

“A DAY LIKE NO OTHER” IN THE CONTEXT OF YAHWEH WAR: JOSHUA 10:14 AND THE CHARACTERIZATION OF JOSHUA

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Joshua 10:12–14 describes a request that the sun and moon stand still over Gibeon and the Valley of Aijalon, along with their compliance, before noting that there has never been a day before or since when Yahweh listened to the voice of a human.¹ This passage has long served as an interpretive crux in the interpretation of the OT,² in large part because of its phenomenological description of the halting of the sun and moon. In this study, I intend to focus on just one facet of this passage, the locution indicating that there has not been a day like that day before or since when Yahweh listened to the voice of a human (10:14). This statement, when understood within the context of ancient Near Eastern (ANE) warfare and Yahweh war, has some important implications for understanding the literary structure of this passage.

The narrator in Josh 10:14 asserts that the events described in the preceding verses are in some way unique.³ However, interpreters have differed on exactly what it is that made the events of Joshua 10 so unique.⁴ Some understand the singularity referred to in Josh 10:14 as the unusual progression of time on that day⁵ or at least the perception of the progression of time.⁶ Others connect the uniqueness of that day to the boldness or faith inherent in a request with such cosmic implications.⁷ The oldest and most common understanding connects the distinctiveness of

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² Cf. Ed Noort, “Joshua and Copernicus: Josh 10:12–15 and the History of Reception,” in *Flores Florentino: Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Early Jewish Studies in Honour of Florentino García Martínez* (ed. Anthony Hilhorst, Émile Puech, and Eibert Tigchelaar; JSJSup 122; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 387–401; H. Kruger, “Sun and Moon Marking Time: A Cursory Survey of Exegetical Possibilities in Joshua 10:9–14,” *JNSL* 26 (2000) 137–52; Mary K. Hom, “A Day Like No Other: A Discussion of Joshua 10:12–14,” *ExpTim* 115/7 (2004) 222.

³ L. Daniel Hawk notes two ways in which the grammar of Josh 10:12–14 highlights its uniqueness (*Joshua* [Berit Olam; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000] 153). First, the narrator’s assertion that Joshua “spoke” (דבר) (10:12a), while common in Deuteronomy and Joshua for divine pronouncements, is used nowhere else in these books to describe an individual’s address to Yahweh. Second, this is the only event in Joshua which is described using poetry.

⁴ Joshua 10:14 may be hyperbole (cf. 2 Kgs 18:5; 23:25), though this does not directly diminish its rhetorical force.

⁵ Volkmar Fritz, *Das Buch Josua* (HAT I/7; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1994) 112.

⁶ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the OT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 2.110–11.

⁷ David Howard, *Joshua* (NAC 5; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998) 251; C. J. Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (BSC; trans. R. Togtman; Grand Rapids: Regency, 1986) 100.

that day with the fact that Yahweh answered Joshua's prayer.⁸ However, the Hebrew Bible contains many examples of God answering prayer (e.g. Num 14:20; 21:3; Deut 9:19; 10:10; cf. 2 Kgs 13:4), and so the significance of Josh 10:14 must lie elsewhere.

Mary Hom, after surveying various interpretations of Josh 10:12–14, suggests a more complex threefold proposal for what made the day in Joshua 10 unique.⁹ First, the enormity of Joshua's appeal—requesting cosmic intervention for the battle at Gibeon—made that day unique.¹⁰ However, while audacious, there are several descriptions in the Hebrew Bible of divine intervention in battle involving heavenly elements, so that while astonishing, the participation of the sun and moon in the battle at Gibeon need not be considered singular.¹¹ Second, Hom points out that the language describing Yahweh's response is unusual. David Howard notes that the phrase in 10:14, שמע בקל (“to listen to the voice of” or “to obey”), with Yahweh as the subject, occurs only three times in the Hebrew Bible (Num 21:3; Josh 10:14; 1 Kgs 17:22) and indicates a much stronger level of response than merely hearing a request. It suggests obedience—here of Yahweh to Joshua.¹² Hom proposes that the language of Yahweh's obedience may be tied to an affirmation of his covenant with his people in light of Israel's covenant renewal (Josh 8:30–35) and

⁸ This is the view reflected in Sir 46:4–5; Ambrose, *Duties of the Clergy* 1.40.205; Chrysostom, *Epistle to the Hebrews* 27.6; Augustine, *City of God* 21.8 (cited in *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1–2 Samuel* [ACCS; ed. John R. Franke; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005] 58–59); Martin Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 176. There is some question as to whether it is Joshua or Yahweh who addresses the sun and moon in Josh 10:12b. Patrick D. Miller notes the temptation in ancient Israel to worship the sun and moon as deities and the ambiguous grammar of Josh 10:12, which does not clarify whether it is Yahweh or Joshua who addresses the sun and moon (*The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973; repr. Atlanta: SBL, 2006] 126–28). Moreover, immediately after the assertion of Yahweh listening to a man, the editor inserts a statement indicating that it was Yahweh who fought for Israel. Thus Miller argues that it may well be Yahweh who addresses the sun and moon as members of his heavenly entourage to influence the battle by standing still. James Yu takes a similar stance (“Understanding Joshua 10:12–14 in its Context,” *ExpTim* 123 [2012] 582–83), providing five supporting arguments. (1) The statement does not follow typical speech patterns that would indicate Joshua is the speaker. (2) The connection between 10:12a and 10:12b can be either sequential or consequential. Yu argues that the relationship is consequential. (3) Context suggests that Yahweh is the primary actor throughout 10:10–12. (4) Spatially, Yahweh acts before Israel (10:8, 10, 11, 12a), which suggests that 10:12b should be interpreted likewise. (5) Several parallels suggest that Yahweh acts and Joshua mimics Yahweh's actions (10:8/10:19; 10:10/10:19–20; 10:11/10:27). However, the LXX attributes Josh 10:12b–13a to Joshua—καὶ εἶπεν Ἰησοῦς στήτω ὁ ἥλιος κατὰ Γαββων καὶ ἡ σελήνη κατὰ φάραγγα Αἰθων (“And Joshua said, ‘Sun stand over Gibeon and moon over the ravine of Aijalon’”). Moreover, the words of Joshua are said to have taken place “before the eyes of Israel” (10:12a), indicating that the speech took place before witnesses. In the book of Joshua, Yahweh always speaks to Israel through Joshua (or through the recollection of Yahweh's words to Moses). If Yahweh was the speaker in 10:12b, this would be the only instance in the book where Yahweh speaks in the hearing of the people. Finally, and possibly most decisively, Josh 10:14 suggests that it was Joshua's speech that set the events of the day into motion, for Yahweh listened to the voice of a man on that day.

