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## GOD'S CALL AND THE REQUISITE PREPARATION FOR PERFORMING VARIOUS MINISTRIES

### Introduction

Several biblical texts relate how God called and commissioned men and women to serve in various ministerial capacities. Scholars have generally viewed divine calls as following a discernible structural form, viz., call narrative.<sup>1</sup> In his article on the call narrative, Norman Habel identified six steps characteristic of a biblical call narrative: (1) Divine confrontation: when the agent of Yahweh or Yahweh makes an initial intervention in the life of the callee. (2) The introductory word: a statement alerting the targeted person that it is Yahweh giving the word. (3) Yahweh's commission: the callee is assigned a specific task. (4) Objection: The callee expresses an objection to the commission and cites all the strong reasons why the commission should not be accepted. (5) Divine reassurance: Yahweh allays the callee's fears by giving reassurance. (6) Signs: at this point the callee asks for signs in order to be certain that God is talking and appointing.<sup>2</sup> Normally, it is after the sign has been given that the

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<sup>1</sup>Norman Habel, "The Call and Significance of the Call Narratives," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 77 (1965): 297-323.

<sup>2</sup>This is the case with Moses and Gideon. When the prophets were called, they did not ask for signs. The differences between the calls of military leaders and spiritual leaders are discussed in this essay.

callee accepts the task.

A close study of individual calls shows that God<sup>3</sup> used different approaches to call people depending on the mission to which God was commissioning them. There are differences in the call process that Yahweh followed to call military leaders, teachers of the law, and prophets.

### Call of Abraham

In Genesis 12:1-3, we notice that Abraham was not called to perform anything. He was called simply to be an exemplary progenitor of nations. The LORD<sup>4</sup> said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? No, for I have chosen<sup>5</sup> him, that he may charge his children and his

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<sup>3</sup>Normally it was not God, Elohim, who called people to ministries; it was Yahweh—the action deity. There is a major difference in status between God and Yahweh in the Torah and in the historical books. Yahweh and Elohim were coalesced to refer to one and only God in post-exilic times. See Mafico *The Emergency of Yahweh Elohim among the Gods* (Leviston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), 123-143; also "God's Name Yahweh Elohim and the Unification of Israel: A Challenge to Africans and African Americans," *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* XXIII, no. 1 (Fall 1995): 49-70.

<sup>4</sup>The name LORD is a Greek translation of the Hebrew divine name YHWH, a tetragrammaton that the Israelites could not pronounce with their lips. Therefore, they substituted YHWH with 'adonai, "lord, master, husband, sir." They inserted the first three vowels of 'adonai in YHWH to form Yehowah. The "Y" and "J" as well as "w" and "v" are interchangeable in many languages. The reduced vowel "&" in Hebrew is pronounced almost like an "e." Thus, the divine name Jehovah is translated "lord" in Greek. Because it is used for God, it is, therefore, written as LORD to distinguish it from ordinary lords. However, Yahweh was not originally Elohim. See Mafico, "The Divine Compound Name: Yahweh Elohim and Israel's Polytheistic Monotheism," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 22 (1996): 155-173.

<sup>5</sup>The word "chosen" is a poor rendering of the Hebrew *yada'* which means "to know," that is, to be in an intimate relationship. God has established an intimate relationship which forces secrets to be revealed that only gods should keep.

household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; so that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."<sup>6</sup> Abraham was, therefore, called to minister to his own household so that future generations would follow Yahweh. By so doing, he would be a blessing to future generations (Genesis 12:3).

It is important to note that Yahweh's commission to Abraham was quite specific. God<sup>7</sup> called Abraham to separate from his kinsfolk and to go to a land that Yahweh would show him. Following his separation, God established a covenantal relationship with him because he agreed to be a father of nations. But that was not all. A close scrutiny of Abraham's character shows that he was a gentle man with deep faith in Yahweh. In contrast to his nephew Lot, Abraham considered the needs of others first before his own. Upon hearing of the incessant fighting between his servants and Lot's servants, he made a bold decision to separate himself from his nephew. Instead of telling Lot to go to the left or to go right of the land, while he went in the other direction, he gave Lot the first choice: "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herders and my herders; for we are kindred. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left." (Genesis 13:8-9). A good father is one who can discern a problem and suggest a work-

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<sup>6</sup>Genesis 18: 17-19 NRSV.

