

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY – CHARLOTTE

THE LORD, THE LEADER, AND THE COMMANDER OF THE LORD'S ARMY:
ANALYSIS OF A SINGULAR EVENT IN THE LIFE OF JOSHUA

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At the end of the Josh 5, on the precipice of Israel's incursion into Canaan, Joshua is suddenly confronted by a mysterious and imposing figure. Their interaction is brief and appears to end abruptly. Then, at the start of ch.6, the reader finds himself seemingly transported to the divine briefing for the siege of Jericho. At first pass, this portion of Joshua can seem disjointed, but closer inspection reveals a better approach. Joshua 5:13-6:5 is best understood as a single narrative unit, the unity of which amplifies themes about the LORD, his angelic emissary, the human leader, and the plot that will continue through the OT and into the New. In fact, the passage proves to be a moment on par with Moses' encounter at the burning bush, as it encapsulates the crucial, intimate relationship between God and Israel's divinely commissioned leader. Any serious student of Joshua should endeavor to mine the riches of this defining episode.

Preparation by Consecration

The book of Joshua is about the LORD, leadership, the law, and the land. The author is concerned to convey fundamental truths about each entity, and all are in view from the outset of the book.¹ In Josh 1, the LORD commissions Joshua as leader of the people, emphasizing adherence to the law as integral to Israel's acquisition of the land (vv.1-9). Joshua then turns to his officers and orders them, "Prepare" (v.11).² The chapters that follow can be summarized as phases of preparation for Israel's first foray into Canaan, culminating in ch.5.³

Joshua 5 is comprised of three accounts of preparation by consecration.⁴ In vv.2-9, the new generation of Israelite males is circumcised. The specific reason for performing the rite at this time is implied by the repetition of "the men of war" in vv. 4 and 6. The previous generation of soldiers

¹ Richard S. Hess, *Joshua*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 73–81.

² All Bible quotations are ESV unless otherwise indicated. The passage under consideration is given from BHS and ESV in appendix A. My translation is given in appendix B.

³ David M. Howard, *Joshua*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 161–63.

⁴ Howard, *Joshua*, 144.

had perished in the wilderness, and new fighters were not ready to wage holy war without being circumcised.⁵ Verses 10-12 then deal with the whole nation, as the community observes Passover. The feast entails remembrance, but no explicit mention of the exodus is made. Rather, the event is recounted with a forward-looking frame. The day marks the end of eating manna in the wilderness and the beginning of enjoying the produce of the land.⁶ Thus, by these two sacraments, Israel is prepared for the mission that lies ahead.⁷

Finally, Joshua experiences his own preparatory event (5:13-15). The narrative flows directly into the LORD's direction for the attack on Jericho (6:1-5). Joshua recapitulates these divine instructions (6:6-7), then comes the actual account of the unusual assault (6:8-21). Accordingly, Josh 5:13-6:5 stands as a bridge between preparation and action.⁸ The LORD and the leader convene, and detailed guidance is given for Israel's first depredation in the land. The chapters that follow are replete with military action.

The event that immediately trails Israel's victory at Jericho is its shameful defeat at Ai because of Achan's sin. The juxtaposition of these accounts has a clear implication: Yahweh will act mightily on his people's behalf when they follow his command, but the consequences of infidelity will be disastrous.⁹ Further, it is the responsibility of the leader not only to communicate but also to enforce the word of God. These tenets reverberate through the rest of the book and the OT. Obedience to Yahweh, the vigilance of human leadership, and successful conquest of the land are intertwined.

⁵ Hess, *Joshua*, 132.

⁶ Trent C. Butler, *Joshua*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 60–61.

⁷ Dale Ralph Davis, *Joshua: No Falling Words* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2010), 71.

⁸ Hess, *Joshua*, 138.

⁹ Howard, *Joshua*, 187, 199.

A Singular Encounter

The beginning of a new text unit is signaled in 5:13 by the common discourse marker וַיְהִי. The verse also gives the setting, בְּיַרְיֵחוֹ. Joshua is in the vicinity of Jericho, though not within the city itself.¹⁰ The previous passages have Israel encamped at “Gilgal on the east border of Jericho” (4:19) and no mention of relocation is made. It may be that Joshua is traversing the landscape between the camp and the city in anticipation of the impending invasion, perhaps wondering how his forces will address Jericho’s formidable ramparts.

