

CAPTAIN OF THE LORD'S HOST

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Joshua 5:13-15 describes what has to be one of the most interesting encounters recorded in the Bible. The passage says, *“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? 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? 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.”* One of the questions that comes to mind from reading these verses is, Who is this “captain of the Lord’s host?”

A “man” but neither human nor an angel

This “captain of the Lord’s host” is called “a man” (Josh 5:13). But this would refer to the form of his appearance, not necessarily his nature. For example, on numerous occasions, when angels appeared on this earth in the form of men, they are referred to as “men” though in reality they were angels (see Gen 18:1-8; 19:1-22; 32:24-32 + Hos 12:4; Judg 6:11-21; 13:1-21; 1 Kgs 19:5-8; Dan 8:15-19; 9:21-23; 10:9-21; 12:5-7; Matt 28:2-8; Mark 16:5-7; Luke 24:22-23; John 20:11-13; Acts 1:9-11). When in the form of men, the appearance of angels was totally indistinguishable from men. That is why certain people entertained angels unawares (Heb 13:2). Therefore, the “man” who stood with his sword drawn before Joshua was not necessarily a man at all. In fact, we *know* this being was not merely a man because Joshua fell down and worshiped him (Josh 5:14). Men cannot be worshiped (Acts 10:25-26; 14:12-18). For this same reason, we can eliminate the possibility that this captain of the Lord’s host was an angel. Angels are our “fellowservants” and must not be worshiped (Col 2:18; Rev 19:10; 22:8-9).

Evidence of divinity

The captain of the Lord’s host did not refuse Joshua’s worship, but rather responded by telling Joshua to take his shoes off because that ground was holy (Josh 5:15). Towards this being, Joshua had not rendered too much, but rather too little. Only God can be worshiped (Matt 4:10; Luke 4:8; Rev 4:10-11; 14:7; 19:10; 22:9). Therefore, all the evidence indicates that this “captain of the Lord’s host” was deity. The question then is, Which of the three beings of the Godhead appeared here to Joshua? This was certainly not the Father, because no man has ever literally seen Him (John 1:18; 1 Tim 6:16). There is no record of the Holy Spirit ever appearing in bodily form like this, so by process of elimination we must consider the strong possibility that the captain of the Lord’s host was Jesus Christ. This conclusion is also supported by the evidence of many other scriptures. We know that Jesus Christ did make some earthly appearances in the Old Testament. Three “men” appeared to Abraham in the plains of Mamre (Gen 18:2). Two or these “men” were without doubt angels. In the next chapter (Gen 19:1-22), two angels came to Lot in Sodom, and were almost certainly the ones who had just visited Abraham with the Lord in the previous chapter. But what about the third “man” that appeared to Abraham? The text says that *Jehovah* appeared to Abraham (Gen 18:1) and the being who spoke with Abraham is repeatedly referred to as Jehovah (Gen 18:13-33). Again, this being was not the Father, and very likely was Christ. And later, Jehovah went before Abraham’s descendants, the children of Israel.

Jehovah before Israel

In Exodus 33, Jehovah spoke with Moses and commanded him to take the children of Israel

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(continued)

to the Promised Land (verse 1). Jehovah promised to send "an angel" (literally, a *messenger*) before them to drive out the inhabitants of the land (verse 2), but added, "I will not go up *in the midst of thee* (verse 3). If this messenger were merely an angel by nature, then there would seem to be no reason he could not have been in the midst of Israel, as God's angels did enter Sodom (Gen 19:1). But Jehovah did not enter Sodom. The indication in Exodus 33:2-3 is that Jehovah would be the messenger going *before* but not *in the midst* of Israel. The remainder of the evidence points in that same direction. In Exodus 33:10, Jehovah spoke face to face with Moses and promised him that His presence would go with them (verses 14-17). Moses then asked Jehovah to show him His glory (verse 18). Jehovah then promised to pass before Moses, but would only permit Moses to see His back not His face (verses 19-23). Moses did see Jehovah in Exodus 34:1-8. Jesus is referred to on several occasions as Jehovah (Isa 6:5-8 + John 12:36-42; Isa 8:13-14 + 1 Pet 2:4-8; Isa 61:1,8 + Luke 4:17-21; Isa 40:3 + Matt 3:3; 11:10; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 1:17,67-79; 3:3-6; 7:27; John 1:23), and this is almost certainly the one whom Moses saw. This is also consistent with the description of Israel's journey from Egypt to Canaan that we read about in other passages of scripture. Exodus 13:21-22 says that "*Jehovah went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: he took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.*" Exodus 14:19 says, "And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them." Comparing Exodus 13:21-22 and 14:19 indicates that the "angel" going with Israel in the wilderness was Jehovah, and, more specifically, Jesus Christ.

The "Angel" to conquer Israel's foes

In Exodus 23:20-23, God said, "*Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him. But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries. For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off.*" God again promised that His "Angel" would go before Israel in Exodus 32:24, and Moses told the Edomites in Numbers 20:16 that the Lord had "sent an angel, and has brought us forth out of Egypt: and, behold, we are in Kadesh, a city in the uttermost of thy border:" This does not appear to be a typical "angel." In fact, 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 plainly tells us that when the Israelites passed through the Red Sea with Moses, the people "*did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.*" Christ was definitely there with the children of Israel when they left Egypt. It only makes sense that now, at the moment when Joshua was about to lead Israel in their first battle to conquer the land of Canaan, that the Christ, their "rock," would be directly with them as he had been for forty years since they had left Egypt. The Lord Himself was fighting for Israel (Josh 10:14,42; 23:3; 1 Sam 17:45-47). Thus, the captain of the Lord's host, Jehovah Himself, would be the ideal one to now lead Joshua and Israel into battle (Josh 5:13-15).