

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 212

Joshua's Conquest of Jericho and the Ugaritic Keret Epic

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Episode Summary

The basic details of the Israelite conquest of Jericho are well known. The renewal of the covenant at Shechem, the miraculous crossing of the Jordan with the Ark of the Covenant, Joshua's encounter with the supernatural commander of the Lord's host, the sending of the spies to the city and their reception by Rahab, the weird battle instructions to march around the city and blow the ram's horns, and the collapse of the walls have been retold in countless Sunday School classes and sermons. But virtually unknown is that many of these details have correspondences in a story from Ugarit, an ancient city state in Syria. That story is known as the Keret (or Kirta) Epic. In this episode we talk about the similarities and how an ancient reader might have processed such parallels.

Transcript

Trey: Welcome to the Naked Bible podcast, Episode 212: Joshua's Conquest of Jericho and the Ugaritic Keret Epic. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin and he's the scholar Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how you doing?

Mike: Pretty good. Pretty good. We're getting into some Ugaritic today. Ain't that great? Yeah, say that fast 10 times in a row!

Trey: Trust me. I had to say it a couple times to get it right. I'm interested about it. I know nothing about it. So...

Mike: Yeah, you're not alone.

Trey: I'm gonna learn something today as if I learn... I think this may be the only podcast (now, granted, I listen to every one), but will make a claim that you will learn something new every Naked Bible podcast episode.

Mike: I hope so. I hope that's true.

Trey: I feel like it is true.

Mike: Yeah, it probably is. For most listeners it probably is, and that's a good thing.

Trey: Can't imagine another podcast packing and cramming as much data and info as you do.

Mike: Yeah, I can't imagine another podcast tackling Ugaritic or doing a series of Leviticus either!

Trey: Unfortunately, our podcast is one that you really can't do anything else while you listen to it. You can't be doing chores or work or something because it's too dense.

Mike: [laughs] So like you might fly off the treadmill? Is that what you're saying?

Trey: Well, you just won't retain what you're saying. Yeah, I mean, you know...

Mike: Gotta focus... Get off the treadmill and listen.

Trey: You literally have to sit still in the dark in a fetal position and just gently rock back and forth while you listen to all this because it's so much data, but I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing. It's good because of the data but, you know, it's not an easy, digestible podcast which I guess could be a strength, but it's also a weakness but hey...

Mike: It is what it is.

Trey: We'll take it. Yeah. I mean, it is what it is. That's right. And I assume this episode's gonna be no different.

Mike: True, true. Yeah, you know this is a real familiar story—obviously, Joshua's Conquest of Jericho. I mean, how many times have we either heard or taught this in Sunday school or heard a sermon on it? Even people who read .001 percent of the Bible probably know this story. We sort of think we know it and we might be able to sort of track through all of the elements. You've got the covenant remade at Shechem and you've got the crossing of the Jordan, you know with the Ark and the Covenant, with the parting of the waters there. And you have the captain of the Lord's host and all that stuff—the spies, Rahab... We pretty much have all the story elements down and the weird marching around the city and the blowing on the horns and the walls collapse. Okay. We've got it. But what we don't realize is that there are a number of similarities between all of that in the wider conquest of Jericho and something called the Keret or Kirta Epic from Ugarit. And so that's where we want to land today and just sort of talk about what the similarities are, and then how an ancient reader might have processed these similarities when the biblical writer is doing this.

Now, one of the things at the outset here is to sort of talk about the order of events or the order of the exposure of one piece of literature to the writer of another. Which came first, the chicken or the egg? Was Joshua written the first or was the Keret Epic written first?

The short answer is it's kind of a muddled mess and we're not going to put too much stock on really any theory of authorship for either. That isn't really what's important. What's important is that the similarities are actually there. But there will be people who are listening to this who think, "Well, God forbid that a biblical writer actually use ancient Near Eastern material! Surely the Book of Joshua must have been written first and then the Ugaritic guy is getting stuff from Josh."

5:00 Well, you know, not so much. I mean, I think if there's anything definite in there is that the person who wrote the Keret Epic isn't saying, "I can't do this job until I read the book of Joshua." That I think is pretty much secure. But to kind of address the authorship a little bit here at the front before we actually get into the bulk of the episode here, I want to read from Howard's commentary. This is Dave Howard's commentary. I think it's the *New American Commentary* series on the authorship and date of Joshua. So let me just read a few things and then we'll go into, "Hey, what in the world is the Keret Epic anyway?" And I'll read a few more things from some other sources and we'll sort of jump into the actual parallels here.

So when it comes to the authorship and date of Joshua, Howard writes this:

The book is anonymous. The Talmud and some rabbis (Rashi, David Kimchi) attributed it to Joshua, but some saw parts of the book as written by later hands (e.g., the account of Joshua's death or other fragments). [Modern critical scholars] attributed it to Samuel, due especially to the phrase "to this day" (4:9; 5:9; 7:26; etc.). Modern critical scholars generally attribute the book to the Deuteronomistic writer(s), ca. seventh and sixth centuries B.C. (see below).

Let's just stop there. Now, what he's talking about here is the idea that Joshua wrote the book of Joshua is very late. There's nothing in the book to establish that. The book is anonymous. It doesn't attribute its authorship to anybody. And so you have these rabbinical traditions. Now, the modern view of this whole issue, something this thing called the "Deuteronomistic writer"... That might be new to a lot of people in the audience. It's actually a big deal in biblical studies, and it's the idea that the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, and the historical books all the way up through 2 Kings were all written at the same time by either the same person or a small group of persons—and as the quotation said (as Howard said), that was in the seventh or sixth centuries BC. Now you think, "Well, how can that be for Deuteronomy? Deuteronomy is part of the

Torah—you know, Moses. That would have been Mosaic.” You get into all these issues of Mosaic authorship.

