

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 241

Psalms 24 and 29 in Their Ancient Context

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Episode Summary

The psalms are often thought of as purely devotional. They of course have that value, but they also contain significant theological statements, especially to ancient Israelites whose ears were tuned to specific points of their content. We often miss such things since we are not part of the ancient Israelite world, particularly in terms of the religious struggle with Canaanite religion and Baalism. In this episode we look at Psalms 24 and 29 for how religious texts from Ugarit help inform our reading. These two psalms contain several specific polemical points directed against Baal that modern readers would miss.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, episode 241: Psalms 24 and 29 in Their Ancient Context. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you doing this week?

MH: Well, it's been a difficult week. Some listeners may know, my dad is not in good health. I mention that in the newsletter from time to time. So he's had a rough week. So pray for him and my mom, especially. If this is my dad's time to go (and it *is* serious), then I'm more concerned for her. He's a believer and he's ready, but it would be rough for her, obviously. They've been married 50-some years. So it's been a rough week. We'll see. All you can do is wait.

TS: Absolutely. Well, you all are in our prayers. And also, for those that are in Denver, we may or may not be able to have that on Friday night, so stay tuned.

MH: Yeah. If I end up having to bail and go home, that'll be the reason.

TS: So be on the lookout for that. Keep Mike's family in your prayers. Mike, we have a topic this week I'm pretty excited about. I'm sure you are—getting back to the Old Testament. You mentioned that you wanted to do something for yourself, so I assume this subject is close to something that you're interested in.

MH: Yeah, it is. I get questions about the value of interpreting things in their ancient context. I got one this week... Actually, it was on an interview where one of the questioners sort of criticized me for inserting ancient stuff *into* the Bible, like Ugaritic stuff, and of course they didn't understand that the point was, no, I can't really talk about parallels between the Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern material unless there's actually stuff in the Bible already that is analogous. So I don't think they quite got the point. And that set my wheels turning—that maybe it would be nice to go back to have another one of these topical-specific episodes where I can at least illustrate why this is legit and the value of it. So here we are with Psalm 24 and Psalm 29.

TS: Alright. Looking forward to it!

MH: Alright. Well, let's just jump in here. We've got a good bit of ground to cover. I'm going to read Psalm 24. We'll just take them in numerical order. I'm going to read the psalm, and then we'll just drill down on a few particulars. So Psalm 24 begins (and this is ESV):

A Psalm of David.

24 The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof,
the world and those who dwell therein,

2 for he has founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the rivers.

3 Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?
And who shall stand in his holy place?

4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to what is false
and does not swear deceitfully.

5 He will receive blessing from the Lord
and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

6 Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Selah

7 Lift up your heads, O gates!
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

8 Who is this King of glory?
The Lord, strong and mighty,
the Lord, mighty in battle!

9 Lift up your heads, O gates!
And lift them up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

**10 Who is this King of glory?
The Lord of hosts,
he is the King of glory! Selah**

Now just to drill down into a few things. There are a lot of things that we could talk about, but I want to pinpoint a few of the details that get us into ancient cognate material. And we'll take a few rabbit trails along the way and a few sidebars. But Psalm 24, as number of commentators have pointed out over the years in their work on the Psalms... I'm going to be referencing a serious commentary (*Word Biblical Commentary*). I'm going to quote a few things from that particular volume.

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But scholars have pointed out that there are basically three types of psalter material in this psalm that often characterize entire psalms elsewhere. For instance, verses 1 and 2 is a hymn. It praises Yahweh for his establishment of the world and his dominion over it. Verses 3-6 is an ascent psalm, or at least that portion of it. Verse 3 says, "Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?" This is a subset of Psalms: *ascent psalms*. Many scholars look for this kind of language as indicating the ascent of a pilgrim up to the temple ("up" Mount Zion) or a psalm after the exile describing a *return* to Zion. It's a geographical reference that, "We're either in the land, and we go up to the temple," or, "We're outside of the land, and our journey to the land... when we hit Jerusalem, we ascend up to Zion."

The language here might sound anachronistic, but it may not be. What I'm getting at there is that if you're looking at it as a return to Zion psalm, then it doesn't make sense to have it a psalm of David because this is well after David. And even the whole idea of ascending up to the temple (verse 3: "Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? Who shall stand in his holy place?"), it feels like a clear reference to the temple. And when you get to verses 7-10, the doors and the gates (the temple idea)... There was no temple in David's time. This is a psalm of David, ostensibly. And after the exile, there was no temple either. So we have to deal with that. So the language appears anachronistic.