<sup>7</sup>We will interchange Yahweh and God in this article for varying the divine name. However, by God (Elohim) we mean Yahweh, a male deity. God, on the other hand, is genderless. God is superior to Yahweh, the action god, the appointee of the divine council of the gods. See Mafico, "The Divine Compound Name," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 22 (1996): 155-173.

ing solution. Abraham's humility and faith in God were attributes of an exemplary father. Those attributes helped his stability in testing times, the example that a father of nations was expected to exhibit.

### Call of Gideon

Gideon lived at a time when the Israelites were overwhelmed by the Midianites. They had no freedom to do anything without being menaced by them. We read in Judges 6:3-4 that "when Israel had sown, . . .the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them; . . .they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, . . .and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass."

God called Gideon to be a military leader because he possessed military prowess. His divine commission to deliver the Israelites from the Midianite oppression reflected this attribute. Although similar to the call of Moses, his call is more akin to the call of other deliverers in the Book of Judges, except we do hear of the spirit of God entering him. Moreover, Gideon was not called because he was a devout worshipper of Yahweh; nor was he serving Yahweh at the time of his call. Rather, he was going about his normal work to make a living during the hard times created by the Midianite military invasion of Israel (Judges 6:1-6). To deliver the Israelites, Yahweh sought a person with the necessary credentials to accomplish the task. It was Gideon's innate valor that persuaded God to call him. Without increasing his valor, God used the valor that Gideon

already possessed.<sup>8</sup>

It is no wonder then that when the Israelites cried (Hebrew *yatsa'*)<sup>9</sup> to Yahweh on account of the Midianites, Yahweh sought a military leader and identified Gideon as well-equipped to deliver the Israelites (Judges 6:7). Gideon's call shows that God calls some people not primarily because they are righteous, holy, upright, or devout. In crisis situations, God seeks those with the qualities for accomplishing the desired tasks rather than pious-do-nothings.<sup>10</sup> In some cases, it is after a person has been identified and called that sanctification begins. To substantiate this important point, we briefly turn to the call of Moses.

### Call of Moses

Moses was born in Egypt when the Israelites were experiencing the most brutal persecution by the Egyptians. The Israelites cried (Hebrew *yatsa'*) to Yahweh, and at the time there was apparently no one among the Hebrews that he could commission to deliver Israel. Therefore, Yahweh pre-

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<sup>8</sup>When Moses was called, he tried hard to ask Yahweh for speech therapy and for other help. God replied: "What is that in your hand?" (Genesis 4:2). In other words, God had already endowed Moses with what it would take to achieve the mission for which he was sending him. In the same way, Gideon was to achieve his mission with the power that he already possessed.

<sup>9</sup>The Hebrew word *yatsa'* does not mean ordinary crying. It is a technical term meaning crying in distress because of unbearable oppression. It is a distress call made to Yahweh who always responds to such calls regardless of whether those crying are his followers or not. In Amos 2, Yahweh judges the nations for their excessive cruelty to one another.

<sup>10</sup>This point explains why in Isaiah 45 Yahweh calls Cyrus his anointed whose right hand he has grasped (45:1). Cf. Isaiah 10:5 where Yahweh refers to Assyria as the rod of his anger. Thus, Yahweh can call even "pagan" people to perform specific tasks.

pared Moses for the work of liberating the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. Because Moses was going to serve in several capacities, as liberator and law-giver, Moses received leadership training.

First, Moses must fully identify with the oppressed Israelites. He could not avoid this, being born by Hebrew parents at a time of great Egyptian repression. Pharaoh made a decree that all Hebrew male children should be killed at birth (Exodus 2:16). To spare Moses, his mother hid him for some time. Nothing much is said about his father because he, too, must have been working in the oppressive brickyards.<sup>11</sup> The significance of women at crucial moments of human survival has not been given sufficient attention.