⁹ Hom, “A Day Like No Other” 222.

¹⁰ Cf. Robert L. Hubbard, *Joshua* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) 295–96.

¹¹ Judg 5:20; Hab 3:11; 2 Kgs 6:17; cf. Moshe Weinfeld, “Divine Intervention in War in Ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East,” in *History, Historiography and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literatures* (ed. Hayim Tadmor and Moshe Weinfeld; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1984) 121–47.

¹² Howard, *Joshua* 250.

their subsequent treaty with the Gibeonites (in seeming contravention of Deut 7:2) before embarking on their southern and northern campaigns.¹³ However, the two other times that שמע בקל with Yahweh as subject is used in the Hebrew Bible (Num 21:3; 1 Kgs 17:22), it does not carry any specific covenantal connotations and likely does not carry such connotations here either. Moreover, while the larger context of Joshua 9–10 may surface the issue of the Israelites’ breach of the covenant, the narrator does not explicitly condemn the treaty with Gibeon and in fact has already resolved any questions of the Israelites’ status vis-à-vis Yahweh and the covenant by relating Yahweh’s tacit acceptance of the Gibeonites’ perpetual service in proximity to his sanctuary, noting their presence there “to this day” (Josh 9:27), thereby ameliorating concerns of possible consequences for breach of covenant. This would make Josh 10:14 as Yahweh’s implicit covenant affirmation unnecessary. Third, Hom points out that the narrator’s description of the incomparability of Joshua’s request on that day parallels the incomparability of Moses related in Deut 34:10–12, thereby legitimating Joshua’s leadership. While the narratorial comment in Josh 10:14 *functions* to enhance the characterization of Joshua, it does not *explain* its referent.

Another possible explanation for the singularity referenced in Josh 10:14 is that when Joshua requested that the sun and moon stand still, he intruded upon Yahweh’s prerogative as divine warrior. John Walton, followed by a few others, observes that what makes the day unique is that “never before had a person presumed to state what sort of supernatural strategy he wanted God to perpetrate on behalf of Israel. God granted Joshua the privilege of taking the initiative in devising divine strategy. This is what the narrator identifies as the singular distinguishing feature of the day.”¹⁴ Essentially, Walton proposes that the singularity described in Josh 10:12–14 is that Joshua seized Yahweh’s prerogative as Israel’s divine warrior and dictated divine battle strategy to Yahweh. Walton and the others who note this possibility do not expand on this proposal, but I believe this reading fits the context well and has significant merits which remain, as yet, unexplored.

I. JOSHUA 10:14 IN THE CONTEXT OF ANE DIVINE WARFARE

We can better appreciate the unique role ascribed to Joshua in Josh 10:14 when we compare the events of Joshua 10 with typical patterns for warfare in the Hebrew Bible and the wider ANE context. Most commentators acknowledge that the events of Joshua 10 are described in terms common to “Yahweh war” or divine

¹³ Hom, “A Day Like No Other” 222 n. 52; also Robert Boling and G. Ernest Wright, *Joshua* (AB 6; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982) 288.

¹⁴ John H. Walton, “Joshua 10:12–15 and Mesopotamian Celestial Omen Texts,” in *Faith, Tradition, and History: OT Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context* (ed. Alan R. Millard, James K. Hoffmeier, and David W. Baker; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994) 183; cf. Robert Coote, “The Book of Joshua,” *NIB* 2.647; Hubbard, *Joshua* 296 n. 57; Sarah Lebharr Hall, *Conquering Character: The Characterization of Joshua in Joshua 1–11* (Library of Hebrew Bible/OT Studies 512; New York: T&T Clark, 2010) 175.

warfare.¹⁵ Gerhard von Rad laid out seven typical elements of what he called holy war.¹⁶ This paradigm is an abstraction—it does not actually occur with all of its constituent elements in any one biblical passage, though many of the elements may appear in any given battle account, and comparison with ANE accounts of warfare has upheld the general validity of von Rad's constituent elements.¹⁷