There are number of reasons why a lot of people think Deuteronomy is late and wasn't written by Moses. This goes back to the whole JEDP thing and all that sort of stuff. Even if you keep Deuteronomy in the Torah and if you're thinking that Deuteronomy was composed with the intention of being the fifth of the first five books and so on and so forth, you can still look at this as though Joshua through 2 Kings were written centuries after the fact—after the conquest—by the same literary hand. Try to think of it that way. If the Deuteronomy thing distracts you, that's fine. The reason why scholars say that isn't just source critical is there are theological things in Deuteronomy that are not in the other books of the Torah, like the laws for the Passover. (I keep bringing this example up because it's so obvious.) The focus on centralized worship and sacrifice in Deuteronomy, where as you know, the Patriarchs are sacrificing whatever they want to... There are just things like this that kind of separate Deuteronomy and chronology from the other material that's in the Torah.

But again, it's a very complex kind of topic. But the idea is that these kinds of concerns (you worship only at one place, the Passover is now a national festival and you have to come to the temple, or the place where the Lord will set his name)... This reflects circumstances of Israel already being in the land, and that, of course, is going to be post-Joshua because at the time Joshua ends (when the Book of Judges starts) the conquest is still not complete. It's not the same situation as it is later on, and there are things about Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, and the historical books that sort of unify them in terms of themes—in terms of specific statements. Like the statement “unto this day” is a big one. There are things that push the composition of those books later.

And so since they have similarities between them, and since obviously the historical books are later but they share these similarities with Deuteronomy, somebody came along and said, “Well it was a historian living at around X,Y, Z time and he and maybe a few other people decided to essentially write all of this stuff at the same time, because none of these books, other than Deuteronomy... If you're going to go with the ‘law of Moses’ phrase, none of the other books are attributed to anyone.”

10:00

There are number of reasons why this chunk tends to be viewed as written at the same time. So that's the standard critical view. Now just for the sake of discussion, let's just go with that seventh or sixth centuries BC. Ugarit was destroyed circa 1200 BC, so you would have to either... If you adopt this chronology, it would be certain that the book of Joshua comes later. Something written at Ugarit, even after the city is destroyed, could have been preserved and archived somewhere that described... You could have come across the Kirta Epic from Ugarit, so the chronology would work out in that particular way. And it's not unreasonable that they (somebody in the professional

scribal class) would have access to the Kirta Epic of this story. There are other things to consider though. I mean, it's not that neat of a picture.

Going back to Howard, Howard says Joshua undoubtedly wrote portions of the book and he bases this on Joshua 24:26, which reads as follows:

²⁶ And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone and set it up there under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the LORD.

Now, it's very obvious if Joshua is writing these words on a stone (even a big stone) and set it up under the terebinth tree that was by the sanctuary of the Lord, he's not referring to the whole book. If you go back in Joshua 24, what is really referred to there are the words of this covenantal renewal kind of thing going on. It's a smaller portion, but this is the only place in the book where Joshua is said to have written something, and so Howard is viewing Joshua as a genuine historical source. And so it's like, "Well, Joshua evidently wrote some of this stuff" because this verse alludes to the fact that he wrote some stuff. That's fair. That's kind of obvious.

So he says Joshua undoubtedly wrote portions of the books, again referring to the content of the covenant the people had made at Shechem, but there are no further indications here or elsewhere in the Bible concerning the book's authorship. As Howard continues, he starts talking about the date and he writes this:

There are no formal indicators in the book or elsewhere about the date of its writing.

Just the whole thing now—not this little part in Joshua 24 that we're going to give Joshua credit for as coming from his hand. But as far as the whole book, there's nothing that indicates any kind of chronology, any kind of date. Back to Howard he says:

However, the formula "until this day" can be instructive in indicating a general date for the book, or at least parts of it. B. S. Childs [and OT scholar] has noted that the use of the formula in Josh 15:63 and 16:10 points to a period not later than the tenth century B.C. This is because 15:63 mentions people from the tribe of Judah living in Jerusalem alongside Jebusites, whom they could not drive out. Since David captured Jerusalem from the Jebusites ca. 1003 B.C. (2 Sam 5:6–10), presumably the Jebusites did not live there in any significant numbers much later than that time. Furthermore, 16:10 mentions Canaanite inhabitants of Gezer among the Ephraimites. Since an Egyptian pharaoh—probably Siamun (ca. 978–959 B.C.)—destroyed the Canaanites at Gezer and gave the town to Solomon as a

dowry (1 Kgs 3:1; 9:16), the reference to Canaanites in Gezer would have come from a period prior to that. Other references to “until this day” would seem to make more sense if a relatively long period of time had elapsed between the events and the time of writing.

15:00

The reference in 6:25, however, about Rahab still being alive “to this day” would seem to indicate a date much earlier. Furthermore, the boundary descriptions in chaps. 18–19 seem to have come from survey descriptions written at the very time (see 18:4, 6, 8, 9), and Joshua was responsible for writing about the covenant renewal ceremony in chap. 24. The reference to Rahab, however, is not conclusive because it may be her descendants in view just as the reference to David in Hos 3:5 refers to his descendants, not to him.

I am going to read you Hosea 3:5, which says:

⁵Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

Now, we know when Hosea's writing—eighth or seventh century or something around there—but he refers to David. Well, that doesn't mean David is still alive. It's a way of referring to his descendants. And so what Howard's pointing out here is that even this reference to Rahab in Joshua 6:25 might not actually be Rahab—it might be her descendants, which would push that chronology much later, and it's not necessarily something you can hang your hat on as being written in the time of Joshua (the person himself), so it's not conclusive like he says. So this is the way Howard concludes his statement:

We conclude that portions of the book were written in Joshua's day and that it was substantially complete by the time of David at the latest.

Okay, so he's going to push it... He's going to say Joshua's day up until about... let's just call it 1000 BC. Now that's earlier than modern critical scholars put it. They would push it into the eighth, seventh, maybe even beyond that to the sixth century BC. But any of those dates would be after the time of the composition of the Keret Epic, because the Keret Epic had to be written before the city of Ugarit was destroyed in 1200 BC. So you're not going to be able to get the book of Joshua before the Keret Epic. So don't even go there with that. That's just not going to work.

Now, one other thing to notice here is that none of these possible early chronological indicators really involve the battle itinerary—the Battle of Jericho. Even the Rahab reference, again, is an after-the-fact reference and it could be chronologically pushed forward even more, based on the Hosea 3:5 parallel idea.

