

The God Who Calls

Yahweh, is not a God who sits around passively after creating the world and just lets things happen. He is actively involved right from the beginning. Not only is he involved, he wants us to be involved with him.

According to our faith, Yahweh has made us in his image, and we out of all of creation are the only creatures who can respond to him and come to know him. As the creed says, we can communicate with him and he calls us to do just that.

Gn.6: deals with the state of the world and the sons of God and women. These were mythological beings who were the great heroes of the ancient times, who fancied the human women of the world. The corruption of the races was seen as something evil. The children begotten by these illicit unions were the giants of old. But God saw the evil and wicked deeds that were conceived in the hearts of humanity. He then decided to rid the earth of it.

Modern archaeology and anthropology are now saying that these stories could go back to a much earlier time than once thought. They could go back to pre-historical times and possibly racial memories of the earliest human. It is now thought possible that at one time there were many species of Humanoids on Earth, Neolithic, Cro-Magnon, Neanderthal and Homo-Sapiens all living at about the same time. It is possible that memories of the first human tribes and their conflicting relationships between the other species carried on as mythical stories of Sons of the Gods and women. But what seems to be a more important implication is the conscious awareness of God by early mankind.

The account of scripture as seen in Gn.7: shows that creation had gone wrong somehow, and people had become independent of God. The cross breeding of races had to be ended. **So Noah is called to save a remnant.** This first call is confined to only one man and his family. This could be interpreted as a kind of ethnic or genetic cleansing of the race. There is no attempt to convert others since it is assumed that there is no other person on earth who walks with God. The story of the flood is not unique in history. There are two accounts of it in the Bible, both coming from different sources. The details are a little different in each account, but the importance is in that there is an underlying truth that we have to see. We should not get too worried about which story is the original, since the sources of these stories probably come from accounts outside of the Bible such as the Gilgamesh epics or vice-versa.

It is not important how long the waters stayed on the face of the earth, or how long they

drifted on the sea, what is important is the response of Noah and how he does what he is told. There is no questioning, no bargaining indeed not a word, he does it because he walks with God.

The most important sacrifice we can make is to act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with our God, and this is what we are led to believe Noah did in his life. He loved God and lived with him and God lived with Noah.

Many early religions thought of a pantheon of gods, and the problems of the world were seen as a reflection of the gods fighting among themselves. As with the stories of the Rig Vedas in the Hindu mythology, the cataclysmic destruction of the world was brought about through the greed and power lust of the Gods. But here in Genesis, we have something new. Here it is humanity that is the cause of the trouble in the world, through mankind's greed and corruption and what has been done to God's creation.

Gn.9: The new order of the world has a change in emphasis now, mankind is seen to be at odds with nature. It seems a contradiction with Gn.2: when we had to care for the land and be its steward, now we are the Terror and dread of all creation which is place into our hands. We are no longer in harmony with nature and the world. Humanity no longer possess the land, but is accountable for it.

There is at this stage a struggle with nature and in order to exist we have to dominate and subdue it. But from this point on it will never be ours except through terror and dread.

Gn.12: The call of Abraham. He as a city dweller is called to leave the house of his father and go to the land that God will show him. There is a promise to make his name famous. Here is a strange story of a very vague promise made to a man who was probably very wealthy, who certainly had a great deal of property and possessions. Abram, as he was then, lived with his family in the city of Ur of the Chaldeans, which is in the south of present day Iraq, close to the borders of Kuwait. Terah, his father, moved with his family to Haran in the north of modern Syria. There Terah died. Abram was in his new home in the city of Haran when he heard the Call of God. One must keep in mind that Abram was not a young man, and had already made a migration of more than 600 miles over some of the most difficult terrain in the world. But he answers the call to move into action again. Here we note that Abram, like Noah answers by action and not words. There is no questioning just a response.

If we look at the promise God made to Abram, we see that God says he will make him into a great nation. 'I shall bless you and make your name famous; you are to be a blessing!'

Abram is told to leave for a land that God will show him. The land is Canaan. But this land will only be shown him not given to him. This is a strange story to accept when one realises the age of Abram, how could he just pack up and leave on a mystical experience? It must have been something very powerful. Some scholars have made remarks to the effect that he wouldn't have been leaving much of value in the city, since he had already made such a long journey. Or perhaps the city of Haran wasn't to his liking and wanted to search for something better. But these suggestions leave out the question of how long had Abram lived in Haran, the text says he left his father's house, indicating that he had inherited his property, and then how long had Terah been dead before his call to leave? Again we must not underestimate the standard of life in those days, Ur and Haran were great cities, some of the oldest we know of. The ruins of Mohan-jo-Daro of the Indus in modern Pakistan is also thought to be one of the oldest cities known, and would have been a contemporary to Ur and Haran.