The psalm itself could be an editorial composite—a later editor wanting to associate the kingship language in the psalm with the house of David. And that's legit, because the English translation, "A psalm of David," is *l'David mizmor*. That could just as well mean "a psalm (or song) *for* David" (on behalf of David, with respect to David). It doesn't have to mean "of David." There are other ways to take that phrase. If the right context in view is worship, it may be a reference to ascending to wherever God's house was. In David's day, that would have been the tabernacle. The tabernacle is referred to as the LORD's house in Joshua 6:24, for instance. I'll just read that:

²⁴ And they burned the city with fire, and everything in it. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD.

Now that's a reference to something happening in the conquest. There is no temple. There's no temple complex. They're not even in the land. So the only reference to the house of the Lord there has to be the tabernacle complex. In 1 Samuel 1:9, you get the same kind of thing:

⁹ After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD.

Well, there *is* no temple. This is Samuel's day. So the reference has to be to the tabernacle. And if we look at it that way, then all of that would align with Davidic authorship (a psalm that David actually composed). For other reasons (namely, stuff we're going to talk about a little bit later), the context of tabernacle prior to the exile is probably preferable anyway.

Verses 7-10... The first part was a hymn, the second part is one of these ascent kind of situations, and the third part is a subset of Psalms and other poetic portions of the Hebrew Bible—and that is the procession of the ark. It's some kind of liturgy—a ceremonial or liturgical sort of situation. Craigie, for instance, in his commentary in the *Word Biblical Commentary* series, Volume 1 (there are three volumes of the Psalms)... Craigie was one of the writers. He might have been the only writer of Volume 1. The second edition is what I'm going to be quoting from. He writes this:

These verses are “associated with a procession of the Ark; again, it is liturgical in form, having a question-response format. (1) The Ark bearers’ declaration [MH: comes in verse 7]. (2) The question posed by the gatekeepers of the temple (v 8a).

**⁷Lift up your heads, O gates!
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
⁸Who is this King of glory? [the gatekeepers would ask]**

(3) The response of the bearers of the Ark (vv 8b–9) [MH: “It’s the LORD of hosts. He’s the king of glory.”]). (4) The further question of the gatekeepers (v 10 a–b).

It continues. They ask a series of questions and you get this question/answer, back and forth response kind of thing. It's common in liturgical texts, is the point.

(5) The response of the ark bearers (v 10 c–d). The original kind of setting presupposed by such a procession is provided in 2 Sam 6:12–19...

I'll just read a little bit of that:

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¹² And it was told King David, "The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God." So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing.

And it just goes and describes a little bit of that procession. So you have a couple of these scenes in the Hebrew Bible about transporting the ark, moving the ark around. So in this psalm, you get all of that packed in to 10 verses—some of these Psalm subsets and these specific themes that can really be evident (or frame) entire psalms elsewhere in the psalter.

Now, a little sidebar here on the psalm titles and superscriptions. I think it's probably worth mentioning something here. I'm going to reference here the *Dictionary of the Old Testament Wisdom and Poetic Books* (that particular volume in the IVP series). The material on the superscriptions (the Psalm titles) was written by D. A. Brueggeman. And he notes this:

Evangelical scholarship generally attributes significant authority to the titles. Derek Kidner [MH: He wrote a few commentaries in the Tyndale series.] (1973, 33) even appears to treat them as inspired, canonical Scripture, noting that the NT even builds arguments on authorship notes (e.g., Mk 12:35–37; Acts 2:29–36 [using Ps 110:1]; Acts 13:35–37 [using Ps 16:10]).

Well, these references are a bit problematic, despite the positive orientation in general of evangelical scholarship, because of some of the things we've already hinted at. Let me just draw from some of what Brueggeman says in this dictionary entry about the problems.

Some doubt that composing psalms is what one might expect of David when he was hiding in caves and fighting Philistines.

