

JOSHUA AND ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN WARFARE

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Homines id quod volunt credunt

"Men believe what they want to believe."

—Caesar

Biblical studies, like other areas of human endeavor, are not unleavened by debate. The work of Martin Noth has profoundly influenced OT scholarship in the last three decades, in particular giving rise to a school of thought regarding the composition of Deuteronomy and the historical books of the OT. Noth's hypothesis of a deuteronomistic redaction and framework including Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings¹ has found wide acceptance.² Scholars of this school date the deuteronomistic strands of composition to around the seventh century B.C., and in no case would they date the book of Joshua as a whole to the second millennium. Because it is a narrative of the conquest, however, the book of Joshua claims to present a second-millennium scenario.

We cannot validate or even completely consider that claim in a short paper. We can, however, consider one aspect of the problem of date. One facet of deuteronomistic criticism may be questioned: the habitual assignment of first-millennium dates to OT literature on the basis of analogous material in surrounding cultures, in particular Assyrian royal inscriptions. Joshua can be, and has been, treated in this way,³ and it is only fair to recognize that the literary phenomena in Joshua have first-millennium extra-Biblical analogues. My hope in this paper is to show that in the book of Joshua the literary usages, and the military practices that those literary techniques are used to describe, also find precise analogies in second-millennium royal literature, both inscriptional and epic, from Ugarit, Assyria and Babylon.

In considering numerous lines of evidence, we will focus again and again on the relation between a king and his god or gods. We will see that striking parallels exist between the divine-royal relationship outside Israel on the one hand and the relationship between the Lord and his people, and the Lord and Joshua, within Israel on the other. Finally we will look at some of the implications of our study for deuteronomistic criticism.

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¹M. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (2d ed.; Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1957).

²E.g. P. Buis, *Le Deuteronomie* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1969); F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1973); G. E. Wright, "The Book of Deuteronomy," *IB*, 2, 311-330.

³Cf. M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972).

I. WAR ORACLES

The *sine qua non* of divine involvement in warfare is the god's communication to his servant, for only by divine command can the servant know the god's will to carry it out. Appropriately the book of Joshua begins with the statement that "the Lord spoke to Joshua" (Josh 1:1), commanding him to cross the Jordan (1:2). Two questions naturally arise: (1) What form did this speech take? (2) What is the background of divine war oracles and commands in the ancient Near East?

The Bible presents a fairly specific picture of divine communication with people. We are told in Deut 34:9 that because Moses laid hands on Joshua he was filled with the spirit of wisdom, and Israel obeyed him and did as the Lord had commanded Moses (this chain of command, Yahweh-Moses-Joshua, has significant ancient parallels that will be discussed below). The theme of succession is picked up in Josh 1:5, where God promises to be with Joshua as he was with Moses. Although Joshua is heir to much of the Mosaic authority, however, God's relationship with Moses was unique, as was his mode of communication with him. Deut 34:10 states that God knew only Moses "face to face" (*pnyṃ ʾl pnyṃ*). According to Num 12:8 God spoke with Moses "face to face" (*ph ʾl ph*) but to other prophets in dream or vision (vv 6-8).⁴

In the book named after him, Joshua again and again receives specific commands from the Lord for Israel's campaign of conquest. Ancient Near Eastern literature from the second millennium offers striking parallels to the Biblical picture. In Assyria, Ugarit and Babylon kings are portrayed as receiving divine commands for military activity.

In Assyria the phrase "at the command of Ashur my lord/ the great gods" (*ina qibīt ʿAshur bēlīya/ilāni rabūti*) is standard from Adadnirari I (1307-1275 B.C.) to Ashurbanipal (668-627).⁵ It is used with the verb *alāku* ("to walk") to indicate divine command for a specific campaign⁶ or with *šabātu* ("to conquer") to show that the god commanded a particular conquest.⁷ There occurs also in the Assyrian royal tradition from Shalmaneser I (1274-1245) to Esarhaddon (680-669) a prayer-confirmation pattern in which the king declares: "I raised my hands (i.e. in prayer) to Ashur and the great gods, (and)

⁴Samuel's prophetic calling should also be noted, in which we are told that "word from the Lord was rare in those days; no vision spread abroad" (1 Sam 3:1). Samuel, however, apparently heard a spoken word (vv 4, 6, 8) and conversed with the invisible God (vv 10-14).

⁵E. F. Weidner, "Die Kämpfe Adadniraris I. gegen Hanigalbat," *AfO* 5 (1928-29) 90-91 (Adadnirari I); E. Ebeling, B. Meissner and E. F. Weidner, *Die Inschriften der Altassyrischen Könige* (Leipzig: Quelle and Meyer, 1926) 116-117 (Shalmaneser I); E. A. Wallis Budge and L. W. King, *Annals of the Kings of Assyria* (London: Harrison, 1902) 278 (Ashurnasirpal); D. D. Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1924) 82 (Sennacherib); R. Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons Königs von Assyrien* (*AfO* Beiheft 9; Graz: 1956) 56 (Esarhaddon); A. C. Piepkorn, *Historical Prism Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1933) 68-69 (Ashurbanipal).

