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"SEND ANYBODY BUT ME"

Divine Call and Human Response in the Hebrew Bible

by

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for Ordination

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CONTENTS

DIGEST

Abraham, the first Hebrew patriarch and prophet, responds to the two pivotal assignments of his career (leaving Haran and the binding of Isaac) with prompt and complete obedience to God's will. Abraham thus proves to be Israel's most obedient servant of the Lord, even in contrast to Moses.

Indeed, Moses appears to be one of Israel's most obdurate prophets -- a man who resists tenaciously his divine call. God, however, not only allows Moses to argue against his choice as God's agent; God would not even rebuke Moses for his recalcitrance. On the contrary, He provides Moses repeatedly with assurances and divine signs in order to assuage Moses' fears and dispel his doubts.

We witness a similar divine *modus operandi* in the call for judgeship of Gideon. Like Moses, Gideon too claims inadequacy to his assigned role of deliverer. He proffers the low rank of his tribe, family and himself as the reason for his indisposition to assume his commission. As with Moses, God imparts no import to the social status of His chosen agent. And again, God allays Gideon's doubts with signs and reassurances.

Like Moses and Gideon, Saul, as king-designate, highlights his tribe's and family's humble origin as his pretext for evading his divine calling. Similarly, Jeremiah claims personal unworthiness and deficient communicative skills as his grounds for declining his commission. God treats these arguments in a familiar fashion, providing divine signs and reassurances for the task ahead.

Jonah's response to his prophetic assignment is unprecedented. Rather than arguing the grounds for his objection to the mission to Nineveh, Jonah simply flees from this assignment. He refuses to go there because he is opposed to God's intent to pardon the immorality of the Ninevites. Like the others before him, Jonah too will assume his mission after his experience with a divine sign. Still, Jonah proves to be the least obedient prophet.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on the call narratives of four prophets, a judge and a king-designate. The common element uniting Moses, Gideon, Saul, Jeremiah, and Jonah is their initial reaction to their respective callings. These individuals' reponse to their divine call may be briefly summarized as "why me?!" or, " how can I take on such a mission?" Hence, the thesis will ask what prompts a Moses or a Jeremiah to object to, or even refuse, the call. Is it the anticipation of hardships and dangers looming down the road, mere humility, or a sense of personal inadequacy to the task? Does such a protestor feel free or constrained in expressing his equivocal disposition toward his divine mission?

This thesis will describe and analyze the divine reaction to such expressions of concern and hesitation, even outright refusal, to accept the commission. Does God allow or expect anything else than prompt obedience to His call? And when such obedience does not occur, does God rebuke the doubting or objecting individual? Does God try and allay the doubts and fears of these men? Also, presuming that God's choice of an agent is not accidental, is it possible then to determine God's reasons for choosing a particular person to serve as His agent? Does God reckon with such considerations as social status, or an earlier personal experience of the person who is called? Would it be correct to say -- as the case of Abraham seems to indicate -- that God sees but little import in the person's past or social standing?

Finally, this thesis will seek to identify the common threads which characterize the call narratives of these six divinely - commissioned individuals. It will seek to

determine whether these narratives are bound together by any particular form or pattern other than the expressed reluctance to go in the name of the Lord.

Chapter I: ABRAHAM

A. Why was he chosen?

As a biblical archetype to all biblical persons Abraham serves as God's prophet throughout his life-span. Yet, Abraham is not a messenger-prophet whom God designates as His emissary to a people or any other constituency. Rather, Abraham gives expression to his kind of prophecy in living a life that gives tribute to God's sovereignty over the world; it is this life-mission of the prophet that would give birth to the faith of Israel.

Abraham's first divine word commanding him to get out of his country and to go forth to a new land of destination seems to have come as though 'out of the blue'. Is there, however, any indication in the biblical account that explains the choice of this man as the recipient of the divine command? The biblical narrative up to this point is devoid of even a single word of introduction which would indicate certain characteristics or basic personal merit of the called one. It appears as though the biblical narrator has little interest in Abraham's past of seventy-five years. For in fact, we hear nothing of Abraham's younger years nor do we know of his activities in the countries where he formerly resided. Was Abraham a righteous man? Did he perform good deeds? The answers to such questions are absent from the biblical narrative. At most the reader may find a few meager details about Abraham's immediate family. But even the seemingly meaningful biographical note (in Genesis 12:5) regarding the souls that Abraham and company "had gotten in Haran" would only pertain to the extent of Abraham's social integration within the rest of his clan folks. Abraham , so it seems, enjoyed no special position or prominent status among them; he was neither a mighty man nor a leader there.[1]

The Midrash and Rashi, however, seek to depict Abraham as a missionary for monotheism even if the biblical narrative would not seem to support this proposition. Simply put, nowhere in the Bible do we find an argument crediting Abraham with bringing to the (pagan) world the belief in a single and sole deity. Furthermore, monotheism as a religious belief was not even invented or first conceived by Abraham, for in his days it had already had a long history of existence.[2] To be sure, unlike the midrash which tells us extensively of Abraham's anti-pagan stand and actions, the biblical text says nothing about God's reasons for the choice of Abraham. One has to infer, therefore, that the Hebrew Bible sees only little import in Abraham's past, e.g., before he sets forth "unto the land that I will show thee". Thus it is not Abraham's history, or his heretofore essence that matters to God, but apparently his future deeds and becoming.

B. Commission

Without any "prior preparation or warning."[3] Abraham's mission thus begins with a call from the Deity. His mandate is to become the progenitor of the chosen people, and in order to do so he must take a prompt and specific action:

> "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing. . . in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed (Genesis,12:1-3)."

This is Abraham's first trial; he is ordered to separate himself from his past, and by conjecture perhaps to deny the gods of his father, and in a sense to "reject his father too."[4]

In clear and explicit words God demands that the man isolate himself from his whole past, "under circumstances and at an age which stress furthermore the lack of rationale" in the divine command.[5] Surely, even if the divine command did not descend on Abraham as abruptly as it did, the exile from his homeland, the uprooting from one life-style (characterized by urbanization, commercialization, and sophistication to name just a few features of Abraham's world), and the transition to a radically different one was a onerous task. Such a separation is the "cruelest of all."[6] And as though this in itself was not enough, God does not even tell his prophet where he was going to go . . . Not knowing where God will lead him may suggest perhaps that Abraham himself was "not yet fully aware of what his mission is to be or how it will be accomplished."[7]

Although Rashi attempts to show that by carrying out God's command Abraham stood to benefit handsomely with the fulfillment of the divine promises to him, it is quite evident that Abraham was to trade filial relations and paternal inheritance for abstract promises for having children, wealth and fame (Genesis, 12:2). Abraham's response, nonetheless was prompt and decisive: "So Abram went, as the Lord had spoken unto him" (Genesis, 12:4). This is the very first thing that the biblical narrator tells us immediately after God's decree. God said "go forth" and Abraham went. God ordered and Abraham obeyed. The narrator leaves no space between the command and its execution thus underscoring Abraham 's acceptance of the divine word as complete and definite. With that the mystery of Abraham's personality begins to unravel as the reader learns of the former's first and foremost characteristic - - his unconditional and total belief in God. Abraham's first appearance in the Bible is thus featured in his resolute hastening to fulfil the Lord's command. Posing no questions and requesting no signs Abraham emerges with an absolute belief in God and in the fulfillment of God's promises to him.

To suggest, however, as many traditional commentators seem to do, that the lure of these divine promises was persuasive in itself would do injustice to Abraham. On the contrary, these divine promises might have made Abraham's response to the call even more difficult. They might have triggered a "struggle of good and evil in Avram's heart. The evil inclination urged Avram to obey the divine commandment" in order to merit God's promised rewards. "But the good inclination retorted: the intention should be solely for the grandeur and glory of the Name of God."[8] It is apparent that God had expected Abraham's acceptance of the mission as a given, and although he could have elected to demur, God had applied no threats or warnings to cajole him into acceptance.

C. The Binding of Isaac

The first divine command to Abraham "lekh lekha" (go for yourself), was only a rehearsal for the unimaginably more powerful command which God addressed for the second time to Abraham, this time concerning Isaac. If the first command called upon Abraham to separate himself from his own past-from his kindred environment, now at the very end of his divine trials God calls upon Abraham to separate himself from the future-to put an end to the line of his divinely promised seed. If upon hearing the first "lekh lekha" Avram was at least going toward the fulfillment of God's promises, the second "lekh lekha" ordered him to put an end to the already fulfilled promise. In both instances Abraham's response was not in word but in deed -- "va-yelekh" -- and he went.

Abraham, to get to the point, "was ordered to do something which could not be compared with any sacrifice . . . it was the most extraordinary thing that could have happened in the world, one of those things which one would think human nature not capable of accepting."[9] Abraham was instructed to cut off the life thread of his only son and heir without whom the whole divine scheme which had brought Abraham to Canaan in the first place was to be nipped in the bud. It is hard to comprehend the horror of the call to offer Isaac as a burnt-offering for its irrationality is multi-faceted. Firstly, acting against one of the most powerful impulses-parental love-and even more so when it came to Abraham's love for Isaac, the son who was given to him in a miracle. Secondly, what perhaps was most direfully shocking to Abraham was the need to face the possibility of believing in a capricious God who suddenly seemed to contradict all that Abraham was able to identify with this deity. The very thought which must have agonized Abraham was the possibility that the very cult of human sacrifice of the abominable Moloch "paled against the ferociousness of that divine order which contravened any logical and moral reasoning."[10]

To accept and follow the incomprehensible meant to act contrary to a cardinal principle of Abraham's life teaching: the sacredness of human life and its supremacy over all other considerations. Hence, what the matter boiled down to "was man's apparently eternal dilemma:-revelation versus reason."[11] Abraham, however, does not retreat from his total belief in his benevolent and merciful God, nor does he choose to pose questions, express doubts or even pray before Him. If he did not continue to adhere, despite his understandable human doubts, to his belief and trust in God's morality, Abraham might have countered God with the same urge for righteousness which he had exhibited in their dialogue concerning the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Be that as it may, the seemingly primitive and savage demand to sacrifice Isaac must have stirred profoundly our sages of old to the extent that they were willing to concede that Abraham did not have to follow God's word in this extraordinary instance. In fact, it is hard to ignore the Rabbis' own wonderment at Abraham's utter silence vis-a-vis God. The midrash would rather have Abraham retorting back by asking God: "haven't You Yourself told me that "in Isaac shall seed be called to thee"?[12] Abraham's greatness says Yossef Albo was in the absolute liberty that he had in deciding whether to carry out the divine demand, for God had applied neither pressure nor threats in order to coerce him to do the act.[13] Even the Rabbis, it must be said, found it hard to accept Abraham's complete silence in the narrative. Abraham, in short, must have struggled with his conscience from the moment he received that fateful divine vision or dream. The midrash augments, in fact, the biblical text in describing almost graphically the frequent appearance of doubts and excuses, for opting out from the whole affair in Abraham's restless mind.[14]

Traditional understanding of the saga of Isaac's binding thus glorify Abraham for going through this harrowing experience to its very end while overcoming his paternal emotions if not serious theological skepticism, and for not forgoing the totality of his belief in God and His word. Furthermore, our traditional commentators emphasize Abraham's utmost efficiency and agility in executing that demand by drawing attention to the multiplicity of significant verbs in verse three of chapter 22: "And Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he cleaved the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto his young men . . ." In verse ten that awesome and terrible experience reaches its climax as the father lifts up the

knife over his son, and all the hopes for the fulfillment of divine promises through Isaac are about to be snuffed out with the imminent death of the son. And yet, Abraham did not recoil, and he "took the knife to slay his son".

Indeed, not only did Abraham go about his task "with abnormal attention to each detail"[15]; the angel of God had to call him twice by name and stop him from his determined implementation of God's command. An act which demanded such a superhuman self-abnegation "can only be explained by an infinite love of God", and it was this love which compelled Abraham to subordinate his paternal love to his love for God.[16] Abraham was able to subdue his paternal emotions from the moment he heard God's command by referring to Isaac as a "lad" instead of "Isaac". Isaac who does not know the reason behind his father's estrangement attempts to reclaim the love of his father: "And Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father, and said: My father". And Abraham who could not reveal to his son the reason for his estrangement relents and replies:"Here am I, my son." This choice of words and evasive style evince Abraham's efforts at distancing himself from his son even as Isaac seeks the very opposite.[17] In short, Abraham had to resort to such a psychological device lest he would find himself emotionally unfit for the task ahead.

Be that as it may, biblical commentators and others have had great difficulty in understanding Abraham's unequivocal determination in executing his unbearable task. Psycho-analysts would like to believe that by suppressing his feelings Abraham was able to take "a temporary flight from reality such as one sees in people who are in a state of emotional shock."[18] Traditional commentators such as Maimonides explain Abraham's unqualified commitment in the fact that he was utterly certain of his prophetic vision and had, therefore, no doubt regarding its

divine origin.[19] Both of these views, so it seems, are predicated on the premise that Abraham must have believed that Isaac's sacrifice was inevitable under the circumstances. That Abraham experienced intense inner struggle with his conscience must be a given in any case.

But beyond that, Abraham was able to fulfil his call not merely because of his total belief in God but also because of his total belief in an all-compassionate and merciful deity. Abraham must have realized that the God he worshipped was a faithful God of love, and that this God would ultimately not permit him to slay his son; that He would not demand this cruel deed from him. It is because of this belief, even in the face of what seemed like an impossible reality, that Abraham deserves being reckoned as the paradigm of belief. After all, was it not he who advised his two young men at the foot of Mount Moriah that "I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship, and come back --'ve-nashuvah', in plural! -- to you" (Genesis, 22:5). The object of this agonizing experience, then, was not merely "to discover how firm was the patriarch's faith in the ultimate divine purpose."[20] It was rather meant to demonstrate to Abraham beyond all doubt, that his was a true gracious God of life, even when the promise for his covenant appeared to be lost.

In conclusion, Abraham was commissioned for prophecy and patriarchy suddenly and irrespective of any prior outstanding merit that would warrant his election by God. The essence of his life is contained between the two pivotal poles of the dual "lekh lekha" experiences. Abraham walks this road exhibiting his most important characteristic - a powerful belief in God; this belief finds its climactic expression in the binding of Isaac saga. In both instances of the "lekh lekha" command Abraham responds promptly not in speech, not in expressing personal doubts in view of his awesome divine mission, but by action --"va-yelekh". Abraham thus establishes

himself as a beacon of devotion, reverence and unconditional obedience to God's word of will. All other prophets and leaders in Israel will be evaluated by necessity against this incredible Abrahamic legacy.

NOTES

1. Ephraim Shapira, *Gibbor Ve'anti-gibbor Ba-mikra* (Tel Aviv: Hakkibutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 1987), p. 24.

2. Adin Steinzaltz, *Dmooyot Min-Hamikra* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 1980), pp. 10, 14.

3. E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (New York: Doubleday Company, Inc., 1964), The Anchor Bible, p. Li.

4. Dorothy F. Zeligs, *Psychoanalysis and the Bible* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1974), p. 4.

5. Shapira, Ibid., p. 66.

6. Nehamah Leibowitz, *Iyunim Besefer Bereshit* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1966), p. 81.

7. Zeligs, Ibid., p. 3.

8. Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah/Genesis*, trans. from French by E. S. Maser (New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1980), I, p. 254.

9. Ibid., p. 452.

10. Shapira, Ibid., p. 67.

11. Walter Orenstein, *Etched in Stone* (New York: Bash Publications, inc., 1989), p. 44.

12. *Bereshit Rabbah*, Vayyera/56:8.

13. Leibowitz, Ibid., p. 142.

14. *Tanhumah*, Vayyera/28-30.

15. Speiser, Ibid., p. 165.

16. Munk, Ibid., pp. 470, 477.

17. Hayim Y. Hamiel, *Mayyanei Mikra* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1983), p. 63.

18. Zeligs, Ibid., p. 33.

19. Munk, Ibid., p. 453.

20.Speiser, Ibid., p. 166.

Chapter II: MOSES

A. Divine Confrontation

In contrast to Abraham who had no missionary mandate Moses was the first Hebrew messenger-prophet sent to the Hebrew people with a specific goal. But in the absence of such a prophetic tradition among the Hebrews Moses would find himself in his initial private oracle with the divine with no pertinent legacy that would acquaint him with this experience. Unique to this experience (and to Moses' prophecy in general) was the manner in which Moses perceived his call; not merely by hearing the divine voice but by actually seeing a divine sight:

> "And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame
> of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold,
> the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.
> And Moses said: 'I will turn aside now, and see this
> great sight, why the bush is not burnt'" (Exodus 3;2-3).

It is evident, therefore, that Moses was awake and alert when he saw that extra-ordinary object. Yet, it must be noted at the same time that at these initial moments of Moses' encounter with God, he did not know as yet that this was a prophetic vision. Moses, in other words, did not know that the divine was present at that place, nor did he know that the fire he saw was an angel's fire. Indeed, Scripture is meticulously careful to avoid referring to any physical form apart from the burning bush. Still, the word "ve-hineh" (and behold) seems to indicate that this apparition appeared to Moses unexpectedly at a time when he was hoping, perhaps, to be alone. It was this paradoxical aspect of his vision which stood in contradiction to nature's conventional physical laws that lured Moses to the wondrous scene.

Yet, God's choice of a burning bush that remained, however, green was intended to impart to His theophany a sense of familiarity; this was important so Moses would not become startled and shun the site. Indeed, a scrubfire sight was not really foreign to desert pasture-lands; firstly, at certain times of the year it is no unusual phenomenon for a dry thistle to catch fire, and secondly, the flowers of that thornbush (which Cassuto identifies as Black-berry) are brilliant red, and from a distance look as flamelike blossoms. This modest form of revelation "was chosen out of solicitude for Moses' inexperience" with prophecy.[1] Initially then, Moses was witnessing "a natural scene". But as he continued to gaze at the sight he realized that he was observing "a miracle."[2] The midrash does, in fact, point out that God was especially careful and tactful not to frighten Moses, a tyro at prophecy, away. Accordingly, God chose to reveal Himself in the voice of 'Amram; it was a ruse to attract Moses to the scene of action.[3]

B. Moses' Initial Reaction

Moses' approach towards the revelation-site triggered off a divine warning to desist at once from getting any closer: "And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said: 'Moses, Moses.' And he said: 'Here I am' " (Exodus 3: 4); Moses was ready to listen to the voice. It seems, however, that Moses was not certain yet whether the voice he heard was God's. Indeed, not even God's statement that he was on holy ground made Moses fully aware of the import of the apparition, for only when the voice out of the apparition introduced itself (Exodus 3: 6) did Moses hide his face fearful to look upon God.

The text, however, makes no suggestion that any corporeal form of the Divine was there to be looked on except the blazing fire out of the bush. Yet, the full awareness that he was in the presence of God finally broke upon Moses. Having stopped in his place, even as he turned his eyes away from the vision of God, Moses listens nonetheless attentively to what God has to tell him. His ensuing commissioning as the first messenger of God to Israel comes in the form of "a monologue, the messenger not being expected to respond, but only to listen attentively."[4]

C. Moses' Pre-Prophetic Life

Verses eleven through twenty-two of Exodus' chapter two are the only biblical source revealing anything about Moses' adult life before his divine revelation and commissioning as a prophet. They tell us of only three events or rather three actions taken by Moses; three times Moses intervenes in on-going conflicts and helps the oppressed party against the oppressor. Moses thus positions himself on the side of justice even though each of these conflicts is different from the others.

