

# GOD CALLED: ABRAHAM! ABRAHAM! JACOB! JACOB! MOSES! MOSES! SAMUEL! SAMUEL!

DAVID J. ZUCKER

In many cases and places in the Hebrew Bible a word is immediately repeated. The technical term for this phenomenon is epizeuxis (Greek root, fastening together) or geminatio (Latin root, doubling). It is a rhetorical expression for the repetition of a word or phrase, usually without any words in between. Often it is an indication of emphasis. A common example is *m'od m'od* (Gen. 7:19; 30:43; Num. 14:7; I Kgs. 7:47; II Kgs. 10:4; Ezek. 37:10). Other examples among many include *ha-adom ha-adom* (Gen. 25:30); *m'at m'at* (Ex. 23:30), and *gevohah, gevohah* (I Sam. 2:3).<sup>1</sup> First Isaiah prophecies *peace, peace (shalom shalom, Isa. 26:3, cf. Jer. 6:14; 8:11)*. It is Second Isaiah, who among the prophets probably most often uses this kind of doubling. *Comfort, comfort my people (nahamu nahamu, Isa. 40:1); Rouse yourself, rouse yourself (hit-or'ri hit-or'ri, Isa. 51:17), Awake, awake (uri uri, Isa. 52:1)*. Third Isaiah utilizes this kind of word play twice in one sentence, *Pass through, pass through; build up build up (ivru ivru; solu solu, Isa. 62:10)*. When, however, it comes to epizeuxis (geminatio) involving God addressing an actual person, there are but a few examples.<sup>2</sup> God's (or God's representative) initially addressing the person by name, never mind by calling out twice, is extremely rare. Usually, God simply speaks without mentioning the person's name (see Gen. 12:1 – Abram; 26:2 – Isaac; 28:13 – Jacob), and countless figures in the Bible including the literary prophets.

The angel's cry to the first Patriarch, actually calling him by name, *Abraham! Abraham!* (Gen. 22:11) is arguably the most dramatic occurrence of such a double vocative in the Hebrew Scriptures. There are three other examples where someone's name is called out twice in quick succession.<sup>3</sup> The next instance is also in Genesis when Jacob is about to leave the promised land to travel south to Egypt. This is God's final dialogue with the third Patriarch. *David J. Zucker, PhD, before retiring, served as Rabbi/Chaplain and Director of Chaplaincy Care at Shalom Park in Aurora, Colorado. www.davidjzucker.org. His latest book is American Rabbis: Facts and Fiction, Second Edition, (Wipf and Stock, 2019). Other publications include The Torah: An Introduction for Christians and Jews (Paulist: 2005); The Bible's Prophets: An Introduction for Christians and Jews (Wipf and Stock: 2013); The Bible's Writings: An Introduction for Christians and Jews (Wipf and Stock: 2013); and [with Moshe Reiss, z"l] The Matriarchs of Genesis: Seven Women, Five Views (Wipf and Stock: 2015).*

Stopping for the night at Beersheba Jacob *offers sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac*. In a night vision, God calls out, *Jacob! Jacob!* (Gen. 46:2). Then in Exodus, Moses, now living in Midian is out pasturing the flocks of his father-in-law Jethro. He sees something quite amazing, a bush is on fire but the flames are not consuming it. Suddenly a voice calls out, *Moses! Moses!* (Ex. 3:4). The final example, *Samuel! Samuel!* (I Sam. 3:10), is when, as a young boy Samuel is apprenticing with the priest Eli at Shiloh. In the middle of the night God calls out to Samuel three times (I Sam. 3:4, 6, 8) waking the lad, who then goes over to Eli seeking what his mentor wants. Finally, Eli discerns that this is God addressing Samuel, and he tells the lad, *Go, lie down. If you are called again, say "Speak, YHWH, for your servant is listening"* (I Sam. 3:9). With Abraham, timeliness was essential. In principle, with Jacob, Moses and Samuel, the call could have been delayed and come sometime later.