So you have a reference in Psalm 57:1, which is supposed to be a psalm of David and at that time in David's life, he's in battle. He's doing military stuff. There are other psalms like that. So some people say, "Would he really have time to do this?" The answer is, "Well, sure, he could have." Because you have lots of examples from World War I, World War II, where people write poems (they write even portions of books) while they're in prison or while they're in trenches. This happens. So the circumstances don't specifically rule out David being able to do this.

Some see historical tension with OT and broader ancient Near Eastern history [MH: with respect to the titles]. Psalm 56 says that David composed it “when the Philistines seized him in Gath”; however, the historical record [MH: of the Bible itself] says that David took himself to the king of Gath to escape Saul [MH: In other words, he went there. So nobody brought him; he brought himself.] (1 Sam 21:10; 27:1–3). But note that David began to fear the king of Gath, feigned insanity, and “escaped to the cave of Adullam” (1 Sam 21:12–23:1).

So what he means by mentioning that is that maybe he was held there against his will when he was at Gath. Sure, he went there by himself, but maybe there was some problem there that we aren’t specifically told about, because David very obviously came up with a ruse to “get out of Dodge.” So maybe it does fit.

Several Davidic psalms mention the temple [MH: Psalm 24 is one of them.], before his son Solomon built it; however, the tabernacle could be called “the LORD’s house” (Josh 6:24) or “the LORD’s temple” (1 Sam 1:9). [MH: So that’s not an insurmountable problem.]

Some say that the third-person reference in the psalm titles [MH: “A psalm of David.” It’s like somebody’s talking *about* David.] seems incongruent with the first-person reference in the psalm itself.

So if David was writing it, would he really include the line, “A psalm of David?” Well, maybe, maybe not. It just seems like somebody else is writing it *to* David or *for* David. (*I’David mizmor* could be translated that way.) So how much should we read into these titles? And Brueggeman notes that, for that reason (and others), this doesn’t necessarily even undermine Davidic authorship of these titles, since we could take it in other ways, and sometimes writers do refer to themselves in the third person on occasion.

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So what do we make of that? If you want to assign a lot of importance to the Psalm titles, there’s probably a way to get there and have them make sense. But on the other hand, there are indications that they might be secondary. They might have been added by somebody else at a different time period or something. So this is why this is a tug of war. It’s a minor discussion. It’s not really a big deal in Old Testament study, but just so that you know why there are two sides to the titles (to the superscriptions)...

So let’s get back to Psalm 24. It begins with this declaration of Yahweh’s creation and supremacy. And then it goes into this ascent language. Now, essentially, the psalm is about an ascent to worship Yahweh, the creator and Lord of all creation in his house (whether that’s the tabernacle or temple) wherein is the Ark (that’s the place or the symbol of Yahweh’s presence). The psalm presents Yahweh as

king. The basis for his kingship is his creative power and subjugation of the chaos waters. We see the conditions necessary for worshipping the king. And what follows (clean hands, pure heart), which refer to disposition—not perfect behavior, which of course is impossible. Someone whose heart inclines *away* from evil and toward Yahweh, not toward some other god. Clean hands, pure heart. If you hear a preacher basically preaching that this means that God requires sinless perfection in your behavior, feel free to ignore that person, because God's not going to require an impossibility. What he's talking about is disposition.

The Ark procession that follows reminds us of the divine warrior who led Israel into the land by conquest. When you go back to the tabernacle (the conquest settings), they're traveling with the ark. And of course, with the Angel and whatnot. So that's what it reminds us of—this divine warrior thing, leading Israel into the land. And therefore, it speaks of Israel as Yahweh's portion (and the Deuteronomy 32 worldview) among all humanity. Israel was created by Yahweh himself after Babel. And he has chosen a land, and that's where they're going. This act (this procession) would further remind Israelites that Yahweh is Lord of all nations. He's traveling through these spaces. He's defeating their enemies. Why? Because he actually owns all the nations anyway. He disinherited them and he created and chose Israel for his own. So these sorts of things (this language in the psalm) would have been reminders to the people listening to it.

Now, it's fairly easy to see all that in a more than surface reading, but there are other nuggets that can only be discerned if we were literate Israelites familiar with Canaanite literature, or even non- or semi-literate Israelites nevertheless familiar with the stories of Baal and El's council from wider Canaanite religion. That's where we want to drill down here. So let's go back to Psalm 24, verses 1 and 2. Some of you out there in the audience, because of your familiarity with *Unseen Realm* (my book) and other episodes we've done, probably have already picked these things out—at least these two. Listen to the verses:

**The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof,
the world and those who dwell therein,
²for he has founded it upon the seas...**

The Hebrew term there is *yammim*; the lemma is *yam*. Store that away. *Yam* means “sea” in Hebrew. The plural is *yammim*.