⁶E.g. Ebeling, Meissner and Weidner, *Inschriften* 116-117; Budge and King, *Annals* 278; cf. Borger, *Inschriften* 56.

⁷Weidner, *Kämpfe* 90-91; cf. (with *abiktašunu aškun*, "I brought about their defeat") Piepkorn, *Historical Prism* 68-69.

they answered me a firm 'Yes'" (*ana ^dAshur u ilāni rabūti qātī aššīma anna kīna epulūninni*).⁸ Whether these communications were by hepatoscopy or more direct may be debated.⁹ What is clear is that the Assyrian kings conceived of their military conquests as commanded by Ashur and the great gods.

In Ugarit the evidence is more explicit. In the Kirta epic the god El, chief of the Ugaritic pantheon, descends in a dream to ask King Kirta what ails him: *wbhlmh il yrd / bšrth āb ādm*, "And in his dream El descends, / in his vision the Father of Man (Adam)."¹⁰ Here we have El appearing to Kirta in a dream vision to converse with him. In the dialogue that ensues El learns that Kirta has been bereft of wife and offspring. To ensure the royal succession the god commands Kirta, upon awaking, to offer a sacrifice and make preparations for war. The king is to march against Pabil king of Udm, from whom, after a seven-day siege, he will obtain Pabil's daughter Hurriya to wife. Here, as in the Bible, the deity is intimately concerned with human affairs and appears in dream and vision to impart his will to his servant. We note also that El's commands are both sacral and military, the same combination that we find in Joshua.

Perhaps the most striking evidence comes from second-millennium Babylon. We learn for example that Samsuiluna (1749-1712) son of Hammurapi (1792-1750) was, like Moses, privileged to speak with a deity face to face.¹¹ Enlil, "whose lordship is supreme to the gods, the shepherd who decrees fate" (lines 1-3), sends Zababa and Ishtar to Samsuiluna with a message. Zababa and Ishtar "lifted their radiant, quickening faces towards Samsuiluna . . . and they spoke to him with glee."¹² They command him to set out on campaigns of conquest and to build the wall of Kish, the holy city, higher than it was before—both of which tasks he accomplishes.

The spread of second-millennium evidence indicates a common attitude toward divine communication and its role in warfare in the Near East. The god could communicate with his servant by dreams or visions, or even face to face. Such communication played an essential role in warfare: The god ordered war, often imparting detailed commands as to its execution. In these respects the second-millennium picture in the Near East is conformable with that of Joshua.

II. THE COMMAND-FULFILLMENT CHAIN

When God speaks to Joshua he does so in some detail, and the accomplishment of his commands is described in similar detail. Some years ago

⁸Ebeling, Meissner and Weidner, *Inschriften* 118-119 (Shalmaneser I); cf. Borger, *Inschriften* 42-43.

⁹Apparently they were oracular, as indicated by evidence from Sennacherib (Luckenbill, *Annals* 7); Esarhaddon (Borger, *Inschriften* 40); Ashurbanipal (Piepkorn, *Historical Prism* 68-69).

¹⁰CTA 14.i.35-37.

¹¹E. Sollberger, "Samsu-iluna's Bilingual Inscriptions C and D," *RA* 63/1 (1969) 29-43.

¹²*Ibid.*, lines 62-69: *a-na Sa-am-su-i-lu-na . . . bu-ni-šu-nu ša ba-la-ṭim na-aw-ri-iš iš-šu-šum-ma el-ši-iš it-ti-šu i-ta-wu-ú.*

Umberto Cassuto noted this command-fulfillment pattern in Ugaritic literature and related it to the tabernacle chapters in Exodus.¹³ The pattern occurs in Akkadian as well as Ugaritic literature, however, and is more extensive than Cassuto recognized.

In Joshua, two examples command attention: the crossing of the Jordan in chap. 4, and the conquest of Jericho in chap. 6. Both cases will repay analysis because they are comparable to second-millennium instances of the command-fulfillment pattern. In Josh 4:1-3 the Lord tells Joshua to select twelve men, one for each tribe. He is to command each one to take a stone from the midst of the Jordan. They are to deposit the twelve stones where they lodge that night. In vv 4-7 we are told that Joshua obeys the Lord's command. He also explains the meaning of the stones to the twelve: They are a memorial that the Lord cut off the waters of the Jordan. In v 8 we learn that the twelve obey Joshua, taking up the stones and depositing them at the lodging place. There is repetition in the command and fulfillment sections, but the verses describing Joshua's obedience also add new information: an explanation of the reason for the stones.