The Bible demonstrates that when human beings annihilate others, a woman, Eve (Hebrew *hwh*, "life generator") is able to generate new life in a people. When women operate in this mode, men take secondary positions. This explains why the Jews in modern times revere Rachel's tomb as one of their holiest places. Jeremiah, the prophet, said: "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, *and* bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they *were* not. (Jeremiah 3:15)

Esther responded to save the Israelites when they were threatened with mass murder at the hand of Haman. (Esther 4:15-17) A closer study of the scriptures shows that, although the woman's voice appears mooted in the Hebrew

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<sup>11</sup>But there could be other reasons explaining the absence of men when a deliverer is born. We notice that even in the time of Jesus when the Israelites were under Roman rule, Joseph, the father of Jesus, was always overshadowed by Mary and later disappeared from view without a trace.

and New Testament, their wisdom and saving actions are boldly recorded in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>12</sup> Returning to the call of Moses, we notice the ingenuity of a woman in strategizing the survival of Moses and, ultimately, the salvation of the Israelites as a whole.

When Moses' mother saw that she could not hide Moses any longer, she decided to implement Pharaoh's decree: "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews<sup>13</sup> you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live." (Exodus 1:22) Moses' mother understood this but carefully exploited its loopholes. First, she noticed that the decree did not say male children should not be thrown into the Nile in baskets plastered with bitumen and pitch. (Exodus 2:3) Moreover, nowhere was there mention that the children could not be thrown into the Nile near the place where the princess of Pharaoh would come and bathe. Finally, Moses' mother understood the difference between men's and women's attachment to children. Generally, men love children with their minds but women love with their hearts and wombs because they have *rahumin*, a Hebrew word meaning "compassion," "mercy," "pity."<sup>14</sup>

Two women orchestrated the initial process of the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt—Moses' mother and his sister who is later identified as Miriam (Exodus 15:20).

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<sup>12</sup>It is significant that the main sustaining factors for humanity are feminine, e.g., *cir*, "city," *eres*, "land," "earth," *adamah*, "dry ground," *hokmah*, "wisdom," *binah*, "understanding," "perception," and *da'at*, "knowledge."

<sup>13</sup>Samuel Greek Targum: Hebrew lacks *to the Hebrews*.

<sup>14</sup>Compassion, mercy, pity, favor, i.e., the state or condition of receiving favor, and so in some contexts, not be in judgment or deserved punishment, implying relationship (2 Samuel 24:14). See R. Laird Harris, ed., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), #2146, 841.

Moses' mother threw him into the Nile River in a basket. She utilized the slavery status of the Israelites to liberate them from slavery. She told Miriam to remain close to the place where the princess would come to bathe, knowing when the princess noticed the crying baby, she would have pity on him. At that point, Miriam should offer to seek a nanny from among the Hebrew slave women. Happily, the events at the Nile took place exactly as Moses' mother had predicted. Pharaoh's daughter accepted the offer of a Hebrew nanny. By divine providence, Moses ended up in his mother's care (Exodus 2:9). As children's foundational reality is learned at an early age, Moses must have learned this by observing the servitude of his father and the suffering of his mother as she kept the home. He must also have heard his mother tell the stories of whom the Hebrews were prior to their servitude and the promises Yahweh made to Abraham.

The next attribute Moses needed in order to carry out his mission was to receive sapiential education. As a son of a Hebrew slave, there was no way he would acquired education in wisdom. However, by being adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, he became a prince who could one day become king. A prince was, therefore, required to learn wisdom at the feet of an Egyptian sage.<sup>15</sup> People in prestigious institutions often disassociate themselves from their lowly her-

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<sup>15</sup>The wisdom covers topics such as "truth and integrity, generosity, and moderation, power, and timely speech, the need to 'hear' (and obey), a correct relationship with officials, women, one's household and friends. By and large a certain upper-class morality, eventually democratized, is evident. Warnings are given against pride and any lack of discipline. The model person is the 'silent' one. Silence is a sign of self-control and thoughtfulness, a characteristic of one who is master of the situation, in contrast to the rash, impetuous person." See David Noel Freedman, ed., "Extra Biblical Wisdom" [Egypt] *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 928-929.

itage; thereby, they negate their historical identity.<sup>16</sup> Moses was different. He frequented the brickyard to see how his kinsfolk were faring. He kept his past history alive by making visits to his people. It is Moses' combination of palace and brickyard, the citadel and the ghetto, that ultimately triggered him to complete his divine training to deliver Israel and lead them through the wilderness.