In the first conflict Moses killed an Egyptian who was smiting an Hebrew; on the morrow of this occurrence Moses attempted to judge between two quarreling Hebrews by criticizing the offender; the third intervention on the part of Moses took place in the land of Midian and this time Moses championed the cause of Jethro's helpless daughters who were bullied by the shepherds. This third action taken by Moses is perhaps the most telling instance revealing Moses' consistent and unflinching penchant for absolute justice. In contrast to the previous cases where Moses intervened only when the wronged were Israelites the third intervention, where both oppressor and oppressed were total strangers, demonstrated Moses' intrinsic and unconditional zeal to side with the victims of

injustice.[5] Indeed, even though a fugitive in a foreign land -- an outcome of this zeal for justice --"Moses cannot remain aloof from his environment; the wrongs he sees compel him to take action."[6]

Why did Moses flee to the desert? Was it merely as Scripture explains because Pharaoh sought to slay him after he had killed an Egyptian taskmaster? This would be perhaps too simplistic for Moses was an Egyptian prince himself. Moses, so it seems, still felt as an Egyptian even after his escape to Midian ("a foreign land" for him). Still, is it possible that his identification with the Israelites, as the killing of the taskmaster may indicate, means that Moses was also repudiating the Egyptian culture in the midst of which he had been reared? Is it possible, moreover, that by becoming a shepherd in Midian Moses was able to relate back to the simple pastoral life of his Hebrew ancestors before they settled in Egypt? Further, did Moses, by choosing an exile in Midian, seek to experience at least a semblance of the alienation experienced by his people in Egypt?

Presumably, however, Moses -- biologically a Hebrew but culturally Egyptian-- was spiritually in conflict between those two dichotomous poles. "This is not an uncommon pattern among liberators of oppressed people; they are often assimilated and privileged numbers of the oppressed people."[7] Still, by the time Moses would return to Egypt and commence his career as a people's emancipator he was only a humble shepherd of Jethro's flock. Thus Moses' career as a liberator was launched not from the Pharaoh's court but from lowly beginnings; a common biblical theme.

In fact, a touching midrash describes Moses as a caring and sensitive shepherd in a tale of a young kid which had escaped from the flock to quench its thirst at a

stream. Moses hurried to retrieve it lest it gets lost in the wilderness and dies of hunger and thirst. Finding the kid at the water Moses said to the animal: 'My beloved kid! Had I only known that you were thirsty I would not have chased after you'. Thereupon Moses lifted up the kid and carried it on his shoulders all the way back to the flock. On which a heavenly voice called out: "how great is your compassion! because you had pity for the kid you will be the loyal shepherd of my people Israel."[8] According to this midrash, then, Moses' skill, conscientiousness and compassion as a shepherd proved his qualification for the task he is now to be called upon to perform.

D. A Dialogue of Negotiation; Initial Doubts of Inadequacy

Moses' ensuing commissioning as God's first messenger to Israel begins in the form of a monologue as God declares His purpose to liberate Israel from Egyptian bondage through Moses : "Come now, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people the children of Israel out of Egypt"? (Exodus 3:10). This clear invitation to Moses to hasten and accept the mission willingly indicates also, so it seems, that God, does not expect his chosen agent to respond at all but rather to listen attentively to his word. And still, a snag in the would be divine scenario develops at once; frightened presumably by the staggering assignment Moses is oblivious of the fact that God has by now committed Himself already twice to the success of the mission (see verses 8 and 10). Although God had left no doubt about the ultimate success of the mission Moses declines his proffered agency by expressing his unworthiness for that enterprise: "And Moses said unto God: 'Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt"?

The thrust of this protestation is clearly negative, viz., Moses is indicating that he is unfit or unworthy to fulfill the difficult calling; a proposition that the Omniscient God had somehow failed to notice. But what Moses had apparently failed himself to notice was the thought that he of all the Hebrews was the best qualified for the job due to his extensive experience and knowledge of the Pharaoh's modus operandi. Indeed, Moses' words project an uncertainty about his self-identity; "He had to know who he himself was before he could accept the responsibility confronting him."[9]

According to Rashi, however, Moses' identity dilemma was not whether he was more of a Hebrew than an Egyptian or vice versa. Rather, his dilemma was how (an unimportant) shepherd as himself would dare face any monarch? Rashi seems to understand Moses' instant recoil from his call in view of the latter's sense of weakness and insignificance both of himself and of the Israelite people as a whole. The Rashbam stresses too Moses' recognition of his lowly status in contrast to that of the Pharaoh: "do I [Moses] deserve even to bring an offering and a present to him? Do I -- a stranger -- merit even to enter the royal court?" Biblical commentator Cassuto concurs with the basic theme of these 'Rishonim', and regards Moses' reaction as a mere expression of "feelings of humility at the importance and exalted nature of his commission."[10] Similarly, N. Leibowitz embraces wholeheartedly this line of construction; it is corroborated in Scripture in that God does not gainsay Moses' self-sense of insignificance and lack of merit.[11]

God, however, does not concur with Moses' operative conclusion -- his twin reluctance --to go to the Pharaoh and to facilitate the deliverance of the Israelite slaves. Hence God's response: "Certainly, I will be with thee" (Exodus 3: 12).

Although God seems to say that Moses alone would be unable to achieve the ultimate objective, the good tidings is that "Ehyeh" will insure Moses' success. (Moses receives on this occasion a leading clue concerning the name of the Divine who speaks to him and despatches him to Egypt.)

At any rate, God's reply to Moses has nothing to do with his apparent problem of self-identity. Besides assuring him success in bringing Israel out of Egypt, Moses is proffered a sign (unasked-for) that will indeed confirm his divine call; the future worship of the people after its exodus at the mountain of God. The implication is "that it doesn't matter who Moses is". The fact that God will be there at Moses' side and guarantee the successful completion of his mission is the only pertinent agenda. "Moses is the man chosen by God; that is his identity" and nothing else is relevant. Furthermore, the subsequent confirmatory sign of Moses' commission at the same site of his own theophany "associated and identified" Moses with all the Israelite people; from now on that will be the second and inseparable component of his identity. And Moses' erstwhile identity becomes hereby insignificant for his future assignment.[12]

Nonetheless, God's attempt to put Moses' mind at ease by winning his heart to His agency fails to materialize. Moses was still unable to visualize the significance of God's first sign even as it was slated for fulfillment later into the future. Heretofore Moses' difficulty at acceptance the call was predicated on the question 'who am I?' (that I should go unto Pharaoh). Now, however, Moses is virtually asking God 'who are you'? even as he continues to question whether the whole oracular vision came from the God of his fathers. Or in the words of Scripture: "Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them: The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you: and they shall say to me: What is His Name? what shall I

say unto them?" (Exodus 3: 13). Common to both questions is the concern with the issue of self-identity. Thus, the question as to the identity of this God which is the focal theme of Moses' second query, may project, in part, "the uncertainty" that Moses still felt about his own identity. Hence, if Moses' new self-identity stemmed from his new relationship with God, then God's identity "was indeed all-important."[13]

Still, God had clearly defined earlier who He was, in terms of His relationship to the fathers of Israel (Exodus 3: 6). Was that definition lacking anything in the eyes of Moses that he would dare asking God for additional credentials even as he was standing on holy ground and hiding his face from the Divine image? Apparently, this is how Moses felt for God had only identified Himself as the God of the Patriarches (and of Moses' father to boot). Moses knew that "he could never hope to enjoy the trust of the people and belief in his message unless he could produce the name of his sender."[14] Clearly, one claiming to speak in the name of Israel's historical deity whose real name had faded out of memory during the long years of bondage, must proclaim its name anew so the people may revive their belief in the memory of a divine promise to their ancestors of an eventual redemption (Ibid.) Moses query, therefore, affords God the opportunity to inform him both of His ineffable name and its meaning. It is quite likely that both were unknown not only to Moses but to the Children of Israel as well. Hence, anticipating to be tested by the people on both the tetragrammaton and its meaning Moses has no doubt "that only if he could produce these would he be credited as an emissary of God."[15]

Clearly then, Moses has not rejected thus far the idea of his calling; this is really not the case. Certainly, Moses hesitates because of his sense of humility and because he feels that other prerequisites have yet to be met before he could

commence the mission. Seeking, therefore, to allay further Moses' difficulties and to reassure him concerning the task ahead God reveals His special name to the hesitant messenger. At the same time God communicates to him as a hefty bonus ; a sense of His power which is contained in a new Divine name "Ehyeh 'Asher Ehyeh" (I will be what I will be). The new name underlines the theme of God's active and continuous presence; the God who was and who is. It expresses "the new relationship, the rediscovery of Moses and of Israel, with the God of their fathers."[16] In revealing the name of the Divine's essence to Moses and from him to the People of Israel God was virtually telling His chosen prophet that he had no more reasons to continue and doubt his inadequacy or ability to carry out the mission.

Henceforth came God's command: "Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them: The Lord [the Tetragrammaton is invoked in the Hebrew], the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob hath appeared unto me". Moses was to tell them further that this ancestral Deity who has seen Israel's affliction in the land of Egypt is also resolved to bring the people out of slavery unto the bountiful land of canaan. While pointing out to Moses that the elders will surely listen to him, both parties were to come together before the Pharaoh and request his permission for a three-day pilgrimage to the wilderness where sacrifices were to be offered "to the God of the Hebrews" (Exodus 3: 14-18).

E. Fears of the People's Incredulity

God who has already assured Moses several times that the emancipation of the Hebrew slaves will be successful, does so again in an explicit prediction of a happy

ending (see verses 20b and 21b). Still, the detailed directions with which God equips Moses in preparation for his meeting with the Israelite elders intensified significantly Moses' concerns: "But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice; for they will say, The Lord has not appeared unto you" (Exodus 4: 1). In his two previous responses Moses cited his personal standing and his lack of indispensable information on God as reasons for his recalcitrant attitude. Moses' third rejoinder constitutes, however, a brand-new defensive gambit on his part albeit still short of an aversion. The doubts which assail him now relate directly to his very "powers and capabilities"[17] in gaining the faith and trust of the people that he was conveying to them the very word of God. His feeling of anxiety is not even couched in the form of doubt but as a factual given.

Was Moses trying then to 'dodge the draft' by hiding "most surprisingly"[18] behind the behind the people's back and citing their incredulity? Is it fair, as some exegetes have suggested, to accuse Moses of slandering the people with his distrustful statement? And in keeping in mind that God had already assured Moses most explicitly that the elders of Israel "shall hearken to thy voice" (Exodus, 3:18), will it be proper to regard Moses' newest protest as a "flat contradiction"[19] of God's statement? Are we really witnessing here "a clash between God and man"[20] where both parties are discontent with their dialogue? Was Moses soliciting, in effect, from God an additional sign to help him prove his credentials before the people?

Commentator N. Leibowitz is determined that at this time Moses was not expressing merely a humble apology for personal inadequacy but rather an "absolute objection"[21] to God's scenario. It was a showdown between two diametrically opposed projections; on the one hand God's assertion that the

Israelite elders will follow fully Moses' leadership, and on the other hand Moses' profession to the contrary. Indeed, Leibowitz finds support to her position in the midrash where it is stated that Moses did not only speak "improperly" but even deserved punishment for libeling the elders of Israel [22]. To be sure, the midrash (and likewise Rashi) makes no attempt to defend Moses on this account or find somehow a fictitious explanation of Moses' lack of trust in God's own assurances. Leibowitz challenges further the exegesis of other 'Rishonim' such as Ibn Ezra, Nachmanides and Maimonides who discern no conflict between God's and Moses' statements; Moses, in other words, raised doubts merely about issues which were not covered in God's statements.

Ibn Ezra thus states that Moses did not question at all the Israelite leaders' trust of him; Moses only doubted the trust of the people as a whole. Ibn Ezra is evidently uncertain of this explication for he provides an alternative version, namely, Moses was not questioning the elders' actual responsiveness to his leadership; he was only doubtful of their heart-felt belief in his word. Leibowitz rejects this interpretation outright. She sees no Scriptural reason to relate Moses' fear of the elders' incredulity to the entire people or alternatively to confine it only to the elders' visceral feelings.

Nachmanides notes that Moses did not negate God's assurance of the leaders' responsiveness in the short range. Moses was only doubting their continued belief in his word following the anticipated failure of the first attempt to secure the Pharaoh's consent for the pilgrimage to the wilderness. Again, Leibowitz finds no indication in Scripture to warrant such an exegesis for a would be key word is absent in Moses' reply, i.e., "they will not believe me ['anymore'], nor hearken ['anymore'] unto my voice".

Maimonides in his commentary notes that Moses understood God's assurances of the elders' compliance with him only as it related to their belief in their ancestral Deity. That Moses did not doubt; he questioned only the elders' belief in his story and his message. At any rate, common to these three commentators is their defense of Moses against any accusation of disbelief in God' word. Moses, in other words, did not gainsay the promises he received from God or took issue with them as such. All that Moses did was to pose a new question or express another hesitation. Leibowitz, however, cannot conceal her implied opinion that such constructions as exhibited above by these 'Rishonim' constitutes an unwarranted favoritism towards a giant like Moses.[23]

Cassutto comprehends the exegetic problem in a different way altogether. Not only doesn't he detect any contradiction between Exodus 3:18 and 4:1, he actually declares them to be "interdependent". In other words, Moses understood that God's assurance of the elders' acceptance of his undertaking did not mean that such an acceptance would be effective immediately. Hence, in expressing his fear that he might be considered "a liar"[24], Moses was signalling to his sender that divine signs would win for him the trust of the Israelite leaders. A. Hacham in his commentary posits likewise that Moses was basically telling God that the elders of Israel would not believe in his agency unless he could administer another divine sign. The first one, that of revealing to him and to the people the tetragrammaton and its meaning was not sufficient; Moses needed an additional sign to corroborate the genuineness of his revelation and his mandate.[25]

E. Divine Signs

The fact of the matter is that the whole idea of employing signs did not originate with Moses but with God. Initially, when the former expressed doubts of his personal suitability to undertake the mission God responded in promising a future confirmatory sign at the same site of the first theophany. That sign was meant to instill confidence in Moses and to lay aside his fears. That, however, did not happen and Moses still feeling powerless in the role of a leader (and liberator) requested tacitly a concrete sign of authentication. Understanding Moses' exigency -- "that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers . . . hath appeared unto thee" (Exodus 4:5) -- God meets this need by enabling His called one to effect ominous wonders that are seemingly impossible tasks. This is the first time in the Torah where a man of God is equipped with such abilities "to verify his commission."[26]

These signs are three in number; the first is the transformation of Moses' shepherd's crook into a deadly snake and back into a rod. In first asking Moses a seemingly simplistic question-"what is that in your hand"? God propels Moses to realize that the staff in his hand was nothing else but an object that always accompanied him; a mere ordinary stick. That fact alone was "to make his amazement at the sign that would be wrought before his eyes all the greater."[27] And indeed, when God told Moses to cast his rod down and it turned into a serpent, Moses fled in fright. Thereupon God instructed him to take the snake by the tail as Moses obeyed the command the snake was transformed again into a rod. This particular snake stunt had unique characteristics; snake handlers invariably apply their skills by pressing back of the snake's head thus managing to paralyze

the reptile which in turn stiffens straight like a rod. When it is thrown down, "the jolt removes the effects of the paralysis and the snake slithers off."[28]

The customary Egyptian snake enchantment featured this procedure: serpent -- "rod" -- serpent, but Moses' sign reversed the conditions to feature: staff-serpent-staff even as Moses "was especially instructed to take the snake by its tail to enhance the wonderment". (As a rule, snakes are held by their necks to prevent them from biting.) Given the fact that the serpent was a most prominent symbol in the Pharaoh's royal crown, the snake feat now entrusted to the hands of Moses symbolized that "God was able to do in Egypt according to His will."[29]

When his introduction to the first sign ends Moses is silent. His reticence might have indicated that he was still harboring doubts about his call and remained, therefore, irreconcilable to the idea of the mission.[30] Alternatively, it has been suggested that God Himself did not permit Moses to speak again lest he expressed misgivings about this sign.[31] At any rate, God deems it necessary to provide Moses with a consecutive sign because the first sign did not seem to be all-persuasive. Hence, Moses is commanded (rather than requested) to put his healthy hand into his bosom; on withdrawing it the hand was "leprous, as white as snow". Another divine command sends Moses' diseased hand back to his bosom, and as he pulls it back the hand was whole again.

The serpent sign suited the land of Egypt where magic with snakes was practiced by Egyptian enchanters a long time before Moses. Similarly, leprosy too was widespread in ancient Egypt. Hence "its removal from Moses' hand was a miraculous feat" in view of the fact that this grievous malady was incurable. [32] All in all, this dramatic display of supernatural powers did not require Moses to make

use of anything that was not normally with or on him, i.e., his shepherd's staff or his own very hand. In other words these signs were to be performed with an absolute minimum of materiel or gear. Above all, they were to demonstrate Moses' capability at controlling the dramatic event and thereby attest to his unique relationship with God.

As at the conclusion of the first sign so it is at the conclusion of the second, Moses is given no opportunity to pronounce even a single word. And again it is as God is still who gives expression to what might have been going on at this juncture in Moses' own mind; the thought that neither sign nor their combination will propel the people to accept him as their emancipator. God's ensuing words seek to impart to Moses the feeling of understanding of his state of mind. Their tone is rather gentle and devoid of anything that might be indicative of criticism or disappointment. God tells Moses that if the two signs should fail to fulfill their objective, he still will be able to further prove his divine mission by transforming the Nile water into blood.

To be sure, the latest sign was not immediately effective like its two other predecessors; it was only contained in the form of a promise as Moses was still far away from the Nile. But even so it was to be the most impressive sign yet. In fact, when the essence of these three signs is examined it is possible to discern that each succeeding one was meant to be more impressive than its predecessor. As mentioned above snake enchantment was not an unknown commodity in Egypt, but curing leprosy was miraculous indeed; it "represented a greater natural wonder"[33] than the previous sign. And most significantly was the irreversible alteration of the awesomely admired Nile water -- Egypt's source of life and fertility. Unlike the first two signs where each changed object returned to its

original condition, the blood would not revert back to water as it would be absorbed in the earth. In fact, the Nile was perceived as a deity in Egypt, and when its water was to be cut off by Moses' God the resultant affect was bound to become all-convincing.

Having revealed the nature of the latest sign it is God who presently becomes silent in sharp contrast to His one-way speaking to Moses at the conclusion of the first and second signs. The message to Moses is unmistakable and need not be articulated at all; with the performance of the third sign the people will surely believe in his mission and embrace his leadership.[34] Hence, the dialogue between God and his chosen emissary on the feasibility of the mission must come to a close. That, however, did not happen, at least not yet.

D. Moses Questions his Eloquence

Even after receiving the extraordinary ability to perform divine feats Moses' inner struggle continued unabatedly with all of its accompanying heavy hesitations and anxiety; for the fourth time Moses states an objection. "In a most unheroic fashion"[35] he pleads again his personal inadequacy, saying, "Oh Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since Thou hast spoken unto thy servant: for I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue"(Exodus 4:10). This time, however, Moses' self-professed inadequacy does not pertain to his lowly social status; rather, it is a certain physical or mental impediment which deters him now from assuming his call. Thus, his slow speech or unpleasant voice must perforce disqualify him from the mission. In commencing his beseech with an expression of entreaty "Oh Lord" Moses was, in effect, appealing to God's compassion to rid him from the mission that he did not desire to assume.

