

Joshua 5:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant?

Analysis

And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant?

This is the divine commander's response to Joshua's question whether he came as friend or foe. The Hebrew *lo* (לֹא, "Nay") negates both options—this figure transcends earthly alignments. He identifies himself as *sar-tseva YHWH* (שַׂר־צְבָא יְהוָה, "captain of the host of the LORD"), commanding heaven's armies. This title indicates supreme military authority under Yahweh's ultimate command.

Joshua's response demonstrates recognition of this figure's divine nature. He "fell on his face" (*vayipol al-panav*, וַיִּפֹּל עַל־פָּנָיו) and "did worship" (*vayishtachu*, וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ)—the same Hebrew word used for worship of God. True angels refuse worship (Revelation 19:10, 22:8-9), but this figure accepts it, indicating divine identity. Most scholars identify this as a Christophany—a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ, the Angel of the LORD who bears God's name and accepts worship.

Joshua's question "What saith my lord unto his servant?" recognizes subordinate position. Though Israel's military commander, Joshua acknowledges higher authority. The phrase echoes Samuel's response to God's call (1 Samuel 3:9-10) and anticipates Mary's submission (Luke 1:38). This illustrates proper response to

divine revelation: worship, submission, and readiness to obey. From a Reformed perspective, this Christophany demonstrates Christ's active involvement in redemptive history throughout all ages—He is not merely New Testament Savior but eternal Lord present with His people in every era.

Historical Context

This encounter occurred at Jericho, just before Israel's first conquest battle. The timing is significant—before military engagement, Joshua receives divine commissioning and instruction. The figure's appearance as a warrior with drawn sword (verse 13) demonstrated that Yahweh actively fights for Israel—this is divine warfare, not merely human military campaign.

Similar theophanies/Christophanies appear throughout the Old Testament: to Abraham (Genesis 18), Jacob (Genesis 32:24-30), Moses (Exodus 3), Gideon (Judges 6), and Manoah (Judges 13). These appearances reveal God's active presence with His people, providing direction, encouragement, and commissioning for service. The pattern shows God doesn't remain distant but personally engages with His covenant people at crucial junctures.

The title "captain of the host of the LORD" may refer to angelic armies (Psalm 103:20-21, 148:2) or to Israel itself as the LORD's host (Exodus 12:41). Likely both—God commands both heavenly and earthly armies. This dual command emphasizes that Israel's battles occur on both visible and invisible planes, with spiritual forces engaged alongside human armies. Paul later articulates this principle: "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers" (Ephesians 6:12).

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does Joshua's immediate worship and submission model proper response to divine revelation and authority?
2. What does this Christophany reveal about Christ's active involvement in Old Testament redemptive history, not merely New Testament salvation?
3. How should recognition that our battles have both visible and invisible dimensions shape Christian spiritual warfare and prayer?
4. In what ways do you sometimes approach God's work as though you are commander rather than recognizing Christ's supreme authority?
5. How does this passage challenge triumphalism that assumes God automatically favors 'our side' rather than calling us to align with His purposes?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר	לֹא	כִּי	אֲנִי	שָׂר	צָבָא	יְהוָה
And he said	H3808	H3588	H589	Nay but as captain	of the host	of the LORD
H559				H8269	H6635	H3068
הָעֵת	בָּאתִי	וַיִּפֹּל	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	אֶל	פָּנָיו	אֶרֶץ
H6258	am I now come	fell	And Joshua	H413	on his face	to the earth
	H935	H5307	H3091		H6440	H776
וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה	וַיֹּאמֶר	לֹא	כִּי	אֲדֹנָי	מִדְּבָר	אֶל
and did worship	And he said	H0	H4100	my lord	unto him	What saith
H7812	H559			H113	H1696	H413
עַבְדּוֹ:						
unto his servant						
H5650						

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 55:4 (Parallel theme): Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.

Genesis 17:3 (Parallel theme): And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying,

Luke 20:42 (References Lord): And David himself saith in the book of Psalms, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,

Daniel 12:1 (Parallel theme): And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.

Daniel 10:13 (Parallel theme): But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia.

Revelation 12:7 (Parallel theme): And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,

Isaiah 6:8 (References Lord): Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

Matthew 8:2 (Worship): And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

Matthew 22:44 (References Lord): The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?

John 20:28 (References Lord): And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.