Let us follow Moses on one of his brickyard visits. One day Moses visited the brickyard and saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave (Exodus 2:11). With nationalist passion, he killed the Egyptian, apparently without anyone helping him. This incident speaks also of Moses' boldness and power. He buried the Egyptian in the sand and apparently returned to the palace. On another occasion, he saw a Hebrew beating another Hebrew. He intervened and tried to reconcile them by asking the assailant, "Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew"? The assailant scared Moses by asking him how he became the judge and also asked him whether he would murder him like he did the Egyptian (Exodus 2:14). Moses realized that the murder of the Egyptian was no longer a secret. He, therefore, fled Egypt for his own safety. But the flight was God's design: Moses could complete his final training for the leadership of Israel through the burning wilderness.<sup>17</sup>

When Moses was called to liberate the Israelites, he had demonstrated passion for his people and had acquired good education. But he did not know the way, nor did he have the practical skills to lead people through the desert. Moses

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<sup>16</sup>Cf. Marcia Riggs, "Answering God's Call in Academe," *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* XXII, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 201. Riggs stresses that her parents made sure she knew who she was.

<sup>17</sup>Biblical leadership and the desert are a motif that needs closer examination.

needed survival skills in the desert. Leading the children of Israel out of Egypt would be a great achievement in itself, but to sustain them through the desert would remain a formidable challenge. Thus, God used Moses' violent temper as a trigger to move him from Egypt to live in the desert for many years. Later, Moses must have felt comfortable in the desert because he even married Zipporah, Jethro's daughter, by whom he had a son (Exodus 2:22). We do not know whether the oppression of his kinsfolk in Egypt was still preoccupying his mind or not, after being away from Egypt for such a long time. At the time of his call, Moses may have been more concerned about the welfare of Jethro's flock and of his own family. Moses has now completed his leadership training process. He knows his true identity, is brave and passionate for his people, and knows how to survive in the desert.

When God appeared to Moses, he was deep in the Sinai desert looking for pasture for the flock. On a certain day, he drove his flock far away from home and reached the mountain of the *'elohim*, "gods." (Exodus 3:1) While there, Yahweh appeared to him in the form of a burning bush that was not consumed.

It is important to note that Moses was called while performing his routine tasks. He was not in the sanctuary praying, nor offering sacrifice. Nowhere is it mentioned that he was a worshipper of Yahweh albeit he was working for the priest of Midian. Moreover, Moses does not appear to have been a righteous person when God called him. He had murdered an Egyptian and did not even repent of this questionable act. It seems as though, at this time of the Israelite's liberation, God was more interested in Moses' credentials to liberate the children of Israel from Egyptian

oppression than being concerned about seeking a righteous person with no liberation skills. These are the characteristics of a liberating leader that God noticed in Moses.

Moses had no identity crisis because he remained a Hebrew in spite of having been brought up as a prince.<sup>18</sup> He was a bold man, unafraid to confront an Egyptian man beating one of his kinsfolk, strong enough to even kill him. Escaping to Midian, he confronted several male shepherds at a well who were making it hard for Pharaoh's daughters to fetch water for their flock (Exodus 2:16-18). It is that bravery that won him the favor of Jethro, who even gave him the hand of his daughter, Zipporah, as his wife. Moses was also the most educated Hebrew man, having acquired sapiential education. Living in the desert for many years, he also knew how to survive in the wilderness.

Moses also showed his boldness at the burning bush. A bush was burning without being consumed. Moses appears to have been alone when he saw this burning bush. Instead of fleeing for his life, he bravely moved toward the spectacle to investigate. When God saw that Moses had turned to check it out, God revealed himself. This is the point that Habel has marked as the beginning of Moses' call. But as we have attempted to demonstrate, Moses' call began before his birth. God had a plan for Moses with a long time of gestation because God is not in a hurry. He would rather wait for the right person to grow up than for the wrong person to meddle in the ministry.