Some biblical exegetes press hard to eke out a commentary that seeks to understand, if not to defend Moses' fourth attempt to seemingly 'dodge the draft'. The Rashbam, for instance, explains that Moses was merely doubting his proficiency of Egyptian; a language he had not used for many years. (The thought of Moses using an interpreter -- Joseph used one --did not occur, apparently, to the Rashbam.). Another biblical commentator Shadal suggests that Moses' lack of eloquence and oratory skills was exacerbated by his old age; hence, going to "the great monarch to argue with him"[36]was a physically hard undertaking for a man of his age. (Wasn't Shadal aware that even forty years later at the time of his death Moses' "eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated"?!) Other commentators would rather underline Moses' great humility in admitting his speech deficiencies which he thought would affect adversely his diplomatic negotiations with Pharaoh. Cassuto would only go as far as admitting that Moses' reasoning for being excused on the basis of his lacking oratory was couched "with some exaggeration."[37]

Still, in spite of these attempts to understand Moses' attitude, it is hard to avoid the impression that at this phase of the dialogue his obstinate reluctance to yield his misgivings and doubts, and accept the call was unbecoming of him; a man who respected and revered justice for its own sake more than his own welfare. Moses might have truly felt that his articulation or eloquence were flawed ; indeed, God does not refute this condition. And yet, his latest objection was invalid for Moses proved to be quite articulate in expressing his difficulties throughout his dialogue with God. Moreover, using his weak communication skills as an excuse to be forgiven may suggest an error on the part of God in appointing Moses for a highly delicate diplomatic undertaking, or that God was somehow oblivious of the particular situation.

To be sure, God puts Moses in his place and promptly gainsays the implied proposition that He was unaware of Moses' lacking communicative condition: "who has made man's mouth" or gives one the power of speech? Moses is asked rhetorically. "Is it not I the Lord" who has sent you? (Exodus 4:11). Clearly then, God is neither going to bypass Moses nor does He lose patience with him. With paternal tone God reassures Moses that he has no reason to cast doubts on his suitability for the task ahead. And just like He did at first at the beginning of their dialogue, God reiterates and even more emphatically: "Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt speak" (Exodus 4:12). The choice of God's words is significant; rather than invoking the more commonly used word for I -- "A'ni" in the Hebrew -- the word is "Anokhi", and then it is followed by "Ehyeh" which symbolizes God's super powers. This wording was designed to further embolden the prophet, and to stress doubly God's commitment to Moses' eloquence.[38]

F. Down to a Plain Refusal

Rather than saying now something like 'Here am I; send me and I shall go', Moses in desperation puts forward one last meek plea for his release from the awesome assignment: "O Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send" (Exodus 4:13) -- that is, 'send anybody but me'. Here Moses recognizes, in effect, that his quiver had run out of arrows; that he was left without any other reasons to argue against his choice as God's emissary to the people of Israel and their Egyptian oppressor. Moses appears now "as though lacking faith in God's capacity to stand by him."[39] His plain request to be excused was not backed now by any logical pretext; it is quite apparent that he did not want the assignment.

Nevertheless, a case could be made that Moses' rejoinder was still short of a categorical 'nay' saying, and that he formulated his words with such deliberate ambiguity that did not exclude him explicitly from assuming the call. He does not accept his mandate whole-heartedly, yet he places the responsibility of making the appointment on God (as though this was not the case until now), thus leaving his name as an option too. Or as Cassuto observes: Moses' reply is "so phrased as to be construed even as an expression of assent."[40] Scripture, however, cannot support this strained attempt at leniency towards Moses. The text says: "And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses"(Exodus 4:14). This is the first time that God is losing patience with his stubborn prophet who had finally managed to irk Him. As long as Moses came up with concrete reasons for his reluctance to accept the mission, God would maintain his patience, even as He responded gently to Moses' arguments. But now, as Moses stated a total refusal citing neither a pretext nor a condition, God's anger was aroused.

G. Aaron Joins the Mission

Nonetheless, if Moses did indeed misconstrue his calling as though it were a summons to oratory, a gift which he did not posses, then, Moses' latest (and last) try of resistance will have to be defused; and at this time with harsh words. In order to remove Moses' last objection God makes a concession to him: "Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite[?] I know that he can speak well"(Exodus, Ibid.). After mentioning the approach of Aaron, God continues relating his solution to Moses' ostensible problem:

> "And you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. He shall speak for you to the

people; and he shall be a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God" (Exodus 4:15-16).

Aaron, in other words, is thereby commissioned as the spokesman for Moses. This Divine plan constitutes in one sense a significant rebuke of Moses even as it makes it clear that God is determined not to bypass Moses, but rather retain him as His authoritative mouthpiece. Moses is not only compelled to acknowledge, albeit implicitly, Aaron's superior speech fluency. He must also hear in 'between the lines' that the latter, unlike himself, "will want to speak" on his behalf without feeling any jealousy for being the spokesman of his junior brother.[41] Moreover, although the coopting of Aaron is done only to appease Moses, it is evident that his need to take a 'partner', and share with him the responsibilities of leadership, constitutes his first failure right at the time of his becoming Israel's first messenger-prophet.[42] While God's original plan contained the assurance: "I will be with thy mouth", the latest plan required the addition: "I will be with thy mouth, and with his [Aaron's] mouth".

The Divine monologue which had turned into a Divine-human dialogue has finally come to a close. And as if there was any doubt about its conclusion, Moses assumes his call despite his hesitations and apparent reluctance. A necessary condition of Moses' commissioning was his safety from persecution by the old Pharaoh (Ramses II?). It is only after God informs him specifically that all those men in Egypt who had sought his life "are dead" that Moses commences in earnest his mission to Egypt as God' agent.

H. Summary

A number of fundamental facts relative to Moses' personality in the pre-revelation stage of his life may be discerned in Scripture. Although compassionate in nature and highly sensitive to the cause of justice, Moses as a prince in the Egyptian court, is no firebrand in the cause of liberty for the Hebrew slaves (notwithstanding the one incident with the Egyptian taskmaster). Certainly, his prolonged persistence in sidestepping his calling underlines the fact that Moses does not volunteer to be Israel's emancipator. To be more specific: God compels him ultimately to go even if against his will. In Martin Buber's words: It is "God's might" that "breaks down [Moses'] refusal" to assume the mission.[43] And although Cassuto sees Moses' "greatness" in that "ineluctably he does all that the will of God imposes upon him,"[44] it is hard to see what other option did Moses possess.

As it seems, we must accept the observation that the whole episode of Moses' call points to a certain failure both on the part of God and His reluctant agent. God was unable to convince His human partner to assume willingly (if not immediately) the monumental task, even as the human party to the dialogue remained consistently in opposition to assume it himself. (According to a midrash Moses believed that his mission should be executed not by humans such as himself but rather by angels.)

On the other hand, the whole episode of the divine commissioning of Moses as a prophet illustrates "how seriously God takes Man". We can first observe that in God's sensitive and accommodating care as not to overwhelm Moses upon witnessing "this great sight" of the flame of fire. In leading him gradually "from

the familiar scrub fire, to the strange unburnableness of the bush, to the awesome heart of the theophany", God allowed Moses retain his composure, and even to engage in a prolonged and mostly "reasoned dialogue" with Him. Moreover, not only does the human partner have "a say in shaping the direction and outcome of the events", there is "genuine give and take" between God and Moses.[45] And last but not least, the elements of Moses' call are recognized to be "the fullest statement . . . of the conditions of God's call and His relation to his messenger" in the Hebrew Bible.[46] N. Habel observes six such elements which are discernible in many other prophets' calls: "1. divine confrontation, 2. introductory word, 3. commission, 4. objection, 5. reassurance, 6. sign."[47]This genre is easily identifiable in the next call considered by this thesis; the call of Gideon.

NOTES

1. Moshe Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus* (New York: Behrman House, 1969), II, p. 71.

2. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. from Hebrew by Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magness Press, 1967), p. 31.

3. *Sh'mot Rabbah*, 3:7.

4. Greenberg, Ibid., p. 91.

5. Leibowitz, Ibid., p.

6. Greenberg, Ibid., p. 56.

7. David Daiches, *Moses* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975), pp. 34-5.

8. *Sh'mot Rabbah*, 2:2.

9. Dorothy F. Zeligs, *Moses -- A Psychodynamic study* (New York: Human Sciences Press, Inc., 1986), p. 63.

10. Cassuto, Ibid., p. 45.

11. Nehamah Leibowitz, *Iyunim Hadashim Besefer Sh'mot* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1970), 56.

12. Zeligs, Ibid., p. 64.

13. Ibid., p. 65.

14. Greenberg, Ibid., p. 80.

15. Ibid., p. 79.

16. Zeligs, Ibid., p. 65.

17. Cassuto, Ibid., p. 65.

18. Leibowitz, Ibid., p. 59.

19. Greenberg, Ibid., p. 87.

20. Andre' Nehar, *Oovekhol Zot* (Jerusalem: Reuven Mass, 1977), p. 150.

21. Leibowitz, Ibid., p. 59.

22. *Sh'mot Rabbah*, 3:13.

23. Leibowitz, Ibid., p. 63.

24. Cassuto, Ibid., p. 45.

25. Amos Hakham, *Sefer Sh'mot* (Jerusalem: Mossad Ha-rav Kook, 1991), p. 56.

26. Yekhezkel Kaufmann, *Toldot Ha-emunah Ha-Yisra'elit* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1967), I-III, p. 733.

27. Cassuto, Ibid., p. 46.

28. Dewey M. Beegle, *Moses the Servant of Yahweh* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Company, 1972), p. 78.

29. Hakham, Ibid., p. 66.

30. Ibid., p. 58.

31. Cassuto, Ibid., p. 47.

32. Ibid.

33. Yehuda Nachshoni, *Studies in the Weekly Parashah*, trans. from Hebrew by Shmuel Himelstein (New York: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1988), II, p. 342.

34. Hakham, Ibid., 60.

35. Zeligs, Ibid., p. 75.

36. Leibowitz, Ibid., p. 58.

37. Cassuto, Ibid., p. 49.

38. Hakham, Ibid., p. 62.

39. Ibid.

40. Cassuto, Ibid.

41. Hakham, Ibid., p. 63.

42. Ibid., p. 65.

43. Martin Buber, *Moshe* (Tel Aviv: Schoken, 1945), p. 36.

44. Cassuto, Ibid., p. 51.

45. Greenberg, Ibid., p. 94.

46. Ibid., p. 91.

47. N. Habel, "The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives", *Zeitscrift fuer die Alttestan-Wissenschaft*, 77-78 (1965-66), 298.

Chapter III: GIDEON

One of the goals of this chapter is to inquire whether Moses' commission bear resemblance to that of Gideon. Was it only the context of the people's predicament, that generated these divine commissions, which may be seen as a common denominator between Moses and Gideon? For, in fact, like the story of Moses, the Gideon account is also set in the context of the people's oppression; this time by the Midianites rather than the Egyptians. The distress of the Israelites was considerable and the narrative describes it in vivid terms; in their destructive raids on grain-growing fields and farms the Midianites and their allies terrorized extensive parts of the land "so Israel was brought very low . . . and the sons of Israel cried to the Lord" (Judges, 6:6). In portraying Gideon ("the valiant warrior") beating out "wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites" (Judges 6:11), the narrator symbolizes the plight of all Israel.

In the Moses narrative we also read that "the cry of the children of Israel" came unto God; the word "ve-'ata" (therefore come now) functions there as the reasoning for the commissioning of Moses. In the Gideon narrative the same word appears in his lamentation to his visitor: "But now the Lord has abandoned us" (Judges 6:13); and just like with Moses, Gideon too as the narrative implies, must be commissioned.

A. Divine Confrontation

It was while he was threshing his wheat that the "angel of the Lord" appeared to Gideon; not only was it at a time of a national crisis, it was "in the midst of his normal routine activities."[1] Just like Moses who stumbled unsuspectingly upon the "great sight" in the course of his duties as a shepherd so is Gideon suddenly disrupted by a divine confrontation. Gideon's ensuing call commissioning him to deliver Israel from the hand of Midian resembles that of Moses. Like Moses Gideon too witnessed a theophany which he was able to comprehend with the senses; he saw, spoke to, and understood the angel of the Lord. It was this divine revelation that qualified Gideon as a judge-prophet. Before turning to the analysis of this initial divine interruption in Gideon's life it is incumbent on us to try and explain the reasons for the election of Gideon as God's agent.

B. The Introductory Word

Just like with Moses the Biblical narrative can hardly tell us anything tangible about Gideon's life prior to his oracular encounter with the angel of the Lord. The reader, therefore, must rely on possible clues or tiny pieces of information that may be found in between the lines. Significant, perhaps, is the telling title conferred by the divine messenger upon Gideon at the commencement of their encounter:"O valiant warrior". It is hard to avoid wondering on what basis was Gideon so designated? Moreover, as he calls upon Gideon to assume the task of a national deliverer the angel refers to Gideon's seemingly already existing might: "Go in this your strength". Is it possible, therefore, that the calling simply brings to light the fact that Gideon had already exhibited some meaningful military strength?

Although there is no certainty in such a construction I am inclined to think that this was the case.

In Judges 8:18 we find a possible clue if not a reference to a previous military clash between the Midianite invaders and the Israelites where some of Gideon's brothers were killed. Could it be, therefore, that the angel of God's references to Gideon's strength and bravery give us a clue as to his previous (and unsuccessful) attempt to liberate the land from the enemy oppressor? Wishing perhaps to avenge his brother's death in addition to the national stake, Gideon is ready for the right moment to resume the war of liberation. Yet he was waiting for a divine signal or sign to start action; "he was expecting that God will raise him and send him." Gideon, in other words, was hankering for a new divine revelation to his people; one that will lead to its deliverance from the present distress.[2]

Thus when the divine messenger seeks to convey to him that very signal saying: "the Lord is with you", Gideon should have customarily replied :"May the Lord bless you."[3] This reply would have indicated that Gideon took the blessing of the passerby (Gideon did not recognize yet his guest's divinity) as personal. But Gideon, experiencing personally and individually the national pain, seizes upon the occasion to invoke the question that stirred his soul -- the plight of Israel -- even though the issue was yet to be raised by the guest. In his humility and patriotism Gideon attributes this assurance to the whole of his people even as the contrast between reality and the blessing prompts him to sound a protest: "If the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us?" (Judges 6:13).

C. The Commission

As far as Gideon was concerned his talk heretofore was with a notable passerby; Gideon speaks to him with modesty and respectfully as though acknowledging the guest's seniority over him.[4] But now that guest (who will be shortly recognized as God's envoy) faces Gideon directly and commissions him as Israel's deliverer in the war with Midian: "Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian" (Judges 6:14). As mentioned above the reference to Gideon's already existing strength might have had to do with his earlier military initiative to become the very deliverer that his Divinely conferred commission called him now to. The midrash, however, identifies Gideon's strength not in his physical prowess but rather in his spiritual strength with which he individualized the national distress as his very own. According to the midrash Gideon stood out in his preparedness and readiness to take Israel's case before God Himself. In those days of trouble sinful Israel had very little merit to motivate any one individual to voice words of merit on its behalf. Gideon in his protest against Heaven proved his compassion and love for his people as well as his piety and faith that Israel's deliverance was attainable only with the help of their God; hence Gideon's election as God's commissioned agent.[5]

D. The Objection

Having been confronted by the Lord's angel and having heard his opening words Gideon was then called upon to "go in this might of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you"? (6:14) Gideon's initial response came, in fact, before the commission to deliver Israel is defined. In that sense his pattern of objection varied from that of Moses' who commenced his objection only after a

definite Divine calling. Gideon apparently anticipated his imminent call in the angel's reference to him as a "mighty man of valour", a reference which as noted above might have had to do with Gideon's earlier attempt to contain the Midianite hostility.

At any rate, this designation stood now in a painful contrast to Gideon's lowly and helpless status of a man forced to thresh his wheat at an out of the way winepress , for he desired to hide it from the enemy. Simply put, Gideon found it hard to believe that anyone would still follow his military leadership after the first defeat, and that he would be able to save his people.[6] Presently, however, Gideon not only hesitates, he challenges and expresses doubt: "O my lord, and if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened? And where are his wonders"(6:13). Moreover, it may be further claimed that Gideon's choice of using the *waw* conversive lends an ironic, even sarcastic tone to his challenging barbs.

Nonetheless, Gideon's initial hesitation to accept the calling was probably uttered before he was aware of his honored guest's divinity. But when the calling was defined specifically Gideon addresses the angel as " 'Adonai" thus signalling tacitly his realization that God Himself was revealed to him through this envoy. Still, Gideon continues to vacillate by protesting the weakness of his tribe, his family, and himself in his father's house as the reason for his insufficiency for the task ahead. Significantly, when the (still unrecognized) angel of the Lord addressed Gideon as an individual: "the Lord is with you, O valiant warrior", the man responded in the plural taking these words as referring to *the people* as a whole. And again when the divinity of the messenger became apparent and Gideon was commissioned due to his personal strength, the man claimed his inadequacy for the task because "my *family* is the least in Menasseh, and I am the youngest in my

father's house"(6:15). As it seems Gideon seeks to 'dodge the draft' by resorting to irrelevant factors; he consistently shifts the focus from himself to the pathetic weakness of the people or to the purported insignificance of his father's household.

Gideon's seeming reference to the (economic) weakness of his household is probably an exaggeration stemming from his humility.[7] The narrative imply, in fact, that his family was one of rank and influence in their town. Joash, his father, is described as a well-respected man of property in his town, and his sons who fell in battle were described by the two captured Midianite chiefs as "resembling the sons of a king" (Judges 8:18). Truly, Gideon did not claim that his father's house was not important in their small city of Ofrah; he pointed out, however, to its "paucity of numbers and lack of influence in the affairs of the tribe" as a whole.[8] In Gideon's mind the status of his household in their town did not impart to him the importance required for heading a national mission.

Further, since the ruling helm in biblical Israel was in the hands of the "elders", Gideon the youngest son in the family quite possibly was without any significant influence.[9] The claim that Gideon was already an independent man within the clan in view of the fact that his firstborn son was old enough to bear arms[10] is dubious in my judgment. Also, it is not unlikely that by describing himself as the least in his father's house Gideon was referring to the fact "that the other household members considered him so because he had been standing by himself against their Baal-approving desires". Indeed, it is stated in the narrative that when he carried out God's command to shatter the local Baal high place (Judges 6:25-27), he used ten of his own servants , "because he feared his father's household" as well as "the men of the city". It is apparent then that Gideon "was not popular in his own home.[11]

All in all, Gideon's modesty and objection in this context is clearly reminiscent of the Moses' commission. The latter initially demurred claiming he was nobody, whereas Gideon objected on grounds of being the least in the weakest clan in the tribe; it is essentially the same objection. Apparently, the precedent established during the Moses' enlistment was well-known in Israel. Thus voicing doubts and concerns about one's qualifications as God's emissary sounded in Gideon's case as though it was almost to be expected, or better yet as though it was a normal operating procedure. Or as it has been rendered by one scolar: "any man called directly to serve the God of Israel is by the nature of things unworthy"[12]; this theme is, therefore, a likely candidate of becoming a part of a stereotyped response in similar future instances.

