

## THE PROPHET JOSHUA? THE NEGLECTED MINISTRY OF THE PROPHET OF THE CONQUEST

JONATHAN J. ROUTLEY\*

**Abstract:** *Although the book of Joshua is considered among the writings of the “former prophets” of Israel, the prophetic role of Joshua during the conquest finds little discussion in scholarship today. Yet the author of Joshua presents Israel’s leader at the time of the conquest as acting as prophet of Yahweh. Joshua meets prophetic criteria and possesses prophetic characteristics listed in the Pentateuch. He repeatedly speaks on behalf of the Lord to the people of Israel, using phrasing similar to the latter prophets of Israel. The Lord accomplishes a number of signs through the prophetic ministry of Joshua, such as the cutting off of the waters of the Jordan River, to verify Joshua’s position as mouthpiece of God. Joshua’s encounter with the commander of the Lord’s army in 5:13–15 and subsequent reception of divine instruction recalls the parallel experiences of Moses in Exodus 3–4 and Balaam in Numbers 22. 1 Kings 16:34 presents the fulfillment of the curse on Jericho as the realization of the word of the Lord through Joshua, connecting him to prophets like Elijah and Elisha. This study seeks to situate Joshua among the prophets of Israel, advancing discussion of prophetic activity between the time of Moses and the judges of Israel.*

**Key words:** *Joshua, prophets of Israel, prophecy, conquest, Former Prophets*

In contemporary discussion of prophecy and the origin of the prophets, very little attention is paid to prophets before the Israelite monarchy.<sup>1</sup> It is evident in the biblical text that Moses (Deut 18:15; 34:10), Deborah (Judg 4:4), Samuel (1 Sam 3:20) and others (Judg 6:8; 1 Sam 2:27–36) held prophetic roles in Israel’s early period. Although Joshua is never called a נָבִיא (“prophet”) in the biblical text, there are key indications that Joshua functioned as a prophet during the conquest, speaking to the people of Israel on behalf of the Lord. Yet Joshua’s prophetic role has been largely neglected in modern scholarship.<sup>2</sup>

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\* Jonathan J. Routley is Professor of Bible and Theology at Emmaus Bible College, 2570 Asbury Road, Dubuque, IA 52001. He may be contacted at [jjroutley@emmaus.edu](mailto:jjroutley@emmaus.edu).

<sup>1</sup> Bullock, for instance, says, “The prophets did not become a significant factor in religious history until the rise of the monarchy.” C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 15.

<sup>2</sup> VanGemeren lumps Joshua together with Moses in his chapter on development of prophecy in Israel and gives him little attention. Willem A. VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1990), 27–34. Freeman does not mention Joshua among the early prophets. Hobart E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 27. Blenkinsopp has no information on Moses or Joshua whatsoever. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996). Recent works that give some attention to Joshua’s prophetic role include Jerome F. D. Creach, *Joshua*,

This study will examine Joshua's role as a prophet in Israel, filling a neglected gap from the prophetic ministry of Moses to the period of the judges of Israel. First, Joshua's qualifications as a prophet will be examined and evaluated using criteria and indicators of prophetic activity as found throughout the Pentateuch. Next, key sections of the book of Joshua will be assessed for prophetic utterance and activity.<sup>3</sup> Third, Joshua's visionary experience in Joshua 5:13–15 will be compared with Moses's encounter with Yahweh in the burning bush (Exod 3–4) and Balaam's encounter with the angel of the Lord (Num 22:31). Fourth, the fulfillment of the Jericho curse in 1 Kings 16:34 will be analyzed in regard both to the summary statement “according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun [הוֹשֵׁעַ בֶּן־נוּן]” and to similar language within the Kings corpus.<sup>4</sup> The study will conclude by summarizing Joshua's prophetic utterances and activity, then offering implications for our understanding of prophecy in Israel's early history and the interpretation of the book of Joshua in light of its prophetic context.

## I. PROPHETIC CRITERIA AND INDICATORS

What are the characteristics and qualifications of the prophets of ancient Israel? Several OT passages are instructive for understanding prophetic activity.<sup>5</sup> To begin, Deuteronomy 18:15–22 reveals four main prerequisite qualifications for a prophet of Israel. First, the prophet is raised up (קום) or appointed by God (vv. 15, 18).<sup>6</sup> Second, the prophet acts as a verbal mediator between God and the people (vv. 16–17). The origin of this mediatorial communication traces back to the giving of the law, where the people of Israel hear the Lord thundering from heaven and beg Moses to serve as intermediary between them and God (Exod 20:18–19). Third, prophets speak the Lord's words, which he puts into their mouths (vv. 18–19). The prophet is therefore a recipient of divine communication and also a transmitter of

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Int (Louisville: John Knox, 2003), 54; Sarah Lebharr Hall, *Conquering Character: The Characterization of Joshua in Joshua 1–11*, LHBOTS 512 (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 24–26, 51–54, 109–110, 123–134, 136–137; Adolph L. Harstad, *Joshua*, ConcC (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2004), 14, 171, 743, 797. Harstad writes, “While Joshua is never explicitly called a ‘prophet,’ his words are ‘the words of the LORD,’ which means that he fulfills the role of a prophet.” Harstad, *Joshua*, 3. Hall's discussion of Joshua as prophet is probably the most extensive to date. Hall posits connections between Joshua and Elisha in that the term שרת is used of both (Josh 1:1; 1 Kgs 19:21) and both part the waters of the Jordan at the outset of their ministry (Josh 3; 2 Kgs 2:14). Cf. Hall, *Conquering Character*, 26.