Biblical and ANE conceptions of warfare held in common several key features which are helpful for our purposes. First is the importance of the divine initiation of battle. In the ANE, this usually took place either through oracular inquiry in the form of dreams, lottery, augury, extispicy, or the appearance of omens. For example, Sa-Moon Kang notes that in Mesopotamia, "There was a profound conviction that no military action could succeed unless its plan had the prior approval of the gods. Thus no military expedition set forth without a series of favorable omen signs."¹⁸ The importance of divine initiation through oracular inquiry is seen in "The Ten Year Annals of Muršili," where Hittite officers refuse to proceed into battle unless the battle order is confirmed by augury or divination.¹⁹ This perspective is also evident, though to a lesser extent, in Egyptian contexts where confirmation was secured when war leaders were told that the gods would deliver their enemy into their hand.²⁰

Second, in ANE ideology it was the intervention of the divine warrior in battle that secured victory. Divine intervention could take many different forms. Most often, it was logged simply through notations of divine accompaniment, such as Muršili's repeated observation that the gods ran before him into battle,²¹ but at other times could include the use of cosmic and natural phenomena that proved

¹⁵ K. Lawson Younger Jr. notes five points of correspondence between Joshua 10 and other ANE conquest accounts (*Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing* [JSOTSup 98; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990] 219–20): (1) the divine use of "stones from heaven," either in the form of hailstones or meteors; (2) the use of astrological omens involving the sun and moon; (3) the phrase "in a single day" or "in a single year" as hyperbole; (4) a request of deities to increase daylight hours in order to secure victory; (5) divine intervention through miraculous signs. "Thus ... 'the miracles' of Joshua 10 are very much within the ancient Near Eastern transmission code for conquest accounts." Cf. J. Alberto Soggin, *Joshua: A Commentary* (OTL; trans. R. A. Wilson; London: SCM, 1972) 126; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Gibeon and Israel: The Role of Gibeon and the Gibeonites in the Political and Religious History of Early Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972) 50; Richard D. Nelson, *Joshua* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997) 139.

¹⁶ Gerhard von Rad, *Der Heilige Krieg in alten Israel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958; repr. *Holy War in Ancient Israel*; trans. M. Dawn; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 41–51. Cf. Tremper Longman III and Daniel G. Reid, *God is a Warrior* (Studies in OT Biblical Theology; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 32–47.

¹⁷ Manfred Weippert, "'Heiliger Krieg' in Israel und Assyrien: Kritische Anmerkungen zu Gerhard von Rads Konzept des 'Heiligen Krieges in alten Israel,'" *ZAW* 84 (1972) 485.

¹⁸ Sa-Moon Kang, *Divine War in the OT and in the Ancient Near East* (BZAW 177; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989) 42. Cf. *COS* 2.113B:262, where Shalmaneser III proceeds "by the command of Aššur."

¹⁹ *COS* 2.16:89; cf. *COS* 1.120:423.

²⁰ Kang, *Divine War in the OT* 56, 98–99. Lori Rowlett notes that Egyptian oracles may have even included the weaponizing of the warrior (*Joshua and the Rhetoric of Violence: A New Historicist Analysis* [JSOTSup 226; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996] 77). Cf. *COS* 2.91:245.

²¹ *COS* 2.16:83–90.

decisive for victory.²² Divine intervention typically resulted in a divinely inaugurated discouragement, confusion, fear, or terror in opponents, which caused them to lose courage.²³ For example, in the Gebel Barkal Stela, Thutmose III describes the appearance of a miraculous star (or meteor) which spooked horses and threw his enemies onto their faces in panic. The stela goes on to say, “With a joyful heart I turned back in a southerly direction, having celebrated for my lord [Amun-Re] who had ordained the victories and who put the dread [of me?] [...] in my life time. Among the foreigners he placed the fear of me so that they might flee far from me. Everyone on whom the sun shines is bound under my sandals.”²⁴ Similar examples of divine intervention resulting in the fear and confusion of the enemy may be found in most ANE cultures for which we have records.²⁵ Thus, it was the intervention of the divine warrior that proved decisive in securing victory, though this concept is much more prominent in Mesopotamian and Hittite contexts and less prominent in Egypt, possibly due to the divine status ascribed to Pharaoh.²⁶ Accordingly, credit for victory was attributed to the nation’s divine warrior.²⁷

Third, most battles were fought through a combination of divine initiative and human cooperation. Several Neo-Assyrian texts emphasize how victory required trust in divine intervention rather than superior forces or strength.²⁸ For example, in the Kurkh Monolith, Shalmaneser III notes how his enemy, Aḫuni of Bīt-Adini, trusted in massed troops, while he himself, with the aid of Aššur and the great gods decisively defeated him, highlighted his own trust in Aššur. Later, in the same inscription, he notes how Aḫuni of Bīt-Adini and Sangara of Carchemish

put their trust in each other. They prepared for war. They marched against me to do battle. With the exalted power of the divine standard which goes before me (and) with the fierce weapons which Aššur, my lord, gave, I fought with them. I decisively defeated them. I felled with the sword their fighting men. Like Adad, I rained down upon them a devastating flood.²⁹

A similar sentiment is expressed in Rameses II’s account of the battle of Qadesh. Abandoned by his army in the face of overwhelming opposition, he says, “Amun I found more help to me than millions of troops, than hundred-thousands of chariotry, than ten-thousands of men, whether brothers or offspring, (even) if united in one will. There is no achievement of (however) many men, but Amun is more help

²² Cf. Weinfeld, “Divine Intervention in War” 121–47.

²³ Cf. von Rad, *Holy War* 46–49.

²⁴ *COS* 2.2B:17, lines 33–37a.

²⁵ Jeffrey Niehaus, “Joshua and Ancient Near Eastern Warfare,” *JETS* 31 (1988) 42–43; Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts* 208–9.

