

AN IN-DEPTH BIBLE STUDY

THE COMMANDER'S SWORD

Joshua, the Wrong Question, and the Christophany Before Jericho

Joshua 5 · Exodus 3 · Revelation 19 · Revelation 22

A journey through history, biblical languages, and the question every believer must answer

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Introduction: The Wrong Question

Standing alone near Jericho, Joshua looks up to see a man with a drawn sword and asks the most natural question a military commander could ask: 'Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?' (Joshua 5:13). The answer he receives is not the one he expected: 'Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come' (v. 14). Neither for Israel, nor against it — but Commander, with His own authority and His own agenda.

This study exists to sit with that answer long enough to feel its full weight: to examine who this 'captain of the host of the LORD' actually was, why Joshua's worship of Him was accepted rather than refused (as every other such worship of a created being is refused throughout Scripture), why the command to remove his sandals echoes, word for word, what God said to Moses at the burning bush, and what it means that the question Joshua asked was, in a real sense, the wrong question to ask.

As with the other studies in this series, careful attention is given throughout to distinguishing what the biblical text states explicitly from what represents a well-supported, reasoned interpretive conclusion — a distinction that matters especially here, since the identity of this 'Commander' is a genuinely debated question among careful, faithful interpreters.

Did You Know?

The Hebrew phrase שַׂר־צְבָאֵי־יְהוָה (sar-tseva-YHWH), translated 'captain of the host of the LORD' or 'commander of the army of the LORD,' appears in this specific form only in Joshua 5:14-15, making this figure's precise title unique within the Old Testament, even as similar 'angel of the LORD' language appears elsewhere and is discussed at length in Chapter 9.

How to Use This Study

Each chapter includes: (1) the central biblical text; (2) historical and linguistic context; (3) explanations of Hebrew and Greek terms; (4) cross references; (5) 'Did You Know?' boxes with historical background; (6) suggestions for maps, diagrams, or illustrations for those teaching this material in a classroom or small group; and (7) questions for personal or group reflection. At the end, you will find a consolidated summary of the main points, a list of further reading organized by theme, and a recommended bibliography for deeper study.

Suggested Illustration

Opening page with a simple map showing Israel's crossing of the Jordan, the plains near Jericho, and the fortified city walls — useful for orienting readers to the geography and military stakes of the scene before beginning the study.

Chapter 1 — Setting the Scene: Joshua 5 at the Edge of Jericho

"And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" — Joshua 5:13

What Israel Had Just Accomplished

Joshua 5 opens on the heels of extraordinary events: Israel has crossed the Jordan River on dry ground (Joshua 3-4), an unmistakable echo of the earlier crossing of the Red Sea under Moses. The nation has renewed the covenant sign of circumcision for the generation born in the wilderness (5:2-9), and has observed the Passover in the land of promise for the first time (5:10). The manna, which had sustained Israel for forty years, ceases the very next day, 'neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year' (5:12).

Jericho: The First and Most Formidable Obstacle

Jericho stood as the first major fortified city Israel would need to overcome to gain a foothold in Canaan — a walled, defended stronghold representing the very real, practical military challenge facing a people who, however miraculously delivered from Egypt, had no siege equipment, no standing army in the conventional sense, and no experience conquering fortified cities.

Joshua Alone

It is in this context — poised at the edge of an intimidating military objective, likely surveying the city or planning strategy — that Joshua 5:13 finds Joshua alone, encountering 'a man' standing opposite him with a drawn sword. The text's spare description invites the reader to feel the same uncertainty Joshua would have felt: is this friend or foe, ally or enemy scout?

Did You Know?

Archaeological excavations at the site traditionally identified as ancient Jericho (Tell es-Sultan) have revealed a long history of fortification across multiple periods, confirming the city's strategic and defensive significance in the ancient Near East, consistent with its portrayal in Joshua as a formidable first obstacle for the invading Israelites, even as scholars continue to debate the precise archaeological dating and correlation with the biblical conquest narrative.

 **Further Reading:** *Joshua 3:1-17; Joshua 4:19-24; Joshua 5:1-12.*

Reflection Questions

1. Why do you think Joshua encountered this figure alone, rather than with his officers or army present?
2. What does the timing of this encounter — immediately before the assault on Jericho — suggest about its significance for the whole conquest narrative?

