

The Narrative Call Pattern in the Prophetic Commission of Enoch (Moses 6)

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INTRODUCTION

In his luminous examination of the book of Ezekiel, Walther Zimmerli distinguishes between two types of prophetic call in the Bible—the “narrative” type, which includes a dialogue with God or other divine interlocutor; and the “throne theophany” type, which introduces the prophetic commission with a vision of the heavenly throne of God.¹ Blake Ostler, in his study on “The Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi,”² has demonstrated in detail the presence of the “throne theophany” type of prophetic call in the Bible, the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, and the Book of Mormon.

There is a similarly striking example of a “narrative” type call in the prophetic commission of Enoch in Moses 6:23–36. This study considers the elements of the narrative call pattern; those elements of this form found in the prophetic commission of Enoch are examined and compared with the biblical narrative call passages.

Among the first to isolate and examine in detail the elements in the narrative call pattern in the Bible was Norman Habel. In a 1965 article, he distinguished six characteristic features of the pattern: (1) the divine confrontation, (2) the introductory word, (3) the commission, (4) the objection, (5) the reassurance, and (6) the sign.³ Habel sees this pattern embracing the prophetic commissions of the throne theophany type (for example, Isa. 6:1–13; Ezek. 1:1–3:11) as well as the narrative variety (Ex. 3:1–12 [Moses]; Judg. 6:11–27 [Gideon]; and Jer. 1:4–10 [Jeremiah]). The Jeremiah passage provides a typical example of the pattern:

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1. Divine Confrontation (v. 4) Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying,
2. Introductory word (v. 5a) Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and
3. Commission (v. 5b) I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.
4. Objection (v. 6) Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.
5. Reassurance (vv. 7–8) But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.
Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord.
6. Sign (vv. 9–10) Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words into thy mouth.
See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.⁴

Since Ostler's study so ably discusses the throne theophany type of the prophetic call pattern, this discussion is restricted to an examination and comparison of the prophetic commission passages in Exodus, Judges, Jeremiah, and the book of Moses.

ELEMENTS OF THE NARRATIVE CALL PATTERN

The Divine Confrontation

In both the Moses and Gideon prophetic call narratives, there is an unexpected confrontation with the divine. Moses was tending the flocks of his father-in-law Jethro when "the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. . . . And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt" (Ex. 3:1–3). Similarly, Gideon was surreptitiously threshing wheat when "the angel of the Lord appeared unto him" (Judg. 6:11–12). There is a like element of surprise in the Enoch pericope. There, Enoch is on a journey (whose exact nature and purpose are not further indicated) when "the Spirit of God descended out of heaven, and abode upon him" (Moses 6:26).

In the Exodus and Judges passages there appears to be an alternation between the divine spokesmen. In the Exodus section, the divine agent is first identified as "the angel of the Lord" (Ex. 3:2). However, later in the passage the being with whom Moses converses

is identified as “the Lord” (Ex. 3:4, 7). In Exodus 3:6, Moses’ divine interlocutor says, “I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” whereafter “Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.” In the Judges call passage, the divine being is again identified as “the angel of the Lord” (Judg. 6:12) but is later referred to in the narrative alternately as “the Lord” (Judg. 6:14, 16, 23) and “the angel of the Lord” (Judg. 6:20, 21, 22). It is, of course, possible and perhaps likely that in each of these cases both the Lord and an angel of the Lord were present and spoke. In the case of Enoch, “the Spirit of God” rests upon him, after which the Lord addresses him (Moses 6:26–27, 32, 35).

The Introductory Word

The function of the “introductory word” in the call narratives is, as Norman Habel explains, “not merely to arouse the attention . . . [of the prophet] but to spell out the specific basis or grounds (*Grund*) for the commission.”⁵ In the calls of Moses, Gideon, and Enoch the reasons for their vocation as prophet are explained. In the Exodus pericope, after Moses’ divine interlocutor identifies himself as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Ex. 3:6), he continues, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters. . . . I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them” (Ex. 3:7, 9). Therefore, he has come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and to lead them out of Egypt to “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex. 3:8). In contrast, in the passage containing Gideon’s call, it is Gideon who describes the current crisis: “But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites” (Judg. 6:13). Similarly, it is the wickedness and unbelief of the people which provide the grounds for Enoch’s call: “And for these many generations, ever since the day that I created them, have they gone astray, and have denied me, and have sought their own counsels in the dark” (Moses 6:28).

The “introductory word” section of the Jeremiah call passage is slightly different. Whereas the Moses, Gideon, and Enoch passages each provide an insight into the historical situation that necessitated their calls to be prophets, God’s premortal knowledge and foreordination of Jeremiah formed the basis of his commission to act as God’s spokesman: “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee” (Jer. 1:5).