...and established it upon the rivers...

The word is *neharot*; the lemma is *nahar*. So remember *yam* and *nahar*.

**The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof,
the world and those who dwell therein...**

Why? Because he has founded that world (he created it) upon *yam* and upon *nahar*. So he has mastered (he has brought order) by creating an inhabitable world, and he has put it on the back (so to speak)... He has nestled it on top of (put it on the back) of *yam* and *nahar*. I'm going to read you a little section from Craigie's commentary here, just so that you know that what I'm going to say and what follows isn't just Mike making stuff up. This is scholarship 101 for people who do Old Testament and Semitics. So Craigie, from his commentary (second edition, first Psalms volume in *Word Biblical Commentary* series) writes:

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The hymn begins with an affirmation of the Lord's dominion over the created world and its inhabitants; that dominion is based upon the fact that God himself "fixed" and "established" the world. At first sight, it appears as if the language of v 2 reflects primitive cosmology: the world, like a floating saucer, is anchored "upon the seas." Yet the language is more profound and contains within it a transformation of Canaanite (Ugaritic) cosmogony. *Yam* (literally, "Sea"), who is also called *Nahar* (literally, "River"), represented a threat to order in Canaanite mythology; the conquest of Yam by Baal represented the subjugation of chaotic forces and the establishment of Baal's kingship. The Hebrew poet, using the terms *yam* and *nahar* in a demythologized and depersonified sense (יָמִים, נְהַרֹת, v 2), depicts forcefully the Lord's creation of an ordered world, "upon" seas and rivers, symbolizing the subdued forces of chaos... The symbolism of the language is significant: just as in the underlying Ugaritic myth, the conquest of *Yam* culminated in kingship, so too the Lord's creative work, as described here, is linked with kingship in vv 7–10. [MH: 'Who is this king of glory?']

Now, this is a good example of a polemic response to Baal theology. Now, this is a good example of the kind of thing we talk about on the podcast a lot—the ancient Near Eastern polemic (in this case, of Baal theology). It's not Baal who brought order out of chaos. It isn't Baal who keeps the waters of chaos at bay. Baal is not Lord, Yahweh is. Baal was called king of the gods at Ugarit. (He's the co-ruler with El.) But Yahweh is king, not Baal.

Now, a little sidebar here. There is a propensity, even among evangelical Old Testament scholars, to think only in terms of Mesopotamian (and not Canaanite) literature when it comes to creation language in these sorts of psalms—these sorts of instances. Now, I'm bringing this up because occasionally I'll get a note about maybe something John Walton says, or somebody else, that sounds a little different than what I'm saying. And one of the reasons is that Walton, for some reason, is sort of fixed on Mesopotamian material. That's his default—what he looks for. I'm not sure why, but maybe he just likes that more. But I'm going to read you something from Tremper Longman in his book, *Psalms: An Introduction*

and Commentary, InterVarsity Press. He's referring to Walton here in this psalm (Psalm 24). This is just to illustrate:

Contrary to ancient Mesopotamian creation accounts (Walton 2009 and 2011), though, there is not a hint of conflict between the Lord and the sea in the description of creation (but see Ps. 74:13–17).

So good for Tremper there. So what? We don't need to have Mesopotamian material, like the Tiamat battle from *Enuma Elish*. Whether that is the point of Genesis 1:1-3 or not, we don't really need it. That could actually be Ugaritic, as well, because of *tehom* and the etymology of that. It doesn't matter. We do indeed have conflict in these passages, but it doesn't come from Mesopotamia. It comes from Canaanite literature. It comes from Ugaritic literature. And in this commentary, there's no word about Canaanite material.