Chapter 2 — "Neither": The Question and Its Answer

"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?" — Joshua 5:14

A Reasonable Question

Joshua's question — 'Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?' — is not naive or unreasonable. It is precisely the question any military leader would need answered before proceeding: which side does this armed figure represent? The question assumes, understandably, that the categories on offer are exactly two: ally or enemy.

A Third Category

The answer, 'Nay,' rejects both options Joshua offered. The figure does not identify as Israel's ally in the way Joshua likely expected — as a divine reinforcement enlisted for Israel's cause — nor, obviously, as an enemy. He identifies instead by office and authority: 'captain of the host of the LORD,' the commander of God's own army, present not to take a side in a human conflict but because He has His own errand, His own timing, and His own command.

Why This Answer Reframes Everything

The force of this answer lies in what it corrects. Joshua's question implicitly assumed that God's role was to be recruited, in effect, into Israel's plan — to bring divine power to bear in support of a human campaign already underway. The Commander's answer dismantles this assumption: He has not come to support Joshua's agenda; He has come with His own, and the appropriate response is not negotiation between allies but submission to a superior authority.

Did You Know?

This scene has often been compared by commentators to a broader biblical pattern in which God's people must learn that He is not a resource to be deployed for their purposes but the sovereign to whom their purposes must be conformed — a lesson also visible, for example, in 1 Samuel 4, where Israel treats the Ark of the Covenant as a talisman to guarantee victory in battle, only to be soundly defeated and to lose the Ark itself to the Philistines.

 **Further Reading:** *Joshua 5:13-14; 1 Samuel 4:1-11 (a related cautionary parallel); Isaiah 55:8-9 (God's ways not conformed to human expectation).*

Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever caught yourself, like Joshua, implicitly asking God to be 'on your side' rather than asking whether you are aligned with His purposes?

2. How does the Commander's refusal to simply confirm Israel's cause change the way you think about prayer for God's help in your own plans and conflicts?

Chapter 3 — Worship Accepted, Not Refused

A Consistent Biblical Pattern

Joshua's response to the Commander's answer is immediate and significant: 'Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship' (v. 14). The Hebrew verb here, וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה (vayishtachu), denotes prostration — a physical posture of worship and submission, the same verb used throughout the Old Testament for worship directed toward God.

What Angels Do When Offered This Worship

Scripture consistently records created beings, including angels, refusing worship when it is offered to them. In Revelation 19:10, John falls at an angel's feet, and the angel responds immediately: 'See thou do it not: I am thy fellow servant... worship God.' Revelation 22:8-9 records nearly identical language when John repeats the gesture. Acts 10:25-26 records Peter, upon Cornelius falling at his feet, immediately lifting him up: 'Stand up; I myself also am a man.'

Passage	Who Falls Down	The Response
Revelation 19:10	John, before an angel	'See thou do it not... worship God'
Revelation 22:8-9	John, before an angel (repeated)	'See thou do it not... worship God'
Acts 10:25-26	Cornelius, before Peter	'Stand up; I myself also am a man'
Joshua 5:14	Joshua, before the Commander	No refusal recorded; the Commander proceeds to give instruction

The Exception That Stands Out

Against this consistent pattern, the Commander of the LORD's host in Joshua 5:14 notably does not refuse Joshua's worship. No correction follows. No 'stand up, I am only a servant like you.' Instead, the very next words are an instruction about holy ground (v. 15), treating the worship as appropriately, not mistakenly, directed.

A Careful Caveat

It is worth noting, in fairness to the text, that Joshua 5:14 does not contain an explicit narrative comment stating 'and he accepted the worship' the way Revelation explicitly narrates the angel's refusal. The argument here rests on an absence — the lack of any recorded correction — rather than an explicit textual affirmation of acceptance. This is a meaningful, widely noted argument, but it is an argument from silence, and responsible study should name it as such.

Did You Know?

This same 'argument from the absence of refusal' has long been part of the traditional case for identifying various 'angel of the LORD' appearances throughout the Old Testament as instances of the pre-incarnate Christ, a category of appearance sometimes called a Christophany, discussed at greater length in Chapter 6.

 **Further Reading:** *Joshua 5:14; Revelation 19:9-10; Revelation 22:8-9; Acts 10:25-26.*

Reflection Questions

1. Why do you think Scripture is so consistent about angels refusing worship, given how dramatic and awe-inspiring angelic appearances often are?
2. How does the absence of any correction in Joshua 5:14 affect your reading of who this figure was, even accounting for the fact that this is an argument from silence?