Habel's analysis is helpful, but it does not do justice to the different ways that Yahweh used to call people for varying tasks. Moreover, it does not show the various ways by

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<sup>18</sup>He was identified by Jethro's daughters as a Hebrew man.

which Yahweh prepared those whom he called to perform the assigned tasks. For example, when Yahweh called people for military leadership, the main criterion that qualified the person's call was military prowess. Almost all the military deliverers in the Book of Judges were similarly called. They led because the spirit of Yahweh (*ruach*), the liberating passion, was upon them, not because Yahweh had noticed their righteousness. It is no surprise that "judges" like Samson ended up abusing the power for the liberation of Israel that Yahweh had accorded them. Besides, Samson did not set a good example as a military leader in spite of being chosen by Yahweh. He prayed to Yahweh only when he was in prison (Exodus 2:18).

Moses was called to perform two tasks. First, he was called to liberate the children of Israel from Egyptian oppression. Then Yahweh told him that he and the Israelites would worship Yahweh on Mount Sinai. As a sign that he had called him, Yahweh said, ". . .this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." (Exodus 3:12) Moses had a dual vocation: deliverance of the Israelites and teaching them to worship Yahweh. The second vocation required Moses' sanctification. Thus, when Moses drew nearer to the burning bush, Yahweh said to him, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). Moses could not go to Egypt to liberate the Israelites like the "judges" (*shofetim*). Although he was a brave man, as was demonstrated by his killing of the Egyptian and driving away the male shepherds who were preventing Jethro's daughters from fetching water for their flock, Yahweh also required him to be morally exemplary.

Therefore, he must first remove the sandals from his feet because he was standing on holy ground.<sup>19</sup>

Feet among the Israelites represented the dirtiest part of a person's body. This explains why when they were eating, they would place their feet as far away from the food as possible, albeit their feet would have been washed. Therefore, the feet represented impurity.<sup>20</sup> The sandals were dirty because they were a covering for dirty feet. For Moses to represent Yahweh in a priestly<sup>21</sup> role, he must first remove his sandals. Only then could he stand on holy ground and summon others to God by both word and exemplary deed. The removal of the sandals by a callee necessitated the callee to become separate, i.e., holy.<sup>22</sup> Several times the Israelites told Moses to speak to Yahweh and not let Yahweh speak to them directly because they were afraid of meeting God in their sinful state. In Exodus 20:19-21 we read: ". . . and [the Israelites] said to Moses, 'You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die.' Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin.' Then the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was." The Israelites could not stand on or near the holy ground because they felt that they were not spiritually

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<sup>19</sup>It is mandatory in the Islamic religion to remove your shoes upon entering the mosque.

<sup>20</sup>See Samuel M. Jackson and Lefferts A. Loetscher, "Foot-Washing," *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*. vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1966), 339-340. "St. Bernard of Clairvaux in his sermon, *De caena Domini*, recommends foot-washing as a daily sacrament for the remission of sins."

<sup>21</sup>Moses played a priestly role throughout his leadership of Israel in the wilderness. See, especially, the Book of Leviticus.

<sup>22</sup>Be holy as your father is holy (Leviticus 20:7).

worthy to be near the holy God. But Moses, who had gone through a process of sanctification, was able to draw near to the thick darkness that represented God's presence (Exodus 19:21b).

We note that when Yahweh called people to the ministry of establishing a relationship with God, the callee's credentials of holiness were primary, unlike those of the people called for military leadership. But again, God was involved in preparing the callee for the job.

### Call of Saul

Saul is another example of a person called by God for his military valor and passion, not for his piety.<sup>23</sup> Saul was looking for his father's lost asses when Samuel disclosed to him that God was calling. His choice to leadership depended on his looks and not on his zeal for Yahweh. As the text states:

. . .Saul [was] a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he; he stood head and shoulders above everyone else (Isaiah 9:2). . . .LORD had revealed to Samuel: 'Tomorrow about this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be ruler over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines; for I have seen the suffering of my people, because their outcry has come to me.' (1 Samuel 9:15-16).

The conversation between Yahweh and Samuel makes

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<sup>23</sup>The choice of Saul as king is complicated by conflicting sources in I Samuel 8:9-10 and 11. In I Samuel 11:5-9, it was Saul's charisma that enabled him to be chosen military leader.

it quite clear that Saul was chosen to deliver the children of Israel from the Philistines. Yahweh was responding to the cry (Hebrew *tsa'aqah*) of the people of Israel because of the Philistine invasion. In one of the sources, Saul's call follows the pattern of the "judges" of the Book of Judges. Yahweh's primary concern is the liberation of the Israelites from the Philistines and not whether Saul is righteous or not at the time of his call. The issue of righteousness is not unimportant, but it normally follows later. What we notice is that God focused on the most pressing crisis first. When that crisis is resolved, then Yahweh reassigned the person to other duties that may, at that time, require that the callee undergo the process of sanctification.