Now, I point this out because sometimes evangelicals don't see ancient Near Eastern connections clearly or they don't draw attention to them because they're fixated on Mesopotamia. Well, our eyes sometimes need to move away from Mesopotamia. This is the kind of thing that creates a bit of a disconnect between the way Walton talks about the Divine Council and divine beings and the way I do. He's always looking for parallels in Mesopotamia, and if he doesn't find them, he says, "Oh, we can't say this or that about the Divine Council." And my objection is, why should we care if we have Mesopotamian parallels? The better parallels are Ugaritic, and they're clear, and there's a bunch of them. So I just want to point this out, because it's not... I don't really know why. John is certainly aware of this material. But he has this propensity to filter the Old Testament material through Mesopotamia, and I think in some cases that makes a lot of sense to do. In other cases it really doesn't make any sense to do, and you're going to miss some things and your attention is going to be deflected away from certain things that are important. So I just thought I'd point that out because I do get some questions on that. So back to the psalm.

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Let's go to verses 7 through 10. We talked in verses 1 and 2 about how you have two clear references to Baal's conflict with Yam and Nahar. In the Ugaritic Canaanite religion, Baal has this battle with Yam, who is also called Nahar (sea and rivers). He has this battle and he defeats Yam, and the result of that is that Baal becomes king in the Canaanite Ugaritic story. The first two verses are a clear allusion to this. Baal isn't the king. Baal isn't the one who subdues chaos. Baal doesn't do any of this stuff. It's Yahweh. And it sets up what follows.

So you have this king-deity. You've got this creator-deity. How should we approach him? Well, verses 3-6: "with clean hands and a pure heart." That's what he wants. He's not talking about perfected performance. He wants a disposition that seeks him as God and seeks righteousness, even though we're humans and we're going to fail. This is the orientation—the disposition—of our

hearts. Our heart wants his blessing—wants that relationship—and does not follow some other god. And then you hit verses 7-10. Another little note from Craigie’s work:

...Kingship of God is the central theme in the last section of the psalm. The basic concept involved was in no sense unique to Hebrew theology, for many ancient Near Eastern nations attributed the role of kingship to their deities. The kingship of Baal, following his conquest of Yam, was central to Ugaritic mythology...

We see how the Hebrew writer—the Israelite writer, the biblical writer—is shooting at Baal in the first two verses. Well, he’s going to shoot at Baal again in verses 7-10. Because he’s already answered his own questions here in 7-10: “Who’s the king of glory?” He’s already answered that in verses 1 and 2. So Baal is going to get his nose rubbed in it again in verses 7-10. Now, the key phrases here that would have made literate Israelites or someone really familiar with Ugaritic religion... They’re key phrases that would have made their ears perk up. And they are: “Lift up your heads, O gates! Be lifted up, O ancient doors!” You say, “What in the world is that?” Well, just hang on.

Baal’s victory over Yam and Nahar has a context of its own – his victories ensure his status as king of the gods. That’s what he wins when he defeats Yam/Nahar. So that section of the Baal Cycle...

(In which that battle occurs)... And it’s set up by a particular scene in El’s council. That section of the Baal Cycle is about kingship. That section of the Baal Cycle there is about establishing Baal as king of the gods. So let’s read some of that—some of the Baal Cycle—and see if it sounds a little familiar.

I’m going to read from Nicolas Wyatt’s translation from his book *Religious Texts from Ugarit*. This is the 2nd edition. And as far as the Baal Cycle reference, this is going to be KTU 2.1, line 17-28, also known as CTA 2-1, line 17-28. So let’s just read through this section of the Baal Cycle:

Message of Yam, your master...

So let me just stop there after the first line. The scene is, Yam has sent messengers (*malakim*) to El’s council. And specifically, these messengers are going to be obliquely talking to Baal, because Baal has emerged as a rival. So when he says, “Message of Yam” (actually, it’s more than one messenger, but they say, “Message of Yam”), “your master...” Yam is king of the gods now. Baal has emerged as a competitor. So it just sets the tone right off the bat.

Message of Yam, your master,
of your lord, R[uler Nahar]:
Give up the god whom you obey,

the one whom you obey, Tempest!

So he's speaking to the Divine Council and Baal is among the group. So he's really talking to Baal, but he's speaking to the whole group, so he says to... The gods are going to be in the scene in a little bit in a few lines. He's speaking to the group, and says, "Give up the god whom you obey." Now, Wyatt has a footnote here:

As king among the gods, Yam's legal right to their obedience is beyond question. It is not clear why Baal is the god whom the others obey, unless they are plotting rebellion, perpetuating an older loyalty (see n. 56 to KTU 1.1 iv 24) or already anticipating future developments.

