

## Approaching the Nature of Yeshua from the Tanach

this would be many, including this writer, who while recognizing that there are (many) limitations to the historical Christian doctrine of the Trinity, that the First Century Jewish Apostles did, in fact, integrate Yeshua of Nazareth into the Deuteronomy 6:4 *Shema* via statements like those witnessed in 1 Corinthians 8:6. They would have been forced to consider Yeshua the Messiah as being a part of the Divine Identity, because of how Yeshua demonstrated Himself to them, and because of actions He performed which only God Himself—and no mere supernatural agent, messenger, or angel—would be permitted.

### Joshua 5:13-6:2

#### “Joshua Encounters the Captain of the Lord’s Host”

“Now it came about when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said to him, ‘Are you for us or for our adversaries?’ He said, ‘No; rather I indeed come now *as* captain of the host of the LORD.’ And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, ‘What has my lord to say to his servant?’ The captain of the LORD’s host said to Joshua, ‘Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.’ And Joshua did so. Now Jericho was tightly shut because of the sons of Israel; no one went out and no one came in. The LORD said to Joshua, ‘See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king *and* the valiant warriors.’”

The conquest of the city Jericho by the Israelites, is commonly regarded by Bible readers as being one of the most significant victories by God’s people in Biblical history. It is hardly a surprise that prior to the assembly of Israel marching around the city (Joshua 6:3-14) before its collapse (Joshua 6:15-21), that Joshua, the leader of Israel and Moses’ successor, would have some supernatural encounter. Significant clues are present within Joshua 5:13-6:2 that Joshua did not encounter just any supernatural intermediary sent from God proper.

It is recorded that as Joshua was looking over Jericho, apparently surveying the ground as it was to be attacked by the Israelites, *v’hinneih-ish omeid l’negdo v’charbo shelufah b’yado* (שְׁלֹפָה בְיָדוֹ), “and behold!—a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand” (Joshua 5:13b, ATS). Joshua inquires of this figure, “Are you one of us or of our enemies?” (Joshua 5:13c, NJPS). The response he receives is, *lo ki ani sar-tzeva-YHWH* (לֹא כִי אֲנִי שַׂר־צְבָאָה), “No, rather, I am the commander of YHWH’s forces” (Joshua 5:14a, Fox). Being told, “No, for I am the commander of HASHEM’s legion” (ATS), many have concluded that the entity Joshua encountered here was a highly exalted supernatural messenger, likely an archangel (cf. Daniel 12:1).

The actions which follow, on the part of Joshua, suggest that this “commander of the army of the LORD” (Joshua 5:14a, RSV), is not just a supernatural intermediary sent by God proper. It is stated in Joshua 5:14b, *v’yippol Yehoshua el-panayo ar’tzah v’yishtachu* (וַיִּפֹּל יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶל־פָּנָיו אַרְצָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה), with Jewish translations such as ATS having, “Joshua fell before him to the ground and prostrated himself,” and Alter with, “Joshua fell on his face to the ground and did obeisance.” Joshua 5:15b notably does include a usage of the verb *chavah* (חָוָה; or *shachah*, שָׁחָה), with some notable alternative translations including: “And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and worshipped” (RSV/NRSV/ESV); “Joshua fell on his face to the ground, worshipping him” (New Jerusalem Bible).<sup>107</sup> If Joshua were seen to be worshipping this entity labeled as *sar-tzeva-YHWH*, “prince of the host of the LORD” (HNV), then if this figure were a created agent, messenger, or angel, this activity would be blatant idolatry in violation of the First Commandment.

<sup>107</sup> The TLV also has: “Then Joshua fell on his face to the ground and worshipped.”

A difference of perspective is witnessed in Joshua's inquiry to the *sar-tzeva-YHWH*, which when read according to the Hebrew Masoretic Text, is *mah adoni medabbeir el-avdo* (מַה אֲדֹנָי מְדַבֵּר אֵלַי עַבְדִּי), ATS having, "What does my master say to his servant?" (Joshua 5:14c). Without any vowel markings, which were introduced later, *adny* (אֲדֹנָי) can be read as either *adoni* or *Adonai*, the latter being a title to be associated with God proper or YHWH. This is somewhat reflected in English versions which render *adny* in Joshua 5:14c with the capitalized "Lord" (NKJV, NIV, New Jerusalem Bible, HCSB). And as is seen, there is good textual reason to believe that the *sar-tzeva-YHWH* whom Joshua encountered, was none other than a distinct manifestation of the LORD or YHWH.

It is narrated in Joshua 5:15a, *v'yomer sar-tzeva YHWH el-Yehoshua* (וַיֹּמֶר שַׂר־צְבָא יְהוָה אֶל־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ), "The commander of YHWH's forces said to Yehoshua" (Fox). Many would conclude that when it is said, "The commander of HASHEM's legion said to Joshua" (ATS), that this is just a supernatural intermediary, messenger, or archangel—a created being—speaking to Joshua. But what does this figure tell Joshua? "Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy" (Joshua 5:15b), a certain repetition of what was spoken to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3:5 by God proper. There are some who read no further, and conclude that this entity was not God manifest as this *sar-tzeva-YHWH*, but instead some archangel, and it is to be taken that Joshua is not as important as Moses in the hierarchy of Israel's leaders. The notes in the 2014 *NIV First-Century Study Bible* are reflective of this:

"Joshua was commissioned to undertake the Lord's battles for Canaan, just as Moses had been commissioned to confront the Pharaoh (see Ex 3:18-20). What was said to Joshua here is nearly identical to what God said to Moses at the burning bush (see Ex 3:5). However, Joshua was addressed by the commander of the Lord's army, rather than by God himself, making Joshua's status less than Moses."<sup>108</sup>

There are other examiners who would urge that readers not stop with the closing verse of Joshua ch. 5. Continuing on in Joshua 6, we see, "Now Jericho was shut up tight because of the Israelites; no one could leave or enter" (Joshua 6:1, NJPS), as the city was on lockdown due to the impending Israelite attack. Joshua 6:2a begins the instructions for Israel's eventual victory over Jericho, and starts with the notable words, *v'yomer YHWH el-Yehoshua* (וַיֹּמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ), "YHWH said to Yehoshua" (Fox) or "HASHEM said to Joshua" (ATS). Joshua 6:2b, with the LORD or YHWH speaking in the first person "I," directs to Joshua, "See, I will deliver Jericho and her king *and her* warriors into your hands." Contextually, if the figure of the *sar-tzeva-YHWH* seen previously (Joshua 5:14, 15) were just a messenger/angel sent from God proper, a created being, there is no reason in Joshua 6:2 for God proper to now be seen speaking, or for first person dialogue to be employed. Joshua 6:2 could just as well have said, "The *captain of the LORD's host* said to Joshua, 'See, *He has* given Jericho into your hand, with its king *and the valiant warriors*'" (NASU modified).

The *sar-tzeva-YHWH* or "the captain of the LORD's host" receives some kind of veneration or worship (Joshua 5:14b), is called *Adonai* or "Lord" (Joshua 5:14c), speaks the almost identical words to Joshua as Moses was at the burning bush (Joshua 5:15b), and then the narrative continues with the LORD or YHWH formally speaking. Is the entity in view only a created, supernatural agent? Or, might this entity be a distinct manifestation of God proper? Not surprisingly, the *sar-tzeva-YHWH* here has frequently been associated with the figure of the *malakh YHWH*, the "messenger/angel of the LORD," who is seen to be a manifestation of God proper. Hugh J. Blair is a commentator who properly concludes,

<sup>108</sup> Kent Dobson, *NIV First-Century Study Bible: Explore Scripture in Its Jewish and Early Christian Context*, 2011 NIV (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 286.

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“[T]here appeared to him the representative of Yahweh, who called himself ‘commander of the army of the Lord’ (v. 14). There can be no doubt that this was God Himself as seen in human form: ignoring the artificial break made by the beginning of a new chapter, it is correct to see 6:2 as following on from 5:15 in a continuous narrative, with 6:1 as a parenthesis. This visitant of 5:13 becomes ‘the Lord’ of 6:2.”<sup>109</sup>

Blair draws the further extrapolation that this was “‘the angel of the Lord’ frequently identified with God, e.g. in Gn. 16:7-11, compared with 16:13. This was none other than the pre-existent Son of God Himself.”<sup>110</sup> Indeed, we should once again be reminded that the principle of an entity sent from God, receiving the same veneration as God and speaking in the first person “I” as God, who takes the identity of God, but can be slightly differentiated from God, is something established by scenes such as Joshua 5:13-6:2. And, it is seen that there are some who forthrightly conclude that the *sar-tzeva-YHWH* whom Joshua encountered, was actually a pre-Incarnate Yeshua the Messiah.

### Judges 2:1-5

#### “The Angel of the Lord Speaks to Israel”

“Now the angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, ‘I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, “I will never break My covenant with you, and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.” But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done? Therefore I also said, “I will not drive them out before you; but they will become as thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.”’ When the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. So they named that place Bochim; and there they sacrificed to the LORD.”

The Book of Judges largely records some of the challenges faced by the Israelites during the period of the Conquest, and the consolidation of the community being settled in the Promised Land. Prior to the death of Joshua (Judges 2:6-10), and with it some of the initial Israelite rejection of the Lord for the Baals (Judges 2:11-23), readers encounter the elusive figure of the *malakh-YHWH* (מַלְאֲכֵי יְהוָה), the “messenger of YHWH” (Judges 2:1, Fox) or “messenger of the LORD” (Alter), an entity which comes to not only speak to the people about past salvation-historical activity for Israel, but also the future surety of problems because not all of the Canaanite pagans had been ejected from the Promised Land (Judges 2:1-3). Significant questions about this entity are necessarily raised, not only as is witnessed how the *malakh-YHWH* speaks in the first person “I” as the LORD or YHWH, but even more so how specific covenantal promises are invoked, where the *malakh-YHWH* was specifically noted to be present in previous Tanach narratives:

“An angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim and said, ‘I brought you up from Egypt and I took you into the land which I had promised on oath to your fathers. And I said, “I will never break My covenant with you. And you, for your part, must make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you must tear down their altars.” But you have not obeyed Me – look what you have done! Therefore, I have resolved not to drive them out before you; they shall become your oppressors, and their gods shall be a snare to you’” (Judges 2:1-3, NJPS).

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<sup>109</sup> Hugh J. Blair, “Joshua,” in D. Guthrie and J.A. Motyer, eds., *The New Bible Commentary Revised* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp 230-251.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 238-239.