<sup>3</sup> Key phrases to be reviewed are: “thus says the LORD [כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה] (Josh 7:13; 24:2), “the LORD spoke to [אֶל־]” (Josh 4:8, 10; 11:23; 14:6, 10, 12; 21:45; 23:5, 14–15), and “the word of the LORD to [אֶל־]” (Josh 3:9; 8:8, 27).

<sup>4</sup> All biblical quotations are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>5</sup> VanGemeren lists several prophetic qualifications based on his analysis of the life of Moses. “Who is a prophet of God? He is an Israelite, called by God, and empowered by the Spirit, who serves as God's spokesperson, who has received authority and a revelation from God, who is a good shepherd over God's flock, who demonstrates God's Word and mission by signs.” VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, 32–34. The discussion in the current study deals primarily with prophetic activity in the Pentateuch as the background for a discussion of prophecy at the time of Israel's conquest of Canaan.

<sup>6</sup> There are comparable calls to prophetic office in the lives of the latter prophets of Israel. As examples, see Isa 6:1–13; Jer 1:4–10; Ezek 2:1–7; Amos 7:14–15.

the oracles of God. Fourth, prophets do not prophesy at their own impulse, but always in response to the command of Yahweh (v. 18).<sup>7</sup> A prophet who speaks a word God does not command incurs death (v. 20). Likewise, prophets whose words fail to come to pass demonstrate that God has not commanded them to speak, but they have spoken by their own will (vv. 21–22). Deuteronomy 13:1–5 is linked to this fourth point in that the Lord would never command a prophet to advocate breaking the first commandment (cf. Exod 20:3). The prophet can speak only as God commands and only the content that God communicates.

In addition to the universal qualifications noted above, several prophetic indicators are often observed in proximity to prophetic activity. Signs (אוֹת) and wonders (מוֹפֵת) can sometimes attest to the veracity of the prophetic message. Moses is given both words from the Lord to take to Pharaoh (Exod 4:11–12) and signs to verify the prophetic message (Exod 4:1–9). At the end of his life, Moses is designated as a prophet (Deut 34:10). One of the distinguishing descriptions of Moses’s prophetic office is that there were “none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror [וְלִכְלֵל הַיָּד הַחֲזָקָה וְלִכְלֵל הַמוֹרָא הַגָּדוֹל] that Moses did in the sight of all Israel” (Deut. 34:11–12).<sup>8</sup>

Another indicator of prophetic activity is the presence of God’s Spirit. In Numbers 11:25–29, the Spirit of the Lord descends upon the seventy elders who are outside the camp of Israel, and they prophesy (v. 25). The Spirit then rests upon Eldad and Medad, who prophesy within the camp (v. 26), and upon hearing it Joshua pleads with Moses to stop them (v. 28). Moses’s response is to say, “Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!” The implication here is that the impartation of the Spirit of God is a prerequisite for prophetic activity.<sup>9</sup> A third indicator of one’s prophetic office would be record of a vision, dream, or some such encounter with the divine. Numbers 12:6 records this avenue the Lord used to speak to the prophets. “Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision [בְּמַרְאֵה]; I speak with him in a dream.” Visionary experiences are presented as the usual means by which God would transmit his message to the prophets.

Of course, not every prophet performed signs and wonders, and though the Spirit’s presence is typical in conjunction with the prophetic office, it is not always explicitly stated as such. Moreover, the Spirit’s presence in a person’s life does not

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<sup>7</sup> On this point, compare 2 Peter 1:21: “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

<sup>8</sup> Certainly, there is also a sense in which Moses stands above the prophetic tradition, since God communicates with him not primarily through dreams and visions but “mouth to mouth [פֶּה אֶל-פֶּה]” (cf. Num 12:6–8). The uniqueness of Moses’s role is also related in God’s speaking to him “face to face [פָּנִים אֶל-פָּנִים]” (Deut 34:10).

<sup>9</sup> Hoffmeier says of Numbers 11, “While the prophetic experience is not explained, it was considered to be an activity only possible when God’s Spirit is placed on a person that allows them to communicate in divine speech.” James K. Hoffmeier, *The Prophets of Israel: Walking the Ancient Paths* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2021), 35.

necessitate a prophetic office for that individual (cf. Exod 28:3; 31:2–3; 35:30–31). Likewise, visionary experiences are not recorded for every prophet in every prophetic circumstance or situation, though Numbers 12:6 might suggest visionary encounters are to be assumed when the text states that “the word of the Lord came to” one of the prophets.