The text is relatively straightforward narrative, structured with a progression of wayyiqtol verbs that drive the account forward.¹¹ There are only a handful of non-finite verbs outside of speech clauses in the passage, so those that appear deserve special attention. The first set occurs in v.13 as a participial description of the person Joshua meets. Joshua lifts up his eyes to find a man standing (עֹמֵד) before him with his sword drawn (שְׁלֵיפָה). The interjection with וַהֲגִיגָה adds a sense of suddenness to the discovery.¹² The words that describe and denominate this mysterious figure hint at a significant, recurring character in Israel’s history (see below).

Joshua confronts the man with a question that proves his pragmatism and arguably his brashness: “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?”¹³ The man’s response is one of the more cryptic statements in the OT: “No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come” (v.14). The utterance is complicated by a variant reading that occurs in LXX, Syr, and other manuscripts, which has לוֹ instead of לֵא, rendering “And he said to him, ‘I am the commander...’”

¹⁰ Robert G. Bratcher and Barclay M. Newman, *A Handbook on the Book of Joshua* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1992), 66.

¹¹ For translation with narrative verbal stratification and comments, see appendix B.

¹² Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 169–70.

¹³ Butler sees here another in a series of bold presumptions that characterize Joshua’s life; Butler, *Joshua*, 61; Hess, however, identifies the interrogation as customary in military context and asserts that Joshua’s behavior is presented as commendable throughout the encounter; Hess, *Joshua*, 139n107.

In the rest of the pericope and often in Joshua, the verb אָמַר is followed by an indication of its object with either לְ or לְאֵל. The confusion of אֶל and לְ would have been an easy mistake for a scribe copying from verbal recitation to make. The variant reading has the advantage of removing the confusing “No” at the beginning of the commander’s response, but this is exactly why the originality of אֶל is more likely.¹⁴ It is difficult to see a scribe altering the straightforward reading “He said to him” to one that elicits such intrigue. While it is impossible to determine the original reading absolutely, most commentators favor אֶל.

If the commander’s first word to Joshua is “No,” it elicits inquiry as to his intent. Is he saying that the LORD and his army are not on Israel’s side? The account that follows indicates just the opposite. The key to understanding the commander’s meaning is in the fact that he answers Joshua’s question of allegiance with a statement of identity.¹⁵ It is essential that Israel’s human leader recognize Yahweh’s authority and involvement. In the truest sense, God is not on Israel’s side, they are on his. So, the commander says in essence, “Before asking who I’m for, understand who I am.” Joshua, for his part, responds to the revelation properly, bowing to the ground before the commander.¹⁶ The verb קָרַב can connote meaning ranging from honor given to another human (Gen 42:6) to the worship of the Deity (Exod 34:8).¹⁷ How Joshua’s homage here ought to be interpreted depends on the identity of its recipient. In any case, by the end of v. 14, Joshua has only one question left: “What does my lord (אֲדֹנָי) say to his servant?”¹⁸

¹⁴ Butler, *Joshua*, 55; Bratcher and Newman, *Handbook*, 66.

¹⁵ Howard, *Joshua*, 156.

¹⁶ Hess, *Joshua*, 139.

¹⁷ HALOT, 295

¹⁸ Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 102. While Joshua clearly acknowledges the superiority of the commander, his response does not necessarily indicate divinity.

Verse 15 is integral to the interpretation of this passage, as it binds the narrative to a Mosaic corollary. We will return to this connection, but for now it suffices to say that the only other person in the OT who is instructed to remove his sandals on holy ground is Moses in Exod 3:5.

It is at this juncture that issues related to the continuity of the text arise. If v.15 represents the terminus of the episode, then it brings the encounter to an abrupt and arguably unresolved end. Who was the commander, and what was the point of Joshua's interaction with him? There are three possible explanations.¹⁹ First, this may be the author's intended conclusion.²⁰ Joshua has discovered, at least in part, the identity of the figure, he has responded with proper deference, and the commander has validated his leadership by connection to Moses. This may be the full intent of the passage, but in the Exod 3 parallel, setting unshod foot to holy ground is hardly the end of the interaction.

The second possibility is that this is the undesirable but only available end to the account. Many analysts, recognizing the precipitous halt at v.15, conclude that the exposition is drawn from an earlier source which was either incomplete or truncated by the author.²¹ More broadly, Josh 5-6 is alleged by critics to evidence much redaction, as well as some attempted "smoothing" in later manuscripts, especially LXX.²² It is probable that the author of Joshua used written and oral sources, but labeling the pericope or this portion of Joshua as incomplete, inaccurate, or incoherent is unnecessary. Recent literary analyses have yielded new and helpful understanding.²³ If anything, the difficulties that arise here indicate a purposeful preservation of the original text.²⁴

¹⁹ Woudstra, *Joshua*, 101.