There is one further example of a double vocative; it is when God self-describes, explaining the divine attributes to Moses atop Mount Sinai. *YHWH, YHWH a God compassionate . . .* (Ex. 34:6). Unlike the examples of Abraham, Abraham, Jacob, Jacob, this is not a doubling of the individual's name. In those cases, it is something like, "*Abraham [Jacob, etc.] . . . yes Abraham, I am speaking to you.*" In this situation with YHWH, YHWH, the twentieth century commentator Umberto Cassuto explains that the "meaning of the two Names that occur at the beginning [of verse 6] . . . is apparently, 'The Lord, He is the Lord', and it is impossible to define His nature in any other words (compare [Ex.] 3:14: *I am who I am.*"<sup>4</sup> Further, this is not God calling out to someone for their attention, this doubling is part of a self-definition.<sup>5</sup>

In the first three examples, Abraham, Jacob, and Moses, the person addressed answers *Hineni/Yes/I am here*. Samuel answers in a different fashion; basically, he follows the words suggested by Eli in the previous verse. Who calls to the individual, and whether the call comes during daylight hours or at night changes. Abraham is called by YHWH's angel (*mal'akh YHWH*, although in v. 16 the angel makes clear that it is representing YHWH), and it is during daylight hours. Jacob is called by God (*Elohim*), and it is a night vision. Moses' encounter comes during daylight hours, and while the verse mentions that YHWH saw that Moses had turned aside to look at the bush, the text says clearly that it is God (*Elohim*) who speaks to Moses. Samuel's experience, as noted takes place in the darkness of night. There also are variations of the verbs

that announce the call. In the cases of Abraham and Moses it is *vayikra* . . . *vayomer*. For Jacob it is *vayomer* . . . *vayomer*. For Samuel it is *vayikra*.

In the examples of both Abraham and Jacob, these unexpected experiences take place late in their lives and careers although they each will appear in a few more chapters. By contrast, in the examples of Moses and Samuel, they will have a full lifetime of activities before them. Abraham (Gen. 20:7), Moses (Deut. 34:10) and Samuel (I Sam. 3:20) are named as prophets in the Bible, and Jacob is regarded by the rabbis as having prophetic insight (TB *Pesachim* 56a; Abraham Ibn Ezra and David Kimchi – Radak on Gen. 49:1).<sup>6</sup> Yet as noted earlier, there is no direct link between being a prophet and having God address the person by name, much less calling him twice in quick succession.

In many midrash collections rabbinic authorities offer explanations why there is the doubling of someone's name. For example, explains *Tanhuma Yelammedenu*, in the case of Abraham it was a matter of some urgency. "Why was his name repeated? Because he [Abraham] was hastening to slaughter him [Isaac]."<sup>7</sup> *Pesikta Rabbati* offers a further comment. God instructs the angel Michael to call out to Abraham and Michael's voice was "like a man crying out in distress."<sup>8</sup> In *Genesis Rabbah* Rabbi Hiyya explains that the doubling of Abraham's name is in terms of love and encouragement (to follow God's laws, and not to commit child sacrifice.) His colleague Rabbi Eliezer explains that God spoke to Abraham and to future generations. There is no generation that does not have people like Abraham, nor he adds, like Jacob, Moses, and Samuel.<sup>9</sup> "Abraham was righteous from his beginning to his end," explains *Midrash Tanhuma*. This is the reason for the doubling of his name. The midrash continues that also was true for Jacob, Moses, and Samuel, hence the doubling of their names.<sup>10</sup>

The medieval commentator Rashi suggests that as earlier with Abraham, God was calling Jacob affectionately. Kimchi explains the double calling of Jacob this way: It had been several years since a spirit of prophecy had rested upon Jacob. So God called him twice to help him understand that it was a spirit of prophecy that was calling him.