The conquest of Jericho follows the same basic pattern. In 6:2-5 the Lord commands seven successive days' marches around Jericho, culminating in seven circumambulations on the seventh day. In v 5 he gives detailed commands about the trumpet blasts, the people's war shout, and the charge of the people when the walls have fallen. Next, in vv 6-7 Joshua gives orders to the priests and the people. In vv 8-9 we are told that they carry out the commands, and we learn extra details of their marching order. Joshua issues further commands in vv 10, 16-19 about the timing of the war shout, the sparing of Rahab's house, and the otherwise complete ban on the city. In vv 11-15, 20-25 these commands are fulfilled. The command-fulfillment pattern as it appears in the Jordan and Jericho episodes has two outstanding characteristics: (1) There is a threefold chain of command (Yahweh-Joshua-the tribal representatives, priests, or people); (2) as the command-fulfillment chain unfolds, details are added in the second and third stages.

The evidence from Ugarit presents important similarities. In the Kirta epic El commands Kirta to march seven days against King Pabil. El's commands as to Kirta's handwashing ritual, sacrifice, war preparations, and conduct of the campaign are given in great detail.¹⁴ Kirta fulfills these commands to the letter.¹⁵ But the fulfillment portion of the poem also adds new information, including King Pabil's distress over Kirta's siege¹⁶ and the return of Pabil's messengers from Kirta.¹⁷ Here we have the same pattern as in Joshua. There

¹³U. Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975), 2. 29-32, 77-79.

¹⁴CTA 14.ii.62-iii.153.

¹⁵CTA 14.iii.156-vi.306.

¹⁶CTA 14.v.227-245.

¹⁷CTA 14.vi.300-306.

is a chain of command-fulfillment from god to man, and as the fulfillment stage of the pattern unfolds, new details are added.

A literary parallel from second-millennium Babylon is even more complete. The *Samsuiluna C* inscription offers a threefold chain of command-fulfillment with details added at each stage of the unfolding of the pattern, exactly as in the Joshua episodes. The inscription begins with Enlil's decision to make the holy city of Kish greater than it was before (lines 1-15). In lines 32-52 he commands Zababa and Ishtar to be present with Samsuiluna for his good, to kill his enemies, and to deliver his haters into his hand. He wishes him to make the wall of Kish greater than it was before and to cause Zababa and Ishtar to live in a dwelling of sweetness of heart. We are told that the two gods rejoiced at Enlil's word (lines 53-61) and then, in lines 62-88, that they relayed it to Samsuiluna in face-to-face communication with some variation of language, including a few extra royal titles and the theological addendum that Enlil has magnified the fate of Samsuiluna—this by way of encouragement to the king. The rest of the inscription tells in much greater detail how Samsuiluna fulfilled these commands, describing his military triumphs over the kings of Larsa and Eshnunna, over some twenty-six rebel kings, and over the totality of the land of the Sumerians and Akkadians (lines 89-128). Likewise we are told the details of his building exploits in Kish (lines 129-143). The inscription ends with a short prayer to Zababa and Ishtar for long life (lines 144-154). Here we have a complete literary parallel to the command-fulfillment pattern as it appears in Joshua. As in Joshua, the command-fulfillment chain is threefold. As the second and third stages of the pattern unfold, new details are added.

It seems clear that the command-fulfillment pattern in second-millennium Ugarit and Babylon is conformable in its literary details to the command-fulfillment episodes in Joshua. The command-fulfillment chain may be two-fold or threefold. Details of command and fulfillment may be added as the pattern unfolds.

Not just a literary phenomenon, the pattern seems to have common theological roots—that is, the literary pattern appears to be an outgrowth of the idea that the command, given originally by the god, must come to pass. Thus in the Kirta epic El commands Kirta in his dream vision to demand Pabil's daughter: *dbhlmy il ytn / bšhrty āb ādm*, "Whom in my dream El bestowed, / in my vision the Father of Man (Adam)." ¹⁸ In other words, Kirta is to inform Pabil that El has already bestowed Hurriya upon him in a dream vision, and this information is supposed to carry weight with Pabil. What the god has commanded in a dream must literally come to pass because he is a god.

Similarly in the *Samsuiluna C* inscription the chief command for the king's activities comes from Enlil, "whose lordship is supreme to the gods, the shepherd who decrees fate" (lines 1-3). He is called "the great lord whose utterances cannot be changed, whose fate-decrees cannot be altered."¹⁹ The

¹⁸CTA 14.iii.150-151; cf. 14.vi.296-297.