The Mohan-jo-Daro ruins still have the remnants of such sophistication that modern cities are only just catching up with. Such as regulated paved streets, with covered water and sewerage courses, public refuse collection services and public baths, (which may or may not have had religious significance). The indications are that there would have been a strong government and law and order structure to maintain such a city system. This means that public safety and security was present to an unknown degree.

City life is only possible with an efficient and prosperous agricultural base to feed it. The farmers would need the city to sell or trade their produce, (unless there was slavery) for the goods they needed, such as tools, cloth and a variety of foods. The agrarian population would have looked towards the City for protection both materially and spiritually. The City would have conscripted for the military from the farming communities and extracted taxes and tithes from them. When going to the city to worship in the great Temples, tax would also be demanded to pay for the services and sacrifices.

It is always in the city that ideas are exchanged as much as goods, so there must have been a level of education. Indeed there are fragments of writing in Mohan-jo-Daro that have yet to be translated. The fact that a high degree of writing existed at that time, is significant for the prosperity of city life and of religion and ritual. It seems to me that there would be many reasons to stay in the comfort and security of a city and a lot left to chance and providence to take up the life of a nomad.

There is an aspect of city life, that in the eyes of the Biblical writer was not so good. This is tied up with the story of the Tower of Babel. Gn.11:-. As I have already said there was a high level of co-operation and organization. Once people are able to agree on something and

work together, there is almost nothing that cannot be achieved. The cult of the Ziggurats, was an example, the creation of what must have looked like manmade mountains to reach the heavens, to worship God, or to control God? Whatever it really was it was seen as being too dangerous that man would find nothing beyond his ability and think himself as independent of God or to start to worship himself.

What we have to remember about the call of Abram, is that it is a reflection after the event and seen from a point of faith as the origin of a nation. A chosen people set apart to be the witness of Yahweh to the world and to be the example of faith that Yahweh requires of his people.

Ex.3: Moses and the burning bush. Before we look at the call of Moses, it is necessary to see the reason and historical build up to this event.

Remember the story of Joseph, how he was sold into slavery in Egypt and how he became Pharaoh's chief adviser and saved the nation from famine. That famine was widespread and affected the sons of Jacob (Israel) and so they, on the invitation of Joseph, migrated to Egypt. But they stayed on after the famine to become residents of the land and took on the local lifestyle and customs. They must have found the Nile valley more comfortable than nomadic life in Canaan. After some 400 years, they had grown into a sizeable nation and the New King of the time was afraid of them. They were known as the Apiru or Hebrew people, the Travelers. But then not all of the Hebrew people were of the same lineage. Some of the other wandering Semitic tribes also lived there and had even ruled Egypt for a time. So perhaps this was why the New Pharaoh became afraid of them and saw them as a threat to his nation. Perhaps that is why he had them enslaved for reasons of national security.

The symbol of slavery has much deeper meanings and evokes greater feelings to the Hebrew than we may be aware of today. It was not only slavery to a human master, but also slavery to things and a culture or way of life or an idea and indeed to sin. This then is the context of the call of Moses, who had himself escaped the edict of death to all male children, through the foresight and ingenuity of his mother and the charity of the princess. It seems to be a bit of a fairy story to some, but there is more than a little truth here that stands up to examination. It was once assumed that the name Moses was a Hebrew name, Mashah, or Moishah, meaning to draw out. But the princess who probably did not speak Hebrew, called him Moses, which means to be born. Mose, is an Egyptian name used by many of the pharaohs and is usually attached to one of the names of the gods, such as Tutmose.

Moses is reared and taught in the city in the palace, but he is nursed by his own mother and would undoubtedly have been taught of his own origin and culture. At this time there

was a revival of the faith of the Hebrew. They remembered the promise God had made to their ancestor Abraham about a Promised Land. This is not surprising as this will always happen to an enslaved and oppressed people. This faith would have been passed on to Moses by his mother and sister. The texts show that he knew his real identity and that he also questioned what was happening to his people. When he stands up for one of his brethren and kills the guard, he has to run away into the desert.

He goes into the land of Midian, to the shepherd Jethro, who is also a priest of the One God. He marries his daughter and becomes a shepherd himself. Events have led him out of the city into the desert. Are these Events of divine intervention? Whatever it is he doesn't forget the condition of his people in Egypt. One day, probably while thinking of them and perhaps even praying for them, he encounters the Burning Bush. When he sees it he is drawn to it out of curiosity, but as he gets closer he hears the voice of God... God tells him to remove his shoes as the place is holy ground. The voice tells him that He is the God of his ancestors Abraham, Isaac/Issaq and Jacob. He has heard the cry of his people and seen their misery and will save them and take them to the promised Land of milk and honey. He will put them in possession of the lands of the present inhabitants.