²⁰ Howard, *Joshua*, 159.

²¹ Richard D. Nelson, *Joshua: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 81–82.

²² Butler, *Joshua*, 55–58, 65–66.

²³ David G. Firth, "Disorienting Readers in Joshua 1.1-5.12," *JSOT* 41 (2017): 413–30.

²⁴ Hess provides a helpful summary of text-critical and literary perspectives on the book of Joshua, many of which intersect with the commander passage; see Hess, *Joshua*, 33–45.

The third explanation is that v.15 is not in fact the end of the encounter, but that the narrative continues into Josh 6 as part of the same unit.²⁵ We should immediately discount one body of evidence against this understanding as superficial, namely the chapter division that exists in modern Bibles. Similarly, the MT inserts a Seder after 6:1. These partitions shed light on the decisions of particular groups of translators, but they are not original to the text and shouldn't be taken as conclusive. With extratextual markers set aside, the two determinative data points for the unity of the passage are the narrative function of 6:1, and the change of Joshua's counterpart from the commander to the LORD himself in v.2.

Joshua 6:1 represents the second occasion of non-finite, non-speech verbs in the text. The verse features an idiomatic construction to describe Jericho's condition, סָגְרָת וּמִסְגְּרָת, lit. "shut and being shut."²⁶ No one is going out of (יֵצֵא) or coming into (יָבֵא) the city. The verse exhibits both the marked word order and verb differentiation that are so formative in Hebrew narrative. The question is, what role do these clauses play in the continuity of the text. The entire description is set forward with predicate participles; No finite verb is present. In the portions of Joshua that precede and follow this passage, a change of scene is explicitly signaled, often with וַיְהִי (5:1, 8, 13; 6:8, 15, 27). If 6:1 is meant as the start of a new section, the transition is decidedly subtle by the author's standards. It seems better to interpret the quick description as parenthetical background information within a continuing discourse.²⁷ Knowing the city's fortified state is necessary to understand the plan that comes next.

The last pertinent consideration is the sudden switch of Joshua's conversation partner. In 5:15, the commander is the other party in the dialogue. Then he seems to disappear, and in 6:2

²⁵ Davis, *Joshua*, 52.

²⁶ Bratcher and Newman, *Handbook*, 69.

²⁷ Davis, *Joshua*, 51–52.

Yahweh himself is speaking. “The LORD said to Joshua” is a frequent refrain throughout the book and can appear either as the initiation of an episode (1:1, 4:1, 5:2, 20:1) or within one (4:15, 5:9, 8:18, 10:8, 11:6), so the presence of the phrase in 6:2 gives no indication of unity or division.²⁸ What is clear is that the commander, whose presence seemed so central just verses before, is no longer in view. This confusing departure is alleviated by the account’s connection to Exod 3. Moses is initially drawn toward the burning bush by “the angel of the LORD,” but after v.2 the angel is not mentioned, and the LORD is the speaker. If Joshua’s encounter is intentionally cast in the same mold, then we might expect a similar shift from the messenger to Yahweh himself.²⁹

It is overconfident to conclude that Josh 5:13-6:5 undoubtedly represents a single encounter. Those who would insert a division have good reason to do so. Nevertheless, I suggest that the best reading of the text flows from 5:15 to 6:2 (with 6:1 as parenthetical) without assuming a change of scene.³⁰ This continuity has implications regarding the identity of the commander, Joshua’s connection to Moses, and the nature of Yahweh’s involvement with his people.

The LORD’s instructive monologue in vv.2-5 is rich with theological significance. The speech begins with a guarantee: “I have given Jericho into your hand.” This is one of many reiterations that occur throughout Joshua of God’s promise to gift the land to his people.³¹ The implication is that God’s providence precedes the people’s obedience. Their conformity is a condition of his promise, but it is responsive, not instigating.

The assurance is followed by a series of meticulous and peculiar instructions for the assault.³² Commentators have set forward many and various theories for the abundance of sevens

²⁸ One way to understand Joshua is as a continuing dialogue between the LORD and the leader; Butler, *Joshua*, 58.

²⁹ “The distinction between Yahweh and his commander is not a sharp one”; Howard, *Joshua*, 159.

³⁰ Hess, *Joshua*, 141.

³¹ See Howard’s interesting excursus, Howard, *Joshua*, 77–81.