Joshua meets each qualification for the prophetic office mentioned above. He receives a call from the Lord for service in leadership that involves Moses laying his hands upon Joshua in the presence of all the congregation (Num 27:18–21). Joshua is commissioned by the Lord at the beginning of his national leadership (Num 27:18–21; Deut 31:14, 23; Josh 1:2–5), and he is also exalted in the eyes of the people as a result of the Jordan River crossing miracle (Josh 3:7; 4:14).<sup>10</sup> Joshua serves as the mediatorial communicator of God’s word to the people (Josh 3:9; 4:15–17; 6:2–21; 7:13–15). He speaks the words of Yahweh on multiple occasions (Josh 3:9; 8:8; 24:2). He not only receives instruction from the Lord but also speaks and acts as the Lord commands him (Josh 4:15–17; 8:27; 10:40; 11:15).

Prophetic indicators of signs/wonders and the presence of the Spirit appear in Joshua’s life as well. Perhaps the most explicit evidence of a prophetic sign is the connection between the miraculous wonder (נִפְלְאוֹת) that was the Jordan River crossing (Josh 3:5) and the exaltation of Joshua in the eyes of the people of Israel (Josh 3:7; 4:14). The sign of the holding back of the Jordan River served to demonstrate for Israel that Joshua was God’s appointed representative and spoke on his behalf. Other miraculous events such as the destruction of the walls of Jericho, the cursing of those who would rebuild Jericho, and the halting of sun and moon during the conquest of the southern area also likely signify prophetic activity. The presence of the Lord’s Spirit is likewise attested to in Joshua’s life. He is spoken of as “a man in whom is the Spirit בּוֹן אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר-רוּחַ בּוֹן” (Num 27:18) and “full of the spirit of wisdom [מְלֵא רוּחַ חֵכְמָה]” (Deut 34:9). Joshua is given various signs to perform during his ministry that verify his role as spokesman of God. Joshua 5:13–15 very likely serves as a visionary encounter between the Lord and Joshua. These characteristics and events in Joshua’s life align well with biblical criteria and indicators for an Israelite prophet (see figure 1).

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<sup>10</sup> Note the connection between Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18, “The LORD your God will *raise up* [קוּם]. . . I will *raise up* [קוּם]” and Joshua 1:2, “Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore *arise* [מִשֶׁה עֲבָדִי מָת וְעַתָּה קוּם].”

Figure 1: Prophetic Qualifications and Indicators in the Pentateuch and the Life of Joshua

Prophetic Qualification /Indicator	Basis in Pentateuch	Fulfillment in Life of Joshua
Raised up/appointed by God	Deut 18:15, 18	Num 27:18–21; Deut 31:14, 23
Verbal mediator between God and Israel	Deut 18:16–17	Josh 3:9; 4:15–17; 6:2–21; 7:13–15
Speaks the Lord’s words	Deut 18:18–19	Josh 3:9; 8:8; 24:2
Prophesies at the command of Yahweh	Deut 18:18; 13:1–5	Josh 4:15–17; 8:27; 10:40
Signs/wonders verify prophetic message	Exod 4:1–12; Deut 34:10–12	Josh 3:5, 7; 4:14
Presence and empowerment of the Spirit	Num 11:25–29	Num 27:18; Deut 34:9
Visionary encounter, dream, etc.	Num 12:6–8	Josh 5:13–15

## II. PROPHETIC UTTERANCE AND ACTIVITY IN JOSHUA

The commonly recognized terminology associated with later prophetic figures, “thus says the LORD [כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה],” “the LORD spoke to [דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל-],” and “the word of the LORD to [דִּבְרֵי-יְהוָה אֶל-],” is likewise used by and of Joshua during the conquest. The correspondence of this biblical terminology with that of other Israelite prophets evidences Joshua’s prophetic office.

The phrase כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה is used 293 times in the OT, always in a prophetic context where a human intermediary speaks on behalf of the Lord. The phrase is used in conjunction with the life of Joshua twice (Josh 7:13; 24:2).<sup>11</sup> In the first event, the people of Israel are held accountable for the individual sin of Achan, which results in their initial loss at Ai. Joshua questions the Lord, “Why have you brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us?” (Josh 7:7).<sup>12</sup> Yahweh responds to Joshua by telling him to get up,

<sup>11</sup> On the significance of this phrase in prophetic utterances, see Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, 121. Hall cites Samuel A. Meier’s work on the phrase: “He demonstrates that while it is not a necessary marker of prophetic speech, and some prophetic books never use it, it is nevertheless characteristic of much prophetic material. By contrast, it is largely absent in the Pentateuch. In narrative material, this formula is never used by the narrator himself, but is always embedded within the speech of a character. As such, it draws attention to the character’s speech as a channel of mediation. The use of this introductory formula in Josh 7:13 contributes to the book’s portrait of Joshua as a mediator between Yahweh and Israel. This mediatory role associates him with Israel’s prophets.” Hall, *Conquering Character*, 124. Samuel A. Meier, *Speaking of Speaking: Marking Direct Discourse in the Hebrew Bible*, VTSup 46 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 274–77.