¹⁹Sollberger, "Inscriptions," lines 16-20: ⁴EN.LÍL be-lum ra-bi-um ša qí-bí-sú la uš-te-pe-el-lu ši-ma-at i-ši-im-mu la ut-ta-ak-ka-ra.

foregoing is said of him in the context of his plans for Kish, and it introduces his commands to Zababa and Ishtar for Samsuiluna. The setting for the command-fulfillment chain is thus the theological concept that the god's decisions cannot be changed.

In Joshua the command-fulfillment chains are likewise set in theological contexts that stress the Lord's authority. Just before he commands the memorial of twelve stones the Lord miraculously clears a passage through the Jordan, and so the point is established that "the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth" has passed over before Israel into the Jordan (Josh 3:11). Likewise in 5:13-15 the angelic commander of the Lord's army appears to Joshua by Jericho just before the command-fulfillment sequence that deals with the conquest of Jericho. The point is not that a certain type of divine appearance or activity is necessary before the god can initiate a command-fulfillment chain. Rather, the command-fulfillment pattern is meant to show that the fulfillment of the great god's command is inevitable. Thus it often appears in a context that in one way or another stresses the god's incontrovertible greatness.

III. DIVINE INVOLVEMENT IN WARFARE

The Lord not only commands military action; he also takes an active part in it. His activity appears on two levels. The use of certain war terms portrays him as active on the battlefield: The Hiphil of *nkh* ("to smite") and the Niphal of *lhm* ("to wage war") are used both of Joshua and all Israel (e.g. Josh 10:29, 31, 34, 36, 38) and of the Lord (e.g. 10:10, 14, 42). But he is active on a psychological plane as well. The might of the Lord causes a great dread in the enemy, rendering them ineffective in battle. Thus Rahab says to the two spies, in Josh 2:9, that "the dread of you has fallen upon us" and that "all the inhabitants of the land melt away from before you." In the next verse we learn the reason for this great dread: They have heard of God's great acts for Israel against Egypt and the two Amorite kings, Sihon and Og (2:10). "We heard," she says in v 12, "and our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man before you, for the Lord your God is God in the heavens above and on the earth below." God's grandeur thus overwhelms the enemy. But in addition God himself controls the enemy's psyche: He reaches into their hearts and hardens them for war against Israel, that he might make them a *hrm* (Hiphil) without mercy (11:20). The use of war terms thus portrays the Lord as actively involved in Israel's warfare and closely identified with Israel, since the same terms are used both of the Lord and of Israel.

Literature from the Assyrian royal tradition displays the same phenomena. Tiglath-Pileser I (1115-1077) declares in his annals: "The splendor of my valor overwhelmed them."²⁰ But he uses almost identical phrasing of his god Ashur: "Terror and fear of the splendor of Ashur, my lord, overwhelmed

²⁰Budge and King, *Annals* 48 (iii.2b: *me-lam qar-du-ti-ia ú-si-ši-ip-šu-nu-ti*). Cf. A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1976), 2. 9.

them.”²¹ The king’s enemies “were afraid in the face of my terrible weapons.”²² But likewise “they fled in the face of the terrible weapons of Ashur, my lord.”²³ In second-millennium Assyria Ashur fights for the king, just as the Lord does for Israel. In the Assyrian inscription, as in Joshua, the identical phrasing shows the close affinity of the god with his servant: Both are involved in the same campaign against unsubmitive enemies.

The activity of the god in battle is portrayed even more graphically earlier in Assyria. For instance, in the Tukulti-Ninurta epic we read that the sword of Enlil, lord of the world, cleaves the flesh of the foe.²⁴

In Assyria, as in Israel, the divine involvement in war includes divine interference with the enemy’s psyche. In an inscription of Ashurbanipal we read how Ishtar “dethroned” the reason of the king of Elam “who does not esteem the gods,” causing him to seek a disastrous war with the Assyrian king.²⁵ But this account, with all its psychological subtlety, is no late theological development. Nearly six hundred years earlier we read in the Tukulti-Ninurta epic how the god Shamash affected the thoughts and fears of the king’s enemy. Tukulti-Ninurta I (1244–1208), king of Assyria, has challenged Kashtiliash IV (1242–1235), king of the Kassites, to battle, and preparations are underway. Then we read: “But Kashtiliash, because of what the decision of the gods sought, changed his mind, withdrawing at the word of Shamash, and fearing the hostility of the gods, and meditating. The decision of the powerful king (i.e. Shamash) bound his body like a vampire.”²⁶ Shamash binds the Kassite, fills him with fear of the gods, and causes him to withdraw in a policy of retreat that eventually leads to his overthrow. The god actively intervenes on behalf of the Assyrian king in the psyche of his enemy.