The Commission

In the Moses, Gideon, and Jeremiah passages, following the recitation of the grounds for their prophetic vocation, the call itself

is made. Thus in Moses' call, God tells him, "Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt" (Ex. 3:10; compare Judg. 6:14; Jer. 1:5b). The Enoch pericope differs from the biblical passages only in that the "call" is stated before the "introductory word," which is introduced by the causal conjunction "for": "And he heard a voice from heaven, saying: Enoch, my son, prophesy unto this people and say unto them—Repent, for thus saith the Lord: I am angry with this people" (Moses 6:27).

The Objection

In each of the call passages, the prophet protests his inability to fulfill his prophetic commission. Moses—possibly with an eye to the slaying which had initially caused him to flee from Egypt—objects to his call by saying, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Ex. 3:11). Indeed, Moses' protest against his commission is not exhausted by a single outburst, but is followed by four more which, with their concomitant words of reassurance and giving of a sign, constitute the balance of Exodus 3 and most of Exodus 4. Gideon replies to his task of saving "Israel from the hand of the Midianites" (Judg. 6:14) with the protest, "Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (Judg. 6:15). Both Jeremiah and Enoch cite youth and lack of speaking ability as reasons for refusing their prophetic calls (in like manner, Moses complains of a want of eloquence in Ex. 4:10); Enoch further insists that "all the people hate me" (Moses 6:31; Jer. 1:6).

The Reassurance

In response to their protestations of inexperience and incapacity, God assures his chosen vessels of aid sufficient to fulfill their commission. In reply to Moses' objection, God replies simply, "Certainly I will be with thee" (Ex. 3:12a). Similarly, the Lord tells Gideon, "Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man" (Judg. 6:16). Both Moses and Gideon had misunderstood their calls, assuming that they would be required to stand alone against the power of Pharaoh or the might of the Midianites. God's reassurance places in sharper focus the nature of their prophetic commission: they are to act as God's agents and spokesmen, but they could expect and would receive his constant companionship and aid.

The divine reassurance to Jeremiah and Enoch represents an explicit response to their objections. Jeremiah had objected that he was "a child" (Jer. 1:6) and could not speak, to which God replies,

“Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord” (Jer. 1:7–8). Enoch had similarly protested his youth, his want of glibness, and the contempt in which he was held. God’s response contains both command and reassurance: “Go forth and do as I have commanded thee, and no man shall pierce thee. Open thy mouth, and it shall be filled, and I will give thee utterance” (Moses 6:32). If before Enoch had been weak in speaking, God’s gift would make that weakness a strength unequalled in other men: “Behold my Spirit is upon you, wherefore all thy words will I justify; and the mountains shall flee before you, and the rivers shall turn from their course” (Moses 6:34).

The Sign

To betoken and guarantee the prophetic commission, God gives the prophet a sign, usually of a miraculous nature. Gideon is the only one among the prophets under discussion who explicitly requests and receives a sign: “And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me” (Judg. 6:17), whereupon he is provided a sign. The sign given Moses following his first objection was the promise that he and the children of Israel would “serve God upon this mountain” (Ex. 3:12b). Following his third objection (Ex. 4:1), his hand is made leprous and then healed again; after his final protest, Moses is given a rod “wherewith thou shalt do signs” (Ex. 4:17). God touches Jeremiah’s mouth, previously the source of embarrassment and shame, and says, “Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth” (Jer. 1:9). Following God’s reassurance to Enoch, God tells him to “anoint [his] eyes with clay, and wash them” (Moses 6:35). Thereafter, “he beheld the spirits that God had created; and he beheld also things which were not visible to the natural eye” (Moses 6:36).

CONCLUSION

The report of the prophetic vocation of Enoch in the book of Moses accords with impressive consistency with the call narratives in the Bible. All of the elements of the prophetic call pattern isolated and examined by Habel in the calls of Moses, Gideon, and Jeremiah are also found in the Enoch passage; with one minor exception, the order of the elements in the vocation of Enoch is the same as in the call accounts recorded in the Bible. This additional authenticating detail places Enoch more securely in the tradition of the prophets and the book of Moses more firmly in the form and tradition of the prophetic literature.

APPENDIX
THE NARRATIVE CALL PATTERN IN EXODUS, JUDGES, JEREMIAH, AND MOSES

	Exodus 3:1-12	Judges 6:11-21, 23	Jeremiah 1:4-10	Moses 6:26-36
1. Divine Confrontation	<p>Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.</p> <p>And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see,</p>	<p>And there came an angel of the Lord, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abi-ezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.</p> <p>And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him,</p>	<p>Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying,</p>	<p>And it came to pass that Enoch journeyed in the land, among the people; and as he journeyed, the Spirit of God descended out of heaven, and abode upon him.</p>
2. Introductory Word	<p>God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.</p> <p>And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.</p> <p>Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.</p> <p>And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows;</p>	<p>and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.</p> <p>And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.</p>	<p>Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee,</p>	<p>(27b) for thus saith the Lord: I am angry with this people, and my fierce anger is kindled against them; for their hearts have waxed hard, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes cannot see afar off;</p> <p>And for these many generations, ever since the day that I created them, have they gone astray, and have denied me, and have sought their own counsels in the dark; and in their own abominations have they devised murder, and have not kept the commandments, which I gave unto their father, Adam.</p>

And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them.