³² Butler identifies much priestly and cultic manipulation of the text, but his arguments cannot be adequately unpacked and addressed in the space available here; Butler, *Joshua*, 66–70.

in the procedure, but the simplest conclusion is that the repetition of the number indicates the completeness of God's action on Israel's behalf.³³ Moreover, the priests' sounding of the horns (שׁוֹפְרוֹתָ) is highly significant.³⁴ The first OT occurrence of the word is at the foot of Sinai, where the presence of Yahweh is manifested with cloud, thunder, lightning, and "a very loud trumpet blast" (Exod 19:16, 19; 20:18). Thereafter, the religious use of trumpets, especially on appointed holy days, entails remembrance of the LORD's power to save his people (Num 10:8-10). Thus Yahweh prescribes a sacred procession for the siege of Jericho, with the ark at its head.³⁵ No explicit meaning is given for these details in Josh 6, but the point is clear: When the people obey God's guidance, he will work mightily, even miraculously for their benefit.

If 5:13-6:5 represents a unified account of Joshua's individual interaction with the LORD, then there must be some passage of time between vv.5 and 6. Notably, v.6 begins with the expanded denomination "Joshua the son of Nun." This formality signals the beginning of the next unit of discourse, and the text moves quickly to the attack itself. Again, we see that 5:13-6:5 is best understood as a single event that functions as a transition from preparation by consecration to action under the LORD's guidance.

The LORD and the Leader

A verse-by-verse comparison of Moses' and Joshua's holy-ground encounters is offered in appendix C. In summary, Joshua's interaction with the commander of the LORD's army is explicitly and intentionally connected to Moses by the imperative in v.15. This in turn consigns Joshua's leadership to the Mosaic lineage. Butler understands this somewhat cynically, as he avers,

³³ Woudstra, *Joshua*, 106; Howard, *Joshua*, 169; Hess, *Joshua*, 143. Connections to the Sabbath, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Year of Jubilee, and others, have all been suggested.

³⁴ Butler, *Joshua*, 70–71.

³⁵ Hess, *Joshua*, 143.

“Wherever he turns, Joshua cannot escape the Mosaic shadow.”³⁶ The question is, would he have wanted to?

Throughout the OT, God often indicates the rightful leader of his people through special interactions and affirmations. Moses’ meeting with Yahweh at the burning bush is in many ways the preeminent example. Further, Moses is arguably the aspirational ideal of what the human leader of God’s people should look like. Yet in Josh 5, Joshua undergoes a similar ordination, and seemingly without the unbelief that Moses initially exhibited.³⁷ Perhaps Joshua had learned from Moses’ lifetime of communion with the un-mistaking One.

We should conclude that it is the LORD’s right to install and uphold his chosen viceroy, and it is the leader’s responsibility to respond with reverence, submission, obedience, and dependence. God’s people would have remembered these commissioning events with appreciation for the past and hope for the future. At any juncture in Israel’s history, but especially at the moments of failed leadership, passages like Josh 5:13-6:5 serve important didactic and redemptive-historical purposes to their hearers.

The Commander of the LORD’s Army?

Despite his brief appearance, the text provides many interesting clues about the identity of the commander of the LORD’s army, שַׂר־צְבָאֵי־יְהוָה. שַׂר can alternatively mean official, chief, leader, or prince. The core concept is one who represents a king, speaking and acting with vested authority.³⁸ The only other figure in the OT whose title approximates that of Joshua’s commander appears in Dan 8:11. Because this occurrence comes in the thick of one of Daniel’s enigmatic

³⁶ Butler, *Joshua*, 62.

³⁷ Hess, *Joshua*, 139.

³⁸ *HALOT*, 1350.

visions, a full delineation will not be attempted here. What is clear is that “the Prince of the host” (שַׂר־הַצְּבָאָה) in Dan 8:11 is the “Prince of princes” in 8:25, and the “God of gods and Lord of kings” in 2:47. In other words, the Prince of the host is Yahweh himself.³⁹

Since Josh 5:13-6:5 parallels Exod 3, we can also recognize an equation with “the angel of the LORD” (Exod 3:2).⁴⁰ Conflation of the two figures is further supported by the commander’s armament in Josh 5. He appears suddenly before Joshua “with his drawn sword in his hand,” בְּיָדוֹ שְׁלֹפָה (Josh 5:13). This syntax exactly matches the descriptions of the angel in Num 22:23, 31, when he confronts Balaam, and 1 Chron 21:16, where David and his elders are the witnesses.⁴¹ In fact, the similarities between these accounts and Josh 5 are remarkable. In each case, the angel appears suddenly, and with the result that the lesser party ends up face down on the ground.