And what we're going to talk about today really concerns the Battle of Jericho itself and the events just prior to it. Those are the things that are paralleled by the Keret Epic.

So you ask. "Well, what in the world is the Keret Epic or the Kirta Epic?" You'll see it referred to both ways. It's also known as "The Legend of King Keret." So what is this thing? Now, I'm going to read a little bit from Peter Craigie's book, *Ugarit and the Old Testament*, which is a nice little paperback book that's very, very handy—very condensed. It's worth having if you're interested in Ugarit and Ugaritic stuff. Craigie writes about the Keret Epic. It's a story that survives in three tablets, two of which are broken in several places. Therefore, the story is incomplete, in the sense that where the tablets are broken, you can't quite read everything. But most scholars think that the story itself is represented by these three tablets. So at one point this would have been the whole story, but because this is all we have and it's broken in places, we don't quite know every detail of it. But it is substantially known, and it very likely is complete (at one time, this was the whole thing). So here's what Craigie writes. He says:

The ancient legend of Keret was recorded on three clay tablets, all of a fairly large size, with the writing in three vertical columns on each side of the tablets...

The story concerns a king who was already regarded a figure from antiquity in the time of the kingdom of Ugarit;

So this would have been referring to a guy who lived earlier than the actual composition.

His name was *KRT*, usually vocalized as Keret, though it is rendered Kirta in some translations. The story begins with a description of the terrible plight in which King Keret found himself. As a consequence of various disasters, almost all of his family had been destroyed. And worse still, though he had had seven wives, each had died from some misfortune, leaving the king without progeny or an heir to the throne. Devastated by disaster, the king went weeping to his room; but when sleep eventually overpowered him, he had a dream.

20:00 **Craigie quotes a few lines from the Keret Epic that goes like this:**

As he wept, he fell asleep;
as his tears flowed, he slumbered.
Sleep overwhelmed him as he lay down;
slumber overpowered him as he curled up.
Then, in his dream, El came down;
in his vision, there was the Father of Humans!
And drawing near, he asked Keret:

“Why is it that Keret weeps?
Why does El’s favorite son shed tears?”

That's the end of the excerpt. Back to Craigie:

Keret responds to the supreme god, El, by indicating his desire for sons and an heir. And so he is ordered to offer sacrifices, both to El and to the god Baal, after which he is to prepare a great army and set out on a military campaign for the state of Udm, ruled over by King Pabil. The purpose of the campaign is not simply to secure booty and victory, but to demand that Pabil’s beautiful daughter, Huray, be given to King Keret in marriage.

On waking from his sleep, Keret puts into action the instructions he had received from the god El and sets out for Udm with a massive army. On the third day of the expedition, the king comes to a sacred shrine of the goddess Athirat; there he makes a vow that if he obtains the princess Huray he will donate great sums of silver and gold to the goddess. Then he continues on his journey, and after four more days of travel his army pitches camp before Udm. King Pabil sends messengers who offer Keret various gifts, but he refuses them all, insisting that he desires only the princess, Huray.

After some demur, the princess is given to King Keret, who then returns to his own land. In the years that follow, Keret and Huray become the parents of many sons and daughters.

Years later, a misfortune again strikes King Keret this time in the form of a grave illness.

I'm going to break in here and say this is going to... This is just a very basic summary. We're going to get to some very specific details that you're going to see pretty easily match what goes on in Joshua. One of them is here, but I just want to draw attention to it here because it's easy to miss. King Keret is going to get sick again. And most scholars of this material would say that it's probably because he forgets to fulfill his vow to Athirat. Remember he met her three days in and the goddess promised this and that. Well the story never has him doing that stuff. So he apparently forgot to fulfill his vow to the goddess and now he gets sick later. So back to Craigie:

The story is less clear at this point, for the text is broken and incomplete, but it seems that the sickness of Keret is prolonged and affects the health and stability of his kingdom. The rains are curtailed, the crops reduced, and violent men have grown strong in the exploitation of the weak and the powerless. But the supreme god El enters the story again and seeks a god from among the members of the divine assembly [divine council!] who would be able to heal Keret from his

sickness. When none is to be found, El creates a female spirit, whom he sends to Keret with instructions to heal him. The spirit, Sha'taqat, went to Keret and, touching him with a magic wand, healed him of his sickness, and then the failing king's zest returned.

After eating, Keret's strength returned and he sat once again on his throne, fully in control of his royal powers. But his son Yassib, thinking perhaps that his father was still sick and not in control of his powers, had hatched a plot to take over the kingdom.

Yassib approached the king and boldly declared the king's failings, which had been a consequence of sickness. But he had badly underestimated his father's renewed vitality, and the story, which began with Keret desperate for a male heir, concludes with the same king declaring a curse on his over-ambitious son, Yassib.

That's basically the story. It's the end of Craig's quote.

You say, "Well, what does that have to do with Joshua?" You could probably guess it's the military part of the story that has something to do with Joshua, and there are a handful of sources that refer to this. If you go into serious commentaries of the book of Joshua, you get a few footnotes here and there with vague references to similarities between Keret and Joshua with his conquest of Jericho.

25:00

There's actually an article (and again, I will put this in the folder that newsletter subscribers can get access to) by Marieke den Braber and Jan-Wim Wesselius. It's called the "The Unity of Joshua 1-8 and its Relation to the Story of King Keret and the Literary Background of the Exodus Conquest" from the *Scandinavian Journal the Old Testament*, and it was written in 2008. Now the article is very technical, so I'm not going to go through the article or anything like that. But I will read the abstract here and then make a few points as we proceed here. Here's the abstract of the article and this gives you an idea of what our episode is really going to focus on from this point forward. They write:

The story of the campaign against Jericho and its taking in Joshua 1-6 is usually assumed to be a composite narrative, in which episodes from various sources have been put together, resulting in a text which exhibits a considerable number of discontinuities, especially in the field of chronology. In this article it is argued that the chronological indications can be joined in one framework of twice seven days. In the middle of the first week the crossing of the Jordan is found, whereas the second week is concerned with the taking of Jericho. It is argued that this scheme mirrors the Ugaritic story of King Keret going to the city of Udum in order to obtain the princess Hurriy as his wife. The arguments in favour and against the assumption of a relationship of emulation between the

two texts are discussed, and the possibility of an encompassing intertextual relationship of the Biblical account of Exodus and Conquest with the story of king Keret is cautiously advanced.