Chapter 4 — Holy Ground: Joshua 5:15 and Exodus 3:5

"And the captain of the LORD'S host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so." — Joshua 5:15

An Exact Verbal Echo

The command Joshua receives is not merely similar in spirit to God's words to Moses at the burning bush; it is, in the Hebrew text, nearly identical in wording. Exodus 3:5 records: 'Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.' The core instruction and its stated reason — the holiness of the ground because of the speaker's presence — match closely enough that few readers, ancient or modern, have failed to notice the parallel.

Exodus 3:5 (Moses, at the burning bush)	Joshua 5:15 (Joshua, near Jericho)
'Put off thy shoes from off thy feet'	'Loose thy shoe from off thy foot'
'for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground'	'for the place whereon thou standest is holy'
Spoken by God directly, from the burning bush	Spoken by the captain of the LORD's host

What Makes Ground Holy

Throughout Scripture, ground or space is not inherently holy in itself; it becomes holy through God's presence and self-disclosure there (compare the tabernacle and temple, discussed at length in a related study on the Ark of the Covenant, where holiness flows from God's declared presence rather than from any property of the physical materials involved). If the same declaration — 'the ground you are standing on is holy' — is made for the same reason in both Exodus 3 and Joshua 5, the most natural inference is that the same kind of presence explains both instances.

A Command Only Fitting for Deity

This detail adds further weight to the case developed in Chapter 3. It would be one thing for a created angelic messenger to warn Joshua of danger, deliver instructions, or even accept a general gesture of respect. It is a different matter for that same figure to declare ground holy specifically because of his own presence there — a declaration that, throughout the rest of Scripture, is tied specifically to the manifest presence of God himself, not to any secondary or created being acting as His representative.

Did You Know?

This exact instruction — remove your sandals because the ground is holy — appears in only these two places in the entire Bible: Exodus 3:5 and Joshua 5:15. Its rarity, combined with its precise wording, has made this

parallel one of the most frequently cited pieces of textual evidence for identifying the Commander of Joshua 5 with the same divine presence Moses encountered at the burning bush.

 **Further Reading:** *Exodus 3:1-6; Joshua 5:13-15.*

Reflection Questions

1. Why might the near-identical wording between these two passages be considered stronger evidence than a general thematic similarity would be?
2. What does it mean that holiness, in these passages, flows from God's presence rather than from any property of the ground itself?

Chapter 5 — Christophany: What the Term Means and How the Case Is Built

Defining the Term

A Christophany refers to a theophany (a visible appearance of God) specifically identified, or reasonably identifiable, as an appearance of the pre-incarnate Son — the second person of the Trinity, active and visible in the world prior to His incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth. This category is distinct from ordinary angelic appearances, in which a created being serves as God's messenger but is not, in itself, worshiped as or identified with God.

The Cumulative Case for Joshua 5

No single piece of evidence in Joshua 5 proves, beyond dispute, that the Commander of the LORD's host is a Christophany rather than a specially commissioned, uniquely authoritative angel. The strength of the traditional case rests on the cumulative weight of several converging details, each individually suggestive and together substantial:

Evidence	Why It Suggests Deity
Worship accepted without correction (5:14)	Every other biblical instance of this worship is explicitly refused
Command to remove sandals (5:15)	Matches, almost word for word, God's own words at the burning bush
"The ground is holy" (5:15)	Holiness in Scripture flows from God's own presence
Independent authority, not a delivered message (5:14)	He speaks with His own agenda, not as a messenger reciting another's words

A Fair Alternative View

It should be stated honestly that not all careful, conservative interpreters agree this passage must be read as a Christophany specifically. Some hold that this is a uniquely authoritative created angel — perhaps the same figure elsewhere called 'the angel of the LORD,' whose relationship to God is unusually close, and who may, in some Old Testament texts, function almost as an extension of God's own presence and authority without being, strictly speaking, the pre-incarnate Son himself. This alternative view takes the same textual evidence seriously but reaches a more cautious conclusion about precisely how to categorize the figure's identity.

Why the Question Matters Less Than It Might Seem

Whichever position a reader ultimately holds, the central theological and practical lessons of Joshua 5 — the dismantling of Joshua's assumption that God exists to take Israel's side, and the call to submission rather than negotiation — hold with full force regardless of the precise resolution of the Christophany question. This study presents the Christophany reading as the most likely and most widely held interpretation, supported by real textual evidence, while acknowledging it is not the only responsible reading available.

Did You Know?