E. The Reassurance

As with Moses God does not address in any fashion Gideon's sense of personal inadequacy; the issue from God's vantage point is impertinent. If God's reticence may still be taken to indicate a concurrence it would also be a concurrent statement that Gideon's insignificant past status is irrelevant to his election to a preferred stature. For God the important thing at this juncture is to relay immediately an oath of assurance to his called prophet: "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man" (Judges 6:16). For Gideon this divine assurance meant "the total annihilation of Midian; the victory was a foregone conclusion."[13]

This two-part divine assurance addressed, in effect, Gideon's initial provocative expression of doubt whether the Lord was with the people to begin with (see v. 13); it also answered Gideon's subsequent doubtful wondering as to how he was to deliver Israel in view of his complete inadequacy for this task (v. 15). Significantly,

the precise words of reassurance-"Ki Ehyeh imakh" (I will be with you) are found in Exodus 3; the Divine's words of response to Moses when he expressed his personal inadequacy. Moreover God, just as He did to reassure Moses, invokes again that variant of His name --"Ehyeh"-- thus proclaiming that the all-powerful Divine was behind Gideon; hence, the latter will certainly smite the Midianites. This theme of cause and effect (what Habel calls a "theological formula") is thus aimed at rendering Gideon enlistment "inescapable."[14]

F. Divine Signs

The narrative indicates specifically that it was the Lord Himself who was revealed to Gideon (presumably through the angel) in order to commission him (v. 14). Indeed, just before he pulls his low rank as an excuse for exemption from the mission, Gideon addresses his interlocutor by the name "Adonai", thus recognizing him, in effect, as God's emissary. (Moses too used this very name just before voicing his fifth objection.) Gideon, however, persists in his skepticism. Although he presently understands that his interlocutor is a divine envoy, Gideon is still unsure whether this divine protagonist was truly an angel of God speaking to him in the name of the Lord. This puzzlement as to the exact identity of Gideon's visitor may have to do with the fact that the narrative is comprised of various elements; when joined together these elements produce "confusion" in the story.[15]

Nevertheless even after being reassured that it was no other than "Ehyeh" who was enlisting him for a mission destined to succeed, Gideon politely requested a confirmatory sign to his surmise that God Himself was enlisting him for the mission (v. 17). Moses, to be sure, did not ask for such a sign; in the first place he knew! that God was speaking to him from the burning bush. Secondly, Moses was

provided with such a sign (albeit one with a delayed fulfillment). Common, however to these signs is the fact that both were meant to prove that God Himself was sending the men on their missions. Still, in asking for such a proof Gideon showed that he "was very slow to recognize the speech of God"[16] in the voice of the stranger sitting under the tree.

Unlike Moses who had nothing to do with the choice of his divine signs, it is Gideon himself who decides about the ingredients to be used in the requested sign -- a whole course of meal. This element further complicates the story because it is unclear whether Gideon first meant to feed (sumptuously to be sure) his honored guest and then receive a sign, or alternatively have the sign performed with the provided food. Moses' signs were particularly characterized by their minimal and modest paraphernalia. On the basis of this tradition there was no need for Gideon to sacrifice for a sign an abundance of food (Judges 6:19); food that was an expensive (if not a rare) commodity in this period of deprivation.

On the other hand, it is implausible that an actual meal would be offered by Gideon to an angel of the Lord; to be sure, Gideon does not place the meal on an altar but serves it to his guest at the place of his sitting "under the oak". (Abraham served food to angels only because he did not know that this is what they were.) And yet, before one is to take this episode as a proof that Gideon did not recognize yet the divine nature of the stranger, there is a need to reckon with the fact that Gideon refers to the food not as a meal but rather as "my offering" (Judges 6:18). Still, had he known that the food he provided to his guest would be utilized for the sign which he had requested, Gideon would have himself placed the offering on the rock.

The solution to the dilemma may lie in a construction that recognizes on the one hand that Gideon presently knew that his interlocutor was "a supernatural being."[17] That observation was sufficient for him to understand that the guest would not partake any of the offered food. Gideon proceeded, nonetheless, with the customary hospitality as the guest did resemble a passerby walking with a staff. Gideon's offering "was neither a real sacrifice nor a real meal: it looked like one, but was served as an object for the performance of a sign."[18] Hence, Gideon requests a sign that would verify his premonition that the guest is divine. On the other hand, although he thinks he knows who this inordinate being is, and believes that his request for a sign would be answered, Gideon does not have yet "an absolute certitude" of his divinity. For thus far "he has seen nothing yet . . . that would appear to have the vision of God."[19] And indeed, up until the time when the sign does take place Gideon does not shield his eyes from looking at his visitor.

Gideon's request for a confirmatory sign is fulfilled when brilliant flaming fire springs suddenly from the rock to consume the food that he laid there. The uniqueness of this sign stems from the fact that the fire came forth from the rock itself and not from heaven as in all other similar instances.[20] This sign was made even more impressive since Gideon poured out the broth on the food; the effect of wetting (and possibly chilling) the meat and the unleavened bread should have rendered them more resistant for such fire.[21] Topping it all was the fact that the angel of the Lord disappeared at once from Gideon's sight without really walking away. Only now Gideon is made fully aware of the fact that his guest was a bona fide angel of the Lord, and that the scene he had just witnessed was an authentic divine sign which confirmed his mission.

Unlike Moses who did hide his face from the sight of the burning bush, Gideon who was seeing the angel face to face ,feels lost. Further, Moses experienced a similar trepidation at the beginning of the vision, but Gideon was filled with acute apprehension at the end of the vision. Three short divine statements that Gideon hears in a vision right after the theophany are supposed to put him at ease, and to assure him that he would not die. From this time on God will be revealed to Gideon through an ordinary prophetic fashion that would not scare the wits out of him again.[22] Rashi understands Gideon's terrific fright following the theophany at the rock site, not in terms of his fearing to die for seeing the angel. Rather, in saying: "Alas, O Lord God! for now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face", Gideon was further exhibiting hesitation whether he truly deserved to look at the angel, and whether he would be able to remain further on the same spiritual level that was imparted to him by the angel and the speech of God.[23]

At any rate, Gideon's vacillation and uncertainties about the success of his mission do not end with the first sign. Gideon needed such a sign to be completely sure that his guest was truly commissioning him in the name of the Lord. And although this particular doubt was finally laid to rest Gideon felt that another sign was needed to dispel his last-minute doubts as to his fitness for the mission; the indelible memory of his first defeat by the hand of the Midianites was apparently high on his mind. Notwithstanding the topical interruption in the biblical text between the first sign and those that follow it, it is widely accepted that the narrative of the signs should be read in sequence.[24] Namely, the subject matter of 6:36-40 is the continuation of the story of Gideon's call. Thus; Gideon's requests for the proof of the angel's identity, and then the proof and forecast of the success of the task laid upon him should be viewed as one integral continuum.

Unlike the previous request for a sign that was addressed to Gideon's divine visitor, Gideon sets his new request for a sign before God; he is certain now that it was God who was actually speaking to him all along. Presently, however, God does not speak back as the angel did, but He cooperates with Gideon's urgent need for a reassurance of a victory right before his offensive against the enemy.

While apparently still at Ophrah Gideon requests that only the fleece of wool that he would put on the threshing floor for the night absorbs dew. Should this be the case and the ground around remains dry Gideon would certainly know that God had really meant what He had said in the enlistment interview. The choice of the unconcealed threshing floor as the site for the sign was significant because it was this open place that even Gideon did not dare to use for beating out wheat in fear of the Midianites. Moreover, the dew which symbolizes a divine gift of grace which never ends will be witnessed especially in the place of distress; albeit according to Gideon's wish solely in the fleece of wool.[25] The symbolism of the latter element may be seen in that this heavenly miracle of abundance would descend on the weakling while being deprived from the numerous surrounding Midianites.[26]

The sign as far as Gideon was concerned turned out to be only partially fulfilled. The fleece of wool did absorb an inordinate amount of dew -- a full bowl; the narrator probably would not have specified this detail unless it was an unusual volume. Nevertheless, the other part of the sign did not materialize as the ground in the threshing floor was not dry. That Rashi explains had to happen the way it did because God would never withhold the provision of dew from reaching the ground.[27]But since it was only natural that the fleece would absorb more dew than the earth around it, Gideon did not suffice with the first sign, and he felt a need for another sign. Very politely if not apologetically he asked for a second sign in a row;

a reversal of the process so that only the fleece of wool will stay dry. This time the sign was fully performed; in fact, the text indicates meaningfully that "God did so that night" -- an editorial remark that is absent from the narrative of the former sign. Gideon's last doubts were thereby removed and he assumed the command of the Israelite army.

G. Summary

Like Moses, Gideon too required three divine signs before accepting earnestly his mission. Both expressed serious doubts and uncertainties about their personal qualifications and their prospects for a successful mission. In both cases God exhibits patience and understanding towards His reluctant prophets. The theophany experienced by Moses at the site of the burning bush may resemble the one that Gideon experienced by the oak tree. In both instances God is careful to introduce the theophany gradually lest the human party would be scared off. Just as the sight of the burning bush might have appeared initially as a natural phenomenon to Moses so is the appearance of the angel of the Lord by the oak tree; his divinity is revealed only gradually, thus allowing Gideon to consider his commission in a non-abrupt fashion.

God does not criticize the prophets for their professed hesitation and concerns nor does He express disappointment at them over this matter. When it becomes apparent that Moses was not completely impressed with the first sign of the serpent God had no qualms about providing another sign and even more impressive than the former. Gideon's latest sign also appears to be more persuasive than its predecessor if not miraculous. To be sure, God does not appear to regard Gideon's request for that sign as a lack of faith in His word. In fact, the pattern of repeated

inquiries of God's thinking prior to a war or any other important action, was a "very realistic"[28] element in that particular period.

Further, both Moses and Gideon reveal true humility in their expressions of personal inadequacy for their respective divine mission. Such humility appears, therefore, to be a necessary characteristic for God's prophet. In the final analysis, both Moses and Gideon who were dubious of their personal capabilities to carry out the tasks they were called for, were sent to their missions against their will. Their ultimate successful missions were a direct outcome not of their own abilities, but of the all-powerful God who commissioned them.

NOTES

1. Habel, Ibid.
2. Yekhezkel Kaufmann, *Sefer Shoftim* (Kiryat-Sefer, Ltd., 1968), pp. 153, 159.
3. Ibid.
4. Yehuda Elitzur, *Sefer Shoftim* (Jerusalem: Mosad Ha-rav Kook, 1976), p. 80.
5. *Tanhumah*, Shoftim:4.
6. Elitzur, Ibid., p. 86.
7. Kaufmann, Ibid., p. 160.
8. C. F. Burney, *The Book of Judges* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1970), p. 189.
9. Kaufmann, Ibid.
10. Alberto J. Soggin, *Judges, A Commentary*, trans. from Italian into English by John Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), p. 119.
11. Leon Wood, *The Distressing Days of the Judges* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p. 206.
12. Soggin, Ibid., p. 120.
13. Habel, Ibid., p. 301.
14. Ibid.
15. Kaufmann, Ibid., p. 157.
16. Robert G. Boling, *Judges* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1975), The Anchor Bible, p. 129.

17. Burney, Ibid., p. 190.

18. Kaufmann, Ibid., p. 158.

19. Kaufmann, Ibid., p. 161.

20. Ibid.

21. Yitshak Levi, *Parshiot Besifrei Ha-neviim: Sefer Shoftim* (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1991), p. 103.

22. Kaufmann, Ibid., p. 162.

23. Levi, Ibid., p. 104.

24. Soggin, Ibid., p.132.

25. Levi, Ibid., p. 113.

26. *Yalkut M'am Loez, Shoftim* (Jerusalem: Or Hadash, 1973), p. 89.

27. Menachem Cohen, ed., *Mikra'ot Gedolot 'Haketer': Joshua, Judges* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 1992), p. 121.

28. Kaufmann, Ibid., p. 152.

Chapter IV: SAUL

Unlike Abraham, Moses (and perhaps Gideon too), Saul is not a prophet; he does not see apparitions or gazes at divine signs the way Moses or Gideon did. Still, does that mean that Saul did not receive a divine call, and may not, therefore, warrant a discussion of his case within the delimited confines of this thesis? This thesis will attempt, however, to show that Saul's call to kingship did have "a prophetic root", not only through the intermediary role of Samuel the seer, but also because Saul himself was endowed (even if only for a short time) with the actual ability to prophesy.[1] Would it be correct then to say that Saul's commission originated with the Divine, and as such "he is God's agent just as are the prophets, although [unlike Saul] they are called upon to announce God's word"?[2] Moreover, this thesis will try and determine whether the account of Saul's commission may resemble the similar literary, form and thematic structure of the call accounts which N. Habel observes in the stories of Moses, Gideon and other prophets.

The election of Saul as Israel's (first) king was an event brought up at a time of a security predicament in which the Israelites found themselves towards the end of the second millennium. The similarity between this setting and the respective backgrounds to the rise of Moses and Gideon as Israel's preeminent national leaders is, therefore, evident. Samuel who had succeeded to unify the people as its spiritual leader and religious judge was unable, nonetheless, to save Israel from the encroaching Philistines and its other enemies. As he became old it became clear that he stood no chance of being succeeded by his sons (I Samuel, 8:5). The elders of Israel were insistent on an alternative type of leadership; a leadership that would succeed where Samuel was unable to deliver, i.e., solving the crisis of security. The

elders of Israel were thus appealing to Samuel :"Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us - - - that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles" (I Samuel 8:5,20).

The severity of the national situation at this time found expression in God's revealed message to Samuel concerning the designated king: ". . . and he shall deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have regarded my people [the Septuagint translation renders: "my people's *misery*"] because their cry has come to Me" (Samuel 9:16). The resemblance between this divine statement to Moses' similar oracle at Mt. Sinai (see Exodus 3:7, 9) is easily detectable. Besides the Philistines the Ammonites added a measure of security problem in their growing pressures on Jabesh-gilead. Clearly then, Israel's distress was both domestic and external. The lack of a promising successor to Samuel as the leader of the people, along with the urgent need for a strong military leader which Samuel had never been, and the punishment inflicted upon the Israelites by their hostile neighbors constituted the setting of the emergence of a new leader in Israel. The reluctance of Israel's elders to consider Samuel's sons as likely successors of their father transferred, in effect, the hegemony in Israel to the tribe of Benjamin.

A. Divine Confrontation

Unlike the elaborate visionary element of the confrontation in the call of Moses this element is not greatly elaborated in the story of Saul. Yet, it is similar to the call of Gideon despite the fact that God Himself is the agent of confrontation even as Gideon was confronted by the angel of the Lord. That Saul's initial confrontation with the Divine was different from the patterns we have met heretofore, can be seen

in the fact that his call and commission was issued through the intermediary role played by God's prophetic agent Samuel.

But the similarity between Saul's (via Samuel) divine confrontation and those of Moses' and Gideon's may be observed in that all three men stumbled abruptly and with no previous inkling upon the divine blueprint to commission them. The narrative thus designates Saul for the monarchy while he is in the midst of a routine action, searching for his father's lost she-asses. Similarly Moses' and Gideon's enlistments occurred when pasturing the flock of his father-in-law or while beating out wheat in his father's winepress respectively.

B. The Introductory Word

The introductory words of the Divine to Moses and Gideon correspond similarly to Samuel's receiving of God's word concerning the Benjaminite man with whom he was to meet on the morrow. Samuel is instructed to anoint the man to be "nagid"(prince) -- a designated king -- so he shall deliver the Israelites from the hand of the Philistines. As noted above God Himself reveals the urgency of the crisis in words reminiscent of the call of Moses. And although the formal commissioning will only take place on the following morning it is evident that the actual designation of Saul as king-elect takes place in the first exchange between Samuel and Saul; again this is also reminiscent of Gideon's actual commissioning which preceded the formal word to this effect.

Hence, when Samuel extends an invitation to Saul to dine with him even as he significantly asks him: "And for whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for you and for all your father's household"? (Samuel 9:19-20), it becomes apparent

that the monarchy will be given to Saul. Unlike the understanding of some commentators who maintain that Saul did "not immediately grasp the import of [this] statement",[3] it is evident that Saul was fully aware of Samuel's search for a man worthy of becoming the king of Israel. Indeed, Saul's stereotyped self-admission of lowly stature (Samuel 9:21) indicates clearly that he understood immediately Samuel's coded statement; namely, it is he who was singled out by God to become king and deliver Israel.

In fact, the key word which verifies this proposition is "eshlakh". It is contained in God's introductory word to Samuel: "About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over My people Israel . . ." (Samuel 9:16). This significant verb is utilized similarly in Gideon's actual commissioning and is contained in the wording "Halo shlakhtikha" (or "Have I not sent you?"). And perhaps most significant is the utilization of this verb in Moses' commission: "Ve-'ata lekha ve-eshlakhakha el Paroh" (or "Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh").

C. Why Saul?

Since one of the objectives of this thesis is to define God's criteria for selecting a man to serve as His agent, the following discussion will seek to probe Saul's particular qualifications which might have figured in his choice for the monarchy. As in the cases of Abraham, Moses and Gideon it is seemingly hard to pinpoint a single factor which determined that choice. Saul's pre-anointment narrative is seemingly a simplistic story which reads like a fairy tale about an immature and a handsome youth, who while looking for lost she-asses finds himself a kingdom. It

has to challenge us, therefore, to look for any possible clue that might lead to a plausible explanation for the choice of Saul as king.

Scripture tells us that Saul's father --Kish -- was a kin to the "Benjaminite" Becorath family, that was probably related to Ehud ben Gera "the Benjamite" judge. If this association is correct, then it might be said that Saul's family was known for its tradition of rebelling against a foreign ruler, and perhaps also as a member of the leading class within its tribe.[4] Indeed the narrator calls Kish a "gibbor khayil" (or a powerful man) -- a title which besides its "military connotation" implies also "economic power" that usually identifies "the taxable gentry."[5]

Saul himself is first introduced by the narrator in the special information about Kish; in it Saul is described to be of a commanding physique, and as the most comely figure in Israel. In fact, Saul's imposing bearing is a detail which the narrator notes twice. Similarly, Scripture also makes mention of the infant Moses' goodly look, and refers tacitly and indirectly to Gideon's physical beauty.

Saul is further described as a sturdy and simple farm youth "without high ambition."[6] Like Moses and Gideon Saul too exhibits filial loyalty towards his father and adheres faithfully to the quite ordinary (if not frequent) mission that his father sends him on. During his journey with the servant Saul demonstrates (besides his inexperience with such overnight trips) his agreeable personality; he treats his servant with absolute respect and dignity, and does not hesitate to rely on him for guidance. All in all, Saul is revealed in his humility, shyness, and is portrayed as an utterly ordinary individual.

