

**What does “call” mean in the Old Testament when God uses the term?  
A Series on Divine Calling: Part 1**

The Hebrew term for “call” is “qārā’.” This Hebrew verb can have several meanings, because it can have several forms (i.e. qal, niphāl and puāl stems) and can be affected by the grammatical structure of the sentence.

The Hebrew verb “qārā” is used about 461 times in the Old Testament of which the Bible records God using the term in 37 instances.

God used “qārā” to mean “the giving of a name” (Gen 1:5, 8, 10; 5:2; 17:5, 15, 19; 21:12; 35:10).

God used “qārā” to mean “to call” to get the attention of a person (Gen 3:9; 21:17; 22:11, 15; Ex 3:4; 19:3, 20; 24:16; Lev 1:1; Num 12:5; 1 Sam 3:4, 6, 8, 10).

From a divine perspective, it is more of a command where God expects man to hear and respond. However, human beings can refuse to hear the call of God (Isa 50:2; Jer 7:13), refuse to obey the call (Isa 65:12; Jer 13:10) or seek to avoid it (Ex 3:11; 4:1, 10, 13; Jer 1:6).

God used “qārā” to mean “appoint” or “summoned” (Ex 31:2).

God used “qārā” to mean “proclaim” His own name (Ex 33:19; 34:6). In God’s self disclosure to Moses, it is an act of revealing God’s glory.

God used “qārā” to prescribe human responses to His Mosaic legislation to mean “invite” (Ex 34:15), “cry” (Lev 13:45), “proclaim” (Lev 23:2, 4, 21, 37; 25:10; Jud 7:3) and “call” (Num 22:20; Deut 31:14).

God used “qārā” to mean “chosen” (2 Chron 7:14). The phrase “who are called in My name” conveys a meaning of “possession” as in Believers of God the Father (Ex 19:5).

The call of God is always in the sense of service and dedication in accordance of His will and commitment to His covenant. The prophet Isaiah reminds the nation of Israel’s of their election (Isa 41:8; 43:10) and His foreknowledge (Isa 41:4), their “qārā” in righteousness (Isa 41:2; 42:6), “qārā” by their name (Isa 43:1) and “qārā” in His name (Isa 43:7).

Isaiah also records that God called Cyrus “by his name” (Isa 45:3-4) and as “His anointed” (Isa 45:1). Just like Pharaoh, the pagan Cyrus (Isa 45:4-5) was used by God as a means to fulfill His plan for Israel.

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A Series on Divine Calling: Part 1 (page 2)**

While God uses “qārā” to speak or call people into His service to whom in His foreknowledge He wishes to entrust with His task, this Hebrew verb is not the only means of doing so.

The call of God’s judges occurred without the use of the Hebrew verb “qārā” (Jud 3:9-10, 15; 4:4-6; 6:11; 10:1, 3; 11:29; 12:8, 11; 13:3-6).

The call of God’s prophets occurred without the use of the Hebrew verb “qārā” (Isa 6:1-8; Jer 1:1-5; Ezek 2:1-10; Dan 1:8-21; Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jon 1:1; Mic 1:1; Zeph 1:1; Hag 1:1; Zech 1:1).

Perhaps significant to us today is that God’s call is the means by which He makes human beings, who are entirely unqualified, into instruments of His will and plan.

References:

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