### Call of Isaiah

The call of Isaiah is also enlightening due to its revelation of the necessity for sanctification for those called to priestly and prophetic ministry. Isaiah had a vision of Yahweh sitting on his throne, high and lifted up. In attendance were the cherubim and seraphim engaged in devout worship. They were singing a song that repeatedly emphasized Yahweh's holiness. Isaiah immediately realized that he was not worthy to be near this holy symphony, being aware that he was unclean and also lived among people of unclean lips (Isaiah 6:5). In other words, Isaiah immediately noticed his unworthiness to draw people to God when he, too, was just like them. To be acceptable as a servant of Yahweh required his cleansing or sanctification. One of the seraphim drew a coal of fire taken from the altar, and touched his lips saying, "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out"

(Isaiah 6:7).<sup>24</sup> It is after this cleansing that Isaiah received the divine commission:

“Go and say to this people:  
‘Keep listening, but do not comprehend;  
keep looking, but do not understand.’ ”

(Isaiah 5:9-10)

Having been cleansed, Isaiah could now hold a conversation with Yahweh to fully understand the dimension of his commission. His specific task was to prophesy to the people whose ears were completely closed. They saw with their eyes but were no longer perceptive enough to discern what Yahweh was about to do. But Isaiah was to prophesy, nonetheless, so that the Israelites would not make an excuse that they were not forewarned. Isaiah was, therefore, sent to “preach” although he would not make any converts. His vocation was primarily to warn and not to establish a religious movement.

The mistake of modern callees is to assume that they are always called to convert people to church. Instead of concentrating on the mission of warning the people, they become preoccupied with the “numbers game,” i.e., counting how many people they have converted and how many people are attending their church. While this is important, it is not the only mission that God calls people to do. Preaching a prophetic message that may be shunned by the people may be as valid as the call to fill a church with converts. At all events, the call of Isaiah demonstrates that some people are called to warn people of the coming doom,

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<sup>24</sup>Fire is used as a cleansing agent in the Bible.

people not necessarily converted due to their being acculturated in wicked ways. They hear the Word but no longer care about the consequences of their actions. They are now used to the "joy of sin."

### Call of Jeremiah

The call of Jeremiah is significant. It demonstrates that Yahweh calls some people long before they are even born (Jeremiah 1:4-5). Furthermore, this text underscores the point we have been making that those called to represent Yahweh as spiritual leaders must be consecrated before engaging in their commission. Yahweh told the objecting Jeremiah:

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
and before you were born I consecrated you;  
I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

(Jeremiah 1:5)

Jeremiah is to be a prophet to the nations, not only to his parochial community and residence. This seems to mean that those who are called by God in modern times must be clear as to the specific duty Yahweh wants them to do. Is it to convert people or simply to warn them of the impending doom, letting them make a choice? Is the ministry to be parochial, regional, national, or international? Only when those called to ministry are quite clear of the dimension of their call, will they feel encouraged even when their ministry appears to fail. Some ministries' success is not determined by numbers, but by whether or not the callee has faithfully discharged the specific commission.

The key to success in ministry is when the callee absolutely discerns God's call. Although Yahweh reassigns people, it is clear from studying the various calls in the Bible that the initial commission is specific. (See Exodus 3:7-9.)<sup>25</sup>

### Types of Call

The foregoing discussion suggests that there are two types of people Yahweh calls and commissions. The first type comprises those called because they possess the necessary skills to perform a specific duty, not necessarily because they are holy. After performing their initial duties, God may reassign them to tasks requiring sanctification. The second type is called and commissioned to draw people nearer to God. People called for this type of ministry first undergo a process of sanctification in order that they themselves may draw near to God to hear and communicate God's word to the people. They can only intercede for the people if they are close enough to God themselves.