I like the wording there: “cautiously advanced,” because as we go through these things you're gonna see that there are some elements there that are really strikingly parallel. Then there are other things that just have no relationship at all. So you have to wonder as you go through whether we have two writers using the same literary conventions in two separate stories, and that's the way to understand this—that they're both sort of dipping into the same well literarily to take their story. Or are they bouncing off each other in some ways? It's an open question. So don't let anybody out there in the internet in the wild, wild world of biblical studies in Middle-Earth tell you that the writer of Joshua had to sit down with his copy of Keret and stole the story. Nobody believes that. The scholars who are into this don't believe that. The issue is that there are similarities. You might have had an awareness on the part of the writer of Joshua (the Jericho conquest story) of Keret, but you could also have two writers drawing from the same well.

So with that said, let's go through the major similarities here. Between the two, the first one is chronology. Now in the article I mentioned (the one from the *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*), on this topic, they spend the first half of the article going through Joshua 1-6 to sort of ferret out indications of a linear sequence of events. Things like “the next day” or “on the day after the next day”—these little time phrases that will show up in a narrative. They go through the whole thing. It's actually quite detailed. It might be a little bit mind-numbing for those of you who read it. But what they're trying to do is they're trying to take all of the time indicators in Joshua and show that it produces two periods of seven days from the time where the Israelites under Joshua are ready to go into the land all the way up to the time when Jericho is taken. You're dealing with two units of seven days, and that becomes important, because when you look at the Keret epic, it has the same layout. So the first similarity is the fact that in both cases in both texts, there's a trip of seven days by the leader (Joshua one case, Keret and the other) toward cities. Their destinations are cities. The period of seven days in both cases is divided up in half—two halves with an important event right in the middle.

Now the important event in the first period of seven days in Joshua is all of the stuff that gets associated with the crossing of the Jordan. So you have the covenant ceremony—the circumcision ceremony—then they wait a few days. And then we've got the crossing of the Jordan—the miraculous crossing there were the waters part, where they take the ark over and they put the stones in the middle of the Jordan all that stuff. Again, that's the Sunday school stuff we are familiar with in the story. But that happens in the middle of the first seven-day period.

30:00

Now in the Keret Epic, this is the way that the authors of the article put it. Whereas in the Book of Joshua, rituals are performed at the crossing of the Jordan on the fourth day (right in the middle), when the priest and the ark have a central role in a memorial of stones being erected afterwards, in the Keret Epic the king makes a vow to Athirat at her temple. Okay, so in both cases you've got the first period of seven days bisected by some event that involves divine activity. In the case of Joshua, it's the covenant renewal. It's the parting of the waters for the Ark of the Covenant and the Ark of course, marks the presence of Yahweh and goes across the Jordan. And in the Keret Epic, it's bumping into the temple of Athirat (of course, Athirat herself the temple), then Keret promises her certain things and he makes a vow to her. He doesn't offer anything to her. He makes a vow about offering something to her later. But there's this divine encounter—divine activity—event right in the middle of the first seven days. So that's a parallel. You might think, “Well, who cares?” You are expecting in these stories, especially in the Bible, that God's gonna be one of the players in the story. And, of course, in other ancient Near Eastern literature, gods pop up all over the place, so big deal. Well, it's just one of several things, and it's the way the story starts—the first seven days.

The number two would be at the crossing of the Jordan on the fourth day. Again, in the Book of Joshua now, there was a covenant renewal. There were certain ritual acts performed creating a binding relationship between the Israelites and God. Now that covenant gets violated very quickly—very quickly—because we know the story of Achan. I mean, sure, they go in. They take Jericho, but it seems like no sooner does that happen... And that's only seven days removed that we've got a problem. We got the Achan problem. So there's something that goes wrong with what was promised the deity. Joshua and the people promised God their loyalty. They promise, you know to enter into this covenant relationship with him. They're going to obey the commands. They're going to go in there and do what they're told. They're not going to touch things that are put under the *kherem*, which, of course, is what Aitken does. They promise to do certain things and not do other things, and they blow it. It only takes another seven days, and they just blow it.

Now in the Keret Epic, the article notes this:

A comparable breaking of the obligation contracted near the middle of the week of the journey is found in the Keret story, in that case not by a minor character but by the protagonist himself.

In other words, the king—sort of the Joshua figure. It's not a minor player like Achan, it's the leader. He's the one that breaks faith. Back to the quote:

Keret neglects to offer to Athirat the offering he had promised on the third day of his campaign and because of that he becomes ill and is at death's door. Only the interference of the god El can rescue him from the punishment for this unfulfilled promise.

That's later on—much later on—but the violation occurs right here, and according to the authors, if we're tracking the relationship between Keret and the Joshua count, the violation occurs at the same place in the story. But the effect of it in the Keret Epic's case is only felt much later. In the biblical story, it's right on the heels of the success of Jericho that we've got the Achan incident. But again, the argument is that the similarity here is that the violation occurs at the same time.

Third: when we begin the second week (the second period of seven days) in both stories, you have some striking similarities. I'm going to read again from the article. This is the way they summarize this:

After these seven days, the second part of the stories starts. In both cases instructions for the action against the city are given by the deity: Joshua is instructed by the Lord himself, at first through a divine messenger (Joshua 5,13-6:5). Keret receives his instructions from El, in a dream (1.14: i 36-iii 49)). Keret receives a complete set of instructions before he leaves for Udum and both periods of seven days occur after his dream. Joshua, by contrast, is provided with his orders in two installments. In Joshua 1,2-9 he receives fairly general instructions, the implications of which only become entirely clear to the readers when Joshua instructs the spies to inspect especially Jericho and when the Israelites set out to cross the Jordan. The meeting in Joshua 5,13-6,5 gives Joshua directions on how to conquer Jericho and what has to be done on which day. This is explicitly indicated by the Lord and carried out to the letter by Joshua.