For me the significance of this story is that Moses, who was a prince of Egypt and a Hebrew, now stuck out in the middle of the desert herding sheep while worrying about his people, probably praying to God asking 'What am I supposed to do about it?' His people are oppressed and suffering and being killed but they are not being destroyed. It is like the burning bush, while it burns it is not consumed and will not go out. To Moses the image of his people is the burning bush. God answers, and says I have seen it already, if you want to help them, Go and free them. What follows is the wonderful dialogue between Moses and God. He gets God to tell him his name so that he can tell his people who it was that sent him. But it is not the kind of name one would expect. God says He is who He is. 'I Am Who Am'. And I shall be with you. You shall call me Yahweh, the God of your ancestors and this shall be my name for all time.

This is the wonder of our God. He calls us and wants us to be involved with him. He is so patient and prepared to listen and explain what we need to know, even to giving us the power we need to carry out the task he calls us to do.

Ex.13: Now we see that the whole people are called. They are called out of the Land of Egypt back into the desert. Ex.19: we see them at Mount. Horeb, which means the Place of the Bush. The alternative name for Horeb is Sinai. Here we see that for the first time a people is called to serve God and to accept His will for them.

Josh.24:1-, Joshua reminds the people of their history as a nomadic people and asks them to ratify their promise and remain a people set apart. This is the beginning of the people of Israel. The Israelites, who were made up of the 'apiru tribes form themselves into a tribal federation under the guidance of Yahweh and the Law. They are not to become like the people of the Land of Canaan. Canaan will become their land, but they are warned not to become possessed by it on pain of death.

Josh. 2:-7: Jericho is the symbol of all that is wrong with the Canaanites, full of corruption, evil and idolatry. They have to take possession of the Land but they are not to live in the city, or they will be inflicted by the curse. Josh.6:26 This curse is realized by King Hiel of Bethel who sacrifices his sons to rebuild the city again. 1Ks.16:34.

God's call of the people demands that they be totally dedicated to the will of God and to remain totally dependant on Him as His nomads.

Jgs.6: The call of Gideon. This story come quite some time after the Exodus and the Israelites have settled the Land and they have become farmers taking on the culture of the Canaanites as their own, they have also taken on all the excesses of idolatry. God punishes them by oppressing them. The Midianites, who are nomads, descendants of Jethro, father in Law of Moses become the oppressors. They raid the Israelite farmers in a very efficient way. But some of the people still have faith and call on God for help.

The Angel of Yahweh comes to Gideon who is a clever and faithful man. he is threshing the grain inside the wine press to hide from the Midianites. The Angel says to him, 'Yahweh is with you Valiant Warrior.' Which is the literal meaning of Gideon's name. But Gideon answers with what was probably an ironic laugh, recognizing the pun, 'Excuse me my Lord, if Yahweh is with us why is all this happening to us? And where are all the miracles we hear he once did for us? Yahweh has abandoned us to Midian'. I am sure there was more than a little sarcastic humour in his voice as he spoke. This is an example of the typical kind of Jewish humour that is still so famous for being able to turn a disaster into a joke.

But now let us re-examine the scene and try to picture it. It is harvest time and the grain needs to be threshed, this raises great clouds of dust into the air, which in turn would signal to the nomad raiders in the hills that it is time for them to raid the villages and farms for the grain. But Gideon, shrewd man that he is has hidden in the wine press. This is probably a cave or a barn like building. No doubt that it was hot and dusty and Gideon would have been brooding and complaining to himself and to God for all the trouble he had to undergo. Maybe he was even trying to understand why God had seemingly cursed them.

Gideon, angry and frustrated as he is, hasn't lost his sense of humour. Yahweh says to Gideon, 'Go in this strength of yours and you will rescue Israel.' This strength is I think, his ability to see the truth and to speak the truth as he sees it and then to act on it. He is not afraid to argue with the Angel. He points out that for him to lead Israel he would have to be someone people would listen to. As it is he is the least of his father's family and his clan is the weakest in Manasseh.

Gideon then tests the Angel to see if it is really Yahweh or just someone trying to make a fool of him. He asks for a sign to see what God wanted of him. He brings an offering of bread and meat. Symbols, Bread for the Farmer and meat for the nomad,. If the Angel accepted the bread only then he accepted the farmer, but if he took the meat only then he wanted the nomad. But the Angel took both and confused him even more. When the Angel gave him the sign only then did Gideon show fear and perhaps shame in that he had the nerve to argue with God. But he is reassured with the peace of God and the promise that God is with him.