There is a trend among some prominent biblical scholars to link Saul, even before his anointment, to a movement of young prophets and nazirites headed by Samuel himself; these prophets were designated as warriors for the freedom of Israel. This movement concentrated especially within the tribes of Ephraim and Benjamin and geared itself up for a struggle against the Philistines. Thus it is suggested that as a member of this movement Saul was also a "nazirite warrior" (though not a prophet), and was "consecrated from his mother's womb" to fight for Israel's freedom.[7]

Although Saul is not a prophet and does not commune prophetically with God like Abraham, Moses and Gideon, he is nonetheless associated with prophets and is perforce linked to prophecy. "The spirit of God [that] came upon Saul mightily" (Samuel 11:6) when he heard the messengers of Jabesh-gilead was "undoubtedly a manifestation of his ecstatic trait."[8] Besides this divine spirit, the fact that marriage kinship linked Jabesh-gilead and the Benjamin tribe (see Judges 21:9,14) might have also propelled Saul to a spontaneous action. The messengers from the besieged Jabesh-gilead came to him because his was a leading family in the tribe. Thus, it is coceivable that the ensuing war against the Ammonites took place prior to the installation of Saul as Israel's king-elect; the goal of this campaign was simply the rescuing of family relatives from their predicament.[9]

Indeed, there is a number of compelling factors which have led some commentators to this conclusion; firstly, the story of the battle with the Ammonites makes no allusion to Saul as the anointed one or as the actual king. In fact, Scripture notes specifically that Saul had learned of the Jabesh-gileadite's predicament as he "was coming from the field behind the oxen" (I Samuel 11:5). Further, even the warning that Saul voices against those who would not follow him and Samuel (I Samuel

11:7) raises suspicion whether Samuel was involved in the picture at all. In the first place it seems to me that Saul would have phrased this warning a little differently if he were to include Samuel in it; Samuel's name would have to be invoked before Saul's. And indeed, apart from this warning "Samuel plays no role whatsoever in the delivery of Jabesh-gilead from the Ammonites."[10] This proposition may be also extrapolated from the fact that when Samuel addresses the people in Gilgal, he significantly notes that the popular clamor for a king was generated only after the Ammonite threat became real (I Samuel 12:12).

All in all, Y. Kaufmann who does not subscribe to the proposition that the war against Ammon preceded Saul's anointment ("Saul is not a war hero whose valor is known from before"), notes nonetheless that the sequence of the narrative under our scrutiny "is not necessarily historical", but based rather on arbitrary and editorial considerations. It is the result of variegated traditions which cannot be easily harmonized.[11] With these observations Kaufmann lends effective support to the proposition which recognizes no linkage between chapters ten and eleven. In sum, the sweeping and surprising success of Saul not only in defeating the Ammonites, but not less importantly in mobilizing forces to his army far beyond his own family and tribe, testified clearly to his leadership abilities. Hence, Samuel did not anoint an inexperienced and immature youth as king; Saul was, rather, a skilled military leader with a proven track record.

D. The Commission

How then are we to understand Samuel's invitation to Saul to dine with him, even seating him at the head of the table, and serving him a choice food portion that was deliberately set aside beforehand? May we extrapolate from the account of the sacrificial meal in Ramah that Saul's anointment and appointment as king-desinate was not as accidental as Scripture seems to describe it? Is it possible, after all, that Samuel might have been aware of Saul's successful military experience, even as he extended to Saul that fateful dinner invitation?

To be sure, it was his victory over the Ammonites that attested to the fact that God was with Saul, and that he was already endowed with a divine charisma. From a human perspective, the choice of Saul for a king makes even further sense when one is to reckon with Saul's respected family tradition as a tribal leader. Notwithstanding its small size, the tribe of Benjamin held a central position in Israel for it was within its borders that the present limited public activity of the Israelite tribes was centered.[12]

The anointment of Saul to the office of "nagid" (or king-designate) fulfilled only the first indispensable element in the election of the first Israelite king; it was a testament to Saul's election by God. As a matter of fact, it was essentially similar to the pattern of "call to office visible also in the calls of Gideon (Judges 6:11-16) and Moses (Exodus 3-4)." In all these cases the reception of the divine call was "a thoroughly private experience."[13] **Saul's secret anointment did not only continue the usual pattern of divine commissioning, but kept also the watchful Philistines in the dark. That Saul kept the secret of his anointment even from his family may indicate perhaps that he was still harboring personal doubts about his kingship.**

Last but not least, although the choice of a national leader was first and foremost to be made by God Himself, the present Israelite infant tradition of democracy called for a measure of a popular role in the overall process of election; it was the assembly of the people at Mizpah that would confirm by acclamation the choice of God.

E. The Negative Response to the Call

As we have seen thus far both Moses and Gideon questioned their personal adequacy or worthiness for the tasks they were called to assume. We have also noted as exemplified in the case of Gideon that in doubting his qualifications for the mission Gideon might have patterned his response after the precedent that Moses had established. In the story of Saul we find again a similar version of what seems as an expression of hesitation if not outright reluctance on the part of Saul to assume the kingship and the responsibilities that it entailed. In treating this issue we would attempt to understand the nature of Saul's response to his call. In other words, were Saul's appeals to the humbleness of his origins a true reflection of reality or just a normative reaction of a man called into divine service?

This thesis is open to the possibility that when embarking on his purported search for the lost she-asses, Saul was knowingly heading for a conference with Samuel concerning his designation as a king. Yet, as the narrative indicates, Saul became more and more discouraged as the journey had progressed, and upon arrival in the land of Zuph he suddenly resolved to turn back. Does this description of Saul's inclination to return home empty-handed, i.e., without the animals or the crown, provide us with a first clue to Saul's dawning timidity in the face of kingship? At any rate, the overall impression from this initial phase of Saul's journey is that he

appears hesitant, passive, tending even to hamper rather than advance the prospects of finding the lost animals. In fact, it is the servant -- whom we must presume was not privy to the real purpose of the journey -- who urges Saul to persist on with the mission.

We have already seen above that similar to Gideon's expression of self-deprecation which even preceded his formal call, Saul too responds to Samuel's clear signal about his imminent kingship by expressing his unworthiness of the choice itself: "Am I not a Benjaminite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then do you speak to me in this way"? (I Samuel 9:21). Saul appears here to concede the smallness of his tribe, and the low rank of his Matri clan within it.[14]

But when the narrator relates the aftermath of Saul's prophesying experience which gave birth to the question: "Is Saul also among the prophets"? we discern conflicting views regarding the particular status of the Kish family. This enigmatic question seems to express amazement as to how it was possible that the son of a respected man as Kish would lower himself and become a prophet? The answer to this question: "Now, who is their father"? seems to imply just the opposite; 'who is after all Kish himself? Was his honor that great to begin with that Saul's collaboration with prophets would be considered as a disgrace to Kish?'[15] My sense is that the question which was asked by all those who previously knew Saul, reflects in fact the reality of Kish's high social standing. The demeaning answer as the narrator stresses was given by one man only, and as such could have been a later attempt by a redactor to degrade Saul himself.

As suggested above Kish's title "*gibbor khayil*" is very significant in determining the socio-economic status of his household. It has been suggested that besides the military connotation this title may describe "a nobleman or wealthy citizen", or in short "any high-ranking citizen."[16] Hence, I am inclined to conclude that notwithstanding Saul's expression of humility and his attempt (sincere or humble) to belittle the import of his family, it is reasonable to assume that the Kish family itself was an important one; for a family which keeps the record of a five-generation lineage does so in all likelihood with respect and pride. This conclusion only strengthens my impression that Saul's attempt to shun his calling was unrelated to whatever status his family did have.

This conclusion may also be based on Saul's seeming reluctance to initiate any active opposition against the Philistines as soon as the signs were fulfilled. In fact, upon the fulfillment of the third sign -- his prophesying among other prophets -- Saul takes off and goes home. This despite the fact that Samuel urges him to act upon the completion of the signs according to the requirements of the occasion, and his familiar if not stereotypical reassurance that "God is with you".

The real issue here is not that Saul's first act as king should have been an attack upon the Philistine garrison stationed at the "hill of God" as Samuel might have implied; the significant aspect is rather that Saul simply goes home and keeps his anointment and commission as a secret. Why he did not tell his uncle about his kingship is open to speculation. Yet, the fact that the narrative includes this seemingly trivial detail may be suggestive if not significant. Might it be that Saul was concerned that his uncle (whom some identify as Abner, the commander of King Saul's army) would criticize him for his passivity "or worse still, by some precipitate action, force his hand"?[17]

At any rate, even if we choose to ignore the speculative aspects of Saul's seeming timidity or humility, the designated king continues to falter and resist his election well beyond the completion of the three signs. Thus when Samuel assembles the people at Mizpah to confirm *de jure* and openly Saul's divine election, the royal candidate does not show up to be recognized as a king even when they search for him. Saul who was hiding in the gear is finally found only after divine intervention through the medium of urim ve-toomim. Saul's hiding among the baggage might have been again an expression of humility on his part in view of the monumental task with which he was divinely charged. Still, whether his motive was mere modesty or genuine timidity, the incident suggests that Saul did not want to be king, and as it were had to be dragged out of hiding for it.[18] Thus it is sensible to conclude that even as he is acclaimed as a king in Mizpah Saul assumes his new office neither boldly nor eagerly.

F. The Signs

As we have seen above both Moses and Gideon experienced a high degree of direct communication with the Divine. By contrast, Saul lacked such an ability to prophesy, and it was Samuel who served as his intermediary with God. The fact that Saul found it hard to prophesy, even though he might have been a nazirite as a youth, may be intimated in the parable "Is Saul also among the prophets?" This inability on the part of Saul was not taken lightly by Samuel. As it appears Samuel feared that Saul's 'spiritual handicap' might delay or even snag the latter's assumption of the kingship. In providing three sequential signs (not unlike in the Moses and Gideon narratives), Samuel sought to encourage Saul to try and acquire

the ability to prophesy, and thus prepare him mentally for leadership and kingship.[19]

All together these signs were meant to instill confidence in Saul and reduce his anxiety of the unprecedented new responsibilities he was to assume. Besides the more concrete and primary purpose of the signs -- imparting to Saul the ability to prophesy -- their very introduction allows Samuel to reassure Saul that his was a divine anointment, and that his divinely sanctioned mandate was to rule over God's "inheritance". This element of reassurance is more elaborate in the Septuagint where Samuel assures Saul that he will deliver his people from the hand of her enemy; the fact that he will do this will be the sign that God has chosen him. Samuel's charge and reassurance to Saul that he may start in earnest to operate as a king since God was with him, confirms thereby Saul's divine authority for leading the people.

The signs themselves bring Saul to experience a gradually growing sense of proximity with God; similarly, both Moses' and Gideon's signs progressed from the less impressive sign to the more impressive one. The symbolism of the gradual heightening of Saul's own prophetic ecstasy was evinced in that he meets only two men at Rachel's tomb, the site of his first sign which was apparently known for its inspirational effect. It is plausible to assume, therefore, that these men told Saul of their praying on behalf of Israel's delivery at the very burial site of the Matriarch of the tribe of Benjamin. Saul's inspiration to prophesy was likely to increase with his next meeting, this time with the three men who were "going up to God" at Bethel - a site hallowed by tradition for the worship of God. Saul's third sign was his teaming up with a larger group of *bona fide* prophets at "the hill of God" - Saul's birthplace and home which served also as a center for the worship of God,

and was inhabited by prophets. It was here among these prophets that Saul himself prophesied, and reached a climactic sense of proximity between him and God; at least momentarily Saul is given the status of prophet. Henceforth, he too will become a man on whom the spirit of God dwells, and his preparation for his task will become complete.[20]

G. Summary

The story of Saul's call as this chapter attempts to show was treated in the same manner accorded to the callings of both Moses and Gideon. Generally speaking Saul does not communicate with God as directly as Abraham, Moses or Gideon did. Yet, the fact that Samuel serves as Saul's intermediary with the Divine shores up Saul's lack of genuine or long-standing prophetic capabilities. Except this modification the story of Saul fits deservedly within the prophetic call pattern; it has in fact all the six elements that comprise the Habel formula. (The other two biblical kings who were also anointed by a prophet upon God's command -- David and Jehu -- do not fit within the formal literary pattern that Habel recognizes in the accounts of many of the classical prophets.)

If we accept the analysis concerning the timing of the campaign against Jabesh-gilead, then it would appear that in all the cases discussed in this thesis, the chosen leader had acquired a considerable and pertinent track record prior to his commission; in the case of Abraham only the midrash (rather than Scripture) provides such an indication. In sum, the reader of the respective narratives would be hard to ignore what seems to be a deliberate attempt on the part of the biblical redactor to strike a comprehensive comparison between Saul's personality and actions and particularly those of Gideon as well as other leaders who preceded him.

NOTES

1. Kaufmann, *Toldot Ha-emunah Ha-Yisrae'lit*, IV-V, Ibid., p. 109.

2. Bruce C. Birch, *The Rise of the Israelite Monarchy: The Growth and Development of I Samuel 7-15* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1976), p. 38.

3. P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc. , 1980), The Anchor Bible, p. 179.

4. Arieh Bartal, *Malkhut Shaul* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1982), pp. 50, 64.

5. McCarter, Ibid., p. 173.

6. Ibid., p. 184.

7. Hayim Gevaryahu, "Hamelekh Shaul Moshi'a Le-Yisrael", *Shmuel ve-Shaul – Ha-navi Ve-hamelekh*, edited by David Shemesh (Jerusalem: Kiryat-Sefer, Ltd., 1986), p. 154-55.

8. Kaufmann, Ibid., p. 110.

9. Bartal, Ibid., p. 47.

10. Birch, Ibid., p. 55.

11. Kaufmann, Ibid., pp. 108-9.

12. Bartal, Ibid., p. 67.

13. McCarter, Ibid., p. 107.

14. Ibid., p. 185.

15. Moshe Z. Segal, *Sifrei Shmuel* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, Ltd., 1964), p.78.

16. McCArter, Ibid., p. 173.

17. V. Philips Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), p. 211.

18. Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950), p. 64.

19. Gevaryahu, Ibid., p. 156.

20. Ibid., pp. 159-60.

Chapter V: JEREMIAH

The similar structure that binds together the stories of Moses, Gideon and even that of Saul has already been recognized above. The goal of this chapter is to try and identify the form and pattern of Jeremiah's initiation into prophecy, and then to determine the contribution of the story to our discussion of call narratives. This chapter will also try and determine whether the call of Jeremiah resembles closely any particular previous account, or features unique elements that are not found elsewhere.

A. Divine Confrontation

Unlike the detailed settings in the calls of Moses, Gideon and Saul, Jeremiah's perception of the Divine's initial word to him is described without any background material at all. Jeremiah does not say a word as to where, when and how he perceived "the word of the Lord" coming to him as it did. Jeremiah's apparent 'out of the blue' confrontation with the Divine, and his commissioning which ensued thereafter, resembles in this sense God's command to Abraham to leave Haran and move to a new land.

In both instances the biblical narrative of the occasion provides no information about the circumstances under which the prophet became aware that he was called by the Divine; nor are we told whether this awareness dawned on him suddenly or gradually. Indeed, both narratives give no indication of an epiphany unlike the call experiences of Moses and Gideon. Are we to deduce, therefore, that the lack of an occasion for the commissioning of Jeremiah may have to do with the fact that his designation as a prophet took place before his birth (or even before his

conception)? And even as Jeremiah's account figured no theophany prior to his induction into prophecy, did the prophet feel nonetheless to have been summoned to his call directly by the Lord?

Jeremiah's call narrative records thrice the expression: "the word of the Lord came to me saying" (Jeremiah 1:11, 13, 2:1). This expression seems to intimate the sense of a non-visual, albeit direct auditory perception of the Divine word. This impression may also find confirmation farther on when the prophet contrasts himself with the false prophets and asks rhetorically: "Who has stood in the council of the Lord, that he should see and hear His word? who has given heed to His word and listened?" (Jeremiah 23:18). Jeremiah, so it seems, underlines the fact that his perception of the divine word was more auditory than visual; the "see and hear" idiom may intimate his wish or hope not only to hear but also to see the word.[1] Yet, it is clear that the prophet unquestionably feels that God "Himself is present to address him."[2]

B. The Introductory Word

That Jeremiah's call narrative is unique and deviates significantly from the other accounts featured thus far is indicated in God's declaration of what He had already done. More specifically, heretofore the person whom God designated to become His agent received at this stage of the divine confrontation a tangible inkling about his imminent calling. But Jeremiah received no such intimation; rather, he is told : "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you" (Jeremiah 1:5a). Jeremiah, in other words, is being told not that he is about to become God's 'ambassador', but that he already is a prophet, and that he has been predestined for this vocation since his conception. God's statement

does not, therefore, induct Jeremiah as a prophet for this has already been done. Rather, Jeremiah is merely being informed that the time to activate his prophecy has arrived.

This divine announcement is unique among the other call narratives. Nevertheless, since God is Omniscient it must be presumed that the idea to launch a Moses or a Gideon into prophecy was foreseen by Him at the time of their conception just as it was with Jeremiah. This supposition begs the question why is it that thus far only Jeremiah was told of his election at conception? Whence the reason for such a special authentication of prophetic vocation?

Jeremiah's consecration as a prophet is revealed to him through a verb ("hikdashtikha navi") which does not appear in the call narratives of his predecessors. Is it possible, therefore, to understand the usage of this particular verb in connection with Jeremiah's priestly lineage and its heritage? It stands to reason that unlike his predecessors who either sincerely, or in mere humility stressed their lowly personal rank, Jeremiah could not possibly resort to such an argument, even when he pronounced his inadequacy for the task he was called to commence. In other words, it would have sounded ludicrous for Jeremiah to claim an insignificant pedigree when his was "as proud a lineage as any man in Israel"; an ancestry that could trace back its antecedents to the family of Moses himself.[3]

Yet, Jeremiah as a late prophet must have possessed the old prophetic tradition in Israel, which as we saw featured at times the expression of unworthiness on the part of the commissioned person. It is not unlikely, therefore, that Jeremiah was informed of his designation as a prophet from conception in order to dissuade him from any attempt to demur. The divine message is unequivocally lucid; Jeremiah

was already a prophet and his option to decline the appointment was not a viable one.[4]

Another possible explanation of Jeremiah's special form of authentication may have to do with the particular conditions of his time; the proliferation of false prophets and their adverse affect on the people. Moreover, Jeremiah was not the only true prophet who prophesied at the time; the prophetess Huldah (and perhaps also Zephaniah and Habakkuk) was active too. Hence, it was critically important for Jeremiah to be recognized as a true prophet of God right at the beginning of his mission, in contrast to the false prophets who have misled the community. The placing in the prologue of such an authenticating formula was to serve, therefore, as a necessary counter response to any challenge to Jeremiah's legitimacy as a genuine prophet. Prepared for the skeptical question like this, 'when did he become a prophet?' Jeremiah was ready to reply 'before I was born!'

As noted above this element of consecration at conception distinguishes Jeremiah from other Israelite leaders such as Moses, Gideon and Saul who were taken from their flocks or fields to assume their calling. Yet, the idea of one's predestined mission was not born with Jeremiah; in fact, the story of Samson also features a similar element of predestination. Earlier we raised the possibility that Saul was also predestined to assume the role of a nazirite who is committed to fight for Israel's freedom. The concept of predestination was well-known in the ancient East where it characterized important royal nominations particularly in the courts of Egypt, Assyria and Babylon.[5] Is it possible, therefore, that Jeremiah's special designation as a prophet from birth may have also to do with such foreign influences that must have been known to scribes and prophets in Judea at the time

of Jeremiah? To be sure, such divine consecrations were used in Egypt and Mesopotamia to glorify the monarch and further his authority.