In second-millennium Assyria we observe the same features of divine involvement in warfare that we find in Joshua. Like the Lord, the Assyrian gods are actively involved in the sword-wielding, smiting and war-waging of their servants or favorites. As in Joshua, where the use of identical terms creates a close sense of identity between the Lord on the one hand and Joshua and all Israel on the other, so in Assyria the use of identical phrasing creates a close sense of identity between the god Ashur and the king. In Joshua the Lord interferes with the psyche of the enemy to effect his downfall; so Shamash does in mid-second-millennium Assyria. Thus the concept of divine

²¹Budge and King, *Annals* (ii.38–39: *pu-ul-ḥu a-di-ru me-lam ḏA-šur belt-ia lu iṣ-ḥu-up-šu-nu-ti*).

²²Ibid., p. 50 (iii.13–14: *i-na pa-an kakkē^{mes} ia iz-zu-te ip-la-ḥu*).

²³Ibid., p. 74 (v.55–56: *i-na pa-an [kakkē^{mes}] iz-zu-te ṣa ḏA-šur beltia ip-par-ṣi-du*).

²⁴R. Campbell Thompson and M. E. L. Mallowan, “The British Museum Excavations at Nineveh, 1931–32,” *Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology* 20 (1933) 119, 123.

²⁵Piepkorn, *Historical Prism* 64–71.

²⁶Thompson and Mallowan, “Excavations” 120, 125. Similarly in a letter the Babylonian king Adad-šum-ušur taunts Ashurnirari III (1202–1197) and Iluhadda of Assyria, claiming that Ashur and the great gods have deranged them because of their sin; see E. Weidner, *Die Inschriften Tukulti-Ninurtas 1. und seiner Nachfolger* (AfO Beiheft 12; Graz: 1959) 48.

involvement in warfare that we find in Joshua closely parallels that in second-millennium royal Assyrian literature, both inscriptional and epic.

IV. WAR PRACTICES

Our study of warfare in Joshua, compared to examples of warfare in mid-second-millennium Ugarit, Assyria and Babylon, has shown that comparable concepts of divine communication, command-fulfillment sequences, and divine involvement in war occur in every case. The parallels can be multiplied by a further consideration of practices common to the Israelite conquest and second-millennium Assyrian campaigns.

1. *The memorial.* The Lord commands a memorial of twelve stones in Joshua 4. These are partly a reminder to future Israelites and partly a testimony "that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty" (Josh 4:24). The stones are thus truly a memorial and not in any sense a boundary marker of the *kudurru* type. Nevertheless, they have an analogy in the Assyrian tradition of warfare. Tiglath-Pileser I, for instance, fashioned memorial lightning bolts of bronze, which he installed in a brick house by the ruins of Khunusa. The lightning bolts told of "the spoil of the lands that through my god, my lord, I had conquered."²⁷ Tiglath-Pileser asserts that he conquered through his god, and he deposits a memorial to that effect. And Israel, who crossed the Jordan with God's help, is to place a memorial likewise.

2. *The urban memorial.* The practice of destroying a city with the aim that it never be rebuilt is also common to Israelite and Assyrian warfare. Tiglath-Pileser I destroys Khunusa, stating: "The three great walls of their city, which with burnt brick were strongly built, and the whole of the city I laid waste, I destroyed, I turned into heaps and ruins."²⁸ Having destroyed the city with its great walls he declares: "That city should not again be inhabited, and its walls should not again be built."²⁹ Likewise Joshua, after the destruction of Jericho with its great walls, curses anyone who rebuilds the city in the future (Josh 6:26). The parallel is not accidental. From the Israelite point of view Canaan was a land at odds with the Lord, and the holy war in which they were engaged was the Lord's punishment of the rebellious and sinful. As the first city destroyed within Canaan, Jericho was to be left as a memorial of the futility of rebellion against the Lord. Likewise when Tiglath-Pileser leaves a city a mound of ruins forever, he does so as a memorial of the futility of rebellion against Ashur. There is further evidence in support of this parallel. Tiglath-Pileser sows salt on the ruins of the city, a symbol of sterilization

²⁷Budge and King, *Annals* 79–80 (vi.16–17: *ki-ši-ti māṭāti ša i-na ili-ia belī-ia ak-šu-du*). Cf. Grayson, *Inscriptions* 15.

²⁸Budge and King, *Annals* 79.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 8.

forever.³⁰ But Shalmaneser I did the same to the city of Arinu, which he explicitly states had fallen away and rebelled against Ashur.³¹

So Jericho is an example, paralleled in second-millennium Assyrian practice, of a type of war memorial: a ruined city left as an object lesson for those who would rebel against the god.

3. *Burning the rebellious.* A second type of object lesson was the practice of burning the rebellious. In Joshua 7, Achan and his household are stoned and burned with fire as a punishment for their transgression against the Lord. Their sin: withholding objects devoted to the Lord. Tukulti-Ninurta I, Joshua's near-contemporary, administers a similar punishment for a similar reason, though on a larger scale. The Shubari and their allies, formerly submissive to Shalmaneser I, have rebelled and are withholding tribute. Tukulti-Ninurta prays to Ashur and the great gods, defeats the rebels, and burns them with fire.³² It is worth mention that this practice assumed a more humane aspect in Israelite hands than in Assyrian: The Israelites killed the rebels by stoning before burning them, whereas Tukulti-Ninurta boasts that he burned a city full of rebels alive.