<sup>12</sup> Hall sees in Joshua’s petition an anticipation of the role of the prophets in Israel’s later history. She also sees Joshua’s announcement of the breaking of the covenant and forthcoming judgment as part

that Israel had sinned by taking some of the prohibited devoted things (הַחֲרָם) in Jericho, and that there would be no victory for Israel, nor God's continued presence, until those items were destroyed (7:10–12). Then the Lord told Joshua what he was to say to the people: "Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow; for thus says the LORD, God of Israel, 'There are devoted things in your midst, O Israel. You cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the devoted things from among you'" (7:13). The Lord then outlined what Joshua should do to rectify the situation and how God himself would search out (literally, "take" or "capture," לָכַד) the offender. Joshua follows the instructions of Yahweh in verses 16–26.

Not only is Joshua specifically told to speak a message to the people prefaced by the authoritative בְּה אָמַר יְהוָה, but he is also told to consecrate the people. David M. Howard Jr. sees a connection between this account and Joshua 3:5, where Joshua had previously told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you."<sup>13</sup> In Joshua 7:13, the consecration of the nation precedes another wonder that the Lord would perform: the capture of the secret offender, Achan. Thus, Joshua's role as prophetic mouthpiece of Yahweh is supplemented in chapter 7 by the verifying sign of Achan's selection from among the nation.

At the end of the book of Joshua, the leader of Israel calls all the other leaders of the nation to present themselves before God at Shechem. He uses the prophetic formula בְּה אָמַר יְהוָה to address the nation with a message from God.<sup>14</sup> This message includes a recounting of their history (Josh 24:2–13), a call to fear the Lord (vv. 14–15), a dialogue with the people about their ability to serve the Lord (vv. 16–21), and a reaffirmation of the covenant (vv. 22–28). In addition to the prophetic utterance formula at the beginning of the chapter, Joshua's declaration to Israel at the end of the speech indicates its prophetic nature. "Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD that he spoke to us [בְּכָל-אֲמָרֵי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר עִמָּנוּ]. Therefore, it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God" (v. 27). These two statements serve as bookends framing Joshua's entire speech as the word of the Lord to Israel through Joshua. The message that Joshua delivers at Shechem should be viewed, therefore, as prophetic in nature as Joshua communicates the oracles of God to Israel.

Both Joshua 7:13 and 24:2 use not the shortened phrase בְּה אָמַר יְהוָה but rather the extended phrase בְּה אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel." Every time this extended phrase is used in the OT it has some connec-

of his prophetic role. Hall, *Conquering Character*, 123. See also Stephen B. Chapman, *The Law and the Prophets: A Study in Old Testament Canon Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 181–185; Richard D. Nelson, *Joshua*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 105.

<sup>13</sup> David M. Howard Jr., *Joshua*, NAC 5 (Nashville: B&H, 1998), 195.

<sup>14</sup> Creach says, "Joshua speaks as a prophet in 24:2–13. His 'thus says the Lord' introductory formula tags the subsequent message as divine speech and identifies him as the Lord's messenger. Here Joshua stands clearly in the place Moses occupied in the previous generation, as mediator of the covenant between God and Israel (Exod 19:3–6)." Creach, *Joshua*, 120. Harstad likewise acknowledges the potential of prophetic address here, particularly in Joshua's negative response to the people's affirmation of Yahweh as God. Harstad, *Joshua*, 797.

tion with a prophet or the prophetic office.<sup>15</sup> The use of the phrase in 1 Samuel 10 is of particular interest, as that occasion has multiple connections with Joshua 7 and 24. Just as Joshua gathers all the people to Shechem (Josh 24:1), Samuel calls all Israel together at Mizpah (1 Sam 10:17). The prophetic utterance formulas are the same (Josh 24:2; 1 Sam 10:18), and each is followed by a historical survey of God's providential care for Israel (Josh 24:2–13; 1 Sam 10:19). Samuel, in an act reminiscent of Achan's selection, has the people stand before the Lord as God takes (לָכַד) by lot first tribe, then clan, then individual, working down to Saul as his selection for king. Just as Joshua records the statutes and ordinances (מִשְׁפָּט) of the covenant with the people in the Book of the Law of God (Josh 24:26), so Samuel "told the people the ordinances [מִשְׁפָּט] of the kingdom, and wrote them in the book and placed it before the LORD" (1 Sam 10:25, NASB). The phrasing of Joshua and Samuel's sending away the people is also remarkably parallel: וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוָה אֶת־הָעָם, "Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance" (Josh 24:28); וַיִּשְׁלַח שְׂמוּאֵל אֶת־כָּל־הָעָם אִישׁ לְבֵיתוֹ, "Samuel sent all the people away, each one to his home" (1 Sam 10:25). The similarities between the passages argue for a connection between Samuel's prophetic role in the selection of Saul and Joshua's prophetic role in the capture and judgment of Achan.