Jeremiah by contrast was predestined to fulfill a spiritual role, to serve as God's envoy to the nations. Still, his consecration as a prophet is endowed with a royal characteristic as well; his activated commission appointed him *inter alia* "over the kingdoms", namely it imparted to him a characteristically royal (if not divine) authority "to destroy" and "to build" nations and kingdoms.[6] In any case, it is self-evident that Jeremiah does not arrive on the scene to rule as a monarch; his mandate is only to convey the word of God.

C. The Objection

Similar to Gideon and Saul Jeremiah too hastens to express anguished doubts of his adequacy for the mission even before his *de jure* commission is spelled out in any concrete terms. At the heart of his short response we find the words 'I cannot': "Alas, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, because I am a youth" (Jeremiah 1:6). Indeed, Jeremiah's reply at first glance appears to depict him as a timid man who seeks to evade his call, fearing like Moses to encounter incredulous or hostile hearers.

Jeremiah cites explicitly his young age as a major factor in his seeming objection to accept the commission. Did he mean, therefore, to indicate that he was simply called prematurely to commence his prophetic ministry, and that in due time his argument would lose its temporary validity? Or that his self-proclaimed inability had little to do with his young age? Moreover, even if we accept the presumption that Jeremiah was "a very young man"[7] when he began his career as a prophet,

was it in itself a legitimate argument on which to base his apparent rejection of the commission?

Jeremiah seems to have known well the birth narrative of Samuel, and the historical memory of Shilo; he used this memory to stress the point that the Jerusalem Temple might meet a similar fate to that of Shilo (Jeremiah 7:12, 14). It stands to reason, therefore, that Jeramiah should have known that Samuel himself was already prophesying while still a "*na'ar*"; the same term by which Jeremiah describes his own young age. Hence, is it possible that Jeremiah's plea of timidity as an excuse did not refer to his age as such, but rather to his perception of himself as a non-important person who stood virtually no chance to impress his contemporaries with the word of God? Is it correct to view the prophet's admission of deficient communicative skills as a non-physical problem but rather as a mental one?

In seeking to understand the meaning of the biblical term "*na'ar*" it becomes apparent that the word has a number of meanings which do not permit us to deduce what Jeremiah's age may have been. Several examples will surely demonstrate that this term is rather imprecise: Judah facing Joseph in Egypt to plea for compassion in the case of Benjamin refers to the latter as "*na'ar*" even as he was about thirty-two years old and a father himself. Similarly Joshua while serving Moses in his tent is referred to as "*na'ar*" while a man of thirty years of age. King Solomon shortly after his ascension to the throne apparently at the age of twenty describes himself also as "*na'ar katon*" (a little child). In view of these examples it is evidently impractical to interpret the word "*na'ar*" which Jeremiah uses within the connotation of the word itself.

Although it is generally assumed that Jeremiah was indeed a young man as he began his ministry, one wonders if his resistance to the call stemmed primarily from this factor. The midrash may provide us with a clue to Jeremiah's hesitation and fear; the matter boiled down to the possibility that he may get killed or at best suffer abuse and scorn by the hands of the people. "I cannot prophesy over them" Jeremiah explains to the Divine. "What prophet did they not seek to kill?! You sent them Moses and Aaron - didn't they seek to stone them? You sent them Elijah - they mocked and laughed at him calling him "a hairy man". You sent them Elisha - they told him: "Go up, you baldhead; go up, you baldhead!" With these episodes on his mind Jeremiah proclaims to God that he cannot take upon himself the mission, for his lack of eloquence [would also be their excuse for mocking him].[8]

It is not unlikely, therefore, that Jeremiah could well sense and anticipate what was in store for him, being destined to pay an awful personal cost during his prophetic career. From God's words of reassurance (Jeremiah 1:8) it transpires that Jeremiah feared that his reproach and rebuke of the people would spawn hatred and violence from his hearers leading even to attempts on his life.[9] Indeed, it was not difficult to foresee that because of the grave nature of his prophecy, Jeremiah would be reviled and hated, and doomed to an anguished life as a stranger in the midst of his apostate people. Furthermore, it appears that being of a tender character as he was, Jeremiah particularly was agonized over the forthcoming upheavals to befall his own beloved people.

In view of these analyses we have to be skeptical of interpreting literally Jeremiah's young age as the real reason for his seeming attempt to shun his calling. Still, is it possible that despite the different approaches to an understanding of the rationale behind Jeremiah's timidity, the prophet was merely offering a stereotypical

objection patterned after the commission accounts of his predecessors? We saw earlier that also king Solomon humbly suggested in his prayer for wisdom that he was but a "*na'ar*" or a 'little child'. And yet, it is absolutely clear that the young king did not use this self-description to even imply that he wished to withdraw from his new task. Rather, it is possible that through his humble confession Solomon seems to have expressed his dependence upon God, from whom he expected to receive not only divine authentication but also the gift of wisdom - a prerequisite for a successful reign.

If this interpretation of Solomon's resorting to the image of a youth is correct, and assuming that Solomon's prayer was known to Jeremiah, then it might be possible to understand in a new fashion the latter's similar confession. Namely, Jeremiah like Solomon in Gibeon was courting divine reassurance, and those qualifications which he needed for carrying out his prophetic assignment. Thus what at first glance appears to be Jeremiah's attempt to withdraw from the commission, may rather be seen now as a "word of submission and acceptance."[10]

Indeed, from another part of the book we learn that Jeremiah was truly glad to serve as God's prophet: "And Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart" (Jeremiah 15:16). Although we should not ignore Jeremiah's earnest concerns stemming from what he perceived as his wanting communicative skills, we have a considerable material that indicates his concurrent willingness to embrace the prophetic role. Jeremiah, in other words, must have felt an inner struggle between his destined prophetic career and his doubts whether he will be able to carry it out.

As we search to understand the significance of Jeremiah's seeming reluctance to accept the commission we must take note of the similarity between his excuse and Moses' respective response at the time of his commissioning. Both men cite their lack of capacity for speaking, though each for different reasons. Moses objected that he was incapable of quick-witted speech; an impediment that was of a permanent nature. Jeremiah's speech deficiency may be understood, however, as a temporary condition which was likely to improve with time; that is if we argue that Jeremiah was only protesting his commission on grounds of being an inexperienced youth

Still, both prophets use a similar wording of their argument featuring a precative interjection as "Ah, Lord God! (Jeremiah) and "Oh, my Lord" (Moses) followed by " '*Adonai*". Similarly, both responses have a form of the root *d b r* preceded by "*lo*" (not), and both end identically with "'*anokhi*". Are these similarities accidental and incidental or rather indicate a possible influence of the Moses narratives on the account of Jeremiah's commission? Jeremiah's presumed familiarity with the story of Moses who as a young infant was cast from his mother's arm into the care of God, might have alerted him to his possible resemblance to Moses; wasn't he set apart by God from his mother's womb too? Further, did not Moses feel himself unsuitable for God's purposes just like Jeremiah felt?[11]

D. Reassurance

As we have observed in the previous call narratives God's reassurance to His commissioned agents follows the phases of objection and of commission. The Jeremiah account deviates somewhat from this pattern in as much as God's

reassurance begins prior to the formal commission. Yet, we have already noted that Jeremiah's actual commission commenced at his conception, so the lack of consistency in the regular structure is negligible. In fact, Jeremiah's formal call to prophecy does not only follow, but is integrally related to God's reassuring response to the former's interjecting reference to his inexperience.

Hence Jeremiah's argument of being scarcely of age, which appeared to be his grounds for not accepting the commission, is immediately laid to rest by God who speaks to him in another oracle: "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' because everywhere I send you, you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am to deliver you" (Jeremiah 1:7-8). Jeremiah thus receives the all-familiar divine oath reaffirming God's authentication and promise to be with him; Moses, Gideon and Saul received in essence the same assurance.

Further, a closer look at God's word of comfort to Jeremiah reveals two pairs of verbs, *š l ḥ* and *h l k* ("send", "go") and *tz v h* and *d b r* ("command", "speak"). The association of the first pair surfaced once before only in the Moses' account (Exodus 3:10, 13). The other pair occurs again in the Gideon account (Judges 6:14), and in the Moses narratives albeit outside the call account itself, (i.e., in Exodos 7:2 and in Deuteronomy 18:18). The passage in Deuteronomy forms part of an oracle of God to Moses which may be titled as 'the prophet section'. Here God differentiates between a true and a false prophet, and promises to Moses to raise up a prophet like Moses himself: "and I will put [the Hebrew verb *n t n*/give is used] my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them [i.e., to Israel] all that I command him." As we shall momentarily see 'the prophet section' shares further verbal and thematic parallels with Jeremiah's account of his formal commissioning.

This commission was proclaimed to Jeremiah in the same vision in which he also received God's word of reassurance.

E. The Commission

In this vision Jeremiah does not only hear the divine word but feels God's outstretched hand touching his mouth. Again there is no explicit indication that this was a visual revelation even as Jeremiah perceived his *de jure* commission pronounced: "Behold, I have put [the verb in Hebrew is *n t n* / give] My words in your mouth. See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jeremiah 1:9-10).

Noticeably, the reassuring element continues throughout the commissioning oracle, so Jeremiah will attain full confidence that God was indeed the source of his prophetic utterance. He Himself gave His word to the prophet placing it in his mouth; this divine element makes it virtually impossible for Jeremiah to rid himself of his call. God's symbolic act "extending his compelling hand and touching the prophet's mouth serves the same function as the attendant sign for Gideon".[12] While Gideon asked for such an authenticating sign it may be assumed that Jeremiah desired to receive the same very result by pulling his age and inexperience as a reason for his reservation towards his calling.

Still, closer association and resemblance between the Jeremiah narratives and 'the prophet section' in Deuteronomy resurface in the commission account. Common to both narratives is the phrase "put [God's] words in the mouth [of a prophet]" using the verb *n t n* (for "put"); in the whole Bible it is used in this context only by

Jeremiah and Moses.[13] These various verbal parallels between the two prophets beg the question as to who had influenced whom? On the one hand there are those exegetes who assume that Jeremiah knew the Deuteronomistic 'prophet section'. They assume that this passage fell within the parts of the "book" found in the temple in the days of king Josiah. Hence, since Jeremiah knew of the "book" and of its content he "looked back to Moses as his [prophetic] ideal."[14]

Interestingly Rashi too seems to agree though tacitly and only indirectly with the basic concept of this interpretation. When explaining Jeremiah's resistance to his call on grounds of his young age, Rashi provides a midrash in which Jeremiah views Moses as an exemplar prophet. Here Jeremiah protests the fact that he is called to reproach the people at the very beginning of his prophetic career, while Moses did so only towards the end of his career after proving to the people his outstanding leadership capabilities.[15]

Conversely, there are those who wonder whether it was just the opposite. Namely, 'the prophet section' in Deuteronomy is considered to have fallen within that part of the book that is believed to be "a late addition to the Deuteronomistic law on the prophet", (and thus was not included in the original "book" found in the temple). Thus, the redactors of the Jeremiah call narrative might have been those who contributed to the formulations of 'our' critical section in Deuteronomy.[16] Surely, it is outside the scope and goals of this thesis to try and determine which approach should be preferred. Yet, we have presented here a number of evidences pointing out to a possible common call pattern particularly for Moses and Jeremiah.

As we observed above Jeremiah's commission has no explicit allusion to the kingdom of Judah; in fact, it is not even clear whether the prophet is sent to the

nation of Israel at all for he is merely appointed "over the nations and over the kingdoms". Thus Jeremiah's commission is not only a very strange designation of a prophet; it is actually unique among its prophetic antecedents. And still, the kingdom of Judah was a nation and a monarchy and as such fell within the scope of Jeremiah's mandate. Only later during the last vision of his call narrative will Jeremiah realize that his principal designated audience is virtually the whole nation of Judah, with its kings, princes, priests and the people as a whole.

F. The Signs

The Jeremiah call narratives like those of his prophetic predecessors feature several divine signs, although the technical term for a sign --"ot"-- is absent from this context. Since the text does not tell us of any request from Jeremiah for such signs one may ask why did God introduce these apparently unsolicited signs or prophetic visions? The relatively many repeated divine reassurances which occur at this juncture of the dialogue between God and Jeremiah beg inquiry into the particular purpose of these reassurances.

Coming right after he realized the formidable national (and personal) consequences that his prophecy was to portend, Jeremiah was apparently still harboring personal doubts concerning the veracity of his divine mandate to prophesy. It is not unlikely that what perturbed him too was the thought that his dire prophecies will be only fulfilled in the far future, with the result that he would become subject to the people's mockery and regarded by them as a false prophet.[17]

Is it possible, therefore, that through the double feature visions God was seeking to allay Jeremiah's concerns, and convince him thereby of his mental maturity, as well

as stressing the message that his prophecies will materialize during his prophetic career? Moreover, is it possible that through the frequent opportunities for divine reassurance -- a strong characteristic of the Moses' calling -- the narrative seems to present the Moses story as paradigm for Jeremiah?

In the first of his two visions Jeremiah perceives an almond branch bereft of its leaves or flowers. Again it is not clear whether Jeremiah saw the rod visually, or had a vision of such an item by means of his imagination. In a fashion that is reminiscent of Moses' first sign with his rod, God asks Jeremiah: "what do you see?" (Jeremiah 1:11). The question that God posed to Moses: "What is that in your hand?" (Exodus, 3:2) was rather simpler, and so it meant to be. While Moses' revelation was straight-forward and riddle-free, the question God posed to Jeremiah was more challenging. Indeed, God commended him for his acuity of perception as he identified the almond branch; such a commendation is unprecedented among all prophetic books.

The symbolism of this vision was fully significant; firstly, having been commended by God for his correct identification of an indistinguishable branch, Jeremiah was reassured again of his capabilities as a prophet. Secondly, through the word-play of "shaked" (almond) and "shoked" (watching over and/or agility), Jeremiah was reassured that his prophecies will surely be fulfilled and rather sooner than later; in other words he will be recognized in Israel as a true prophet.[18] The midrash emphasizes the element of quick fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecies drawing its cue from the fact that the almond tree is fast to bloom.[19]

In a closely related vision that emerges right after the former revelation, God asks Jeremiah again what he sees. Having identified the rather simple sight of a boiling

pot which was kept seething (either by the wind or a bellows) while tilting away from the north, Jeremiah is further reassured of the quick fulfillment of his prophecies, even perceiving the direction from which the offensive on Jerusalem will be launched. His divine message was clear; the two different imageries complementing each other served to corroborate the veracity of his forthcoming prophecies. And besides, divine signs (or visions as in this context) that feature only minimal and modest paraphernalia have been heretofore a true 'trade mark' of Deity; Jeremiah must have realized hereby that his two visions matched easily this established pattern.

Still, even after the double feature vision Jeremiah continued to experience fear and anxiety vis-a-vis his task ahead. As with Moses on Mt. Horeb Jeremiah too is given no opportunity to pronounce a single word; perhaps even he is too stunned to say a thing having just realized the catastrophe about to befall over his people. There is also little doubt that his fright is considerable in view of his mandate to face the hostile national chieftains and speak truth to power. God in a gentle but firm tone, reminiscent of his words to the wavering Moses following his signs, seeks similarly to further embolden the vacillating Jeremiah:

> ***"Do not be dismayed before them . . . Now behold I have made you today as a fortified city, and as a pillar of iron and as brazen walls against the whole land, to the kings of Judah, to its princes, to its priests and to the people of the land. And they will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the lord"***
> **(Jeremiah 1:17-19).**

In this elaborate and peculiar conclusion of Jeremiah's commission, Jeremiah appears like a surrounded king fighting his besieging enemies; its imagery may be borrowed from neighboring monarchical terminology imparting thereby again a

royal character to the prophet's commission. Indeed, the images of an iron pillar as well as that of brazen walls are unique to the Bible but common in the ancient East.[20] Yet, Jeremiah does not choose these royal imageries to glorify himself. In fact, the whole passage is understood in the context of his great difficulties if not an outright refusal to accept the commission. At any rate, the purpose of this particular and exclusive passage is to serve notice that God stands fully behind His agent and reassures him repeatedly of that fact. Of all other prophets discussed in this thesis it is Moses at Mt. Horeb who similarly receives a whole line of repeated reassurances.

G. Why Jeremiah?

The death of king Josiah in 609 B. C.E. when Jeremiah would have been seventeen years old, meant a quick death to the Torah oriented reform that the king initiated. The hope for Israel's faithfulness to God diminished rapidly with the reign of Jehoiakim who reverted back to the evil ways of his grandfather -- king Manasseh. Although Jeremiah began to prophesy during king Josiah, it is evident that the prophet is sent explicitly to the kings of Judah (Jeremiah 1:18) who succeeded Josiah.

Thus even though Jeremiah's *de jure* commission was probably activated in Jehoiakim reign, it is also possible to say that Jeremiah had already experienced the taste of prophecy even earlier as he admonished the true prophets in Judah to exhort the people to follow the words of the newly found Torah (Jeremiah 11:1-3). In other words, Jeremiah who was designated for no apparent reason as a prophet prior to his birth, has acquired in his rearing years in Anatoth such education in Torah and in prophecy, that was presumably available mainly if not solely to

priestly families (Jeremiah 18:18). His knowledge and skills were particularly crucial at such critical time that followed the death of king Josiah. Thus, it may be said that Jeremiah like his successors had established as well a certain track record that qualified him for prophecy at this particular juncture.

H. Summary

Jeremiah's call account introduces some new elements to the narratives of the prophetic calls which this thesis discusses. At the same time this account seems to follow the essential form structure of these calls. Jeremiah's consecration as a prophet from birth is seen as a unique feature of these prophetic calls, and so are a number of imageries that are not found elsewhere in the whole Bible.

The Jeremiah account seems also to point out to the possibility that the prophet was influenced considerably and in various ways by Moses - his prophetic paragon; their call narratives do indeed share a number of significant common denominators. Both men are described as struggling against feelings of inadequacy and timidity, and in their real concerns about popular opposition; an aspect which is absent from the other narratives. Both prophets seem also to receive many divine reassurances; an aspect that may say something about the extent of their hesitation to accept the commission. All in all, while the Jeremiah call narrative presents some significant aspects of being particularly under the influence of the Moses story, it remains basically loyal to the general stereotypical pattern of the other prophetic accounts.

NOTES

1. Menahem Bulah, *Sefer Yirmiah* (Jerusalem: Mossad Ha-rav Kook, 1983), p. 299.

2. Habel, Ibid., p. 307.

3. John Bright, *Jeremiah* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1965), The Bible Anchor, p. Lxxxviii.

4. Bulah, Ibid., p. 3.

5. Moshe Weinfeld, "Yirmiyahu, Ishiyutto Vetorato", *Iyunim Besefer Yirmiyahu,* Edited by B. Z. Lurie (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 1971), I, pp. 49.

6. Ibid., pp. 49-50.

7. Bright, Ibid., p. Lxxxvii.

8. *Yalkut Shimeoni*, II, 262.

9. Bulah, Ibid., p. 11.

10. John M. Berridge, *Prophet, People, and the Word of Yahweh* (Zurich: Evz-Verlag, 1970), p. 48.

11. William L. Holladay, "The Background of Jeremiah's Self-Understanding", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 83 (1964), 162.