The angel of the LORD is a recurring character in the OT. His doings can be categorized into four sorts of activity. Often, the angel confirms a leader at a crucial moment in Israel’s history (Gen 22:9-18; Judg 6:11-24, 13:1-25). Alternatively, he executes justice against those who would oppose God, sometimes with extreme prejudice (Judg 2:1-4; 2 Kgs 19:35; Isa 37:36). Perhaps most strikingly, on a few occasions the angel brings comfort to the lowly in their hour of need (Gen 16:7-12; 1 Kgs 19:7, Ps 34:7). Lastly, the angel recurs as an eschatological figure in the Prophets (Zech 1:11-12, 3:1-10; Dan 8:11).⁴²

Everywhere this awesome messenger of Yahweh appears, he is at least regarded with serious reverence, and often seems to be coequal with God.⁴³ In Judg 2:1, the angel of the LORD

³⁹ James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ICC (New York: Scribner’s, 1927), 335.

⁴⁰ Yaacov Azuelos, “The’ Angel Sent before the Lord’ in Targum Joshua 5,14,” *Biblica* 96 (2015): 161–78; Many commentators also see a connection to Jacob’s wrestling partner in Gen 32; see James Montgomery Boice, *Joshua*, Boice Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005).

⁴¹ Woudstra, *Joshua*, I.C.3.a.

⁴² In Hag 1:13 and Mal 2:7, the construction יְהוָה מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה refers to Haggai and the priesthood, respectively.

⁴³ Andrew S. Malone, “Distinguishing the Angel of the Lord,” *BBR* 21 (2011): 297–314; Woudstra, *Joshua*, 102.

claims credit for the exodus and the covenant. In Zech 3:1-6, it is unclear whether the angel speaks for the LORD or as the LORD. In Judg 13:22, after a particularly fiery encounter with the LORD's emissary, Samson's parents conclude that they have seen God himself.

It is ambitious to assert that the commander of the LORD's army is a preincarnate manifestation of the second person of the Trinity. Questions of personhood, perichoresis, and the nature of theophany abound.⁴⁴ What we can say is that the figure's appearance is a significant entry in the metanarrative of leadership that runs through the OT. The angel of the LORD is nowhere more prominent than in Judges, and Exod 23:20-23 seems to link him to the conquest of Canaan.⁴⁵ If we assume an original readership for the earliest form of Joshua during or shortly after that era, his involvement here highlights the importance of divine ordination of the leader, and evokes questions as to how and why later leaders failed so miserably.

For Readers Then and Now

The book of Joshua is about the LORD, leadership, the law, and the land. For the original audience, the story of Joshua and the commander of the LORD's army would have set forward important propositions about each entity. First, the LORD is shown to be primarily, actively, and intimately involved in his people's circumstances. Just as he brought Israel out of Egypt by miraculous feats, so he brought them into the land with great power.⁴⁶ It is not quite accurate to call what happened at Jericho a battle; It was an astounding rout as Yahweh obliterated human fortitude. Readers in the age of the Judges would have pined for the days of God's mighty intervention. Occasionally

⁴⁴ Nathan J. Chambers, "Reading Joshua with Augustine and Sommer: Two Frameworks for Interpreting Theophany Narratives," *JSOT* 43 (2019): 273–83.

⁴⁵ René López, "Identifying the 'angel of the Lord' in the Book of Judges: A Model for Reconsidering the Referent in Other Old Testament Loci," *BBR* 20 (2010): 1–18; Howard, *Joshua*, 160.

⁴⁶ Mark J. Boda, *The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology: Three Creedal Expressions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 16–19.

they still experienced it (Judg 7:19-23), but as Israel's situation declined in the time between Joshua and Samuel, the story of Jericho should have prompted them to ask, "What changed?"

One answer to that question was the people's responsive obedience. It is little wonder that the Jericho account makes for such tantalizing Sunday school fodder. Coloring books and *VeggieTales* episodes revel in the city's dramatic collapse (even if they neglect to mention the bloody extermination that followed). The danger is that familiar readers might shortchange the utter peculiarity of the LORD's plan.⁴⁷ His instructions to Joshua are meticulous and decidedly inexpedient.⁴⁸ Yet the leader and the people followed them to a tee and the outcome was blessed. If adherence to unusual siege strategy proves so fruitful, how much more the very law of God? In the generations that followed, though, "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg 17:6, 21:25), and the consequences were severe.