Gideon then sets to work, clearing out all the idols and altars to the gods and Baals. First on his father's lands, then in the town. He then confronted the people and challenged them to reject the cult of Baal and follow him to meet and rid the land of the Midianites.

I am sure that Gideon was more than a little uncertain when he saw the massed armies against him and so wanted more assurance that it really was God who was leading him. And so he asks God for another sign Jgs.6:36-40 he asks that the fleece be wet with dew while the ground dry and so it happened. But being the shrewd man he is, he wants to be even more sure and asks for it again only this time the other way around, with the fleece dry and the ground wet.

The result of this is that he leads the Israelites against the Midianites and wins. But this time it is Yahweh who takes the initiative and reduces Gideon's army by a number of tests leaving him with only 300 men. This is to point out that it is really Yahweh and not the army who wins the battle. As a result, Gideon re-establishes the cult of Yahweh among the people and becomes judge over Israel.

1 Sam. 8-16: the Anointing of David.

The people by this time had become rather settled into the city life and culture. The tribal structure had almost faded away and in times of conflict with other cities and kings they had no central authority to turn to, except the Judges. The people, or rather the merchants had demanded a King so that they could be like everyone else. The reason given was that the

sons of Samuel were not following the example of the prophet. They were not fit to be judges as they were seduced by money, took bribes and gave biased verdicts. The elders wanted a king to be judge over them. Samuel tries to argue that it is wrong to have a king and that it would lead to even more corruption, but more importantly, it was a rejection of God as their ruler. The people would not listen they wanted a king so that the king would fight their battles for them. 1Sam. 8:1-22.

Samuel, under orders from Yahweh, gave them Saul. But he first points out that God is their King, and that they should not want to be like everyone else. God told Samuel, if they wanted a king, I will give them one, one they will soon become fed up with. Saul was made king over Israel, but he soon left the way of Yahweh and became like other kings of the land. It was then that God ordered Samuel to anoint David, who was a shepherd. A young man of great faith. 1Sam. 16:1-13. He was possessed by God and chosen over his older brothers. God chose a shepherd to remind the people who they are and that they were called to be a People set apart, a Holy Nation a Royal Priesthood for all the Nations, not just for Israel.

The purpose of a priest is to bring the people to God. A priest becomes useless when he wants to become like everyone else, compromising his faith, allowing and practicing rituals contrary to his office and calling. Finally the priest becomes so corrupt that he no longer sees corruption and evil and is no longer able to speak out against it with authority and credibility. Like Eli the high priest and his sons, who were so corrupt that they even cursed God. **1Sam.2:12-26 A Priest is called and must follow his God alone.** All the prophets were called, and all the accounts of these calls have within them the same phrase, '**Do not be afraid, I am with you, Follow me.**' (see no2 on the themes and trends,)

Jer.1:4-19, Jeremiah is called by Yahweh, and says that before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you came to birth I consecrated you; I appointed you as prophet to the nations. Jeremiah tries to protest and argues that he is only a child and does not know how to speak. But Yahweh replies that while the nations will fight against you, do not be afraid for I am with you, to rescue you.

Ez.1,3:1-21 Ezekiel is likewise sent to the people, the words of Yahweh are put into his mouth. The warning that he must issue will rebound on himself if he fails to proclaim the word. Compliance will not only save the people but Ezekiel as well..

Mt.1:18-25, Joseph is called by God through the dream and he is commanded not to be afraid, since this is all the work of the Holy Spirit. Mt.2:13-15 Again Joseph is commanded to take the family to safety in Egypt, his response is unquestioning obedience.

Lk.5:1-11. The call of the disciples, are preceded by a demonstration of Jesus' power and authority to call. The recognition by Peter of who Jesus is demonstrated by his fear and awareness of his own sinfulness. Also there is the awareness that there is no where for him to hide from the presence of Jesus. Which is why he asks Jesus to leave him. Again we hear the words 'do not be afraid;'

Jn.20:19-23 The scene described is the great commission of the disciples to receive the Holy spirit, in order to forgive sins. The fear displayed by the disciples is dispelled by the familiar words 'Peace be with you!' which has the same effect as saying do not be afraid.

Acts.9:1-19 the call of Paul by way of his conversion. Paul could not resist the truth that confronted him as he persecuted the believers. His blindness is removed by Ananias and then accepts baptism and the commission to go out to the nations.

The Call of God continues today in each and every person on Earth and everyone has a unique story but the same call of 'Be not afraid come follow me' and the promise that God will always be with you!