The question of how many, and which, Old Testament 'angel of the LORD' appearances should be read as Christophanies has been debated throughout church history, with figures ranging from early church fathers to Reformation-era and modern theologians offering varying assessments of individual passages, even while broadly agreeing on the category's legitimacy and its presence somewhere within the Old Testament.

 **Further Reading:** *Genesis 16:7-13; Genesis 22:11-18; Exodus 3:1-6; Judges 6:11-24; Joshua 5:13-15.*

Reflection Questions

1. How does holding the Christophany reading as 'most likely, though not certain' change the way you might teach or discuss this passage with others?
2. Does the alternative reading (a uniquely authoritative created angel) change the practical lessons you take from this passage?

Chapter 6 — "Neither": Dismantling the Wrong Question

Revisiting the Core Exchange

Having established the likely identity of the Commander, this chapter returns to the theological weight of His answer to Joshua's question — the pivot point around which this entire study, and the copy that inspired it, is built.

The Assumption Behind Joshua's Question

'Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?' assumes a binary in which the divine visitor's role is to align with one human party against another — precisely the way a human military alliance would work. This is not a foolish or malicious assumption; it likely reflects a natural, culturally reasonable expectation for how divine involvement in warfare would function, especially set against the backdrop of Israel's dramatic deliverances at the Red Sea and the Jordan, both understood as God acting decisively 'for' Israel.

Why "Neither" Corrects Rather Than Merely Answers

The Commander's answer does not simply supply missing information (as in, 'actually, I am on your side, just not in the way you expected'). It rejects the category of the question itself. The appropriate posture toward the Commander of the LORD's host is not alliance-seeking but submission. This is why Joshua's response — falling facedown, asking 'What saith my lord unto his servant?' — represents the correct recalibration: not 'here is my plan, will you support it?' but 'I am your servant; what do you want me to do?'

A Pattern With Wide Application

This dynamic is not unique to Joshua's circumstance. Believers throughout history have been tempted to treat prayer, in practice, as a request for God's endorsement and empowerment of plans already decided — asking God to bless what has already been determined, rather than genuinely submitting the plan itself to God's authority. Joshua 5 offers a vivid narrative correction to this tendency, embodied in an actual historical encounter rather than merely stated as abstract counsel.

Did You Know?

The reorientation from 'is God on my side' to 'am I on God's side' has parallels in other biblical narratives of correction, including Job's extended questioning by God in Job 38-41, which similarly does not answer Job's specific complaints directly but instead reframes his entire posture toward God's sovereignty and wisdom.

 **Further Reading:** *Joshua 5:13-15; Job 38:1-4; James 4:13-15 ('If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that').*

Reflection Questions

1. Can you think of a time you approached prayer more as seeking God's endorsement of your plan than as genuinely submitting to His direction?

2. How might reframing your own prayers from 'is God on my side' to 'am I on God's side' change the way you approach a current decision or challenge?

Chapter 7 — The Impractical Battle Plan

What the Commander Actually Instructed

Joshua 6, immediately following this encounter, records the Commander's strategy (delivered through continued instruction to Joshua) for taking Jericho: the armed men and priests bearing the Ark are to march around the city once daily for six days, with seven priests carrying seven trumpets; on the seventh day, they are to march around the city seven times, after which the priests blow the trumpets, the people shout, and the wall of the city falls (Joshua 6:2-5).

A Plan With No Military Logic

Judged by any conventional military standard of the ancient world, this plan involves no siege equipment, no breach tactics, no calculated exploitation of the city's defensive weaknesses — only marching, trumpet blasts, and a shout. The plan's apparent absurdity is, in a sense, the entire point: nothing about the actual conquest of the city would result from Israel's own military competence or strategic cleverness.

Consistent With the "Neither" of Chapter 5

This impractical strategy makes theological sense precisely in light of the Commander's earlier answer to Joshua. If the Commander had come to align Himself with Israel's own plan and reinforce Israel's own military effort, one might expect a battle plan drawing on recognizable strategy, perhaps supernaturally enhanced. Instead, the plan removes any grounds for Israel to credit the victory to its own competence: Israel's role is confined to obedience — marching, carrying, blowing trumpets, shouting — while the actual collapse of the walls is not attributed to any human action within the narrative's own account.

Did You Know?