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It suggests that there's some sort of coup being planned. And Yam is aware of it, so he sends his messengers and says, "Hey, surrender to me the god that you guys are obeying." It's a challenge. And he adds, "Surrender the one whom you obey," and then the word, "tempest." It's interesting, Wyatt at this point points out what the Ugaritic word is. It's *hmlt*. And the Hebrew parallel is *hamulla* (storm) or you could understand this word as referring to multitudes. Wyatt writes:

The form *hmlt* appearing in KTU 1.1 iii and parallels is still appropriately translated 'multitudes', though the etymology may still be the same, alluding to the noise of a vast crowd of people.

So that's probably the better way to take this. "Surrender to me the god whom you obey, the one whom you obey, you multitude." In other words, you council—you multitude of supernatural beings. "Cough him up, surrender him to me." This is a big confrontation. And then the Baal Cycle keeps going:

Give up Baal [and his retinue],
the Son of Dagan, whose gold I shall seize!"'
The divine assistants depart;
they do not delay.
T[hen] they set their [faces] towards the divine mountain,
towards the convocation of the Council.

So this is a flashback. And then the scene transitions again to where this challenge is going to be (or is) issued.

Now the gods were sitting to ea[t],
the sons of the Holy One to dine.
Baal stood by El.
Lo, the gods saw them,
they saw the messengers of Yam,

the embassy of Ruler [Nahar].
 The gods lowered their heads onto their knees,
 and onto the thrones of their princeships.
 Baal rebuked them:
 ‘Why, O gods, have you lowered your heads onto your knees,
 and onto the thrones of your princeships?
 I see, gods,
 that the tablets of Yam’s messengers, [MH: They came with an official message.]
 of the embassy of Ruler Naha<r>, are humiliating (you).
 Lift up, O gods, your heads from on your knees,
 from the thrones of your princeships,
 and I shall answer the messengers of Yam,
 the embassy of Ruler Nahar.’

So Baal accepts the challenge. And he tells the gods of the council who are cowering (“we’re in trouble now, because Yam knows what’s going on”), “Lift up your heads from your knees. As the Cycle (this section) continues, Yam’s messengers demand Baal be turned over to him. El says “okay,” which really ticks Baal off. He responds by attacking Yam’s messengers. And then you have a section that’s missing about 120 lines, and when the text returns to what we actually have, Baal is actually fighting Yam himself. And he kills him. And he becomes king of the gods. So when you think about it, when Baal shows up, the gods lower their heads onto their knees. They cringe at Baal’s rebuke. They’re afraid. They basically put their heads between their knees. (They put their heads “onto the thrones of your princeships.”) They’re putting their heads between their knees. They’re getting as tight and low as they possibly can. They’re apparently afraid that they are undone. Yam is angry, and they have been under Baal’s lordship, not Yam’s, and now they’re in trouble.

Now all of that assumes Yam is the greater deity. They think Baal is going to get his clock cleaned, and they’re going to be in trouble. Baal tells them to knock it off or buck up. He commands they lift up their heads and stop being fearful. He’s large and in charge, as some would say. So what’s the point? The language of the Baal Cycle where Baal becomes king of the gods is re-purposed by the psalmist in Psalm 24:7-10 to declare the kingship of Yahweh. It has some subtle changes and applications. So let’s read verses 7-10 again, and be thinking about that scene in the Baal Cycle:

**⁷Lift up your heads, O gates!
 And be lifted up, O ancient doors,
 that the King of glory may come in.**
**⁸Who is this King of glory?
 The LORD, strong and mighty,
 the LORD, mighty in battle!**

⁹ **Lift up your heads, O gates!**

**And lift them up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.**

¹⁰ **Who is this King of glory?**

**The LORD of hosts,
he is the King of glory!**

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Now, a couple items of interest. Rhetorically, who is the king of glory? Well, it ain't Baal. [laughs] It's not Baal. It's Yahweh. If you know the Baal story and you read (or hear) this psalm, your ear is going to catch similarities and phrases. The difference, of course, is this "lift up your heads, O gates! O everlasting doors" – instead of "lift up your heads, O gods." Why the change from gods to gates or doors? What does it signify? It signifies a couple of things. Just for the sake of time, I'm going to limit the discussion here.