35:00

So again, the point of the parallel is that when the second period of seven days begins, we've got divine instructions for “when you get to the city, this is how you set up. This is how you lay siege to it.” So we have that happen in both stories.

Number four (and this is where it gets a little more particular): the siege of seven days. There's a seven-day siege in both episodes. To quote another source, this is going to be from Dozeman's commentary. In his *Anchor Yale Commentary* on Joshua 1-12, he writes this:

The seven-day cycle is prominent in ancient Near Eastern literature and in the Hebrew Bible. Fleming (1999: 212–13) identifies the seven-day procession as a motif of war in the Ugaritic story of Keret. He recognizes the same theme in the seven-day procession around Jericho and suggests that the period of seven days

may be the conventional way of describing siege warfare in the ancient Near East (1999: 226).

I'm going to stop there. That's important. In both stories, you have a seven-day procession with respect to the city being the target, so that's a pretty striking parallel as far as doing a certain thing, laying siege of the city, or surrounding it, moving around it, and whatever. A procession for seven days. The quote, though, points out an important thing. The author is quoting Fleming, and the point is that this may be sort of a stock description of how to describe siege warfare in the ancient Near East. So it may not be that the biblical writer or the writer of the Keret Epic... They're not cross-fertilizing each other. Maybe this is just the way that siege warfare is described, because you get this in other places. Back to the quote:

The motif also appears in the war between Ahab and Ben-Hadad, where the Deity again plays a prominent role in the Israelite victory: "They encamped opposite one another seven days. Then on the seventh day the battle began" (1 Kgs 20:29).

Think about that quote. That quote does suggest that this is how you do siege warfare. They camp opposite one another for seven days and on the seventh day the battle began. Maybe just because of the way wars were conducted. It took seven days to be ready. It took seven days to do X,Y, Z, or this was just a thing that they did. I mean it's not really clear, but you have this idea show up. Back to the quote:

This battle, moreover, also results in the collapse of a wall that kills twenty-seven thousand men.

So you actually even have a wall collapse in the First Kings 20 episode that involved, again, this seven-day reference to "you're doing something for seven days before you attack." And so what the writers here are wondering is that, "Well now, you got this in Joshua." Yeah, it's a little odd in Joshua because they're going around the city, but they do that on the seventh day. On the seventh day they do it seven times. That's not in view anywhere else, but you've got this seven-day period, at the end of which the battle is engaged. In Jericho's case, it doesn't last very long because the walls collapse and they just invade, but you have this motif elsewhere. And so the scholars wonder, "Well, we've got this in Keret, we've got this in Ben Haddad and Ahab, and maybe this is just sort of how they did things."

Walton just chimes in here with a sentence in *The Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*. He writes:

...the Legend of Kirta from Ugarit records how King Kirta waits outside the city of Udim for seven days before the king of Udim appeals for peace.

40:00

Now, I threw that in here because, again, it's not that Keret's armies are circling the city seven days like Joshua. The parallel is just seven days. But it's interesting here how the king in the city of Udum... Why doesn't he appeal earlier than the seventh day? Again, maybe this was just what you do: you find out on the seventh day what their intentions are. Honestly, scholars are not sure about this, but there seems to be something to the seventh day pattern that appears in Joshua and Keret and 1 Kings chapter 20. Maybe there's something to this.

So it's definitely a parallel, as far as the number of days before the battle is engaged, but there are obvious differences. Again, the encircling, and then on the seventh day the seven times—that's a clear difference.

Number five: the two authors of the *Scandinavian Journal* article (Braber and Wesselius) write this:

Both Joshua and Keret besiege a city for six days: Joshua and the people of Israel walk around Jericho every day, without making any noise. Keret orders his people to remain around Udum for six days, but does not allow them to undertake any military action.

So they surround the place. They're not circling it, but they surround it, and he says that we're not going to do anything until the seventh day.

In both cases, no real war takes place on these six days.

On the seventh day, there is an enormous noise in both stories, after the period of calm and quietness in the preceding six days. In the Jericho episode horns are blown and the Israelites shout, followed by a collapse of the city wall of Jericho. After that, the city is at the mercy of the Israelites and they can go on to conquer the rest of the Promised Land. King Pabil of Udum in the Keret story is unable to sleep on the seventh day because of the noise which the animals in the besieged city of Udum produce. He decides to negotiate and offers Keret gold and silver. After Keret has refused this and asked for the king's daughter Hurriy instead (as he was told by the god El), the daughter comes out to Keret the same day, ready to become his wife and to bear him children.

So that's the end of number five. What they are suggesting here is that within the seven-day pattern—six days of doing something but not attacking, and then you've got the engagement on the seventh—for the six days leading up, there's quiet. In the Joshua story, they're not allowed to do anything. You just marched around. That's all you do. You don't attack, you don't say anything, you remain silent. In the Keret story, we're not told that the animals inside the city... And this

is what happens when cities are under siege. I mean, you've got to have your animals for food supply and whatnot. So they're in the city there with them. We don't read about any real complaint—any real problem during the six-day period. It's just that on the seventh day, the king just... There's just a loud noise. "All the animals are making noise now, I gotta do something here. We can't live like this." So he tries to negotiate, of course. All that Keret wants is the woman. So scholars are saying, "Well, this is something of a parallel, as well. You've got this period of quiet, which is odd and unusual, before you hit the seventh day when everything gets resolved—when there's an engagement, when something happens."

Those are the five major parallels between the two stories, and what I'm hoping you're thinking at this point is, "I could see why people would talk about this. There are some similarities here." We've got some chronological similarities. We've got sort of a timeline similarity. We've got a seven-day pattern. We've got in between the first week some sort of divine encounter and all that kind of stuff. So yeah, there are some parallels here. But I'm also hoping you're thinking to yourself, "You know what? I expected more than that." Because there are other things that are ancient Near Eastern texts that are parallel to Old Testament passages that quite honestly are a lot more striking than this. So you may have expected more than that, and you're saying that because you know the biblical story well and there are a lot of disconnects between the two—a lot of clear disconnects.