4. *Public exhibition of corpses.* In Israel and Assyria the public exhibition of enemy corpses has a theological context. In Josh 10:26-27 we read that Joshua hung the bodies of the five kings on trees until sundown, then buried them in the cave in which they had hidden. Before Joshua executes the kings he commands the Israelites to put their feet on the kings' necks and tells them that the Lord will do so to all their enemies (Josh 10:24-25). He then kills them and exhibits their corpses as proof of God's victorious assistance. Similarly Tukulti-Ninurta I begins the account of his campaigns by stating, in the context of his election by Ashur, that he "put his foot on the neck of the lands."³³ He subsequently boasts that he piled up the bodies of his enemies like grain beside their city gate.³⁴ In both cases the foot-on-the-neck imagery and the public display of corpses indicate the power of the god at work to subdue enemies. The point is made similarly elsewhere by Tukulti-Ninurta when he declares that he put his feet on the lordly neck of Kashtiliash and brought him bound before Ashur his lord.³⁵

V. THE RATIONALE FOR WAR: GOD, SERVANT, REBEL

In Deuteronomy we read that Israel is a chosen people: "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ebeling, Meissner and Weidner, *Inschriften* 114-117.

³²Weidner, *Inschriften* 3.

³³Ibid., p. 1 (1.i.29: *i-na kišad mātāti šēpa ú-kin*).

³⁴Ibid., p. 2.

³⁵Ibid., p. 12.

for his own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deut 7:6). The passage goes on to discuss the blessings attendant upon the chosen people's obedience to God and concludes: "You shall destroy all the peoples that the Lord your God will give over to you; your eye shall not pity them, neither shall you serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you" (7:16). The Lord has chosen Israel as his people. As such, they must be obedient. If they are, he will use them in a pitiless campaign against those who are not his servants, those who do not acknowledge his authority. This package of ideas constitutes the rationale for the holy war in Joshua.

The same ideas are operative in Assyrian warfare in the second millennium. As in Israel, the Assyrian king is chosen by deity. Tiglath-Pileser I styles himself the king whom Ashur and the great gods "in your faithful hearts have chosen."³⁶ He adds: "To be king over the land of Enlil (you) did grandly appoint him."³⁷ As in Israel, the Assyrian king is chosen by the god to be his worshiper and servant. As in Israel, the Assyrian king is the instrument of the deity to subdue the rebellious, those who have not acknowledged the rule of the god Ashur (i.e. Assyria). Tukulti-Ninurta I makes these points clearly:

When Ashur my lord faithfully chose me for his worshiper, gave me the scepter for my office of shepherd, presented me in addition the staff for my office of herdsman, granted me authority so that I might slay my enemies (and) subdue those who do not fear me, (and) placed upon me the lordly crown—at that time) I set my foot upon the neck of the lands (and) shepherded the extensive black-headed people like animals.³⁸

The king also makes it clear that those who are "insubmissive to him" (*la ma-gi-ri-šú*) are also "the haters of Ashur" (*za-e-ru-ut dA-šur*).³⁹ Shalmaneser I makes similar claims, using similar language.⁴⁰ The Assyrian kings also say that they are obedient to their deity (as Israel must be).⁴¹ They wage merciless campaigns against the god's enemies (as Israel must do).⁴² And they are victorious because they trust in their deity (as Israel should do).⁴³ There are

³⁶Budge and King, *Annals* 30. Cf. Grayson, *Inscriptions* 5.

³⁷Budge and King, *Annals* 30. Cf. Grayson, *Inscriptions* 5–6.

³⁸Weidner, *Inscripfen* 1. Cf. the similar statement by Tiglath-Pileser I, who records for posterity "my heroic victories, my successful battles, (and) the suppression of the enemies (and) foes of the god Ashur which the gods An and Adad granted me" (Budge and King, *Annals* 104). Cf. Grayson, *Inscriptions* 19.

³⁹Weidner, *Inscripfen* 9.

⁴⁰Ebeling, Meissner and Weidner, *Inscripfen* 112–113.

⁴¹Cf. n. 5 *supra*.

⁴²The phrase "without mercy" (*lā padu*) occurs often in the Assyrian tradition; cf. *AHW*, 2. 808.