Joshua 6:2 records the LORD's own words to Joshua: 'See, I have given into thine hand Jericho' — stated in the past tense, as an already-accomplished fact, before a single step of the march has taken place. This grammatical detail reinforces the theological point: the victory belongs to God's decision and declaration, not to the unfolding of Israel's military campaign.

 **Further Reading:** *Joshua 6:1-21; Hebrews 11:30 ('By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days').*

Reflection Questions

1. Why might God have chosen a strategy so removed from conventional military logic for Israel's first major conquest in Canaan?
2. How does the connection between this 'impractical' plan and the Commander's earlier 'neither' deepen your understanding of both passages?

Chapter 8 — The Angel of the LORD Elsewhere in Scripture

A Recurring Figure

The 'angel of the LORD' (Hebrew מַלְאֲכֵי יְהוָה, malak YHWH) appears throughout the Old Testament in a series of encounters that, in several instances, blur the line between a created messenger and God's own direct presence — a broader pattern that provides useful context for evaluating the Joshua 5 encounter.

Hagar in the Wilderness

In Genesis 16:7-13, the angel of the LORD appears to Hagar, and the text states directly that Hagar 'called the name of the LORD that spake unto her, Thou God seest me' — the narrator apparently treating the angel's words as God's own words, spoken in the first person as God ('I will multiply thy seed exceedingly,' v. 10).

Abraham and the Ram

In Genesis 22:11-18, the angel of the LORD calls to Abraham from heaven to stop the sacrifice of Isaac, and, notably, speaks in the first person as God: 'thou hast not withheld thy son...from me' (v. 12), and later swears 'by myself, saith the LORD' (v. 16) — language that would be extraordinary for a created being to use on God's behalf without careful qualification.

Gideon at the Winepress

Judges 6:11-24 records the angel of the LORD appearing to Gideon, addressed at points in the narrative simply as 'the LORD' (v. 14, 'the LORD looked upon him'), and Gideon's own response upon recognizing who he has been speaking with: 'Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face' (v. 22) — followed by God's reassurance that Gideon will not die, echoing the common Old Testament fear that seeing God directly would be fatal (compare Exodus 33:20).

Passage	Figure	Evidence of Divine Identity
Genesis 16:7-13	Angel of the LORD, to Hagar	Speaks in God's own first person; called 'the LORD' by the narrator
Genesis 22:11-18	Angel of the LORD, to Abraham	Swears by himself as God; speaks as if the sacrifice were made 'to me'
Judges 6:11-24	Angel of the LORD, to Gideon	Identified as 'the LORD'; Gideon fears having seen God face to face
Joshua 5:13-15	Captain of the LORD's host, to Joshua	Accepts worship; declares ground holy using Exodus 3:5's exact language

Did You Know?

This pattern of the 'angel of the LORD' being, in various texts, closely identified with God himself — sometimes speaking in God's own voice, sometimes receiving worship or being called by the divine name — has led many theologians throughout church history to view at least some of these appearances as pre-incarnate manifestations of the Son, distinct from the Father yet fully divine, consistent with later, fuller New Testament revelation of the Trinity.

 **Further Reading:** *Genesis 16:7-13; Genesis 22:11-18; Exodus 33:18-23; Judges 6:11-24; Joshua 5:13-15.*

Reflection Questions

1. How does seeing this broader pattern of 'angel of the LORD' appearances change the weight you give to the Joshua 5 encounter specifically?
2. Why might God have chosen to reveal himself in this partially veiled way throughout the Old Testament, rather than more directly?

Chapter 9 — Common Questions and Interpretive Caution

Given how much theological weight this study places on the identity of a figure Scripture never names explicitly, this chapter addresses several fair questions a careful reader might raise.

"Is it certain that this is Christ, or just a strong possibility?"

As Chapter 5 discussed directly, this study presents the Christophany reading as the most likely and most widely held interpretation of Joshua 5, supported by genuine, converging textual evidence — but not as a certainty beyond all responsible dispute. Careful, conservative scholars have held both this view and the alternative view (a uniquely authoritative created angel) without either position being fairly characterized as unfaithful to the text.

"Isn't the argument from Joshua's worship just an argument from silence?"

Yes, and Chapter 3 named this directly. The text does not explicitly state 'and the Commander accepted the worship'; it simply records no refusal, in contrast to every other biblical instance where such worship is offered to a created being. This is a real and widely persuasive piece of evidence, but its nature as an argument from silence should be acknowledged rather than glossed over.

"Does this study's reading of 'neither' overstate what the text actually says?"