45:00 So what do we do with this? I think it's very evident that you can't argue coherently. Again, this is internet theology, and I don't know... We're doing this topic because I got this email about wanting to do the topic so I put it on my list. So I don't really know what the person who asked it was reading, but chances are you can go out on the internet and find stuff on this and you're bound to run into something like the stuff in Genesis, like other stuff in Exodus. People are essentially just kind of mouthing off and saying, "Well, you know the biblical writer is just stealing this story. He sits down and takes this material and... plagiarism." It's just ridiculous. Okay, that's not... Not only did people in the ancient world have no sense of intellectual property (especially in Old Testament ancient Near Eastern context), but it's just not that tight. It's nowhere near that tight. You're going to have some similarities here. But if the biblical writer sat down with a copy of Keret and said, "I need this to write my story," he did a pretty inept job. I mean, he's got some basics here, but there's so much new material that it makes you wonder. "Well, how can we even view this as any sort of dependence?"

45:00

See, because that's where internet theology wants to take you. They want to talk about *dependence* of one author (the biblical author) on some ancient Near Eastern material as opposed to what the writers of some of these excerpts that I've read are suggesting. We're not suggesting literary dependence. They're suggesting common patterns of the way you write things in the ancient world. That is not dependence; that is being an intelligent writer and knowing, either in

terms of historical convention how a siege warfare runs (you know of some historical connection to the way things were done) or literary conventions and how a scene is set up or written. Okay, one or the other, and probably a little bit of both. That is more viable. That's the kind of thing that scholars talk about: common literary, social, and cultural conventions that wind up being included in stories, or stories are structured according to those things. And since we've got Israel and Ugarit, everybody is sort of in the same region of the world—writers, scribes, the scribal elite—in all these cultures. They're going to be well-read. They're going to visit libraries. They're going to see correspondence. They're going to read literature from other places. They're going to be able to read in more than one language. Okay, El Amarna letters are a good example of this. They're going to know these conventions and they're going to be the people who are actually tasked with writing this stuff. It's not “what do we think is going on” in biblical writing (and I'm speaking again to the internet theology crowd). “How do you think this happens? You know that some guy was a slave and now he's out of work or whatever. He got fired or got kicked out of the gang and you know...” You go out there in the desert dying out and so he goes out and says, “I need to write something down here. I need to produce something in writing now, but I'm gonna go steal something and make up a composition. I hope it sells and I can make my livelihood that way.”

Again, it's absurd. You have a literate class of scribes who are well-read. They understand the craft. They have intellectually been cross-fertilized with the writings of other peoples in other places, and they know how to intelligently produce a piece of writing so that the people within their class (people who are used to reading, and you know literacy is not this widespread phenomenon)... They know how to craft something so that it is viewed as a professional job—as something respectable, something competent. That's what happens. You don't have people running around stealing pieces of writing and then making their own and hoping it sells or hoping it has influence. That is a cartoonish way to look at how, not only the Bible but other ancient Near Eastern documents were composed and why they were composed and why they have similarities related to the scribal culture—the literary conventions that the scribes know from other places. You know, that's why we have these similarities from the same region. This is why we have similarities, and then there's also the element of polemic and things like that, where writers do want to take shots at somebody else's religion or somebody else's battle or somebody else's king. They do want to do that, and they know just how to do it because they've been exposed to the literature of that other place. They know what they're doing and they're good at it. These things aren't impromptu. They're not just wholesale cheating and copying it. That's internet theology. That's internet biblical studies. It's not what we're talking about here. Nobody in the academy is going to view things so cartoonishly and simplistically.

50:00

For the sake of our episode here, let's try to get into a little bit of... not application, like it's sermonic, but how do we *think*? How do we apply this to our

thinking about the Old Testament, about how this particular section of Joshua is put together? You can't really psychologize the writer. I think it's always a mistake to try to pretend that we know what the writer was thinking exactly. Good writers will write their content in such a way that you can make some good guesses at that kind of thing, but we don't want to overly psychologize. Maybe that's the better way to put it here. There's no clear explicit polemic, for instance, between the first six chapters of Joshua and the Keret Epic. We can't point to anything and say, "Oh, he's really shooting at that." That's not really evident here. So we don't have a clear, explicit polemic. We can't really psychologize the writer, therefore, but we can ask questions like, "Well, what impression would the Joshua story (the Joshua narrative) give someone familiar with the Keret Epic?" Let's say you had somebody who knew the Keret story then they read Joshua. What impressions would they take away? Especially if they were a Canaanite; especially if they were someone who worshipped El and Baal and Athirat. We can ask questions like that.

So if you're familiar with the Keret story... If you're a Gentile, you are a Canaanite worshipper of the deities mentioned in the Keret story, or even if you're an Israelite and you know what Canaanites think religiously... How would you have processed the Joshua 1-6 story? If you're familiar with the one and you read Joshua's story, you should be able to see the similarities. What might occur to you as you read them? What thoughts might it challenge you with? I would say especially if you're Canaanite, but even if you're an Israelite, you know those people over there what they're thinking theologically. How might they process this? What impression would it create? Well, let's just make a few observations here. But let's ask to start off here: Who was it that told Joshua and Keret to assemble for the siege? Who was it that gave the instructions? Now, the Canaanites (or a Canaanite) would know that Israelites referred to their God, Yahweh, as El. If they've read any kind of biblical material or they've had a conversation with a theologically serious Israelite, they know that theologically an Israelite is going to say Yahweh is El. He is El or Ha-el. He is *the* God. And they're going to identify with El, if you're an orthodox (we'll call them an orthodox) Israelite. That doesn't mean that you think Yahweh does all the stuff that El does because El does pretty crazy stuff—pretty nasty stuff, pretty immoral stuff. What I mean by that is they're going to view Yahweh as the highest of all gods. He is Lord of the pantheon. He's Lord of the spiritual world. There's no higher God.