The author of Judges is quick to connect the sinful autonomy of the people with the lack of a king. In fact, the headship of a God-ordained, obedient leader is apparently the determinative criteria for the covenant community's wellbeing. Israel needed more shepherds like Moses, Joshua, and David, but they suffered under too many with hearts akin to Korah, Achan, and Saul. Even if one holds to a later date for a substantial first version of Joshua, these lessons would have been at least as poignant to a late-monarchic or post-exilic audience.⁴⁹

At the heart of Joshua's encounter stands the commander of the LORD's army. As more is learned about this man who is more than mere man, the reader is tempted to ask, "Could not this superior warrior simply take charge?" What would it be like for God's people to have a leader who

⁴⁷ Davis, *Joshua*, 51.

⁴⁸ To be fair, *VeggieTales* creatively highlights this reality with the iconic hit "Keep Walking"; Phil Vischer, "Josh and the Big Wall," *VeggieTales*, December 1997.

⁴⁹ Ian Douglas Wilson, "Conquest and Form: Narrativity in Joshua 5-11 and Historical Discourse in Ancient Judah," *HTR* 106 (2013): 309-29.

lasts, one who advances righteousness, opposes the proud, and is concerned for the lowly? Perhaps these are exactly the longings this recurring emissary is meant to evoke.

Appendix A: BHS and ESV Texts of Josh 5:13-6:5

5:13 וַיְהִי בַּהֲנִיחַ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בִּירִיחוֹ וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה-אִישׁ עֹמֵד לְנֶגְדוֹ וְחַרְבּוֹ שְׁלוּפָה בְּיָדוֹ וַיֵּלֶךְ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הֲלָנוּ אַתָּה אִם-לְצָרֵינוּ: 14 וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא כִי אֲנִי שָׂר-צָבָא יְהוָה עִתָּה בְּאַתִּי וַיִּפֹּל יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶל-פָּנָיו אֲרֻצָּה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מָה אֲדֹנָי מְדַבֵּר אֶל-עַבְדּוֹ: 15 וַיֹּאמֶר שָׂר-צָבָא יְהוָה אֶל-יְהוֹשֻׁעַ שְׁלֵבְךָ מֵעַל רַגְלֶךָ כִּי הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עֹמֵד עָלָיו קֹדֶשׁ הוּא וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ כֵּן: 6:1 וַיִּרְיַחוּ סִגְרֵת וּמִסְגְּרֵת מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר יוֹצֵא וְאֵין בָּא: 2 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-יְהוֹשֻׁעַ רְאֵה נָתַתִּי בְּיָדְךָ אֶת-יְרִיחוֹ וְאֶת-מְלִכָּהּ גִּבּוֹרֵי הַחַיִּל: 3 וְסַבְתֶּם אֶת-הָעִיר כָּל אַנְשֵׁי הַמְּלָחָמָה הַקְּרִיף אֶת-הָעִיר פַּעַם אַחַת כֹּה תַעֲשֶׂה שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים: 4 וְשִׁבְעָה כְּהֹנִים יִשְׂאוּ שְׁבָעָה שׁוֹפְרוֹת הַיּוֹבְלִים לִפְנֵי הָאָרוֹן וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי תִסָּבּוּ אֶת-הָעִיר שִׁבְעַת פְּעָמִים וְהַכְּהִימִם יִתְקַעוּ בַשּׁוֹפְרוֹת: 5 וְהָיָה בְּמִשְׁדָּו בְּקִרְוֵן הַיּוֹבֵל בְּשִׁמְעֵכֶם אֶת-קוֹל הַשּׁוֹפָר יִרְיעוּ כָּל-הָעָם תְּרוּעָה גְדוֹלָה וְנָפְלָה חוֹמַת הָעִיר תַּחְתֶּיהָ וְעָלוּ הָעָם אִישׁ נֶגְדוֹ:

5:13 When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?” 14 And he said, “No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, “What does my lord say to his servant?” 15 And the commander of the LORD’s army said to Joshua, “Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so. 6:1 Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in. 2 And the LORD said to Joshua, “See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor. 3 You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. 4 Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. 5 And when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him.”

Appendix B: Translation of Josh 5:13-6:5⁵⁰

5:13 Now it happened that⁵¹ when Joshua was⁵² at Jericho,⁵³

he lifted up his eyes

and he looked, and behold,⁵⁴ a man standing in front of him

and his sword was drawn⁵⁵ in his hand.

And Joshua went to him

and said to him,

“Are you for us or for our enemies?”

⁵⁰ In the translation given, lines that are left-aligned indicate a clause that begins with a *wayyiqtol* verb. The indented lines (there are only two) indicate conjunctive-*waw* clauses. Italicized text indicates direct speech.