²⁶ Kang, *Divine War* 108.

²⁷ Note the words of Ninurta-kudurri-ušur (*COS* 2.115B:280) after a lengthy description of his own exploits in fighting at the city of Ra’il: “Anyone in the future who comes forward and says: ‘How [did] Ninurta-kudurri-ušur, governor of the land of Suḫu and the land of Mari, [inflict] this defeat?’ (should be told that) I did [not] inflict (this) [by my own power, (but rather) I inflicted this] defeat by the power of Šamaš and Marduk, A[dad and Apla-Adad, the great gods].”

²⁸ Rowlett, *Joshua and the Rhetoric of Violence* 104–5; cf. Niehaus, “Joshua and Ancient Near Eastern Warfare” 46 n. 43; *COS* 2.115A:278, lines 13b–18; *ANET*, 290.

²⁹ *COS* 2.113A:261–2.

than them!"³⁰ Successful ANE war leaders trusted in the divine warrior's intervention, yet also emphasized their own key role in battle, so that most often battles were viewed as a synergism between divine leadership and human cooperation. Thus, in ANE ideology, the divine warrior sanctioned the battle and intervened in decisive, sometimes miraculous, ways, while human war leaders mustered the troops, trusted in the deity, and then participated in the divine warrior's victory-securing stroke by engaging in mop-up operations.

Fourth, most ANE battle accounts do not relate the origin of the specific military strategies employed in battle. However, there are a few cases where divine warriors not only commissioned a battle, but also played a vital role in setting battle strategy or tactics. For example, in Ashurbanipal's seventh campaign against Elam, a seer receives a nocturnal vision and reports Ishtar of Arbela's instructions to Ashurbanipal, instructing him to wait but promising her accompanying presence in battle.³¹ The Ugaritic tale of Kirta includes a description of El instructing Kirta through a dream to engage in a seven-day march and then to raid towns and attack cities, though he is told not to attack the city of Pabil, king of Udm. Instead, he is to lay siege to Udm, so that Pabil will negotiate and eventually give Kirta his daughter, Hurriya, to be his wife.³² After Thutmose III's first Asian campaign and subsequent deportations, he hints that his success stems from the plans of Amun,

I carried off their citizens to Egypt and their property also. It was my father who gave them to me, [Amun-Re] the magnificent god, the one who accomplishes successfully, whose plans do not fail, who sent my majesty in order to seize lands. All foreigners who were united, I overthrew them in accordance with his decree in the way he is accustomed to doing. He caused me to smite all foreigners without there being one to challenge him.

Significantly, Kang notes that in ancient Egypt, "War is not only the divine command, but also the prepared divine plan. . . . To conduct war is to carry out the divine will. . . . The duty of the king is to carry out the divine commission."³³

Thus, while certainly not monolithic, ANE battle ideology generally included a belief that: (1) battles were divinely instigated, often via the use of oracles or omens; (2) the intervention of the divine warrior through cosmic or natural phenomena, often inducing confusion and fear among an army's enemies, proved decisive in securing a positive outcome in a given battle; (3) while the decisive blow was struck by the divine warrior, battles were generally fought with the assistance of human warriors who trust in the might of the divine warrior; and (4) battle strategy could, on occasion, be set out by the divine warrior.

³⁰ *COS* 2.5A:35, lines 115–19.

³¹ John Van Seters, "Joshua's Campaign of Canaan and Near Eastern Historiography," *Scandinavian Journal of the OT* 4/2 (1990) 1–12; repr. in *Israel's Past in Present Research: Essays on Ancient Israelite Historiography* (ed. V. Philips Long; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999) 178–79, referencing *ANET* 606.

³² *COS* 1.102.

³³ Kang, *Divine War* 90.

II. BATTLE PROCEDURES IN THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

The third and fourth elements of these observations are of greatest interest in considering the possibility that the narrator’s indication of the uniqueness of the battle at Gibeon in Josh 10:14 refers to Joshua’s role in setting divine intervention strategy. Several of the features of warfare described above may also be found in the battles described in the book of Joshua, though the descriptions in the book of Joshua are complicated somewhat by the fact that Joshua presumes familiarity with, and obedience to, the instructions of Moses laid out in the Torah (Josh 1:7–8).

The description of the destruction of Jericho in Joshua 6 is the fullest battle account in the book of Joshua and functions paradigmatically for the following battle narratives.³⁴ Unlike most ANE battle accounts, where oracles and omens are relayed to war leaders by intermediaries, Yahweh interacts directly with Joshua, his human war leader.³⁵ After an initial assurance of victory (6:2), Yahweh lays out Israel’s battle strategy (6:3–5), if one can call it that in this case. Joshua then dutifully relays (6:6–7) and implements Yahweh’s unique strategy (6:8–21). Hawk notes the presence of a command-execution pattern in this chapter where Joshua executes Yahweh’s commands, which “powerfully demonstrates the nation’s complete obedience to YHWH and Joshua.”³⁶ Joshua and Israel thereby exhibit their full trust in Yahweh and their reliance upon Yahweh’s miraculous intervention. This comports with the general ideology of ANE warfare and more specifically, Yahweh war, where Israel’s primary role was to place its faith in Yahweh rather than military might and wait for Yahweh to fight on its behalf.³⁷

Yet within the boundaries of the complete obedience observed by Hawk in Joshua 6, the narrator makes it clear that Joshua also has the freedom to augment and improvise within the bounds of Yahweh’s battle strategy. So Joshua adds to Yahweh’s instructions by stationing armed men *before and behind* the ark (6:7, 9, 13), allowing the priests to blow trumpets while circling the city on the first six days (6:8, 9, 13), enforcing silence upon the rest of the people while marching the first six days (6:10), instructing Israel to exercise the חרם-ban and warning them not to take anything under the חרם-ban, for this would make the camp liable to destruction (6:18—this is not included in Yahweh’s instructions, though it may be implied from Deut 7:2; 13:16 [ET 15]; 20:17), sparing Rahab and her family (6:22–25), and adding plundered gold, silver, bronze, and iron objects to Yahweh’s treasury (6:24). In this way, Joshua implements Yahweh’s strategy but at the same time has the freedom to add his own innovations.