Looking at God's call closely, notice that God's call does not follow one fixed structure. God's approach to those called to ministry may be divided into three main categories: (1) the direct or dialogical call, (2) the indirect or durative call, and (3) the command and immediate call. These different categories of a divine call can only be discussed briefly in this article.

A dialogical call involves a discussion involving God and the callee about the commission. Oftentimes, the callee is reluctant to do the work because of inadequacies.

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<sup>25</sup>It was after Moses accomplished the first commission that God reassigned him to spiritual matters.

Moses is a good example of this type of call. In Exodus chapters three and four, Moses tries hard to convince God that he was not fit for the mission. Normally, the callees did not succeed in their objections. When God identifies a person suitable for a mission, that person may argue. The end result is always the same: the person will do whatever it is God is requesting.

The indirect or durative call is induced on the callee by other people. In the case of Samuel, Hannah exposed Samuel to God's call by vowing to God that if he gave her a son, she would dedicate him for the service of Yahweh (1 Samuel 1:11). Samuel worked as the priest Eli's protégé until he was a young man. He was loyal to Eli because Eli's voice was the only authoritative voice he knew. When God called him, he thought he was hearing the voice of Eli and rushed to him. It was the third call when Eli realized that God was calling the young man. Being a good mentor, he told Samuel to answer in these words, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." (1 Samuel 3:9b) It is from that day Yahweh began to communicate with Samuel directly. Unlike Moses and Gideon, Samuel did not object to serving Yahweh because he was already separated from his peers and consecrated to God by his parents. He was not commissioned to perform any specific task, not even to report God's words to Eli. Eli had to press Samuel to divulge what the LORD had said. But that Samuel was a god-fearing man is clearly stated: "As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the LORD. The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD. (1 Samuel 3:19-21)

In a command or immediate call, Yahweh does not discuss the call with the person he calls. Instead, God commands the person to perform the divine assignment immediately. In this type of call, the person called saw the word or the word comes to the callee. Amos saw the word of Yahweh concerning Israel in the days of King Uzziah of Judah (Amos 1:1). In the case of Hosea, the word of the LORD came to him in the days of King Uzziah (Hosea 1:1). The word in this case is not abstract; it is concrete. That is why the prophets felt the pressure to deliver it to the Israelites.

The command or immediate calls are always in the imperative mood and assume that the callee is a devout Yahwist. Therefore, no sanctification is necessary in this case. The callee finds it impossible to refuse the call on the grounds of impurity of lips, as in the case of Isaiah, or being too young, like Jeremiah. Once they see the word of Yahweh or the word comes to them, they feel compelled to declare it. This is how Amos, Hosea, and most of the Minor Prophets were called by Yahweh.

### Conclusion

It should be emphasized that the way God calls people is multifarious depending on the tasks to perform. For ministries such as liberation, God will call those with the skills to do so. But for church and prophetic ministries in which the spokespersons represent God, the callees must first all go through a process of sanctification. Finally, calls are in three categories: (1) dialogical and durative, e.g., Moses' call; (2) indirect and induced, e.g., Samuel's call; and (3) direct and imperative, e.g., the call of most

prophets.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the form and call narrative that scholars have categorized is not representative of the majority of the calls recorded in the Bible.

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<sup>26</sup>William H. Myers, *God's Yes Was Louder Than My No: Rethinking the African American Call to Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: William H. Eerdmans, 1994), 71-74 also notes three types of God's call: cataclysmic/reluctant, noncataclysmic/reluctant, and noncataclysmic/non-reluctant.

The prophet's call is a divine summons to a life of service and sacrifice. It is not a mere profession of faith, but a commitment to a higher purpose. The prophet is called to stand for the oppressed and to speak the truth to the powerful. This call is often accompanied by a sense of isolation and a willingness to suffer for the sake of the community. The prophet's role is to bring about social and spiritual renewal, and to lead the people back to the path of righteousness. The call of the prophet is a challenge to the status quo and a call to action for all who hear it.

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In conclusion, the call of the prophet is a divine summons to a life of service and sacrifice. It is not a mere profession of faith, but a commitment to a higher purpose. The prophet is called to stand for the oppressed and to speak the truth to the powerful. This call is often accompanied by a sense of isolation and a willingness to suffer for the sake of the community. The prophet's role is to bring about social and spiritual renewal, and to lead the people back to the path of righteousness. The call of the prophet is a challenge to the status quo and a call to action for all who hear it.