⁵¹ **Now it happened that** (5:13): The beginning of the discourse section is marked by the frequently employed *wayyiqtol* וַיְהִי, lit. “And it was...” A more emphatic phrasing is helpful to indicate the start of a new narrative episode. Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 54.

⁵² **when Joshua was** (v.13): B. with the infinitive indicates a temporal use; see also 6:5. Arnold and Choi, *Syntax*, 117–18.

⁵³ **at Jericho** (v.13): Here the preposition clearly has a spatial sense, but context makes clear that Joshua is in the region of Jericho, not within the city itself, therefore “at.” Arnold/Choi, 116.

⁵⁴ **and behold** (v.13): וַיַּבְהִי is best understood as introducing an object of immediate perception from Joshua’s perspective (Arnold/Choi 169-70). That is, the reader, along with Joshua, suddenly becomes aware of a man standing before him. While we should not assign too much interpretative significance to the particle, the identity and armament of the man suggest that וַיַּבְהִי probably entails a sense of special noteworthiness and awe. C. H. J. Van der Merwe, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 2nd ed. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 410–13.

⁵⁵ **was drawn** (v.13): The verb here is the passive participle שְׁלוּבָה, with a predicate function, “his sword was drawn” (Arnold/Choi, 92-93). Notably, the verb שָׁלַח only occurs in participial form in three other instances in the OT (Num 22:23, 31; 1 Chron 21:16), each describing the sword in the hand of the angel of the LORD.

14 But he said,

“No,⁵⁶ but⁵⁷ I am the commander⁵⁸ of the army of the LORD. Now I have come.”

And Joshua fell on⁵⁹ his face to the ground

and bowed down⁶⁰

and said to him,

“What does my Lord command of his servant?”⁶¹

15 And the commander of the army of the LORD said to Joshua,

“Take off your sandals from your feet,⁶² because the place that you are standing upon is holy.”

⁵⁶ **No** (v.14): The commander’s response to Joshua’s inquiry raises text-critical and interpretive issues. Various Hebrew manuscripts and the Septuagint give “But he said *to him*” (אֵלָיו אָמַר), but this is likely an alteration to resolve hermeneutical tension. It is better to identify אֵלָיו as the beginning of the commander’s reply. Does this mean the commander does not consider himself to be for Israel’s cause? Such a conclusion does not jive with the rest of the book, or even the account that immediately follows. It may be that he is correcting Joshua for asking the wrong question in light of his glorious identity, but the commander’s “No” is largely mysterious. Bratcher and Newman, *Handbook*, 66; Howard, *Joshua*, 156, 156n285.

⁵⁷ **but** (v.14): If the commander’s speech begins with אֵלָיו, the וְ that follows is easily translated as “but” or “rather.” For וְ to begin the clause would be unusual and would make it difficult to translate. Van der Merwe, 433-37.

⁵⁸ **commander** (v.14): מִצְחָק can be translated as “commander,” “prince,” “official,” “chief,” “leader,” etc. The concept is one who is a representative of a king, and translation should vary based on the context of that representation. The emphasis here is militaristic, so “commander” is best. William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 354.

⁵⁹ **on** (v.14): Some manuscripts have אֶל as opposed to MT אֶלָיו. This variance has little effect on translation.

⁶⁰ **and bowed down** (v.14): The first derived-stem verb in the passage occurs here with the *Hishtaphel* stem. The causative, reflexive form of חָוָה means lit. “to bow down” in reverence, but the word does not always entail worship of a divine figure (though it often does). “Bowed down” is the most hermeneutically neutral translation, but as I will argue, the numerous versions that translate this clause with “worshipped” might be justified. Arnold/Choi, 64.

⁶¹ **What does my Lord command of his servant** (v.14): The clause is constructed with a *Piel* participle of דָּבַר with a predicate function. The *Piel* of דָּבַר gives an intensified meaning, hence “command.” A rigidly literal translation would render, “What is my Lord commanding to his servant?” Waltke/O’Connor, 397-98; Holladay, 67.

⁶² **your sandals... your feet** (v.15): In MT, נַעֲלֶיךָ and רַגְלֶיךָ are singular, so various manuscripts including the Septuagint pluralize both nouns. However the words are elsewhere used in the singular with an obviously collective sense (e.g. Deut 29:4; 1 Kings 2:5; Isa 20:2), so the alteration is not necessary. The singular could theoretically have had interpretive significance in light of the single-sandal ceremony in Ruth 4 (vv.7-8), but the next clause makes clear that both shoes are in view, as barefooted-ness on holy ground is the commander’s intent.

