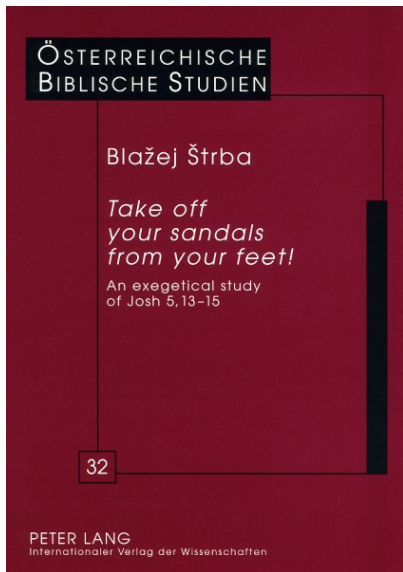


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Take Off Your Sandals from Your Feet! An Exegetical Study of Josh 5, 13–15

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The present book by the Slovakian-born scholar, Blažej Štrba, is a slightly revised version of his doctoral thesis submitted in 2006 to the Faculty of Biblical Sciences and Archaeology, *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum*, of the Pontifical University “Antonianum” in Jerusalem. The book aims to demonstrate that Joshua enjoys the same authority as Moses in matters of leadership (14).

The book consists of three main parts. After a brief introduction (11–14), part 1 opens with two chapters. Chapter 1 evaluates the state of the research (15–69), while chapter 2 introduces the reader to the methodology employed, which combines syntactical with narrative analysis (71–119). Part 2 contains two chapters also: chapter 3 (121–69) investigates Joshua’s succession to Moses in Num 27 and Deut 31, and chapter 4 (171–287) treats the unique status of Moses and Joshua in Deut 34. Part 3 devotes one section, chapter 5 (289–335), to properly examining the short pericope of Josh 5:13–15. A general conclusion (337–41) revisits earlier conclusions and elucidates some of their implications. The book finishes with an appendix (Appendix A, 343) in which Deut 34:1–12 is divided according to its syntax, followed by abbreviations (345–51), bibliography (353–89), and a subject index (391–404).

A review of major works dealing with Josh 5 is found in chapter 1. Though the discussion can feel at times tiresome, the chapter is a good reminder of the complex form-critical issues involved when trying to elucidate this seemingly displaced passage. The textual variations of Josh 5:13-15 in the MT, LXX, Peshitta, and the Targum, which Štrba addresses in chapter 2, further complicates the matter. The review may be of interest to some readers, and the textual discussion may be potentially illuminating if used in a comparative manner, but the subsequent investigation is mostly based on the text as it now appears in the MT (91), thus making the textual discussion somewhat redundant. The core discussion that sees Joshua a prophet like Moses lies in chapters 3–5.

The triple installation of Joshua in his role is the subject matter of chapter 3. Štrba helpfully compares Num 27:18-23 and Deut 31:7–8, 14, 23—all texts dealing with the commission of Joshua. There are reported in these passages three distinct versions of how Joshua is to receive authority over the people of Israel and for which tasks the position is conferred. Štrba claims that, although YHWH instructs Moses to lay his hand(s) on Joshua, set him (vv. 18–21) “before” (לפני) Eleazar and the congregation and commission (צוה) him “in their sight” (לעיניהם), it is Eleazar who first commissions Joshua by laying his hands on him. It is mainly the absence of “in their sight” from verse 23 that makes Štrba conclude that Eleazar laid his hands on Joshua, for the instruction Moses receives from YHWH clearly requires him to commission Joshua “in the sight,” not simply “before” the people. Consequently, since Moses did not commission Joshua at this time, there is no transfer of (some) authority from Moses to Joshua either. The ordination of Joshua by Eleazar merely validates Eleazar in his new priestly role (167). The argument is carefully devised, but one can rightly wonder which is more difficult to accept: the absence of לעיני from verse 22 as indicative of Moses’ postponement of his commission of Joshua or that Eleazar, whose explicit duty is to assist Joshua by giving him guidance, not to install him in his office (v. 21), is the actor of this first commission.

Moses’ commission of Joshua takes place in Deut 31:7–8. In this Mosaic installation, the task set before Joshua is twofold: to “go into/enter” (qal בוא) with the people the Promised Land and to apportion it for them. During this occasion, Štrba argues, Moses gives Joshua some of his own authority or honor (הוד), as instructed by YHWH in Num 27:20. The powers that pass from Moses to Joshua are partial and proportionate to the less important task of accompanying the people into the Land (156–57), not of leading them, as mandated by YHWH (see below). Though the expression “in the sight of” (לעיני) occurs in Deut 31:7a, the absence from this report of key markers of commissioning, such as the verb צוה and the laying of hands on Joshua, is noteworthy. If Moses had not yet installed Joshua, as Štrba would have us believe, then the absence of these indicators at this commissioning is striking.