3. Commission

Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

4. Objection

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?

Wherefore, they have foresworn themselves, and, by their oaths, they have brought upon themselves death; and a hell I have prepared for them, if they repent not;

And this is a decree, which I have sent forth in the beginning of the world, from my own mouth, from the foundation thereof, and by the mouths of my servants, thy fathers, have I decreed it, even as it shall be sent forth in the world, unto the ends thereof.

And the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?

(27a) And he heard a voice from heaven, saying: Enoch, my son, prophesy unto this people, and say unto them—Repent,

Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.

(31) And when Enoch had heard these words, he bowed himself to the earth, before the Lord, and spake before the Lord, saying: Why is it that I have found favor in thy sight, and am but a lad, and all the people hate me; for I am slow of speech; wherefore am I thy servant?

5. Reassurance

And he said, Certainly I will be with thee;

But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord.

And the Lord said unto Enoch: Go forth and do as I have commanded thee, and no man shall pierce thee. Open thy mouth, and it shall be filled, and I will give thee utterance, for all flesh is in my hands, and I will do as seemeth me good.

Say unto this people: Choose ye this day, to serve the Lord God who made you.

APPENDIX—Continued

	Exodus 3:1-12	Judges 6:11-21, 23	Jeremiah 1:4-10	Moses 6:26-36
6. Sign	<p>and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.</p>	<p>And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me.</p> <p>Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again.</p> <p>And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it.</p> <p>And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so.</p> <p>Then the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight.</p> <p>And the Lord said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die.</p>	<p>Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.</p> <p>See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.</p>	<p>Behold my Spirit is upon you, wherefore all thy words will I justify; and the mountains shall flee before you, and the rivers shall turn from their course; and thou shalt abide in me, and I in you; therefore walk with me.</p> <p>And the Lord spake unto Enoch, and said unto him: Anoint thine eyes with clay, and wash them, and thou shalt see. And he did so.</p> <p>And he beheld the spirits that God had created; and he beheld also things which were not visible to the natural eye; and from thenceforth came the saying abroad in the land: A seer hath the Lord raised up unto his people.</p>

NOTES

¹Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, trans. Roland E. Clements, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 1:97–100. I also wish to thank my colleague, David P. Wright, for sharing with me his insights on the narrative call pattern in the Bible and in the book of Moses.

²Blake T. Ostler, "The Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi: A Form-Critical Analysis," *Brigham Young University Studies* 26 (Fall 1986): 67.

³Norman Habel, "The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 77 (October 1965): 298–301. The literature treating the narrative call pattern in biblical literature is not inconsiderable; compare Rudolf Kilian, "Die prophetischen Berufungsberichte," in *Theologie im Wandel* (Tübingen: Katholisch-Theologische Fakultät Tübingen, 1967), 356–76; Antonius H. J. Gunneweg, "Ordinationsformular oder Berufungsbericht in Jeremia 1," in Gerhard Müller and Winfried Zeller, eds., *Glaube Geist Geschichte: Festschrift für Ernst Benz* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 91–98; Klaus Baltzer, "Considerations Regarding the Office and Calling of the Prophet," *Harvard Theological Review* 61 (October 1968): 567–81; Wolfgang Richter, *Die sogenannten vorprophetischen Berufungsberichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1970); Gregorio del Olmo Lete, *La vocación del líder en el antiguo Israel* (Salamanca: Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 1973); W. Vogels, "Les récits de vocation des prophètes," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 95 (January 1973): 3–24.

⁴The appendix is a chart showing the respective elements of the narrative call passages in Ex. 3:1–4:17; Judg. 6:11–24; Jer. 1:4–10; and Moses 6:26–36.

⁵Norman Habel, "Call Narratives," 298–99.

NOTES TO THE APPENDIX

¹In general, the analysis of the call passages into constituent elements follows Habel, "Call Narratives," 297–309.

²It should be noted that the commission element in the Enoch passage precedes, rather than follows, the introductory word section.

³In the Moses call passage, the objection/reassurance/sign elements continue from Ex. 3:13–4:17:

Objection 2: Ex. 3:13–14; Reassurance: Ex. 3:14–22

Objection 3: Ex. 4:1; Sign: Ex. 4:2–9

Objection 4: Ex. 4:10; Reassurance: Ex. 4:11

Objection 5: Ex. 4:13; Reassurance: Ex. 4:14–16; Sign: Ex. 4:17.