Similarly, in the second battle of Ai, the narrative again begins with Yahweh’s battle instructions (8:1–2), indicating Yahweh’s initiative. However, the narrator describes how Joshua takes Yahweh’s general battle strategy of ambushing the city

³⁴ Nelson, *Joshua* 91; Hall, *Conquering Character* 91.

³⁵ Rowlett notes two Egyptian examples where a deity directly addresses a human war leader (*Joshua and the Rhetoric of Violence* 77–82).

³⁶ Hawk, *Joshua* 90.

³⁷ Miller, *Divine Warrior* 159; Rowlett, *Joshua and the Rhetoric of Violence* 120; Longman and Reid, *God is a Warrior* 37.

and adds to it, this time by setting out the specific manner in which the ambush will take place. Joshua stations his troops to the north and west of the city (8:4–7, 13, 14–17), instructs his men to burn the city as per Yahweh’s command even though no command is explicitly related (8:8; cf. Deut 13:16), holds his javelin aloft as a signal to his men (8:18b–19), and exercises a pincer strategy to trap the men of Ai (8:20–22), thereby successfully capturing the city. While other battle reports in Joshua 10–11 do not reflect the same extensive interaction between Israel’s divine warrior and his human agents, the presence of similar elements (like the victory oracle and decisive divine intervention) suggest this fusion between divine and human initiative within the Joshua war narratives is normative, as it is in the ANE context.³⁸ Thus, in the portrayal of the battles of Jericho and Ai, Yahweh is portrayed as setting out Israel’s battle strategy. However, Joshua exercises considerable freedom in implementing and improvising on Yahweh’s commands without compromising or overshadowing the decisive nature of Yahweh’s miraculous intervention on Israel’s behalf.³⁹

III. THE BATTLE AT GIBEON (JOSHUA 10:1–14)

The pattern of freedom and initiative in implementing the commands of Yahweh serves as a significant backdrop when reading Joshua 10. Joshua 10 narrates Yahweh’s promise of victory (10:8, 12) and several features of Joshua’s battle strategy, including a midnight march to Gibeon (10:7, 9), the pursuit of Israel’s enemies (10:10b, 19), and the capture and execution of five Amorite kings (10:16–18, 22–28). It is significant to note that, unlike earlier battle reports in the book of Joshua, which only briefly mention one example of Yahweh’s direct intervention,⁴⁰ Josh 10:7–14 emphasizes Yahweh’s decisive involvement three separate times: (1) Yahweh throws the Amorite coalition into confusion (חַמְסָם) before Israel (10:10); (2) he sends stones from heaven (10:11); and (3) he listens to Joshua’s request for the sun and the moon to be still (10:13). These descriptions of divine intervention comport with phenomena related in other ANE battle accounts⁴¹ and are capped off by a summary highlighting the singularity of the events related to the sun and moon standing, averring that Yahweh listened to the voice of a man and that Yahweh fought for Israel (10:14). These three descriptions of divine intervention sur-

³⁸ Rowlett, *Joshua and the Rhetoric of Violence* 80; Miller, *Divine Warrior* 156.

³⁹ Joshua’s own initiative in implementing Yahweh’s (and Moses’) commands is not restricted to the battle reports of Joshua, but is evident throughout Joshua 1–11; cf. Hall, *Conquering Character* 21–22, 96, 115–16, 156–57, 166–67, 186. Joshua’s freedom in implementing the commands of Yahweh is also evidenced in Joshua 12–24: e.g. Joshua expands upon Yahweh’s initial command to allocate land to the tribes by allocating the specific land claims of individuals (Josh 14:6–15; 17:4–6). Joshua is also able to choose the location of three cities of refuge in the Transjordan (Josh 20:1–2, 7–8; cf. Deut 4:41–43), and Joshua instructs the Cisjordan tribes to share their plunder with their fellow Cisjordan inhabitants (Josh 22:8; cf. Josh 8:2, 27; 11:14).

⁴⁰ In Josh 6:5, 20, Yahweh’s hand is seen in the collapse of Jericho’s otherwise impenetrable wall (cf. 6:1). In Joshua 8, Yahweh’s intervention is seen in the relating of battle strategy of ambushing the city (8:2).

⁴¹ See above, n. 15.

rounding Joshua’s request for the sun and moon to stand are significant rhetorically and raise questions for attentive readers about the rationale for this change in narrative patterning, particularly when compared with previous accounts, where Yahweh only intervenes once in a battle sequence.⁴²

It is within this context that we should now come back to our original hypothesis: the uniqueness of the events narrated in Josh 10:7–14 is that Joshua seized Yahweh’s prerogative as divine warrior to set the parameters for divine involvement in battle. This point is emphasized by the fact that Josh 10:14 does not relate the uniqueness of the events narrated in Joshua 10 to the events related to the sun and the moon, but to the fact that *that Yahweh listened to the voice of a man*. If orthodox battle protocol affirmed the priority and prerogative of divine initiative in securing victory in battle, and even in some cases that battles had to be fought according to the plans of the divine warrior, then the previous battle accounts in the book of Joshua affirm this pattern. Joshua could improvise and adapt Yahweh’s plan, but it was fundamentally *Yahweh’s plan*. Moreover, elsewhere in the book of Joshua, it is Yahweh who determines the means and manner of his own miraculous intervention. Against such a backdrop, a request from a human war-leader directing not only Yahweh’s participation, but specifying the nature of his intervention and Yahweh’s obedient response would indeed be astonishing!