⁴³The phrase "with trust in Ashur, my lord/the great gods" is standard in the Assyrian tradition; cf. e.g. Weidner, *Inscripfen* 1–2 (Tukulti-Ninurta I); Budge and King, *Annals* 36 (Tiglath-Pileser I); W. Schramm, "Die Annalen des Assyrischen Königs Tukulti-Ninurta II," *BO* 27 (May–July, 1970) 148 (Tukulti-Ninurta II); Borger, *Inscripfen* 65 (Esarhaddon).

thus fundamental parallels between the relationship of the king and his gods in second-millennium Assyria on the one hand and the relationship of Israel and the Lord in the book of Joshua on the other.

There are also interesting parallels between Joshua himself and the Assyrian kings. God makes Joshua great, as we learn in Josh 3:7; 4:14. But Tiglath-Pileser I can also hail "Ashur and the great gods, who have made my kingdom great."⁴⁴ Earlier in Babylon, Zababa and Ishtar tell Samsuiluna that Enlil "has made your fates great." Along with personal greatness comes fame. So we read in Josh 6:27 that as a result of the Lord's favor "his (Joshua's) fame was in all the land." Likewise in Assyria divine favor leads not only to regional but international repute. Tiglath-Pileser is the king "whose name has been proclaimed over princes,"⁴⁵ "whose weapons Ashur has directed (and) that he should be shepherd of the four quarters has proclaimed his name forever."⁴⁶ He is the king "whose splendor overwhelms the quarters."⁴⁷ The inevitable connection between greatness and divine election is apparent early in the Assyrian tradition. Shamshi-Adad I (1814-1782) is the one "whose name Anu and Enlil have called unto greatness."⁴⁸ There is even an analogy to Assyrian royal succession in Joshua's case. As we learn in Josh 3:7, the Lord begins to make Joshua great so that Israel will know that the Lord is with Joshua as he was with Moses. The same rationale is operative in the Assyrian royal tradition in the second millennium. This is obvious from the fact that the successive kings use the same epithets in their titularies, all illustrative of legitimate succession as well as divine election.⁴⁹

Moshe Weinfeld touches on a similarity between Joshua and Assyrian kings when, in a discussion of military orations, he comments on the Lord's encouragement to Joshua to "be strong and courageous": "For the employment of like formulae in ancient Near Eastern literature to inspire and encourage kings confronted by enemies see oracles to Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal . . . and the Zakir inscription."⁵⁰ It is typical of Weinfeld's methodology that he draws attention to the seventh-century evidence. But we find Zababa and Ishtar giving similar encouragement to Samsuiluna: "Enlil has made great your fates; for your keeping in wholeness he sent us here; at your right side we will go; your enemies we will kill; your foes we will deliver into your hands" (lines 82-83). Moreover, every blessing promised by these gods can be found either in prayers by the Assyrian kings to their gods, or in statements that the gods did such things for them, in second-millennium Assyrian inscriptions.

⁴⁴Budge and King, *Annals* 33.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴⁸Ebeling, Meissner and Weidner, *Inschriften* 22-23.

⁴⁹See M.-J. Seux, *Épithètes Royales Akkadiennes et Sumériennes* (Paris: Letouzey et Ane, 1967).

⁵⁰Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy* 45 n. 5.

But the military oration is not confined to encouragement from the god to his servant, either in Joshua or in Assyria. Joshua speaks words of encouragement to his troops in Josh 10:25: "Do not fear or be dismayed! Be strong and courageous, for thus the Lord will do to all your enemies with whom you fight." Tukulti-Ninurta I, Joshua's near-contemporary in Assyria, gives a similarly rousing speech to his warriors: "You will make the king of the Kassites the laughingstock of warriors of (the god) Ashur. . . . The sword of Ashur will stand fast unyielding. . . . Then will Tukulti-Ninurta, the terrible merciless storm, pursue and destroy them."⁵¹ For Tukulti-Ninurta, as for Joshua, it is the deity who assures victory by engaging on the side of his servants. And in both cases this theological fact forms the encouraging center of the military oration.

The second-millennium Assyrian evidence also renders unnecessary the distinction Weinfeld makes between two supposed traditions in Joshua: (1) a deuteronomic tradition, which portrays Joshua as a national military leader, and (2) an early tradition, which portrays him as a national religious leader like Moses. Weinfeld comments:

The wars of Joshua, according to these latter traditions, are locally fought battles in which the sacral factor plays a dominant role (for example, the conquest of Jericho, the Achan episode). In the deuteronomic strand, on the other hand, Joshua figures as a typical military national leader who wages lightning and sweeping campaigns (chs 10-12) and in which the sacral element is completely absent but is replaced by a pervasive and fervent national feeling.⁵²