A Canaanite is going to view El in that position. Now, it's true that Baal is the one who gets called "most high," but Baal has to ask permission of El to do certain things. So El is the real authority. Baal is referred to as "most high" because he basically acts as El's proxy or vice-regent. He runs everything, and El is sort of in the background. But El is the highest authority at Ugarit because Baal has to ask his permission to do things. That's just the way it is. As an Israelite, you think there is no higher authority than Yahweh. He doesn't have to ask permission to

do anything. So in the Joshua story, you have the highest deity—the highest God—give Joshua instructions. In the Keret story, that deity is El.

Now you say, “Well, what's the big deal?” Well, you could read (and again, this is just a thought experiment here) thinking, “How would this have been received?” If you were familiar with the Keret story, you could read Joshua and his commissioning as evidence of the favor of El on an Israelite. In other words, “El is blessing the Israelites, because isn't Joshua trying to get rid of the Canaanites and the land? Isn't this like our history, where we used to be living in this land and then we were driven out by Joshua and the Israelites? How'd that happen?” Well, it was because the guy you thought was on your side was really on their side. I mean you could see how a Canaanite could process the story like that. It would be ironic, and probably irritating. “Well, what did we do wrong that El is over there blessing them? Maybe the Israelites are right. Maybe Yahweh is the highest authority. After all, we were the losers here.” You could see how a Canaanite would process the story because of where the plans and where the success of the military campaigns go in the Joshua story. They might be thinking thoughts like that. Again, we don't know, but they might be. Like I said, this is a thought experiment.

55:00

What about the midweek ritual—the midweek cultic events, the supernatural encounter stuff? Again, you have the Joshua story of sacrifices to reenact the covenant, and God acts on behalf of Israel by parting the waters for the ark. Parting of the waters, of course, hearkens back to the parting of the Red Sea event. I think that's intentional. In the Keret Epic, Keret is the king and he makes a vow to Athirat at her temple at the midway point. So you have something going on the midway point of both stories. If you are familiar with the Keret story and then you read Joshua, you could ask yourself, “Well, wait a minute. How come in the middle of this seven-day thing with Joshua they didn't include Athirat? What happened to her? Is that a diss against our goddess? Is that a diss against Athirat? Frankly, when I think of it (because I'm a literate Canaanite here), in all this Israelite stuff that I've ever read there are no goddesses, at least, that are positive. It's really the priestly class.” They wouldn't use this term, but the biblical class—the biblical writers—don't endorse the idea of a goddess anywhere. “My neighbor the Israelite over here, he kind of sneaks goddess-worship in during the week or whatever because you've got that going on outside the scope of the biblical writers, but the stuff I read in their religious leaders... They just don't have any room for Athirat except as a villain. I mean, this feels disrespectful to me as a loyal Canaanite. What happened to Athirat? She just gets pushed out of the picture.” And then you might recall, “Wait a minute that parting of the Jordan stuff that goes back to the Red Sea... It's like well Athirat didn't do any parting of the waters, so maybe I shouldn't complain too much. Maybe the Israelites have a good reason to lower Athirat or entirely eliminate her from consideration of the pattern. Maybe it is a theological statement to eliminate her and replace her with the God who parted the Red Sea.” Again, this is just a

thought experiment. But if you were a Canaanite familiar with both pieces of literature, you could read it and wonder, "Hey, what happened to Athirat?"

Third, at the beginning of the second week in both cases, we have instructions for action against the city, given by the deity. Joshua's instructed by Yahweh at first through the captain of the Lord's host. Keret gets his instructions from El. What's the big difference? Those are similarities, but what's the big difference? Well, on the biblical side, the Divine Warrior imagery gives the reader the distinct impression that Yahweh himself fights for Israel. In other words, Yahweh takes a personal interest in his people. El didn't fight for Keret. El gives him the instructions, but he doesn't show up as a man of war like the captain of the Lord's host. He's not boots on the ground, whereas Yahweh is. Is El weaker? Is he afraid? Is he less interested? Again, you can see how someone could either (and maybe the writer does) mean to telegraph some of these things. I don't know, but you could see how a reader might ask him or herself those questions. "Why is it that Israel's God is boots on the ground and ours is not?"

1:00:00

Fourth, the seventh day siege. Fleming (back to that quote from the *Anchor Yale Commentary* when Fleming is quoted) argues that on the basis of the Keret text from Ugarit, the seven-day period represents this sort of pattern. Not only the pattern that you get with siege warfare, but he also kind of zeroes in on... We didn't go back and quote that article, but in that article Fleming zeros in on the number seven and he argues in a number of cases that seven is often associated with the work of God—the work of a deity—and that the siege involves God because of the Ark of the Covenant there. So some scholars wonder, "Well that kind of transforms the story a bit," where it indicates God's personal involvement. I would also say (Fleming doesn't mention this specifically) that it's transformed by the divine warrior of Joshua 5. Again, Yahweh is boots on the ground. Yahweh is boots on the ground and El is not. Butler, in his commentary, adds these thoughts to the seven thing. This is Butler in the *Word Biblical Commentary*:

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It's interesting to note that, in the flow of the biblical story, a seven day period is frequently associated with being made fit for sacred space or entering sacred space.

And that's really my words summarizing some of the things that... You can see it in his commentary, but it is interesting. If you actually do a search for seven-day periods, they're not always having to do with Divine activity. They're not always fixated on being prepared to occupy sacred space, or if you have some kind of blemish, or you've been ritually impure you wait seven days, then you're okay. But there are a lot of them. There are a lot of these seven-day periods that have something to do with divine activity or being fit to occupy sacred space, and if the issue is sacred space, then God is there again. God is boots on the ground in the Joshua story.

Now Keret of course gets an heir. Well, good for him. He got an heir—he got a wife, so now he can have kids. But Israel gets more than that. Israel is being prepared at the ceremony there in between the first week. They are fit to occupy sacred space through the covenant renewal—through the parting of the waters. They go into Canaan; they go into Yahweh's land. Remember Deuteronomy 32:89: "Israel is the Yahweh's portion, Jacob is his allotted inheritance." And in these were the parameters of the land that God chose, that Yahweh took for himself, and so on and so forth. Israel as a people is now going into that space and their task is to eliminate that which God doesn't want there so that he will occupy that sacred space.