An equally astonishing breach of battle protocol may be that in 10:12b–13a Joshua directly addresses the sun and moon in setting out their role in the ensuing battle, to which Yahweh then responded (10:14). Joshua 10:12b–13a is a poetic fragment which probably originated elsewhere and has been inserted here by the editor of this passage, as seen by the reference to the book of Jashar.⁴³ This may explain some of the awkwardness of Joshua addressing Yahweh (ידבר יהוש ליהוה), “Joshua spoke to Yahweh,” 10:12a), before addressing the sun and moon (ויאמר לעיני ישראל שמש בגבעון דום וירח בעמק אילון), “And he said before the eyes of Israel, ‘Sun stand over Gibeon and moon over the valley of Aijalon,’” 10:12b). In the context of his examination of the biblical evidence for sun worship in ancient Israel, Glen Taylor has proposed that Joshua’s commands to the sun and moon should better be understood as Joshua directly addressing Yahweh as the sun, i.e. that Yahweh was *equated* with the sun at Gibeon in an early period of Israel’s history.⁴⁴ Taylor recognizes that Josh 10:12b–13a is a poetic fragment that has been intentionally framed by a deuteronomistic editor to draw this connection between the sun at Gibeon and Yahweh. This reading, suggests Taylor, has the advantage of

⁴² On the rhetorical importance of patterning, see Gerard Hauser, *Introduction to Rhetorical Theory* (2nd ed.; Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 2002) 243–62. On the significance of breaking patterns in biblical narrative see Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985) 478–80.

⁴³ The LXX does not contain this citation. Cf. Kristin De Troyer, “‘Is This Not Written in the Book of Jashar?’ (Joshua 10:13c): References to Extra-Biblical Books in the Bible,” in *The Land of Israel in Bible, History, and Theology: Studies in Honour of Ed Noort* (ed. Jacques van Ruiten and J. Cornelis de Vos; VTSup 124; Leiden: Brill, 2009) 45–50.

⁴⁴ J. Glen Taylor, *Yahweh and the Sun: Biblical and Archaeological Evidence for Sun Worship in Ancient Israel* (JSOTSup 111; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993) 111–18.

taking the passage at face value (Joshua addressing Yahweh in 10:12a and the sun in 10:12b). It would also explain why the narrator viewed Yahweh's obedience to Joshua as unique, and only by assuming that Yahweh was understood as the sun at Gibeon can one account for the placement of the narrator's astonishment that Yahweh listened to a man (10:14b) after a phenomenon as astounding as of the halting of the sun (10:13b).

Taylor's desire to take the text at face value is helpful. However, when reading the text at face value, the narrative does not explicitly equate the sun with Yahweh, and one may only arrive at the equation of Yahweh and the sun by implication. Also, somewhat problematic for Taylor's reading is the emphasis upon the sun *and moon* in Josh 10:12b–13. Taylor, recognizing the challenges to his interpretation posed by Joshua's address to both the sun and moon, points out that the poetic fragment of 10:12b–13a originally had a different setting (as indicated by the reference to the book of Yashar), and has been imported into its present context. Additionally, the reference to the moon stands in parallel with the sun, so that the moon serves as a bi-form of the sun, and that 10:12b–13a was chosen for its reference to the sun—the presence of the moon in the passage is incidental to the purposes of the narrator.⁴⁵

However, the narrative does not simply reference the moon in parallel with the sun, but specifies its location in terms of a geographical feature, the valley of Aijalon (10:12b). This reference to the moon standing over the valley of Aijalon is curious if it is simply a bi-form of the sun, particularly when paired with the sun over another geographical location (Gibeon). Moreover, the reference to the location of the moon may not be incidental to the thrust of the passage. John Holladay, modified by Walton, has pointed to the possibility that the references to the sun halting over Gibeon and the moon over the valley of Aijalon may have served as geographical references for astronomical omens.⁴⁶ The simultaneous appearance of the sun in the east (over Gibeon) and the moon in the west (over Aijalon) would then not be incidental to the text. Apart from that, the references to the sun at Gibeon and the moon at Aijalon serve to broadly demarcate the initial theatre of battle. When taken together, these factors suggest that the role of the moon is not incidental to the events to the day.

Finally, Taylor argues that the equation of the sun with Yahweh best explains the narrator's amazement at the events of Joshua 10, placing the astounding nature of Joshua's address to Yahweh on par with, or even greater than the phenomena with the sun and moon. Taylor's focus on the unique nature of Joshua's address and Yahweh's response rather than on the specifics of the actions of the sun and moon is accurate, for the narrator does not directly remark upon the singularity of the events related to the sun and the moon, but on the fact that Yahweh listened to

⁴⁵ Ibid. 117 n. 1.