Moses is considered by the rabbis as the greatest teacher and prophet of all time. Many midrashim explain why his name is doubled in Exodus 3:4. In *Exodus Rabbah* Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai explains that the repetition of Moses' name is an expression of God's love for Moses, and it also was an exhortation

to Moses. Another explanation suggests that the doubling of his name is that just as Moses taught the Torah in this life, so will he teach it in the next life. The midrash adds the thought that while God spoke to many prophets, those were done intermittently. With Moses God carried on a continuous dialogue, hence, *Moses! Moses!*, without a break. It then adds a lovely image. The midrash suggests that in time to come, Israel will go to Abraham and ask him to teach them Torah (i.e. Jewish learning.) Abraham will reply, go to Isaac, because he studied more than I did. When they go to Isaac, he replies, go to Jacob, because he studied even more than I did. When they say to Jacob, teach us Torah, he will reply: “Go to Moses who learned Torah directly from God.”<sup>11</sup> Another midrash suggests that the doubling of Moses’ name indicates that he was as meek before he spoke to God as he was after that.<sup>12</sup> Cassuto suggests that the doubling of Moses’s name was to alert Moses to the urgency and importance of the call.<sup>13</sup>

The suggestion that the call from God to Moses was particularly urgent is noted in a different way in the midrashic corpus. In printed Hebrew texts of the Bible in over 500 cases there are small vertical lines or bars between certain words. This printer’s mark is known as a *paseq*.<sup>14</sup> The word *paseq* means separator but there is no consensus on why these marks appear. In terms of these doubled names, there is a *paseq* separating *Abraham! Abraham!*, *Jacob! Jacob!* as well as *Samuel! Samuel!* That there is no such mark between the words *Moses! Moses!* is because of the urgency of God’s concern in speaking to Moses, explains *Exodus Rabbah* 2.6.

God’s doubling or repetition of the name Samuel is the only example of such a call outside of the Torah. *Exodus Rabbah* 16.4 takes note that Psalm 99:6 reads, *Moses and Aaron among [God’s] priests, Samuel among those who call on [God’s] name*. That both Moses and Samuel are mentioned there might suggest a similarity between those two figures. These, however, are different situations explains the midrash. Moses came into God’s presence to hear God’s requests. Then later people came to Moses for adjudication (*Moses sat as a magistrate among the people* – Ex. 18:13). Yet in the case of Samuel, God went to him. *YHWH came and stood there, and called as before: “Samuel! Samuel!”* (I Sam. 3:10). Why did God do this? God reasoned that Samuel will take the trouble of going in a circuit from place to place to judge the people to spare them the trouble of coming to him. *Each year [Samuel] made the rounds*

of Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, and he acted as a judge over Israel in all of those places (I Sam. 7:16). God said, “Moses sits in one place to judge Israel, so let him come to me to the Tent of Meeting to hear my commands. Samuel goes in circuit to Israel in their cities to judge them. So I will go and speak with him.

The repetition of the same word oftentimes is a mark of added emphasis, such as in the words *ha-adom ha-adom* (Gen. 25:30) and *m'at m'at* (Ex. 23:30) as mentioned at the beginning of this article. In principle the epizeuxis (gemination) might merely be a dittograph, where a scribe accidentally repeated a word. This could be in the case of Psalm 94:23, where one finds the repetition of the word *yatzmiteim / annihilate them* – and coincidentally no *paseq*. Or in the case of the young lad who calls out in II Kings 4:19, *roshi roshi / my head, my head*, but with a *paseq*.

In the four cases discussed in this article, where God addresses a human being doubling his name, there does not seem to be any one principle which links all of these cases. The midrashic explanations linking these four characters are compelling, but they are homiletical in nature. As mentioned, two of these callings are during daylight hours (Abraham/Moses), two are at nighttime (Jacob/Samuel). Two are relatively late in the person's life (Abraham/Jacob), two serve as a kind of call to a future position of leadership (Moses/Samuel). Only in the case of Abraham is there a real sense of in-the-moment urgency. While Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and Samuel are all very important figures, it would be a subjective judgment call to say that they *all* merited this special attention, unlike other major figures such as Joshua, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezra. On the other hand, one can divide the Bible into two sections. The earlier part is where God is regarded as the sole ruler of the people. Then, after the anointing of Saul there are human rulers (cf. I Sam. 8:7, *Heed the demand of the people ... For it is not you that they have rejected, it is me that they rejected as their ruler*). Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and Samuel are four of the most pivotal figures in the earlier period. It is possible that they alone merited God calling them in such a special fashion. Alternately, an even more compelling unifying principle might yet be suggested, and if it were to come, that would be good indeed, *m'od m'od*.