12. Habel, Ibid., p. 309.

13. Holladay, Ibid., p. 155.

14. P. E. Broughton, "The Call of Jeremiah", *Australian Biblical Review*, VI, (January, 1958) 42.

15. *Mikraot Gedolot: The Book of Jeremiah*, Trans. from Hebrew into English by A. J. Rosenberg (New York: The Judaica Press, Inc., 1985), p. 4.

16. Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), p. 99.

17. Bulah, Ibid., p. 11.

18. Ibid., p. 5.

19. *Yalkut M'am Loez, Yirmiyahu* (Jerusalem: Vagshel, Ltd., 1987), p. 7.

20. Bulah, Ibid., p. 9.

Chapter VI: JONAH

That the story of Jonah differs from the other narratives of divine commission in this thesis, is apparent at the very beginning of the book. A prophet of the Lord is sent to a foreign city to proclaim an impending devastation, but instead flees from his commission. In contrast, Moses, Gideon, Jeremiah, and Saul (as king-designate) expressed their reluctance to assume their commission only verbally. Moses demurred on grounds of his speech impediment as well as his concern over the people's incredulity. Similarly, Jeremiah too confessed his inadequacy for the task on the basis of his young age and lack of rhetorical proficiency. In these objections (as well as in the other cases,) the commissioned individual doubted his ability to carry out successfully the difficult task of prophecy, (or judgeship or kingship) that he was called to assume.

Jonah, however, does not refuse to prophesy on the grounds of his unworthiness; he expresses his refusal not in words but by his flight to the end of the world, later preferring his own death to the acceptance of the commission. Moreover, no reason is given for his flight at the very commencement of the story. Only towards the end of the narratives does the reader learn of Jonah's motive; if Moses or Jeremiah, for instance, refused their commission for fearing to fail, Jonah rejected his prophetic office for the opposite reason, i.e., his fear of succeeding as a prophet. Jonah, in other words, has no problem with his prophetic skills; his problem lies in the mission itself. This chapter will seek, therefore, to explore the possible or actual difficulties that Jonah has with his mission, discuss the reasons for this difficulty, and analyze God's particular means of persuasion in bringing the fleeing prophet to fulfill his task. At the same time this chapter will determine whether the story of

Jonah fits, in other regards, the narrative pattern of the other personalities covered in this thesis.

A. The Commission

Unlike the previous accounts Jonah hears his commission without any preliminary divine confrontation or an introductory word. This factor may be attributed perhaps to the fact that this particular calling was not Jonah's first, and that he already was an established prophet. According to the Talmud[1] Jonah was attending the festival of the water-drawing at the Temple in Jerusalem when the word of the Lord came to him. Although he sees no vision Jonah perceives the divine word not unlike Jeremiah: "And the word of the Lord came to" (Jonah 1:1); a prefatory formula considered by the Sages as a high form of prophecy.[2] Jonah perceives his plainly worded divine revelation in daylight and in full awakeness (Jonah 4:8-9) : " Arise! go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against her, for their wickedness has ascended before Me" (Jonah 1:2). Surely, this dozen-word message is scarcely a prophecy, and yet it can be seen that God feels sorry for Nineveh even as He calls upon Jonah to do the same. The formula ". . . and cry out against her" seems to indicate that the prophet is not expected merely to announce the divine message, but also to cry out in empathy with the Ninevites that such is his mission.

B. Who is Jonah?

Jonah, it seems, does not differ from the other prophets only in his mode of objection to the mission. While the reader is cognizant of the historical context and biographical background of the earlier commissioned persons, Jonah is an utterly

unknown quantity. Simply put, it seems as though the narratives impart no import to the person of Jonah. The book commences rather with a statement of mission before we have the slightest idea about who Jonah is, what his origin is, and the time of his prophecy. In fact, Jonah is never explicitly termed "a prophet"; still, it is quite sensible to presume that his divine revelations, as well as his previous prophetic experience may qualify him as a prophet.[3]

The question as to who was this Jonah son of Amittai is not a simple one. Some biblical scholars may be willing to associate Jonah with the prophet from Gath-hefer, who prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II son of Joash (as is mentioned in II Kings 14:25), even when no other information about this prophet exists. Many others reject the association between the two Jonahs, even as they deny the historicity of the account under study, regarding it rather as fictional literary work. Many of those who are of the former opinion are aware nonetheless of the particular prose style of the Jonah book which discourages historical inquiry. Yet, although the question of Jonah's historicity is far from resolved, there is still no compelling reason to rule out that Yonah ben Amittai's mission to Nineveh may have been historical. Hence, Jonah might have possibly brought the Lord's message to Nineveh before the year 612 B.C.E., the year of its own destruction, and perhaps even before 705 B.C.E. (Sennachrib), if not prior to the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C.E.[4]

If we are willing to presume the historicity of Jonah, then there is a good reason to consider seriously the possibility that the prophet lived during the first half of the eighth century B.C.E.; this would mean that Jonah of Gath-hefer was the same Jonah that went to Nineveh. Jonah thus stands with one foot at the conceptual world of those prophets who recognized no possibility for atonement of sin. (See for

instance I Samuel, 15:24-25, 29; for the significance of this example see pp. 106-7.) His other foot stood right at the threshold of a new prophetic epoch that begins with the writing prophets; its new theme announced that a prophet may help the people to keep out of harm's way by warning them of sin (Hosea, 12:14). This might explain why Jonah does not understand his task. And although he is commanded to go to Nineveh, he forsakes God's service by going just in the opposite direction.

C. The Objection

Having learned of their commission Moses, Gideon, Saul and Jeremiah hastened to express their reasons for their inadequacy or unworthiness of the task they were summoned to fulfill. Jonah by contrast is silent even as he hears his own mission; still, like his predecessors (in this thesis) he does not ignore the call. In a radical and surprising move devoid of any explication on his part

> "Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from before
> the Lord's presence. He went down to Jaffo
> and found a Tarshish-bound ship; he paid
> his fare, and boarded it to travel with them to
> Tarshish from before the Lord's Presence (Jonah 1:3).

Before we attempt to make sense of Jonah's reasons for his flight, it is incumbent on us to try and understand why he chose this particular way of a flight via the sea. Did he seek to flee from God's sovereignty believing it was confined solely to land of Israel as the abode of God? Did Jonah hope that his flight from there would bring him out of God's reach? These are not simplistic questions; their origin may be found in the Scriptural prohibition of animal offerings outside the soil of Israel,

from whence one might deduce that God's effective control was also understood as limited only to Israel proper.

Nonetheless, the answer to these questions is quite obvious in view of Jonah's infallible belief in God's universal Sovereignty -- "God of the heavens . . . who made the sea and the dry land" (Jonah 1:9). In fact, "even among Israel's pagan neighbors there is no notion that a national god is impotent beyond his frontiers."[5] Surely, had Jonah wished to flee from God's authority by embarking on the ship that headed for Tarshish, then it should have been enough for him to go even to . . . Damascus, or for that matter Jaffo that lay outside of Israel (or Judah) in the Ninth or Eighth Centuries.

Did Jonah choose to flee not from God's authority but as an effort to diminish his own receptivity to prophecy, on the presumpion that the spirit of prophecy does not rest on man away from the land of Israel (unless the prophecy concerns Israel itself)? This suggestion is unacceptable for we, in fact, see that at the end of the book (Jonah 4:5, 9) Jonah had divine revelations in Nineveh and to the east of the city; Jonah, however, confessed no surprise at these free intercourses with the divine, nor did he admit to have been mistaken in thinking initially that such a revelation, (outside Israel or not for Israel's sake), was impossible.

If, as it seems, Jonah fled from Israel knowing too well that there was no escape from God or from divine prophecy, then is it possible that in so doing Jonah was simply turning his back on his God, even rising in rebellion against His word? This is indeed the understanding of Ibn Ezra who distinguishes between Scripture's usage of the wording fleeing "from before the Lord", and the more commonly used idiom of fleeing 'from'. Thus Jonah is not described as trying to flee from God's

presence as though fleeing from another human. Rather, the employment of "before" is typically used by such prophets as Elijah and Elisha, and in our context it highlights the total abandonment of Jonah's prophetic task.[6]

Jonah's attempt to disengage himself from obedience to God's commission is seen for example in the trivial detail concerning the payment of his sea fare. Notwithstanding the debate among biblical commentators whether Jonah paid his own fare, or the purchase price for the entire ship, it is apparent that in order to flee Jonah paid a fare that was probably very expensive. Further, when Scripture goes on to tell us that Jonah boarded the ship "to travel with them to Tarshish" it appears that the words "with them" add another dimension to the prophet's escape from prophecy. Thus Jonah is seen as striving to extricate himself from his existential loneliness as a prophet, even as he seeks his acceptance by the sailors as any one of them.[7]

But if Jonah knew that the God who is sending him on to his mission was as powerful in Nineveh as anywhere else in the world, then it stands to reason that Tarshish also as well as the sea route to it were unmistakably under God's sovereignty. Why then did Jonah set off for Tarshish? Instead of attempting to ascertain the geographical location that the author of Jonah might have had in mind, it would be sufficient perhaps to think of Tarshish as a place "about as far west as one can go."[8] In other words, Jonah headed towards the farthest possible place from where he was commanded to go. Was Jonah operating on the illusion that God will let him 'off the prophetic hook' upon seeing his utmost efforts do the very opposite thing He commissioned him to do?

Was Jonah prepared to forsake even his own life as the ultimate price for not fulfilling his mission? No, the issue is not whether Jonah knew that for refusing to prophesy in the name of God a prophet would incur death (see Deuteronomy 18:19 and Ezekiel 33:8). The issue is not even whether Jonah felt that in opting out of this prophetic mission he was also denying the essence and purpose of his life as a prophet. Rather, the question is the meaning and significance of Jonah's falling (fast?) asleep at the ship's hold, even as "a mighty tempest in the sea" was threatening to break up the vessel. Is it correct then to see Jonah's ability to fall asleep, even as every one else on board "became frightened and cried out each to his own god!" (Jonah 1:4-5), as another expression of his flight from God? Further, does the dramatic scene that took place on the ship signify Jonah's willingness to die as a way out of his mission? Or, is it plausible to view Jonah's demonstration of his preparedness to die for his convictions -- "Pick me up and heave me into the sea and the sea will calm down for you" (Jonah 1:12) -- as an expression of hope that God will relent and let him walk away from his mission? Was Jonah playing brinkmanship with God even as he hoped that the storm would subside before he was to be heaved into the raging water?

In attempting to answer these questions one is drawn to Jonah's absolute reluctance to call to his God for help even after the captain urged him to do so. This dramatic (if not pathetic) contrast between 'religious' pagans crying out for help to their respective gods, and a prophet of the Lord who would not do the same even as his own life was in danger, demonstrates convincingly Jonah's "stoical indifference to death."[9] The captain's question "How can you sleep so soundly?" (Jonah 1:6) is a dramatic testimony of Jonah's calmness and total tranquility vis-a-vis his approaching death; death that might as well constitute for him a better alternative to acceptance of his commission.

This attitude is further seen in Jonah's continuing reluctance to call upon God to stop the tempest (he knew that he was the reason for the terrible storm), even as the sailors failed in their heroic efforts to row their way back to shore. The sailors fearing death were attempting by their utmost efforts -- spiritual and technical alike -- to extricate themselves from their predicament; Jonah did just the opposite, and his passivity indicated that he was not afraid to die for his cause. But if Jonah had somehow hoped that God would 'blink' first in the face of his conscious march towards death, and revoke his commission by allowing him a safe return to solid soil, it became patently clear that this was not to happen.

Thus as the sea grew stormier it was high time for Jonah to knuckle under, and cease his rebellion by appealing to God for mercy; this would have been Jonah's last opportunity to save his life. Such a move would have indicated his acquiescence to assume the commission. Jonah, nonetheless, refused to take such an action; no, he was not toying with the delusion that he could somehow 'impress' God with his ostensible readiness to prefer death to the assumption of a task which he abhorred. Rather, Jonah was 'dead serious' about his resolve to dodge the commission at any price.

D. Understanding Jonah's Objection

1. Hatred of pagans?

Why was Jonah so alienated from his designated commission? Did he refuse to go to Nineveh because its population was non-Israelite? Did he think that Hebrew prophets were not to prophesy to the nations? Did Jonah's escape betray thoughtlessness and hostility towards pagans?

As a rule of thumb Hebrew prophets were not sent to the nations for their own benefit. Though Moses was sent to the Pharaoh he talked to him only about Israel and its God. Indeed, a central objective of Israelite prophecy was to announce and reassert the exclusive reign of God. Yet, Jonah's commission had nothing to do with such an objective; his mandate was unprecedented and uniquely limited to moral conduct even as the Ninevites' idolatry was irrelevant to this task.[10] Indeed, it is quite clear from the narratives that neither God nor Jonah considered the Ninevites' pagan beliefs as sin; it was only their ethical transgressions that mattered. To be sure, when Jonah finally explains the reason for his flight -- God being "relenting in regard to punishment" -- we hear nothing against extending this very divine attribute to pagans. Namely, Jonah was not disturbed by the *religious* identity of the recipients of God's compassion; he was, rather, troubled by the very availability of such grace to *morally* sinful people.

Jonah's objection to his commission could not have been related, therefore, to xenophobia or to reluctance to prophesy to pagans. That Jonah did not harbor hostility towards 'foreigners' may be plainly seen in his behavior during the storm. It is apparent that he did not wish to harm in anyway the sailors of the ship. It was Jonah who suggested, therefore, that they throw him overboard and save themselves from certain death, even as they were reluctant to heave him into the sea. Clearly, Jonah was determined to prevent any adversity to the vessel's crew resulting from his dispute with God.

2. Hatred of Assyrians?

Did Jonah recoil from his task because he had no compassion for those who destroyed, or were about to destroy the Kingdom of Israel? Does Scripture support the claim that Jonah held the Ninevites as enemies of his people? Certainly, such questions could only come from those who do not associate Jonah of Gath-hefer with the hero (anti-hero?) of these narratives; such questions presume that the Jonah saga occurred after the destruction of the Northern Kingdom by the hands of the Assyrians. And as far as Jonah was concerned God had no business in overlooking the infamy of his people's enemy.

Still, many biblical students who assume the identity of the 'two' Jonahs claim that the prophet did foresee "that the Assyrians would annihilate Israel". He, therefore, "wished that Nineveh should go down to its doom"[11] before it was able to devastate the Israelite kingdom. But the book of Jonah provides no historical backdrop which may associate the account with any particular time if not locale; it seems as though the 'national' and geographical identity of Nineveh has no pertinent meaning. Further, it is apparent that Jonah does not betrays his 'national' feelings towards Nineveh; as far as he is concerned this city does not represent anything besides its single characterization as a sinful city. His 'problem' with Nineveh is only a moral one; it is centered solely on such issues as sin and punishment, repentance and forgiveness. Nowhere do we find a reference to any other sins such as the oppression of foreign people.

In other words, Jonah does not represent the people of Israel, nor does Nineveh represent Assyria either before or after the destruction of the Northern Kingdom.

Moreover, if Nineveh were to represent the Assyrians, Israel's bitterest enemies in pre-exilic times, it stands to reason that the narratives would not have characterized Nineveh thrice as "the great city". By contrast, another prophet Nahum, who did deal in his prophecy with the historic Nineveh, gave it the epithet "city of blood". It is in the light of these factors that Jonah's escape from before the Lord can not be attributed to his feelings or premonitions vis-a-vis historic Nineveh, the Assyrian capital.

3. Saving the Honor of Israel?

Even though Jonah does not appear as a prophet who represents the people of Israel, there are old biblical commentaries which explain Jonah's motives in 'dodging the draft' in light of his concern for the honor of the people of Israel. In other words, Jonah attempts to escape because he understands that the main object of his commission would not be Nineveh but rather Israel. Thus, Jonah was commissioned to go to Nineveh chiefly for Israel's sake, for it was the censure of Israel that constituted his ultimate task; the divine scheme being to demonstrate to Israel the speed in which "the uncircumcised gentiles have repented". Jonah in turn would be able to come back to Israel and rebuke them: "You, on the other hand, have been repeatedly warned" by God's prophets but have persisted "in your stubbornness and have not repented."[12]

Jonah was concerned, therefore, that Nineveh's easy and quick (therefore doubtful and insincere) repentance would expose Israel's decadence and necessitate divine retribution. Feeling that in taking his designated mission he might harm Israel, Jonah deemed it unnecessary to go to Nineveh at all, and his only recourse was to flee. He chose loyalty to the people he loved before obedience to his sender; or in

the words of the midrash "the honor of the son" came before "the honor of the father."[13]

This line of interpretation which begins in early midrashim and is developed further in biblical commentaries of the Middle Ages is discarded in modern Jewish scholarship. The Jonah narratives simply cannot corroborate such a construction inasmuch they are devoid of any allusion to the people Israel.

4. Did Jonah Fear Being Perceived as Liar?

In 4:2 Jonah 'divulges' to God why he escaped to Tarshish; Jonah had foreseen the divine forgiveness of Nineveh's iniquities, and that his prophecy of doom would not be realized. Is it possible, therefore, to view his flight as a necessary action to avert damage to his personal honor? Was he concerned about being libeled as a false prophet by the Ninevites upon seeing the failure of his prophecy -- "forty days more and Nineveh shall be overturned!"? Was he bothered by the thought that after this experience his prophetic reputation would be irreparably tarnished, and no one will ever believe him anymore?

The first to focus on Jonah's prophetic stature as a possible motive for his flight appears in the midrash. Accordingly, Jonah was known as Ben Amittai (person of truth) because his prophecy concerning the restoration of Israel's borders under Jeroboam "from the approach of Hamath unto the sea of the plain" [II Kings 14:25] was explicitly fulfilled. The midrash goes on and without a prooftext relates another instance in which Jonah prophesied; this time regarding the destruction of Jerusalem. This prophecy, however, was not fulfilled because the people repented. Yet, "ignorant segments of the populace" came to distrust Jonah calling him a false

prophet; they did not comprehend that God changes an evil decree in response to repentance.[14] Thus, according to another midrash Jonah was concerned that if the Ninevites were to survive, they would accuse him of prophesying falsely with the result that the Name of Heaven would be profaned through him. The possibility of his being labeled for a second time as a false prophet, and especially by pagans perturbed Jonah, and drove him to escape to Tarshish.[15]

Ibn Ezra rejects this midrashic explanation; it does not make sense to him that Jonah would so much resent being called a 'false prophet', since he was not going to take up residence in Nineveh in any case. Further, "the people of Nineveh were not stupid" says Ibn Ezra, and Jonah must have known that they were not going to pronounce him a sham prophet only because they acted upon his prophecy, and saved themselves by returning to God.[16] According to Ibn Ezra, one could not ascribe to the Ninevites deep understanding of God's will and the hope that was contained in His warning, and view them concurrently as harboring contempt for the prophet who enabled them to realize that hope. Indeed, the king of Nineveh himself avers: "He who knows -- let him repent and God will be relentful; He will turn away from his burning wrath so that we perish not" (Jonah 3:9). Herein we find a prooftext that supports Ibn Ezra's invalidation of the midrashic claim concerning Jonah. As it seems, the Ninevite king is actually declaring that if the prophecy of doom did not materialize, it would not mean that Jonah had fabricated it; rather, though the prophecy was a true one, God might still change His mind about it.