Additionally, the phrase דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל־, "The LORD spoke to," is used a number of times in the book of Joshua in reference to Yahweh's message intended for Israel but delivered through Joshua as spokesman.<sup>16</sup> In Joshua 4:1–3 the Lord gives Israel's leader instructions for commemorating the crossing of the Jordan through the selection of twelve men (one from each tribe) carrying twelve stones from the place where the priests stood with the ark of the covenant in the river. The twelve stones are later used to build a memorial monument (v. 9). The pattern for Joshua's role as spokesman of Yahweh is demonstrated here: the Lord speaks his word to Joshua, who is then to speak it to the people on his behalf.

And the people of Israel did *just as Joshua commanded* and took up twelve stones out of the midst of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, *just as the LORD told Joshua* [וַיִּשְׁפָּט יְהוָה אֶל־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ]. ... For the priests bearing the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was finished *that the LORD commanded Joshua to tell the people* [אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ לְדַבֵּר אֶל־הָעָם]. The people passed over in haste (Josh 4:8, 10).<sup>17</sup>

Sometimes Joshua's role was to carry to fruition the word of the Lord that had been declared to the people through Moses. For instance, in Joshua 11:23 we

<sup>15</sup> The phrase is used by Moses and Aaron (Exod 5:1), Moses alone (Exod 32:27), Joshua (Josh 7:13; 24:2), an unnamed prophet (Judg 6:8), Samuel (1 Sam 10:18), Nathan (2 Sam 12:7), Ahijah (1 Kgs 11:31; 14:7), Elijah (1 Kgs 17:14), a young servant of the prophets (2 Kgs 9:6), Isaiah (2 Kgs 19:20; Isa 37:21), the prophets as a collective group (2 Kgs 21:12), Huldah (2 Kgs 22:15, 18; 2 Chron 34:23, 26) and, most commonly, by Jeremiah (Jer 11:3; 13:12; 21:4; 23:2; 24:5; 25:15; 30:2; 32:36; 33:4; 34:2, 13; 37:7; 42:9; 45:2).

<sup>16</sup> See Josh 4:8, 10; 11:23; 14:6, 10, 12; 21:45; 23:5, 14–15.

<sup>17</sup> Italics added.

are told, “So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD had spoken to Moses [כָּל־אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה]. And Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments. And the land had rest from war.” Likewise, in the giving of Hebron to Caleb (14:6, 10, 12), it is the word of the Lord through Moses that is being brought to completion by Joshua. In other passages the word of the Lord is presented as having been given to Israel by God himself (21:45; 23:5, 14–15). These statements look generally at God’s communication of his word to Israel, and yet the method he chose to speak to Israel was through the human agents of Moses and Joshua.

Joshua at times explicitly states that he is speaking the words of the Lord (הוֹדָה), as in Joshua 3:9 and 8:8, 27. Just before the miracle of the holding back of the waters of the Jordan, Joshua speaks to the people, “Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God [וְאֶת־דִּבְרֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם]” (3:9). In verses 10–13, Joshua then proclaims the message that the Lord had given him, summarized by the author of the book as the Lord’s speech in 3:7–8 and expanded upon in Joshua’s statements of 3:9–13. Similarly, after the initial failure of Israel at Ai and the stoning of Achan, the Lord instructs Joshua on how to successfully take the city. Joshua commands the warriors to set the city of Ai on fire in Joshua 8:8: “And as soon as you have taken the city, you shall set the city on fire. You shall do according to the word of the LORD [בְּדַבַּר יְהוָה].” Although the text does not contain an earlier directive to Joshua commanding the use of fire to destroy Ai, the Lord had previously said, “And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its livestock you shall take as plunder for yourselves. Lay an ambush against the city, behind it” (8:2). These words imply the Lord’s commanding of a fiery demolition of the city. Later, in 8:27, the author would recall the Lord’s words and recount them after the battle for Ai: “Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel took as their plunder, according to the word of the LORD that he commanded Joshua [בְּדַבַּר יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֶת־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ].” The words of Yahweh to Joshua are evidently transmitted to the Israelite warriors when they raid the city for plunder. Joshua acts as prophet in speaking the very words of Israel’s God to his people.

Occasionally the Lord speaks to Joshua without any official prophetic utterance formula but with a message intended to be shared with others. In Joshua 1:1, the phrase “the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun [וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן־נֹון]” is immediately followed with predictive prophetic revelation that Joshua later shares with the people of Israel (cf. 3:10; 10:25; 23:4, 6, 9). Before the battle of Jericho, Joshua is told by the Lord to circumcise the men of Israel, and Joshua complies (5:2–3). The commander of the Lord’s army appears to Joshua just before the battle (5:13–15) and instructs him on military techniques to be used in the conquest of Jericho (6:2–5). Joshua then carries out the Lord’s plan just as he had been told (6:6–7, 10, 16–19). Similarly, after Achan’s execution, the Lord reveals to Joshua the strategy for taking Ai (8:1–2), and Joshua explains to the people how they will conduct the battle (8:4–8). Here Joshua explicitly tells them that his command is from God: “You shall do according to the word of the LORD [בְּדַבַּר יְהוָה]” (8:8).