So while Keret gets an heir (again, good for him—he gets a wife so now he can have kids and he'll have an heir to the throne), Israel is claiming the land for Yahweh. Israel is transforming it into sacred space for their entire posterity—not just one kid who's gonna occupy the throne. I mean it magnifies the whole story if you associate the elements of the story (in this case the number seven element) with what happens in the story and how the number seven is used elsewhere, especially in the Torah—especially in connection with how we keep the land pure, the laws that are there about not only ritual impurity but also just moral purity. That was all connected to the land.

I am thinking back... A lot of you probably haven't seen this or heard it, but I did a series at church on this and one of them was about this. You could watch the YouTube videos on my YouTube channel. But if the moral impurity got to such an extent, the Israelites were promised that you will be expelled. You'll be expelled, and God even said, "I'll leave. I don't want to be in this place." They kick you out. I'm going to leave. So there's the sense again that the land itself is sacred space. And again, ritually the number seven occurs in lots of these sacred space kind of contacts. And you have the seven that goes back the siege warfare—the siege of Jericho. On the seventh day, they go around seven times, and scholars just wonder about the what the number seven really conveys here. And in our thought experiment, if you are the Canaanite, you're looking at this, and you're noting the comparisons of the story. The number seven is one of these comparisons. You look at the way your story winds up and you think, "Well, good, you got a wife and King Keret had an heir and his heir turned out to be kind of a jerk anyway. He has to curse him at the end, but he still got what El promised." And then you looked on the Israelite's side and the promise is so much bigger. It's not only to one guy and one kid. It's to the whole nation. Again, Yahweh is boots on the ground acting on behalf of an entire people—the entire nation itself.

1:05:00 Yahweh's earthly family (getting into a little Divine Council theology here)... Yahweh's earthly family is the focus, the inheritor of the story—the story of the conquest of the land. It's not just for one guy. It's not just for Joshua. It's for everybody. And in Keret, it's only the king and his one son. Yahweh fights for his people and his children collectively. If you're a Canaanite, only the king gets any

favor. Would a Canaanite have actually had that thought? I don't know, but I think it's possible that they could have. "Why is Yahweh... Why is their God so interested in everybody—the whole people? Whereas over here El is acting on behalf of one guy and El even calls that one king as his favorite. What about the rest of us?" If you do think thoughts like that as a Canaanite—as an outsider—this is part of the rationale for Israel to be a peculiar people to be a kingdom of priests. You know, you might think thoughts like, "Good grief, I wish our God thought about us the same way, but he doesn't. He doesn't."

So to wrap up here, we don't really know why these elements are there. There's not a clear polemic in this case. Again, I think it's fair to do our little thought experiment about how a literate person familiar with both religions (Israelite theology and Ugaritic religion)... They're familiar with both texts and are reading through them both, noting the similarities, but also noting some of the important differences—the things that could have popped into their head and made them wonder about, "Why is it that Israel just seems to have this special relationship with her/their God and we're just kind of over here?"

Now if this was written centuries later, you're not going to have the native Ugaritian thinking these thoughts, but you are going to have outsiders— people from Canaan who you know should be there, shouldn't be there, whatever... They're going to know the biblical story. They're going to know the traditions of El and Baal and they're still gonna be worshiping those other gods. We know that from the biblical story on into the monarchy and the divided monarchy and whatnot. The worship of El, and particularly Baal, is a big deal. They're the chief competitors to Yahweh of Israel. We know that from the books of Samuel and Kings—that's sort of like Old Testament 101 stuff. We know that. So even if it's farther removed, this is the way that the story is cast. This is their history. And if you are an outsider, you may have been looking at all this wanting to be an insider. That's the point. I can't prove that (there's no specific polemic), but it's just kind of interesting.

So for the purpose of this episode, when we do encounter similarities, I think the takeaway here is as you do your Bible studying and you're using sources, you're reading commentaries, you're reading articles, study Bibles, whatever it is, you're going to run into some of this stuff. And I think it's a good exercise to ask yourself how an Israelite reader or a Canaanite reader would have seen it when you have you know instances of parallelism—how they would process the story, how each person would have processed story. You put them in the same room... how would they talk about it? What questions would the similarities and the differences raise for the Israelite and the Canaanite? Because we need to ask those same questions ourselves as we try to interpret the text—as we try to think about the text well. What kinds of questions do the similarities and the differences raise, because you know what? The bottom line is that they are going to be theological questions. At the end of the day, there are going to be theological questions about our God or gods and us and our destiny and why

we're here and does he love us or not? These are theological questions. Just because somebody lived a long time ago doesn't mean that they're not wondering about their destiny, about what their God thinks of them. They are. They are people. They are like us in that respect. They're going to have the same set of questions. So I think it's a useful thing to keep in mind when we come across things like this and to tear yourself away from the cartoonish internet theology—this chicken or egg theology—like people are passing documents around like cheat sheets. It's just ridiculous. It's just more complicated than that. And frankly, it's just deeper than that. It's more meaningful than that. So again, hopefully this just gives us a little indication on when we run into this stuff, how might we think about how might we approach it.

1:10:00

Trey: Very interesting, Mike. Insightful. In fact, we've got several of these topics coming up that I think are going to be interesting. So, that's why I love this podcast, Mike. It's good stuff. You're not gonna learn this stuff anywhere else. If you're me, you know, I'm not going to go out and pick up the Keret Epic or text. You know, I'm not gonna...

Mike: It's not on your Amazon wish list.

Trey: No, it's not. It's not. It probably needs to be, but there's just not enough hours in the day to get everything done that I want to. That's why I (and I know everybody else) relies on you to do that stuff for us, Mike, so you can digest it and give it back to us in 60 minutes or less. So we appreciate that.

Mike: Good.

Trey: All right, Mike. Well, with that, I just want to remind everybody that we probably will vote on the next book that we're going to cover coming up, probably in June. So we're still a couple of months out. So I just wanted to throw that out there to be looking forward to the voting on the next book of the Bible that we will cover on the podcast.

Mike: Yeah, go to my website to www.drms.com on the right hand side and subscribe to the newsletter.

Trey: There you go. All right, Mike. Well just like that. I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible podcast! God bless.