The idea that one cannot mislead when moving people toward the good was not foreign to the era during which Jonah might have lived (provided that we are willing to assume his historicity). This may be deduced from an incident reported

in II Kings 20:1-6 (or in Isaiah 38: 1-8) whereby the prophet Isaiah is entrusted with a message that God soon annuls. The prophet Isaiah carries a notice of doom to a seriously ill King Hezekiah; from its wording and tone the message seems to be as categorical and final as Jonah's pronouncement to the Ninevites. Still, as he heard his sentence Hezekiah took immediate action to confront the situation, and desperately turned his face to the wall to pray and repent.

Seeing Hezekiah's immediate and sincere penance God ordered Isaiah, even before he left the palace, to return to the king with word of a reprieve: "The Lord, God of your ancestor David says, I have heard your prayer, seen your tears, and I am healing you . . . I will add fifteen years to your life, and will rescue you and this city as well from the grip of the Assyrian king". Isaiah, as one may notice, returned promptly to the palace with no hesitation on his part to fulfill this sudden turnabout.[17]

The lesson of this episode in connection to Jonah's possible fear of being perceived as a liar is quite apparent. Isaiah did not regard his original prophecy to king Hezekiah as mere soothsaying that had to be fulfilled even in the face of true repentance. Both accounts of this episode say nothing of the prophet being concerned for his stature, just because the king had repented and God forgave him. Further, from Jeremiah 26:18-19 we learn about another prophet, Micha, who lived about the same time; neither King Hezekiah nor the elders of the land held him as a false prophet even when his prophecy of doom did not materialize. The king took to heart the severity of the prophecy and returned to the Lord. In response "the Lord changed His mind about the misfortune which he had pronounced against [the king and his kingdom]."

Thus, if Jonah lived at either the same era or at a later time, one may surmise that he also might have been aware of the prophetic principles that emanate from these two episodes (as described in II kings and Jeremiah). In the final analysis, it is also evident that the Jonah account provides no indication that the prophet feared being ridiculed by the Ninevites when his prophecy of doom failed to materialize. On the contrary, if Jonah had indeed expected the Ninevites to sully his reputation of a true prophet, he should have hastened to return home at the conclusion of his second mission. Nonetheless, Jonah remained in Nineveh by his own volition, sitting at the east of the city "until he would see what would occur in the city" (Jonah 4:5). It appears, therefore, that Jonah overlooking Nineveh from his shanty booth was not concerned at all with his personal welfare; rather, his great interest was in something bigger than himself.[18]

5. Justice Before Mercy?

If neither historical or 'national' nor personal reasons moved Jonah to sail away, could it be then that 'theology', or more specifically his concept of 'crime and punishment', might possibly explain his flight from God's service? There is a little doubt that Jonah was fully aware from the outset of Nineveh's grave ethical decadence and corruption. God Himself seems to imply that He intended to punish the Ninevites, even though at his first commission Jonah was not yet commanded to foretell their punishment; according to Malbim that decree had not yet been sealed.[19] Yet, if God was firmly resolved to do them evil, Jonah's journey to the city would seem to be superfluous and unnecessary. In other words, the very fact that Jonah is sent to Nineveh signals in itself that the future is yet to be determined. Jonah's commission thus seems as "prophetic, not just predictive,"[20] for if God had meant only to 'shoot' why announce that?

Although the reader does not know immediately the reason for Jonah's escape, a careful reading 'between the lines' may provide the direction for a solution to this enigma. In exhorting Jonah to call upon God, the captain of the seemingly doomed ship expressed his hope that as a result "God will pay us mind and we will not perish" (Jonah 1:6). Similarly when the Ninevites heard Jonah's prophecy of doom, they too called "mightily to God" hoping "He will turn away from His burning wrath so that we perish not" (Jonah 3:8-9). Again it is reasonable to presume that if both the captain and the Ninevites knew the secret of God's repenting character, Jonah should have had "an even more definite knowledge of it."[21] And indeed chapter 4:2 confirms the veracity of these telltales; it was his anticipation that God will ultimately change His mind concerning the fate of Nineveh, and exhibit His compassion for the residents of this "enormously large city", that induced Jonah to fly from God's Presence. Thus, forgetting "that he is only the arm of God, not his mind or heart,"[22] Jonah appears to rebel against Deity in the name of a theological idea; divine pardon as a substitute to divine justice contradicted his religious logic.

Yet, even if we do know the reason for Jonah's rebellion, it is still incumbent on us to figure it out, i.e., what problem did Jonah have with a divine plan that allowed sinners to change their way and earn forgiveness? Why did he think that his escape and probable death was preferable to serving as the agent of an all-merciful Deity? Is it possible that this prophet failed to understand God's modus operandi, and if this is so, why?

Jonah as we saw revolted in the name of an idea; the idea that even God Himself may not repeal a sentence of punishment He had intended to carry out against sinners. Jonah is rather explicit when explaining that he "had hastened to flee to

Tarshish" for he knew that God was not only "a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, and abounding in kindness, [but also] relenting in regards to punishment" (Jonah 4:2). Our task, therefore, is to try and find out why Jonah felt that God was changing the rules of the 'justice game', thus rendering his own calling as unacceptable? Why was it revolting in his eyes to serve a God who relents of punishment?

In citing his objection to God's readiness to relent when it comes to punishment, Jonah's wording resembles very closely Exodus 32:14. This passage from Exodus concludes a pericope which relates God's reversal of His intent to bring calamity upon the Israelites who had sinned by worshipping the golden calf. Significantly, this divine forgiveness came in response to Moses' plea, but there is no indication that God relented because the Israelites repented of their iniquity; the issue of penance and return is absent from this text. To be sure, the element of repentance is absent from various other biblical passages where divine punishment does occur. The generation of the Deluge, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the peoples of Canaan are but a few examples of the Bible's initial concept of sin which entails total calamity; none of these stories features an element of divine pardon. The notion here is that sin results in punishment even as none of these constituencies is offered the opportunity to atone for its iniquities, and attain thereby the hope that God will alter His intention for their destruction.[23]

Jonah's protest against God's proclivity to relent in respect of punishment is typical of the early prophets' conception that the word of God proclaimed by a prophet will always be fulfilled.[24] For example, when Samuel informs Saul of the imminent demise of his kingship he makes it utterly clear, despite Saul's remorse and repentance, that God "will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He

should change His mind" (I Samuel, 15:29). It is this realization that "sin can be expiated only by punishment" that prevails in the Bible[25]; hence, Jonah's recoil from his calling becomes a little more intelligible.

Notwithstanding the later introduction into the Bible of the newer conception regarding repentance and divine clemency (such as presented in the case of King Hezekiah), Jonah subscribes to the earlier and more dominant 'theology'. He simply does not understand how it is possible that merely by renouncing any further sinning, a villain earns divine pardon. Moreover, Jonah like the earlier prophets who were not sent to bring about the return of the wicked to God, but rather "to prevent sinning, or pronounce punishment", does not understand the later prophetic goal to save the villain from punishment.[26] Jonah is greatly displeased and grieved, therefore, when Nineveh is not overthrown; its residents' elaborate and seemingly sincere atonement does not affect him at all. For it is evident that he ascribes no import or significance to the sinners' remorse and return to God. It appears as though his sense of divine justice has a mathematical nature, e.g., sin equals retribution, and no other factors such as compassion should figure in this equation. Hence, if God would not adhere to His own principles of justice, then Jonah had no business serving a deity who is remiss in the practical application of these principles.

E. The Signs

As a rule of thumb, most prophets did not ask for signs. God, however, provided them -- at times as supernatural phenomena -- to allay concerns of personal inadequacy, reconfirm the divine origin of the commission, and reassure that the mission will be successfully fulfilled. In a nutshell, the ultimate goal of such signs

was to enable the doubting prophet to overcome his initial skepticism or objection; indeed, soon after the demonstration of such signs, the prophet would assume his task that lay ahead.

The 'signs' Jonah encounters along his escape route do not differ in principle from those received by Moses or Gideon; likewise, they are designed to convince the 'conscientious objector' that his reluctance to take on the mission is unacceptable to God. Further, there can be no question about their supernatural character in view of the "unalterable" laws of nature that were changed to ensure that Jonah would go to Nineveh. The tempest, being the first in a sequence of other signs, seems to be as Malbim notes, unseasonable and "clearly the result of Divine Providence."[27] Scripture's particular wording "Then the Lord cast a mighty wind toward the sea" (Jonah 1:4) may be indicative of a specifically 'customized' storm, as it is evident that the narrator chose to distinguish this gale for its divine origin and reasoning. Presumably, the narrator (and with him Jonah too) must have believed that all other storms were also a product of God's cosmic laws, so why stress the fact that the Lord Himself had cast this particular tempest?

The uncanny nature of the gale was manifest also in its seeming discriminatory targeting of Jonah's ship. The narrator demonstrates it apparently by using the definite article "*ha*" to single out "the ship [that] threatened to be broken up" (Jonah 1:4). Thus it seems as though it was only Jonah's ship that appeared in danger of becoming shipwrecked. Nonetheless, despite the opportunity offered him to respond to the call, Jonah remains unimpressed; not only does he refrain from calling upon God to stop the storm, he ignores the powerful gale by descending to one of the ship's holds, laying there down, and falling fast asleep. This reaction on his part is not too dissimilar to Moses' reaction to his first sign; Moses too

remained reticent and irreconcilable to the idea of his mission. And like Moses, Jonah is given another sign as the first sign did not seem to be altogether persuasive; it is for this reason that also Gideon requests another sign.

Just as Moses' and Gideon's second sign was even more impressive than their first one, Jonah's second sign defies all human logic in its miraculous nature as well. It is this feat with the large fish that ultimately compels the fleeing prophet to relent, and acquiesce to go to Nineveh. Jonah, who was willing and prepared to die in the sea, would find out that even this privilege -- the freedom to die -- was taken away from him. For as a 'tenant' in the fish's belly, Jonah was deprived of life in freedom as well as the freedom to die. His prayer to God asserts, in effect, the superiority of God over him, even as it recognizes the impossibility to run away from Him.[28] Having been spewed out of the fish, Jonah obeys his renewed calling and goes to Nineveh.

F. Summary

Even as he was hearing his commission, Jonah could already anticipate the triumph of God's attribute of compassion over that of justice as far as the fate of Nineveh was concerned. His theological concept of justice could allow for no compromise, even if God Himself would allow it, i.e., Nineveh atones for its transgressions and God in turn forgives. In fleeing from his mission Jonah was proclaiming, in effect, that even God should not deviate from the principle on which he, Jonah, was operating; this principle prescribed divine retribution to the sinner irrespective of any repentance. Not understanding that God's concept of justice provided for the pronouncement of punishment in order to make punishment itself unnecessary, Jonah runs away from his mission preferring death

to compliance. It was this dogmatic jealousy for unadulterated justice that motivated him to rebel against his merciful God.

It was this type of rebellion that distinguishes Jonah from the rest of the reluctant or hesitant prophets. No other prophet would rebel against God's commission to the extent that Jonah did. Still, there seems to be a streak of similarity between Abraham -- God's most obedient prophet, and Jonah -- God's least obedient prophet. Both are the least selfish prophets; they are utterly oblivious of their own welfare in fulfilling what they view as God's ultimate will. Abraham hastens to offer God the life of Isaac -- his ultimate sacrifice. God's will must under no circumstances be subjected to compromises; no, not even in the name of compassion. Jonah operates along a similar mode; justice should be the ultimate will of God, and its execution must be divorced from any lesser considerations such as compassion. In adhering to this conception Jonah is willing to offer his dearest price -- his own life. Hence, both Abraham and Jonah are driven to fulfill what they perceive to be the ultimate will of the Divine, and in doing so they are willing to offer their ultimate sacrifice. Similarly, both prophets' highly emotional three-day journey towards death, end with a most dramatic manifestation of God's compassion.

In conclusion, though the Jonah account lack several components of Habel's formula of the call narratives, it still contains other elements of this formula; commission, objection, and sign. Since all the calls discussed here share the objection element as their focal common denominator, the Jonah account must be considered as a part and parcel of our subject. Last but not least, like all other called individuals who offered initially their objection but proceeded eventually to fulfill their divine mission, Jonah too relents and fulfills his prophetic assignment.

NOTES

1. *Talmud Yerushalmi:* Sukkah 5:1.

2. *Bereshit Rabbah:* 44:6.

3. Jack M. Sasson, *Jonah* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1990), The Anchor Bible, p. 86.

4. Kaufmann, Ibid., p. 283.

5. Herbert C. Brichto, *Toward a Grammer of Biblical Poetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 68.

6. Shulah Avramski, "Hitnakrooto Shel Yonah Utshuvato", *Beth Mikra,* 79 (Jerusalem, 1979) 376.

7. Uriel Simon, "Yona", *Mikra Le-Yisrael: Ovadiah, Yonah,* edited by Moshe Greenberg & Sh'muel Ahitoov (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, Ltd., 1992), p. 45.

8. Good, Ibid., p. 42ff.

9. Simon, Ibid., p. 47.

10. Kaufmann, Ibid., I-III, p. 729.

11. S. D. F. Goitein, "Some Observations on Jonah", *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*, XVII (1937), 65.

12. Moshe Alshich, *The Book of Jonah*, trans. from Hebrew into English by R. Shahar (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1992), p. 33.

13. *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael*, Masekhet d'Paskha, Bo:1.

14. *Talmud Bavli*, Yoma:73b.

15. *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, 10:3.

16. Uriel Simon, "Sefer Yona - Mivneh U-mashmaoot", *Sefer Yitzhak Arieh Zeligmann*, edited by Yair Zakovitch & Alexander Rof'e (Jerusalem: Elhanan Rubinstein, 1983),
II, p. 297.

17. Sasson, Ibid., p. 295.

18. Simon, Ibid., p. 296.

19. Nosson Scherman & Meir Zlotowitz, eds., *Jonah* (New York: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1978), p. 80.

20. Andre' & Pierre E. Lacocque, *Jonah: a psycho-religious approach to the prophet* (Columbia:University of South Carolina Press, 1990), p. 128.

21. Goitein, Ibid., p. 72.

22. Brichto, Ibid., p. 80.

23. Kaufmann, Ibid., IV-V, p. 285.

24. Alexander Rof'e, *Sipoorei Ha-neviim* (Jerusalem: The Magness Press, 1982), p. 141.

25. Kaufmann, Ibid.

26. Ibid, 285-86.

27. Scherman, Ibid., p. 87.

28. Simon, Ibid., p. 303.

Chapter VII: CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has focused primarily on the call narratives of three prophets (or five if we include Abraham and Gideon, as I think we should), and one king-designate. Common to these individuals (excluding Abraham) was their verbally professed doubts about, or reluctance to assuming their respective commission. Their prompt human response to a divine call may be laconically paraphrased as "why me?!" This reluctance emanated from a sense of humility and modesty which compelled the demurring individual to regard his personal weaknesses as incongruous with the kind of task he was called upon to take on.

Moses saw himself as a mere shepherd inflicted by speech impediment, and had little faith in his ability to convince either the Israelites or the Pharaoh himself. In fact, even after God had provided him with magical signs, his unwillingness to accept the mission did not abate. Similarly, Gideon stressed his family's weak stature within its tribe which was small in itself, as the basis for his self-doubts whether he could become Israel's deliverer. Likewise, Saul as king-designate cited before Samuel his family's humble origins as his grounds for what seems as hesitation, if not outright reluctance, to assume the kingship. In pronouncing his inadequacy for a prophetic career Jeremiah focused on his personal non-importance and lack of communicative skills. Jonah expressed his firm objection to his calling not by word but by running away in the opposite direction of his assigned destination; his reasons for doing so were not personal but ideological.

It is apparent, however, that Scripture imparts little import to whether such expressions of humble origin, as argued by Moses, Gideon, Saul or Jeremiah, were factually correct. God neither denies nor confirms these arguments. It seems as

though God chooses His agents irrespective of their social status. Still, the very fact that the commissioned men do demonstrate humility and modesty suggests, perhaps, that God expects His envoys to possess such personal characteristics.

Nevertheless, the seeming reluctance of 'our' prophet to assume his commission was not restricted solely to the confines of humility and perception of social insignificance. It is his vivid anticipation of hardships along the way that figure high in his mind. Thus, despite God's repeated assurances of a successful mission, Moses continues to profess his doubts whether the people and their leaders would believe his credentials. And Gideon, affected by his former adverse experience in containing the Midianites, doubted too his appeal to the people as their prospective deliverer. Similarly, Jeremiah seems to realize too well what his prophetic career would mean in terms of personal hardships and physical dangers.

Despite their seeming attempts to decline the 'job offer', all commissioned men end up in accepting their task. And although such a person enjoys full freedom to argue his reasons why he should not become God's agent, God does not rebuke the protestor, nor does He get angry at him. On the contrary, God responds to such expressions of concern and doubt by providing in all cases divine signs (supernatural at times); each individual receiving at least two signs. Moreover, in some instances it is noticeable that when a commissioned person does not seem to be completely impressed with a divine sign, God provides another one which is seemingly even more impressive than the former. Such wonders are commonly preceded and followed by divine oral assurances of success which are meant to infuse God's 'ambassadors' with greater self-confidence, and to further allay their fears. Thus, showing hesitancy and harboring doubts about one's qualifications for a divine mission is apparently normative if not stereotypical.

Notably, only Abraham emerges as a prophet who obeys most piously and promptly all that the Lord commands him to do. Abraham's last divine assignment was so incredibly terrifying; yet, Abraham hastened to fulfill it. No other prophet and certainly not even Moses -- the greatest prophet -- would be able to emulate Abraham's degree of obedience. Yet, perhaps after Abraham, God is not interested any longer in picking agents for His service that would possess Abraham's type of automatic devotion. Perhaps, God would like His servants first to grapple with their personal doubts before they assumed their commission.

While all the bona fide prophets (Abraham and Gideon included) perceive God, and comprehend His word through their senses -- seeing apparitions or gazing at divine signs -- Saul is different. Although he becomes king according to God's explicit will, Saul does not communicate with God, at least not directly. It is only through Samuel that Saul attains an 'open line' to the divine. Still, despite this significant difference, Saul is God's envoy even as the account of his call fits well the Habel formula of prophetic call narratives in the Bible.

This formula identifies six basic elements which comprise the call account: divine confrontation, introductory word, commission, objection, reassurance, and signs. This formula demonstrates in its own way the 'tactful' and considerate approach of the Divine to the recruited individual. God has no intent to overwhelm the chosen man into submission out of fear. In most instances the called person is first shown a divine theophany accompanied by an implicit intimation of the imminent commission. As noted above, God does not only allow the individual to voice his qualms about the designated task, but responds in various reassuring ways. Thus, when Moses, for instance, is perturbed by his poor oratory skills, God appoints

Aaron as his spokesman. When Jeremiah enunciates a similar argument, he receives in turn the all-familiar divine oath reaffirming God's authentication and promise to be with him. And finally, all commissioned persons ultimately overcome their initial if not continuous concerns, and assume their divine charge. As it seems, there is no escape from God's service, and the Jonah account is an unmistakable exemplar of this reality.

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