלוּ לַיהוָה וְהִסְרוּ עָרְלוֹת לְבַבְכֶם אִישׁ יְהוּדָה וְיֹשְׁבֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם פְּנוּ-תֵצֵא כָאֵשׁ חֲמָתִי וּבַעֲרָה וְאִין מִכָּבֵה מִפְּנֵי רַע מַעַלְלֵיכֶם: | Circumcise yourselves to the LORD and remove the foreskins of your heart, men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, or else My wrath will go forth like fire and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds. |
| Ezek 46:13 וְכִבֵּשׁ בֶּן-שָׁנָתוֹ תָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה עֹלָה לַיּוֹם לַיהוָה בַּבֹּקֶר בַּבֹּקֶר תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתוֹ: | And you shall provide a lamb a year old without blemish for a burnt offering to the LORD daily; morning by morning you shall provide it. |

Note carefully that in all seven of these instances, the vowel attached to the *vav* conjunction (Gen 18:17) or to the inseparable preposition is not *chiriq* but is *patach*! This tells us something very important. This pattern of vowelation occurs when a particle is attached to a word that begins with a guttural. The five gutturals in the Hebrew language are: א, ה, ח, ע, ר. So why would the scribes consistently use the *patach* in the above examples, the vowel which is used when the next letter is a guttural? The reason is because the three vowels attached to יהוה are not the actual vowels of the Tetragrammaton, but are the first, middle, and last vowels of the word the scribes intend for the reader to substitute and to pronounce, namely, אֲדֹנָי, *Adonai*. And since *Adonai* begins with an *aleph* (א), one of the gutturals, the scribes use the *patach* vowel on the inseparable particle rather than combining the *chiriq* with the initial *yod*. This is conclusive proof that the first vowel written on יהוה, the *sheva* vowel, is not the actual first vowel of the Tetragrammaton, but is the first vowel of the word the scribes intend the reader to substitute, namely, *Adonai* (אֲדֹנָי). Thus, what the ancient scribes intend the reader to pronounce in these seven instances is: *va-donai* (with the *conjunction vav* added to *Adonai*) or *ba-donai* / *la-donai* (with the preposition ב or ל). In all of these cases, the *aleph* of the word *Adonai* is quiescent, meaning it has no vowel.

Given this obvious fact of grammar, Nehemiah Gordon is clearly wrong in his claim that when יהוה is written with all three vowels, the scribes actually gave the real vowels of יהוה which then allow us to know its ancient pronunciation. No! They were putting the vowels of the word they intended the reader to substitute, namely, *Adonai*, and the vowelation used when a particle is attached to the beginning of יהוה proves this conclusively.