This study's central theological point — that the Commander's answer corrects Joshua's assumption that God exists to be recruited to Israel's side — is drawn directly from the plain sense of the exchange itself and is not a speculative extension. The further application of this principle to prayer and spiritual life generally (Chapter 6) is a reasonable, widely applied extension of the text's principle, consistent with how Scripture is normally read for devotional application, though it moves one step beyond the bare historical narrative.

Did You Know?

Maintaining this kind of careful distinction — between what a text states directly, what a strong pattern of evidence supports, and what represents a faithful but extended application — has been the consistent method applied across every study in this series, precisely because it allows a study's strongest claims to be received with full confidence while its more interpretive observations are held with appropriate humility.

 **Further Reading:** *Joshua 5:13-15; Revelation 19:10; Revelation 22:8-9.*

Reflection Questions

1. Which parts of this study's argument do you hold with the most confidence, and which do you consider more open to alternative readings?
2. How does this kind of transparency about levels of certainty affect your trust in the study's overall conclusions?

Chapter 10 — Practical Applications for the Christian Life

The encounter between Joshua and the Commander of the LORD's host, and the theological pattern it reveals, carries direct implications for how believers understand prayer, submission, and spiritual conflict today.

1. The Right Question Is Not "Is God on My Side?"

Joshua's initial question reflects a natural but misdirected instinct — treating God's involvement as something to be secured for a predetermined human purpose. The Commander's answer redirects believers toward the more searching and appropriate question: not whether God supports what I have already decided to do, but whether what I am doing aligns with what God has called me to.

2. Worship Belongs to God Alone

The consistent biblical pattern of angels refusing worship (Chapter 3) is itself a standing reminder that no created being, however impressive, however seemingly worthy of reverence, should receive worship that belongs to God alone. This has practical implications for how believers relate to spiritual experiences, visions, and even trusted human leaders — reverence and respect are appropriate, but worship is reserved.

3. Submission, Not Negotiation, Is the Right Posture

Joshua's response — falling facedown and asking, 'What saith my lord unto his servant?' — models the posture Scripture consistently commends toward God's authority: not negotiation from a position of perceived partnership, but submission from a position of genuine servanthood. Believers facing significant decisions or conflicts can take Joshua's posture as a pattern: presenting themselves as ready to receive instruction rather than presenting a plan for approval.

4. God's Plans Often Look Impractical by Human Standards

The battle plan given for Jericho (Chapter 7) reminds believers that God's methods do not always, or even usually, conform to conventional wisdom or strategic logic. Obedience to instructions that seem impractical, provided they are genuinely discerned as God's instruction, has its own scriptural warrant, illustrated vividly by the fall of Jericho's walls.

5. God Has Been Revealing Himself Consistently, Even When Veiled

The pattern traced in Chapter 8 — the angel of the LORD appearing throughout the Old Testament in ways that blur into direct divine presence — reminds believers that God's self-revelation has been consistent and purposeful throughout redemptive history, culminating in the full, unveiled revelation of the incarnation. Recognizing these earlier, partial appearances deepens appreciation for how much continuity exists between the God of the Old Testament and the Christ of the New.

 Did You Know?

Joshua's own name, יְהוֹשֻׁעַ (Yehoshua), means 'the LORD saves' or 'the LORD is salvation' — the same underlying Hebrew name that becomes, through its Greek form Iesous, the name Jesus. Many readers find it a fitting detail that the man who encountered the Commander of the LORD's host near Jericho bore, in Hebrew, the very name later given to the One many identify as that Commander himself.

Reflection Questions

1. Which of these five applications feels most relevant to a decision or conflict you are currently facing?
2. How might reframing a current prayer from 'please support my plan' to 'what do you want me to do' change both the prayer and your posture toward its answer?

Chapter 11 — Joshua and Moses: A Deliberate Pattern of Succession

The parallel between Joshua's encounter and Moses's encounter at the burning bush, traced in Chapter 4, fits within a much larger pattern of intentional correspondence between the two leaders — a pattern the book of Joshua develops deliberately, and which adds further context for understanding why this particular echo occurs at this particular moment in Joshua's leadership.

Established at the Jordan

Joshua 3:7 records God's own stated purpose for the miraculous crossing of the Jordan: 'This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.' The crossing of the Jordan on dry ground deliberately recalls the crossing of the Red Sea under Moses (compare Joshua 4:23), and the text explicitly states this parallel is intentional, designed to establish Joshua's God-given authority in the eyes of the nation.