⁴⁶ The proposal of John S. Holladay Jr. ("The Day(s) the Moon Stood Still," *JBL* 87 [1968] 166–78) is followed and modified somewhat by Walton ("Joshua 10:12–15 and Mesopotamian Celestial Omen Texts" 181–90), who suggests that the position of the sun and moon on the day of the battle at Gibeon may have served as negative omens for the Canaanite coalition facing Joshua's army.

the voice of a man (Josh 10:14). However if, as suggested above, Joshua directly addressed the sun and the moon—celestial objects under Yahweh’s ultimate aegis—thereby seizing Yahweh’s prerogative in battle, it would indeed be unique in the Deuteronomistic History. The narrator’s remarks upon the exceptional nature of the day would then stem from the fact that Yahweh responded to Joshua’s “cheekiness” in usurping his prerogative in divine warfare rather than the specific events connected with the sun and moon.

IV. NARRATIVE CHRONOLOGY IN JOSHUA 10:7–14

Such an interpretation may also help to explain a vexing feature of Joshua 10. The chronology, and hence the narrative “flow” of Joshua 10 is quite disjointed. Baruch Margalit, followed by Hartmut Rösel, for example, points to several disjunctions in the narrative, such as the shift in focus from Josh 10:10–11, where the account of the battle with the Amorite kings progresses from the Gibeon area to Azekah and Makkedah, but then shifts back to Gibeon and the sun standing still in Josh 10:12–14.⁴⁷ We could add that Josh 10:7 notes Israel’s departure from Gilgal before relating Yahweh’s victory oracle (10:8) and then returns to describe Israel’s midnight march from Gilgal (10:9). The timing of Joshua’s request regarding the sun and moon is also rather ambiguous. Hall concludes, “Whether its current form is due to redaction or stylistic choices, the chapter as it exists in the final form of the MT almost certainly includes temporally overlapped material; the organization of various components of the story is clearly dischronological.”⁴⁸ These chronological distinctives have at times been attributed to the redactional process that resulted in the present form of the text.⁴⁹ However, recognition of the use of a “back-track-and-overlap” narrative structure that moves the plot forward and then retraces its steps before moving forward again⁵⁰ may help to explain some of the challenges in reading Josh 10:1–27, and particularly 10:1–14.

We may illustrate the narrative chronology of Josh 10:7–14 as follows:

⁴⁷ Baruch Margalit, “The Day the Sun Did Not Stand Still: A New Look at Joshua X 8–15,” *VT* 42 (1992) 470; Hartmut Rösel, *Joshua* (Historical Commentary on the OT; Leuven: Peeters, 2011) 168; cf. Boling and Wright, *Joshua* 278.

⁴⁸ Hall, *Conquering Character* 164.

⁴⁹ See Fritz, *Josua* 112; Trent Butler, *Joshua* (WBC 7; Waco, TX: Word, 1983) 112–13; Martin Noth, *Das Buch Josua* (2d ed.; HAT 7; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1953) 63–65.

⁵⁰ Richard Hess, *Joshua* (IOTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996) 212; Nelson, *Joshua* 138–39; K. Lawson Younger Jr., “The Rhetorical Structuring of the Joshua Conquest Narratives,” in *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History* (ed. Richard S. Hess, Gerald A. Klingbeil, and Paul J. Ray Jr.; BBRSup 4; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008) 6–7.

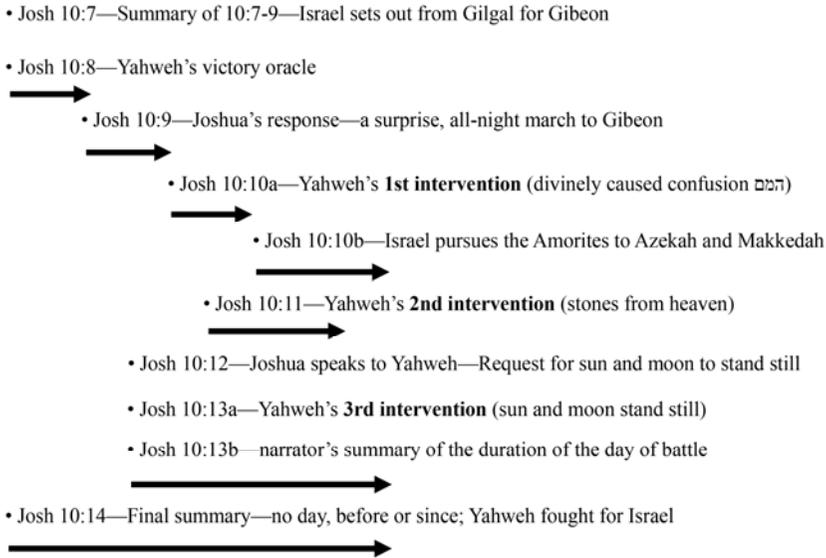


Chart 1: The Narrative Chronology of Joshua 10:7–14

Joshua 10:7 summarizes Joshua’s departure from Gilgal for Gibeon. Joshua 10:8 interrupts Joshua’s midnight march to relay Yahweh’s victory oracle, legitimizing Joshua’s advance and placing the upcoming battle under Yahweh’s overall initiative and prerogative. Joshua 10:9 returns again to Joshua’s midnight march from Gilgal, before recounting the first instance of Yahweh’s intervention in Josh 10:10a (divine confusion—חמם), and then summarizing the results of the battle (Josh 10:10b), which takes the narrative to the furthest points of the pursuit of the enemy, Azekah and Makkedah (cf. Josh 10:16–17, 21, 28–29), and hence, the end of the battle. The narrative then steps back a bit in time to the initial phases of Israel’s pursuit on the slopes of Beth-Horon near Gibeon to note Yahweh’s second act of intervention, sending stones from heaven (10:11).⁵¹ The narrator draws attention to Yahweh’s decisive role in securing Israel’s victory and Israel’s ancillary role in the battle by stating “many more died who were killed with hailstones than whom the Israelites killed with the sword” (Josh 10:11b). The narrator clearly emphasizes the key role of Yahweh in securing Israel’s victory here.