Joshua's prophetic role is also revealed in the defense of the cities of Gibeon (Josh 10). As Joshua marches with his army to aid the Gibeonites against the southern coalition of armies, the Lord reveals to him that he has already given these armies into his hands (10:8). Joshua's commanding the sun and moon to halt should likely be viewed in conjunction with his prophetic office as confirmation of the word of the Lord to Joshua and affirmation of Yahweh's presence in fighting for his people.<sup>18</sup> Joshua likewise hears the Lord's encouragement not to be afraid in the conquest of the northern Canaanite territory: "For tomorrow at this time I will give over all of them, slain, to Israel. You shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire" (11:6). Joshua's obedience to this command from the Lord shows that he communicates it faithfully to Israel as prophetic utterance (11:9).

Joshua's prophetic role in the distribution of the land is apparent in 13:1–6. The Lord tells Joshua that he is advancing in years and needs to complete the work of dividing Canaan and distributing it to the tribes of Israel. Chapters 13–19 of Joshua document the leader's pronouncement of God's decisions on which tribes would get which land. Joshua as prophet ministers alongside Eleazar the priest and the heads of the father's houses of the tribes to authoritatively divide up each territory as the Lord directs (14:1–2).<sup>19</sup> The Lord manages the appointing of the cities of refuge in the same way (20:1–6), and Joshua communicates and completes the Lord's directives in the establishment of those six cities (20:7–9). The final two chapters of Joshua also display a communication of divine revelation to Israel, though in these chapters the Lord's statements to Joshua are not recorded. Though much of the content of these chapters reiterates Deuteronomy 28, Joshua's prophetic role is not thereby negated, since the content of the prophetic message has not changed from Moses's declaration before the conquest to Joshua's oration after the land division. Israel's success in the land is ever conditioned upon their obedience to the law of the Lord.

### III. JOSHUA 5:13–15 AS PROPHETIC VISIONARY ENCOUNTER

There are indications that Joshua 5:13–15 is meant to function within the narrative as a visionary experience by which God communicates directly to the proph-

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<sup>18</sup> Wray Beal says of Joshua here: "Joshua acts in a mediating role in verses 12–13 as he speaks to the LORD words that are also intended for Israel's hearing. The words addressed to God are not given, but Joshua's apostrophe to the sun and moon are included in them. Like Moses before him, who spoke to the rock in the presence of the people (Num 20:8), Joshua's words are a sign to the people that creation is obedient to God—even through his appointed servant." Lissa M. Wray Beal, *Joshua, Story of God Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 231.

<sup>19</sup> Creach views the inclusion of Eleazar and the tribal family heads as demonstrating that "the process is democratic, as far as human involvement goes, and reflects the radical concern for inclusion and equality." Creach, *Joshua*, 100–101. Harstad says, "The distribution 'by lot' (14:2) ensures that Israel's leaders are showing no favoritism. The LORD is guiding the whole procedure. . . . Eleazar was the high priest who succeeded Aaron. He is named first in 14:1 as the one who was in charge of casting the lots. He may have used the Urim and Thummim in his priestly breastplate (see Ex 28:30; Num 27:21; and the commentary on Josh 9:14)." Harstad, *Joshua*, 513.

et Joshua.<sup>20</sup> Two intertextual connections to earlier events in the Pentateuch demonstrate the prophetic context of this passage. First, the link between Exodus 3:5 and Joshua 5:15 with the removal of sandals on ground sanctified by the presence of holy Yahweh is enhanced by the comparable contexts of the passages where God calls Moses and Joshua to deliver his words on his behalf to his intended recipients. Moses speaks of the burning bush phenomenon as “a great sight [הַמְרָאָה],” a word regularly employed for a vision.<sup>21</sup> Moses is then instructed as to how God would communicate through him to Pharaoh and Israel (Exod 4:10–17). Similarly, Joshua “lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold [וַיִּשָׂא עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה]” a man stands before him who goes on to speak with the authority of the Lord, commanding Joshua how to wage war against Jericho (Josh 6:2–5).

The second intertextual connection is drawn from the description of the man Joshua sees standing before him. The man is described as readied “with his drawn sword in his hand [וַיַּחַרְבוּ שְׁלֹפָה בְּיָדוֹ]” (Josh 5:13). Parallel language is used in Numbers 22:31.<sup>22</sup> There, Balaam son of Beor goes forth to curse the people of Israel for gain. We are told that Balaam performs divination (22:7) and is used by the Spirit of God to proclaim oracles after he “sees the vision of the Almighty [מִחֹזֵה שְׂדֵי יְחִזֵּה]” (24:4). Thus, Balaam occupies a position similar to that of an Israelite prophet in function but from a Canaanite ethnic and religious background. As Balaam goes to meet Balak, the angel of the Lord opposes his journey. Balaam’s donkey turns aside twice from the angel in the road and lies down under Balaam on the third instance (22:22–26). After Balaam strikes the donkey, the Lord opens the animal’s mouth to rebuke her master (22:27–30). “Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam [וַיִּגַּל יְהוָה אֶת־עֵינָיו בְּלִצְעָם], and he saw [וַיִּרְא] the angel of the LORD standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand [וַיַּחַרְבוּ שְׁלֹפָה בְּיָדוֹ]” (22:31). Balaam is told to speak only the message that God would give him (22:35, 38; 23:12; 24:13). Joshua’s readers are meant to recall Balaam’s encounter with the angel of Yahweh and his drawn sword. The contexts are again similar; as Balaam is given a divine oracle to pronounce and cannot deviate from it, so Joshua must be and is faithful in following the commands of the Lord in the conquest and destruction of Jericho.