A Pattern Continued at Jericho

The burning-bush echo in Joshua 5:15, read against this backdrop, is not an isolated coincidence but the continuation of a deliberate narrative strategy: just as God's presence and calling were unmistakably confirmed to Moses at the outset of his leadership, so too Joshua receives a comparable confirmation — arguably an even more direct encounter — at the outset of the military campaign that will define his own leadership of Israel.

Moses	Joshua	Purpose
Crosses the Red Sea on dry ground (Exodus 14)	Crosses the Jordan on dry ground (Joshua 3-4)	Establishes each leader's God-given authority through a comparable miracle
Removes sandals at the burning bush (Exodus 3:5)	Removes sandals before the Commander (Joshua 5:15)	Marks each encounter as standing on holy ground, in God's presence
Receives the law and covenant at Sinai	Leads Israel in covenant renewal (circumcision, Passover) at Gilgal	Reaffirms the covenant identity of the nation under new leadership

Did You Know?

The place where these events occur, Gilgal, becomes a significant, recurring site throughout the rest of the book of Joshua and beyond (compare Joshua 9:6; 10:6-9; 1 Samuel 11:14-15) — functioning, in a sense, as Israel's first established base of operations in the land of promise, much as Sinai had functioned as the formative site for the nation under Moses.

Why This Matters for Reading Joshua 5

Recognizing this deliberate literary and theological pattern of succession strengthens, rather than weakens, the case developed earlier in this study. The burning-bush echo in Joshua 5:15 is not an incidental verbal similarity that a modern reader has projected onto the text; it fits a demonstrable, textually signaled pattern the book of Joshua itself establishes and develops, in which Joshua's leadership is repeatedly and deliberately validated by comparison to Moses's own formative encounters with God.

 **Further Reading:** *Joshua 3:7; Joshua 4:14, 23; Exodus 14:21-22; Exodus 3:1-6; Joshua 5:2-12.*

Reflection Questions

1. How does seeing this broader pattern of intentional Moses-Joshua parallels change the weight you give to the burning-bush echo specifically in Joshua 5:15?
2. What does this pattern suggest about how God chooses to establish confidence and authority in new leaders throughout Scripture?

A Closing Reflection: The Question That Remains

Joshua asked a question every believer, at some point, asks in one form or another: whose side is God on? It is not a foolish question, and it was not asked in bad faith. It is simply the wrong question — a question that assumes God's role is to be enlisted, rather than to be obeyed.

The Commander's answer did not leave Joshua without direction. It gave him something better than an ally: a Sovereign. Joshua's response — face to the ground, sandals removed, waiting for instruction — remains, across the length of this entire study, the single clearest picture of what it looks like to get the question right.

The walls of Jericho did not fall because Israel found the right military strategy or the right divine alliance. They fell because a Commander who had never needed Israel's permission gave a plan Israel simply obeyed. The question this study leaves with its reader is the same one Joshua had to answer that day near Jericho — not whether God is on your side, but whether you are on His.

Did You Know?

The book of Joshua closes, many chapters later, with Joshua issuing his own famous challenge to the nation: 'choose you this day whom ye will serve... but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD' (Joshua 24:15) — language that echoes, across the span of an entire lifetime of leadership, the same reorientation from alliance-seeking to submission that began with a drawn sword near Jericho.

 **Further Reading:** *Joshua 5:13-15; Joshua 24:14-15.*

A Note on This Study's Place in a Wider Series

This study on Joshua 5 is part of a broader collection examining how single Old Testament images, words, and encounters anticipate specific dimensions of Christ's person and work: Melchizedek's eternal priesthood, the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant, the meaning of the name Gethsemane, the wilderness rock Paul identifies with Christ in 1 Corinthians 10:4, Jacob's ladder and its echo in John 1:51, and the bronze serpent Jesus cites in John 3:14.

Read together, these studies share a common conviction and a common method. The conviction: that the Old Testament is not merely historical background to the New Testament, but a coherent, Spirit-inspired witness whose full weight becomes visible once its central Subject is recognized — sometimes explicitly, as when Jesus himself cites the bronze serpent, and sometimes through careful, well-supported inference, as with much of the case built in this present study. The method: distinguishing consistently between what a text states outright, what a strong and repeated pattern of evidence supports, and what remains a suggestive but more speculative observation — a discipline applied throughout this study, most visibly in Chapters 5 and 9.