NOTES

1. <https://www.studylight.org/lexicons/eng/bullinger/e/epizeuxis-or-duplication.html>
2. The duplication of a person's name, *other* than God addressing the person is a feature in both early Genesis: *Noah Noah* (Gen 6:9); *Shem Shem* (Gen 11:10); *Terah Terah* (Gen 11:27). and in the book of Ruth: *Peretz Peretz* (Ruth 4:18)
3. There are also four examples in the Christian Scriptures where there is this kind of a double call of a name. Jesus calls out to God, quoting Ps. 22:2 [22:1, in many Christian translations], My God, My God (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34); Martha (Luke 10:41); Simon (Luke 22:31); and Saul (Acts 9:4, who also is known as Paul, Acts 13:9).
4. Umberto Cassuto, *Exodus*, Jerusalem: Magnes, (1967) 1983, 439. On the other hand, Childs suggests that this may be “a repeated exclamation.” He goes on to write that “it is possible to take the first ‘Yahweh’ as the subject of the verb *wayyiqra*’. This interpretation finds its support in the parallel, Numbers 14.17-18 (cf. margin NJPS).” Brevard S. Childs. *The Book of Exodus*, Old Testament Library, Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1974, 604 n. 6.
5. There was a tradition in the ancient world that the name YHWH was not actually doubled at this point. In the Septuagint (c. 250 BCE) YHWH is only written once. Alternatively, the authors of the LXX deliberately featured God's name once. “The translators of the Septuagint apparently took the second occurrence of “Yahweh” as redundant, so they deleted it.” J. Carl Laney, “God's Self-Revelation in 34:6-8.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (January-March 2001): 41 [36-51]. [http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted\\_hildebrandt/otesources/02-exodus/text/articles/Laney-Ex34-BSac.pdf](http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/otesources/02-exodus/text/articles/Laney-Ex34-BSac.pdf). See also comments by William C. Propp, *Exodus* 19-40. Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 2006, 22, 584, 590, 609-10.
6. In Islam, Jacob (Yaquub) is also regarded as a prophet (“We bestowed on him *Ishaq* and Yaquub, each one of them we made a prophet.” *Qur'an*, *Surah* 19.49)
7. *Tanhuma Yelammedenu – Genesis and Exodus*. Translated and notes by Samuel Berman. Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1996. And the Lord Appeared (chap. 4), 23. And he saw the place from afar off (Gen. 22:4). See also *Midrash Tanhuma, Genesis. Vol. 1 of Midrash Tanhuma*: S. Buber Recension. Translated by John T. Townsend. Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1989. Vayera 4.46 Genesis 22:1 ff., Part VIII.
8. *Pesikta Rabbati: Discourses for Feasts, Fasts, and Special Sabbaths*. Translated by William G. Braude. 2 vols. Yale Judaica Series 18. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968, Piska 40.6. See also ibn Ezra and *Hizquni* (13<sup>th</sup> cent. France) on Gen. 22:11.
9. *Midrash Rabbah (The Midrash)*. Edited by H. Freedman, Maurice Simon, and Judah J. Slotki. 10 vols. London: Soncino, 1939. *Genesis Rabbah*, 56.7.
10. *Midrash Tanhuma, Genesis. Vol. 1*, Chap 2, Genesis, Noah, 2.1 (Genesis 6:9ff., Part I).
11. *Exodus Rabbah* 2.6.
12. *Numbers Rabbah* 14.21.
13. Cassuto, *Exodus*, comment on Exodus 3:4. Cassuto died before he was able to his commentary on Genesis. No doubt had he written about the words *Abraham! Abraham!* he would have said something very similar, that it indicated the urgency of the call.
14. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew\\_punctuation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_punctuation)