In Joshua 5:13–15, Joshua encounters the Lord through a visionary experience similar to Moses’s encounter with God in the burning bush and Balaam’s encounter with the angel of the Lord as he went out to curse Israel. In each of these encounters, God appears to individuals whom he selects to be receivers of his divine oration and senders of that same message to God’s intended recipients.

<sup>20</sup> Nelson allows for this possibility when he says the section “suggests a commissioning story on the order of Judg. 6:11–24 or a revelatory encounter such as Judg. 2:1–5.” Richard D. Nelson, *Joshua: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 81.

<sup>21</sup> For examples, see Exod 24:17; Num 12:6, 8; Judg 13:6; 1 Sam 3:15; Ezek 1:1; 8:2–4; Dan 8:15–16. Also see discussion of the term in H. F. Fuhs, “רָאָה *ra’á*,” *TDOT* 13:239–240.

<sup>22</sup> The phrase is also used in 1 Chronicles 21:16, where David sees (a vision of?) the angel of the Lord with a drawn sword about to judge Jerusalem. “And David lifted his eyes and saw [וַיִּשָׂא דָוִד וַיִּרְא וַאֲתֵעֵינָיו וַיִּרְא] the angel of the LORD standing between earth and heaven, and in his hand a drawn sword [וַיַּחַרְבוּ שְׁלֹפָה בְּיָדוֹ] stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces.”

Joshua sees the commander of the Lord's army, receives the Lord's battle instructions, and faithfully communicates the battle plan to Israel. The details by which the battle is conducted (marching around the city in procession with the ark of the Lord once for six days and seven times on the seventh day), therefore, should be understood as prophetic directive demonstrating God's power to accomplish the impossible (compare 1 Kgs 18:44; 2 Kgs 5:10). Joshua's curse of Jericho (Josh 6:26) likewise occurs within the overarching prophetic context of 5:13–6:27.

#### IV. 1 KINGS 16:34 AND THE FULFILLMENT OF THE JERICHO CURSE

The final clue regarding Joshua's role as prophet comes from later biblical commentary on his prophetic activity in the cursing of Jericho (Josh 6:26). In 1 Kings 16:34, Hiel of Bethel rebuilds Jericho, which had been cursed by Joshua after the destruction of the city. "He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun [בְּדָבַר יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר [דִּבֶּר בְּיַד יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בְּרִנְוֹן]" (1 Kgs 16:34). Wray Beal points out that this statement serves to introduce the Elijah narratives by highlighting the faithfulness of God to fulfill his word.<sup>23</sup>

Comparison with other similar statements in Kings highlights the prophetic significance of this notice. The same terminology is used of Shemaiah the man of God (1 Kgs 12:22), an unnamed man of God from Judah (2 Kgs 23:16), an unnamed prophet of Bethel (1 Kgs 13:26), Ahijah the Shilonite prophet (1 Kgs 14:18; 15:29), and Jehu the prophet (1 Kgs 16:12). It is used frequently in the lives of Elijah (1 Kgs 17:5, 16; 22:38; 2 Kgs 1:17; 10:17) and Elisha (2 Kgs 4:44; 7:16; 9:26). The same phrasing is also used of the prophetic activity of Jonah: "He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah [בְּדָבַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בְּיַד-עַבְדּוֹ יוֹנָה]," (2 Kgs 14:25). 2 Kings 24:2 uses the same terminology in reference to the prophets as a general category of God's servants. Since this phrasing of doing something "according to the word of the LORD spoken by the hand of [prophet's name]" is used *only* in conjunction with the prophets, it is reasonable to conclude that Joshua is viewed by the author of the Kings corpus as occupying a position in the prophetic tradition, at the very least in conjunction with the destruction and cursing of Jericho.

#### IV. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Joshua occupies a prophetic role in the conquest of Israel. He fits seamlessly with qualifications and indicators of biblical prophets and prophetic activity as found in the Pentateuch. Technical prophetic utterance formulas are used in con-

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<sup>23</sup> "As the word spoken through Joshua long ago is effected, so too will the word spoken through Elijah the prophet be effected." Lissa M. Wray Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, AOTC 9 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 225–26.

nection with Joshua's ministry. Joshua frequently speaks to the people of Israel on behalf of the Lord as his spokesman or mouthpiece. The sign of the Jordan River crossing is used by Yahweh to validate Joshua's prophetic position, exalting him to Mosaic status in the eyes of the people of Israel (Josh 3:7; 4:14). Joshua's encounter with the commander of the Lord's army situates the passage within a prophetic context similar to the calling of Moses in Exodus 3 and the appearance of the angel to Balaam in Numbers 22. The curse Joshua pronounces upon Jericho (Josh 6:26) is spoken according to the word of the Lord and later fulfilled (1 Kgs 16:34). Joshua is, therefore, viewed as a prophet both within the book that bears his name and later in subsequent biblical literature.