# A Clergywoman's Prayer

Mother God / Father God of us all  
Remind my brothers that I, too, am Imago Dei  
That being made in Your image  
sanctifies, justifies, and qualifies me to  
hold all offices of the Church  
exercise all gifts for the Church  
perform all duties in the Church  
without apology.

Lord hear our prayers.

O, Creator of Justice for all  
Prompt my brothers to understand  
That their idolatrous attachment to traditions  
Denies, decries, and defies Spirit's work in me to  
preach good news to the poor  
comfort the brokenhearted  
liberate any in captivity  
without apology.

Lord, hear our prayers.

Holy Trinity be our all  
Teach my brothers that You hear my prayers  
That the uncommon names I call when I call on You  
clarifies, magnifies, and glorifies You to be also  
Mother, Son, Spirit  
Creator, Redeemer, Universe  
Womb, Wound, Wind  
without apology.

Lord, hear our prayers.

Amen.

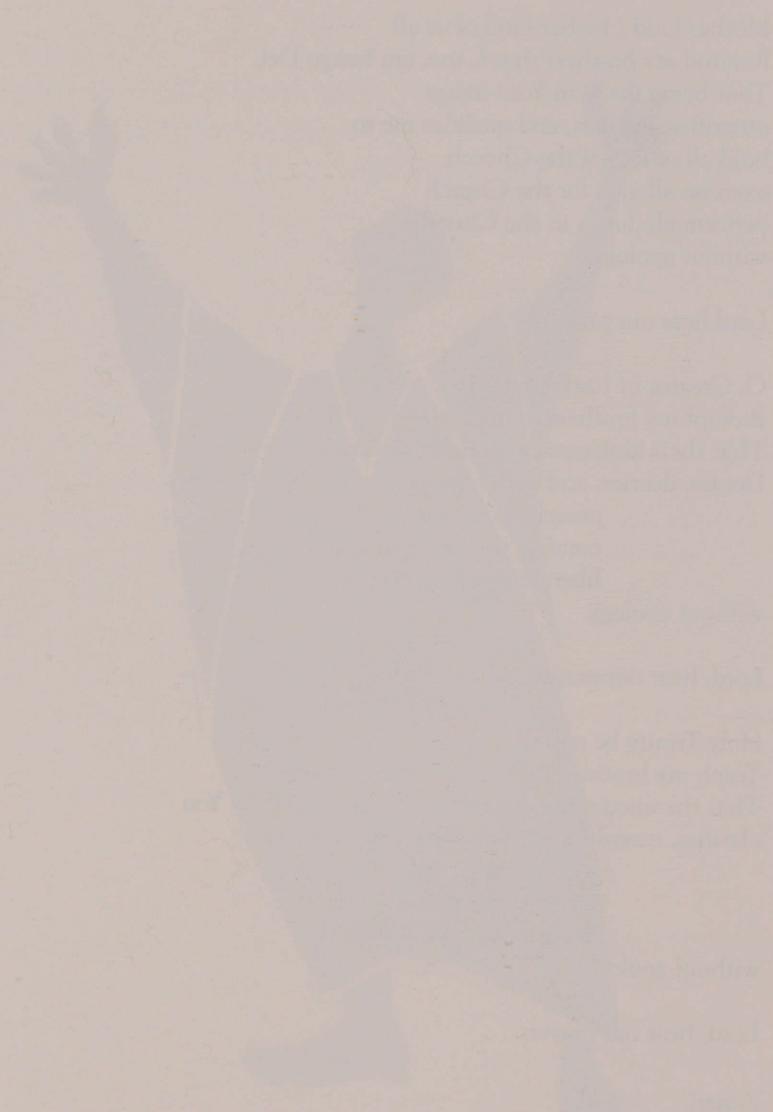
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*Editor's note:* The poems of RevSisRaedorah, reflecting her spirituality, are interspersed throughout this issue and are used with permission.

# A Clergywoman's Prayer



Prayer is a spiritual exercise which is  
the essence of religion and a gateway to  
theological training. Prayer is a vital part  
of the Christian's life and a necessary  
and holy duty.

Prayer is the heart of the Christian's life and  
the gateway to the spiritual world.