And Joshua did so.

6:1 (Now Jericho⁶³ was shut up inside and out⁶⁴ because of the presence of⁶⁵ the children of Israel. There was no one going out and there was no one coming in.)

2 And the LORD said⁶⁶ to Joshua,

“See, I have given Jericho into your hand, its king and its mighty warriors.”⁶⁷

3 *And you shall⁶⁸ go around the city, all the men of the army walking around⁶⁹ the city one time. Thus you shall do for six days.*

4 *And seven priests shall carry seven rams’ horns in front of the ark,⁷⁰ and on the seventh day they shall go around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow on the horns.*

⁶³ **Now Jericho** (6:1): וַיִּיחַד marks the sole disjunctive clause in the pericope. Whether 5:13-6:5 is better understood as a single encounter or two separate episodes depends on the nature of the *waw* here, as well as the *wayyiqtol* that initiates v.2 (see n17). It is possible that the clause represents a “scene change,” but it seems preferable to treat v.1 as parenthetical background information necessary to understand the unusual plan of assault that Yahweh is about to prescribe; Arnold/Choi, 106-108. A *waw* occasionally signals a change of topic within a series of quotations by the same speaker, which may be the use here. Van der Merwe, 423-26.

⁶⁴ **shut up inside and out** (v.1): סָגְרָת וּמְסֻגְרָת is an idiomatic construction using dual participles, the second being *Pual*, so lit. “had shut and was utterly shut up,” or something to that effect. Bratcher and Newman, *Handbook*, 69.

⁶⁵ **because of the presence of** (v.1): מִפְּנֵי יְשָׁרְאֵל, lit. “from/because of the face of...” Arnold/Choi, 130.

⁶⁶ **And the LORD said** (v.2): This is the last *wayyiqtol* verb in the passage; vv.2a-5 are a single block of direct speech as Yahweh instructs Joshua with the impending plan for invasion. If v.2 begins a new narrative segment, it is impossible to determine the time and place of the battle briefing, not to mention what would be an abrupt and inconclusive end to the preceding account. Notably, the pericope begins at a fast pace – with nine *wayyiqtol* verbs occurring in 5:13-14 – before slowing down with a detailed description of the commander’s and Yahweh’s dialogue with Joshua in 5:15-6:5. The pace then resumes with four *wayyiqtol* verbs in 6:6-7.

⁶⁷ **mighty warriors** (v.2): גְּבוּרֵי הַחַיִל, lit. “the strong men of the armies.”

⁶⁸ **shall** (vv.3-5): The finite verbs in the LORD’s speech carry the jussive sense of a superior commanding an inferior; Arnold/Choi, 74.

⁶⁹ **walking around** (v.3): A *Hiphil* infinitive with an explicative connection to the main verb. Van der Merwe, 174.

⁷⁰ **ark** (v.4): The meticulous reader will remember that אָרוֹן means simply “box,” but “ark” is useful shorthand to indicate the singular covenantal specialness of the box in question.

*And it will happen that at the blasting⁷¹ of the ram's horn, when they hear⁷²
the sound of the horn, all the people shall shout a great battle cry, and
the wall of the city shall fall down flat,⁷³ and the people shall go up,
each man straight ahead.”*

⁷¹ **blasting** (v.5): The verb מִשָּׁחַק literally means “to pull” or “to draw out” and can describe a variety of actions. The sense here is of a prolonged and intense sounding of the horns, hence “blasting.” Holladay, 219.

⁷² **when they hear** (v.5): The MT *qere* associated with this infinitive verb suggests that the preposition אֵת should be used, אֵת שִׁמְעוּהוּ. The change has little effect on the English translation, as both prepositions when prefixed to infinitives have a temporal meaning, but אֵת may also entail a resultative sense, i.e. “as soon as they hear.” Arnold/Choi, 117-23.

⁷³ **where it stands** (v.5): Lit. “under itself” or “in its place.”

Appendix C: Comparison of Exod 3:1-22 and Josh 5:13-6:5

Exod 3		Josh 5-6
v.1	The leader out, about, and alone	5:13a
v.2-3	The envoy catches the leader's attention	v.13b
-	<i>The commander identifies himself to Joshua</i>	v.14a
v.4	The leader submits himself to the LORD	v.14b
v.5	"Take off your sandals..."	v.15
v.6	<i>Yahweh identifies himself to Moses</i>	-
v.7	The precondition for divine intervention	6:1
vv.8-22	The LORD sets forward his plan	vv.2-5
vv.8-22	<i>Yahweh responds to Moses objections</i>	

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