Joshua's encounter near Jericho fits naturally within this series precisely because it raises, in miniature, the same question every one of these studies ultimately serves: not simply what a given Old Testament passage meant to its original audience, but who has been present, active, and self-revealing throughout the whole of Scripture, long before Bethlehem — and what it means, in light of that presence, to fall facedown and ask the right question at last.

Did You Know?

Each study in this series closes with the same basic structure — a summary of key points, further reading organized by theme, and a recommended bibliography — precisely so that readers encountering the series for the first time can move confidently between studies, tracing connections (such as the shared 'angel of the LORD' material touched on both here and in the Melchizedek study) without needing to start from scratch each time.

Summary of Key Points

- Standing near Jericho, Joshua encounters a man with a drawn sword and asks whether he is for Israel or its enemies; the answer, 'Neither,' identifies him instead as 'captain of the host of the LORD,' present with His own authority and agenda.
- Joshua responds by falling facedown in worship, and — unlike every other biblical instance of worship offered to a created being, which is consistently refused (Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9; Acts 10:25-26) — no refusal is recorded here.
- The Commander instructs Joshua to remove his sandals because the ground is holy, using language that closely echoes, almost word for word, God's own words to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:5).
- These converging details — accepted worship, the burning-bush language, and independent divine authority — form the traditional cumulative case for reading this figure as a Christophany, a pre-incarnate appearance of the Son, though this study also acknowledges a fair alternative reading (a uniquely authoritative created angel) held by some careful interpreters.
- The Commander's answer, 'Neither,' dismantles the assumption behind Joshua's question — that God exists to be recruited to a human cause — and reorients the appropriate question from 'is God on my side' to 'am I on God's side.'
- The subsequent battle plan for Jericho (Joshua 6) — marching, trumpets, and a shout, with no conventional military strategy — reinforces this same theological point: the victory belonged to the Commander, not to Israel's own competence.
- This encounter fits within a broader Old Testament pattern of 'angel of the LORD' appearances (to Hagar, Abraham, Gideon, and others) that similarly blur the line between a created messenger and God's own direct presence.
- Practically, this study grounds a reoriented posture in prayer (submission rather than negotiation), reverence reserved for God alone, trust in God's sometimes unconventional methods, and appreciation for the consistency of God's self-revelation throughout redemptive history.

Further Reading by Theme

On Joshua 5 and the Conquest Narrative

Joshua 3:1-17; Joshua 4:1-24; Joshua 5:1-15; Joshua 6:1-27.

On Angels Refusing Worship

Revelation 19:9-10; Revelation 22:6-9; Acts 10:25-26; Colossians 2:18.

On the Burning Bush and Holy Ground

Exodus 3:1-15; Exodus 33:18-23.

On the Angel of the LORD Elsewhere in Scripture

Genesis 16:7-13; Genesis 22:9-18; Judges 6:11-24; Judges 13:2-23; Zechariah 3:1-2.

On Submission and Trusting God's Methods

Hebrews 11:30; Job 38:1-42:6; James 4:13-17.

Bibliography and Recommended References

The works below are recommended for readers who wish to go further than this introductory study, whether through academic commentaries or accessible reference resources.

Commentaries on Joshua

- HOWARD, David M. Joshua. New American Commentary. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group.
- HESS, Richard S. Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.
- WOUDSTRA, Marten H. The Book of Joshua. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

On Christophanies and the Angel of the LORD

- BORLAND, James A. Christ in the Old Testament: Old Testament Appearances of Christ in Human Form. Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications.
- MCKELVEY, R. J. 'The Angel of the LORD,' in various evangelical theological dictionaries and encyclopedias of biblical theology.
- HAMILTON, Victor P. Handbook on the Historical Books. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

On the Doctrine of the Trinity and Christ's Pre-Existence

- LETHAM, Robert. The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship. Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing.
- BAUCKHAM, Richard. Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

On the Conquest Narrative and Ancient Near Eastern Warfare

- LONGMAN, Tremper III, and REID, Daniel G. God Is a Warrior. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- HESS, Richard S., KLINGBEIL, Gerald A., and RAY, Paul J. (eds.). Critical Issues in Early Israelite History. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.

Dictionaries and Original-Language Tools

- BROWN, DRIVER, BRIGGS. A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (BDB).
- HARRIS, R. Laird; ARCHER, Gleason L.; WALTKE, Bruce K. (eds.). Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT).
- VINE, W. E. Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words.

— End of Study —