The narrative steps even further back chronologically in Josh 10:12–13 with the use of the Hebrew particle **אז**. The particle **אז** (10:12a), when used with non-perfective verbs, can be used to indicate a reference to past events, carrying the sense of “this was when....” Actions introduced by **אז** here should be thought of as

⁵¹ Noort, “Joshua and Copernicus” 388–89, notes how the narrator’s description of the “great stones from heaven” (**אבנים גדולות מן השמים**) of Josh 10:11 serve as a link to the means by which the five Amorite kings are imprisoned (Josh 10:18) and ultimately memorialize the events of that day (Josh 10:27). This not only connects 10:1–14 with the following narrative, but also serves as another reminder of the decisive role of Yahweh in securing victory.

“having taken place before the completion of the preceding action.”⁵² Furthermore, Holladay and Walton observe that Joshua’s request that the sun and moon stand over Gibeon and the valley of Aijalon assumes the position of the sun in the east (over Gibeon) and the moon in the west (over the valley of Aijalon).⁵³ This juxtaposition of the sun and moon only occurs in the morning, which would mean that, presumably, Joshua’s request came in the pre-dawn or early morning hours, before or just at the beginning of the entire battle sequence, *not at the end of the day*. If this were the case, it would make Joshua’s request and Yahweh’s subsequent response temporally prior to the note in Josh 10:10a of the divine confusion instigated by Yahweh and the note about Yahweh’s intervention by sending stones from heaven (10:11), even though it is the last event narrated.⁵⁴

Several observations are pertinent at this point. The victory oracle in Josh 10:8 indicates that the battle occurs at Yahweh’s initiative, and Yahweh’s assurance, “I have given them [the Amorites] into your hands” (10:8) is reaffirmed by the narrator (10:12) immediately before narrating Joshua’s request regarding the sun and moon, thereby safeguarding Yahweh’s initiative. In addition, the concluding narratorial comment summarizing the entire sequence of events, “Yahweh fought for Israel” (10:14b; cf. 10:41b), erases any doubts as to the source of Israel’s victory. Moreover, the third account of Yahweh’s intervention, which was initiated by Joshua, (the sun and moon standing—10:12b–13a) is narrated last despite the fact that it is chronologically prior to the other two examples of Yahweh’s intervention. This may be for dramatic effect or due to redactional layering. However, the narrator’s unusual chronology in this passage, which places Joshua’s instructions regarding the sun and moon last, after Yahweh’s decisive role in securing victory has already been affirmed twice in this compact narrative (10:10, 11), is significant. Moreover, the double use of the affirmation of victory (10:8a, 12a) which *precedes* Joshua’s request regarding the sun and the moon, coupled with the narrator’s affirmation of Yahweh’s fighting for Israel (Josh 10:14b) immediately *following* Joshua’s request, thereby bracketing Joshua’s involvement, coupled with the high concentration of descriptions of Yahweh’s intervention in the battle at Gibeon in Josh 10:7–14, suggest that the dischronologization of this passage is intentional. The unusual narrative chronology of this passage acknowledges the unique role of Joshua in Yahweh war in this particular instance while at the same time safeguarding the traditional protocols of divine warfare. Having already narrated two accounts of divine intervention before inserting an atypical third example where Joshua directs Yahweh’s intervention and battle strategy, the narrator safeguards the reality of Yahweh-secured victory while at the same time highlighting the unique role of

⁵² Bruce Waltke and Michael O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990) 31.6.3b.

⁵³ Holladay, “Day(s) the Moon Stood Still” 166–78; Walton, “Joshua 10:12–15 and Mesopotamian Celestial Omen Texts” 181–90.

⁵⁴ Younger, “Rhetorical Structuring” 13, notes that the role of 10:15 may be compositional (10:14c + 10:15 is parallel to 10:42b + 10:43) and emphasizes Yahweh’s involvement, as well as creating a narrative pause in the story.

Joshua in the events of that day. This would explain the unusually high concentration of accounts of divine battle intervention, the repeated use of the assurance of victory, and the bracketing of the account of Joshua's role in the events of that singular day with affirmations of Yahweh as the source of Israel's victory ("on the day Yahweh gave the Amorites to the sons of Israel" [10:12a], "for Yahweh fought for Israel" [10:14b]). Joshua's unique role is affirmed while safeguarding Yahweh's essential role.

Therefore, while interpreters of Josh 10:14 have traditionally linked the narrator's comments about the singularity of the events described in Joshua 10 directly to events related to the sun and the moon, the thesis forwarded here suggests that the uniqueness in view in this verse relates better to Joshua's role in seizing the prerogatives of Yahweh, the divine warrior. Joshua, rather than Yahweh, sets out the parameters of Yahweh's intervention and dictates divine battle strategy and Yahweh accedes to Joshua's initiative. The chronological arrangement of Josh 10:7–14 seems to recognize the unusual nature of Joshua's role by first relating two clear instances of Yahweh's decisive battle intervention (10:10, 11) before relating Joshua's unique request (10:12–13) and Yahweh's compliance (10:14), thereby securing Yahweh's decisive role in the victory.