Such an analysis is not even true to the intra-Biblical evidence, for Joshua 10-12 does not portray an undifferentiatedly "lightning" campaign. We are explicitly told in Josh 11:18 that "Joshua waged war a long time with all these kings." Moreover, these chapters show the same combination of human military prowess and divine activity for the chosen servant that we find in the second-millennium Assyrian inscriptions. The separation of strands of tradition into sacral and military is dubious in light of the Assyrian evidence. In an inscription of Tukulti-Ninurta I the king's lightning victory over forty kings of the Nairi in one battle is combined with his bringing them before Ashur in his temple and making them swear an oath by the great gods of heaven and earth.⁵³ Likewise, he brought King Kashtiliash IV bound before the god Ashur.⁵⁴ Similarly, Tiglath-Pileser I's lightning victory over twenty-three kings of the Nairi in one battle is combined with his causing them to swear an oath by his gods to pay homage.⁵⁵ He also brought King Sieni, who had not submitted to Ashur his lord, captive to his city Ashur and then sent him away "as a worshiper of the great gods, that he might live and pay

⁵¹Thompson and Mallowan, "Excavations" 119, 123.

⁵²Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy* 50.

⁵³Weidner, *Inschriften* 27.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Budge and King, *Annals* 69-70.

reverence (unto them)."⁵⁶ Thus in second-millennium inscriptions we find sacral and military elements fused, not only in lightning victories over many kings but also in individual victories over individual kings. To separate into two strands of tradition in Joshua, supposed to be woven together in the seventh century, what we find combined in individual inscriptions of Tukulti-Ninurta I and Tiglath-Pileser I in the second millennium is not, I submit, proper methodology. Any literary model produced by OT scholars should be tested against extra-Biblical literature whenever possible. If it is not so tested, there is less control on speculation and our literary models become arbitrary.

Finally, the book of Joshua shows the same narrative combination of lightning and sweeping campaigns, and local and even tedious ones, found in second-millennium Assyrian inscriptions. For instance, Tiglath-Pileser I can boast that he conquered the city of Murattash in one-third of a day, before sunrise,⁵⁷ and declare that he vanquished in one battle twenty-three kings of the Nairi who were gathered against him.⁵⁸ Yet he can also give details of a prolonged campaign against the rebellious Qummukhi, telling how he burned some cities but had to pursue many who fled to Shereshe on the far side of the Tigris, hewing his way through the steep mountains with axes of bronze to make a path for his chariots, then crossing the Tigris and finally conquering the rest of the enemy at their stronghold of Shereshe.⁵⁹ The combination of different types of campaigns in the Joshua and Assyrian narratives reflects fluctuating military realities, not different strands of tradition.

The spread of evidence we have considered shows a consistent compatibility between literary reporting on warfare and divine involvement in warfare in the book of Joshua and in second-millennium-B.C. extra-Biblical literature in Ugarit, Assyria and Babylon. The literatures show a common attitude toward divine communication and its role in warfare. The god communicates with his servant, ordering war and even imparting detailed commands as to its execution. Because the god is supreme his commands must come to pass, and this concept is illustrated by the command-fulfillment pattern as used in campaign descriptions in Joshua, Ugarit and Babylon. The god not only commands war but also fights on the side of his favorites, smiting the foe and, in both second-millennium Canaan and Assyria, interfering with the enemy psychologically to bring about their merciless defeat. The purpose of warfare is to bring unsubmitive territory under the effectual rule of the god. To this end he helps his servant in war, for it is through his servant that he establishes his visible rule in the land. Thus the servant sets up a memorial to the help his god has given him. He leaves a ruined city as an object lesson to those who would rebel against the god. He burns those who rebel against the god, and the corpses of other unsubmitive ones he publicly displays. The evidence shows a strong similarity between the relationship that subsists

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 70-71.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 58.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 66-68; cf. the king list in Joshua 12.

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 37-40.

between the non-Israelite king and his god or gods, on the one hand, and between Joshua and the Lord, and Israel and the Lord, on the other. In both cases the god chooses and assists his servant, assuring his victory because he is faithful to the god (as opposed to the enemies, who are hostile to the god and his servant).

Weinfeld has postulated two traditions pertaining to Joshua: a deuteronomic one that portrays Joshua as a military leader conducting lightning campaigns, and an earlier one that portrays Joshua as a religious leader in local campaigns of sacral character. Our study indicates that, in light of Assyrian inscriptional evidence, such a division of supposed traditions is arbitrary. Precisely such reports occur in individual inscriptions of the Assyrian priest-kings of the second millennium B.C. and reflect fluctuating military realities in campaigns undertaken in the name of sacral kingship.

In the light of all this evidence we return to a fact noted at the outset. First-millennium extra-Biblical evidence can be marshaled to the same effect, and in varying degrees it has been. We introduce the second-millennium evidence to make a point that needs to be made and that many consistently ignore: On literary grounds there is no reason to date Joshua to the first millennium and no reason to divide it into deuteronomic and nondeuteronomic strands. A more complete argument would require more than a brief paper. But it is hoped that the present attempt will be an encouragement in a new—or, should we say, an old—direction.