Deuteronomy 31:14, 23 reports the final installation of Joshua by YHWH, who wants Joshua to “bring” (hiphil בוא) the people into the land, not just “go with” them. It is leadership rather than companionship that Štrba sees in YHWH’s commission of Joshua. In this installation Joshua receives from YHWH the full authority of Moses (157, 166–67, 286), “an authority also equal to that of Moses *in the matter of leadership*” (157, emphasis original; see also 168). In the absence of an explicit sign for the people seeing Moses and Joshua approaching the tent of meeting for YHWH to commission Joshua and invest him with authority equal to that of Moses’ (31:23), the confirmation comes after the crossing of the Jordan, when YHWH exalts Joshua in the sight of all Israel. It was then that people “revered him all the days of his life, just as they had revered Moses” (Josh 4:14; see also 3:7), which Štrba brings as evidence that YHWH bestowed the same authority on Joshua as he did on Moses. In my opinion, much depends on what the reader makes of the relative particle “just as” (כאשר). Is the passage saying that *both* leaders have been deeply esteemed or that both have been *equally* revered? The way Štrba gets around this counter-possible reading is to argue that Moses and Joshua fulfill in equal measure the plan laid out in Exod 3:8: the deliverance of the people out of the hand of the Egyptians (Moses) and their bringing into the land (158–62, 166–68). Two equally important tasks for two equally important leaders!

Chapter 4 deals with Deut 34:9–12, a text often used to justify Moses’ superior status among the leaders of Israel. Against the grain of ancient and modern scholarship, Štrba challenges the division of this chapter, which causes Joshua to be seen in lesser terms than Moses (171–72, 190). He proposes to see verse 9, which presents Joshua “full of the spirit of wisdom” after the mourning for the dead leader Moses, as the beginning of Moses’ epitaph in verse 10a. Most exegetes would see Moses alone being described in verses 10–12, but Štrba thinks these two verses weave Joshua and Moses together in a unique history of comparable divine interventions done through them, which puts them on the same footing (191, 205–11). For this claim to stand, Štrba needs to resolve a number of literary problems, including the meaning of the adverbial particle עוד in 34:10. Since when has no prophet like Moses arisen in Israel: since Moses’ death or since Joshua’s installation by YHWH in 31:23? Štrba claims it is the latter, thus also implying that Joshua’s “fullness of the spirit of wisdom” (v. 9) derives from Moses’ laying hands on him in 31:7–8, which 34:9 recalls in a flashback. But, as said above, at best this can be only an inference, for 31:7–8 is silent about the matter (214). Instead of vigorously arguing in favor of Moses’ laying hands on Joshua in a text that does not provide the explicit evidence (236–44), would it not be easier to accept that Moses laid his hands on Joshua in a text where textual evidence can support such a claim (Num 27:23)? Moreover, Štrba claims that the person whom YHWH knew “face to face” (פנים אל־פנים) refers not only to Moses but also, since the commissioning in the tent, to Joshua (198–200, 205). Yet one may resist

this claim on the grounds that the root “know” (יָדַע) is not used during YHWH’s communication with Joshua in the tent of meeting; there YHWH merely commands Joshua what to do (Deut 31:23a). The syntactical correlation between Joshua in the tent and Adam in the garden of Eden (Gen 2:16) through the *wayyiqtol* form of וַיֵּדַע proves little concerning the nature of the relationship of the divine with his human agent that the phrase “know face to face” evokes (200–204). To my mind, the relationship of YHWH to Moses is quantitatively different (i.e., Moses enjoyed the most direct contact with God) to that of Joshua (at least at this point in the story), so I find unhelpful Štrba’s indiscriminate application of the expression “know face to face” to Joshua—in favor as I am of a synchronic reading aimed at liberating Joshua from ages of exegetical (mis)representation (173–90, 284–87).

At last, chapter 5 offers a study of Joshua’s encounter with the heavenly being near Jericho (Josh 5:13–15). Joshua’s theophany, Štrba thinks, extends from 5:13 to 6:5 and parallels Moses’ theophany in Exod 3 (290–91). He shows that the two dialogues in Josh 5:13–15 and 6:2–5 are syntactically related through a series of *wayyiqtol* clauses, which not only makes them part of the same speech-event but also uttered by the same speech-actor. In other words, the “commander of YHWH’s army” (שָׂרֵצְבָא־יְהוָה) who talks to Joshua is none else but YHWH, who instructs him regarding the destruction of Jericho (298–310). Štrba, then, reads Josh 5:13–6:5 as a theophany type-scene similar to the theophany of Exod 3:2–8, in which the identity of the divine being and the task given is gradually revealed (311–23). Seeing Josh 5:13–15 as a “theophany scene” is indeed possible and constructive, but the conclusion that the “man” Joshua meets near Jericho is an anthropomorphic embodiment of YHWH is harder to accept. Why would YHWH call himself “commander of YHWH’s army” if he is who Štrba claims he is? Must we necessarily uphold Štrba’s view in order to fully comprehend the important role Joshua has in carrying out the second part of YHWH’s plan revealed in Exod 3:8? I do not think so, neither do I think, as Štrba believes, that this encounter, key as it is, forms the main theme of Josh 1–12 or that the prospect of taking the land through conquest is only here announced to Joshua (323–24). Štrba is right to say that the conquest alone is not the main theme of the first half of the book of Joshua. There are a cluster of themes designed to frame the story of the people, beginning with the patriarchs in Genesis and finishing in 2 Kings, written perhaps during the fifth century B.C.E., as he postulates.

In conclusion, this book is a bold attempt, if overly confident at times, to credit Joshua with the same authority that Moses enjoyed as leader of the people of Israel. Though well-written and nicely jacketed, the book still maintains a thesis-like appearance. For an exegetical study devoted to Josh 5:13–15, it spends a disproportionate amount of pages preparing the ground. Only the last, and the shortest, of its five long chapters deals substantially with the chosen text. But even so, Blažej Štrba has done us a great service in

reopening the discussion about the significance of those biblical characters like Joshua, shadowed by the greatness that writers and readers alike attribute to their predecessors, yet without whom not even giants like Moses can truly succeed.