Understanding that Joshua held a prophetic role in Israel has several implications. First, it demonstrates a link in the prophetic chain from Moses into the time of the judges of Israel. God was not silent during the years of conquest and division of the land of Canaan. He spoke by means of his servant Joshua to the nation. Furthermore, there is room to explore the connections between the prophetic ministries of Moses and Joshua. Since Joshua functions as a prophet in Israel, Moses's prediction of a prophet in Deuteronomy 18:15–19 may have anticipated a near fulfillment in the ministry of Joshua.<sup>24</sup> The question of why Joshua is never explicitly called a נביא may find its solution in the closing statement of Deuteronomy:

And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel (Deut 34:10–12).

If the authorial purpose in these final verses of Deuteronomy was to show the exceptionality of Moses in his prophetic role in anticipation of another prophet who would know and relate to the Lord “face to face,” perhaps the technical title of נביא was not ascribed to Joshua either in Deuteronomy or the book of Joshua to intentionally avoid confusion as to the identification of that prophet.<sup>25</sup> Moses's

<sup>24</sup> Barstad, while taking a negative view of prophecy in Deuteronomy, argues that Joshua is the prophet in view in Deuteronomy 18:15–22. Hans M. Barstad, “The Understanding of the Prophets in Deuteronomy,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 8.2 (1994), 236–51. Deuteronomy 18:15 says, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen [אֶלֶּי תִשְׁמָעוּן].” It is significant that the people were said to obey Joshua in fulfillment of the Lord's words to Moses: “And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him. So the people of Israel obeyed him [וַיִּשְׁמָעוּ אֵלָיו] and did as the LORD had commanded Moses” (Deut 34:9); “You shall invest him with some of your authority, that all the congregation of the people of Israel may obey [וַיִּשְׁמָעוּן]” (Num 27:20). Deuteronomy 18:18 also says, “And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.” This is certainly true of Joshua (see especially Josh 3:9; 4:15–17).

<sup>25</sup> The title נביא is applied sparingly to early prophets in the OT. Moses is called a נביא on only two occasions (Deut 18:15, 18; 34:10). It is used of Samuel only once (1 Sam 3:20). The absence of the term נביא in relation to an individual does not prohibit their involvement in prophetic activity in the OT. Another potential explanation for the lack of the term in relation to the life of Joshua may be found in 1 Samuel 9:9: “Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he said, ‘Come, let us go to the seer,’ for today's ‘prophet’ was formerly called a seer.” If the term נביא finds popularity only after the

words in Deuteronomy 18:15–22, while perhaps initially anticipatory of Joshua’s ministry, prove to point beyond a near fulfillment to a greater and ultimate future fulfillment.<sup>26</sup>

Another implication of this study is that the interpretation of major events in the conquest narratives should include discussion of Joshua’s prophetic activity. Joshua functions as prophet not only at the time of the crossing of the Jordan, but also when instructing Israel to march around Jericho at the time of its destruction (Josh 6:1–21), in the selection of Achan as troubler of Israel (7:10–21), and even in commanding sun and moon to halt in the sky (10:12–14). These passages should be more carefully analyzed in light of Joshua’s prophetic office. Similarly, Joshua’s speeches at the end of the book, particularly in chapters 23–24, should be read and interpreted through the lens of prophecy. Rather than being motivational speech or an attempt at reverse psychology, Joshua 24:2–24 especially functions as a prophetic utterance akin to God’s revelation through Moses in Deuteronomy 28. Finally, there are also implications to consider for how an awareness of Joshua as early prophet in Israel affects one’s understanding of the later prophets of Israel and their relationship both toward God and toward the nation of Israel.

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time of monarchy of Israel, its sparse usage in the earlier history of Israel should be acknowledged, making it less surprising that it is not used of Joshua.

<sup>26</sup> Peter applies Deuteronomy 18:15–22 to Jesus in Acts 3:22–26. There, it is significant that Peter says, “God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first.” Jesus is not specifically called “prophet” by Peter in Acts 3, but he is called “servant,” and is “raised up” (*ἀναστήσας*) by God. The same Greek verb for “raised up” (*ἀνίστημι*) is used both in Peter’s citation of Deuteronomy 18:15 and in the LXX. There is a connection, therefore, between the titles of prophet and servant in Peter’s presentation of Jesus’s fulfillment of this OT text. Joshua, while never called a נָבִיא, is called “the servant of the LORD [עֶבֶד יְהוָה]” at the end of his life (Josh 24:30).