1) It signifies that there is no need to single out the members of Yahweh's council because they fear no other god. The context is different here. You don't have gods in Yahweh's council plotting to side with some other deity. So that is not in the picture. They don't fear any of their own membership. They fear the Lord. They fear Yahweh. They fear no other god as being more powerful than Yahweh. So the threat element is not there.

2) Recall that the context of verses 7-10 (biblically) is the procession of the Ark of the Covenant, the throne (or footstool, depending what passage you're in) of Yahweh. (Also, "throne" or "footstool" depends on whether we're talking about tabernacle or temple.) The "gates" and "doors" speak of the tabernacle or temple entrances. In biblical descriptions, there is no other deity in this localized, earthly sacred space. You bring the ark in... There's no other deities in there. The ark is the throne or the footstool for ONE—one deity—and that's Yahweh. Other gods, even other council members, are not in view there. There is no need to bring them into the scene. Because Yahweh is the only one who sits enthroned on Zion.

So there's a theological and logical reason why the language is changed a bit, but it clearly draws on the Baal Cycle. Verses 1-2 clearly drew on the Baal Cycle—the combat element there, the challenge that's issued by Yam (also known as Nahar) to Baal. When Baal becomes king of the gods (when he defeats Yam in verses 1-2) it's Yahweh who is over Yam. Yahweh is the one who is Lord over Yam and Nahar. It's not Baal. And then you get to verses 7-10, where it's talking about kingship, and you have this "Lift up your heads" language. That part is word-for-word from the Baal Cycle. So literate Israelites would have picked up on this. And this is the way they are able to be taught or learn or even picture in their minds correct theology. That's the point. That's why the writers do this. They are picking a fight. They are blackening the eye. They

are rubbing the nose of Baal in something. It's in this material. This is a theological side-swipe. But it's easy for us to just read right over that stuff, and think, "Well, that's kind of goofy talk," or, "Oh, that reminds me of Handel's Messiah." Well, good, but [laughs] there's still something else going on here.

Let's quickly go to Psalm 29. We're just illustrating these points. And by the way, I didn't insert anything into Psalm 24. The language is already there, and it is parallel to language somewhere else in some other literature. I'm not saying, "Oh, there are holes in this psalm. Boy, it would be nice if there were a few lines from the Baal Cycle in here. Let's put those in." We're not doing that. Most of my audience is going to know that. But just for the sake of making the comment, there it is. Let's read Psalm 29:

A Psalm of David

Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,

ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

² Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;

worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.

³ The voice of the LORD is over the waters;

the God of glory thunders,

the LORD, over many waters.

⁴ The voice of the LORD is powerful;

the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

⁵ The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;

the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

⁶ He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf,

and Sirion like a young wild ox.

⁷ The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.

⁸ The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;

the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

⁹ The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth

and strips the forests bare,

and in his temple all cry, "Glory!"

¹⁰ The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;

the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.

¹¹ May the LORD give strength to his people!

May the LORD bless his people with peace!

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That's Psalm 29. Now, by way of setup, I'm going to use Craigie again, because he has some nice opening comments here and gets us into some things we at least ought to mention.

Psalm 29 is a *hymn*; it contains three basic parts. (1) The call to praise (vv 1–2), addressed to the “sons of God”; (2) the praise of the Lord’s “voice” (vv 3–9); (3) a concluding section, describing the praise of the Lord in the temple (vv 10–11).

Very easy to plot that out. What has drawn attention, of course, is Canaanite/Ugaritic elements, and Craigie comments:

The Canaanite/Ugaritic aspects of the psalm formed the basis of an hypothesis presented by Ginsberg in 1935 (“A Phoenician Hymn in the Psalter”; see also *Orientalia* 5 [1936] 108–9), in which he proposed that Ps 29 may originally [MH: that’s a key word] have been a Phoenician hymn.

Now, Ginsberg’s theory... I just want to say something about it, because this is the sort of thing that’s going to make internet theology headlines. “Psalm 29 Really from the Phoenicians!” Nice. Thanks for the click-bait.

Ginsberg’s Phoenician orientation is due to proximity of Phoenicia to topographic references in verses 5-6 (Lebanon, Sirion... That’s adjacent to Phoenician territory), and he used that to argue that Psalm 29 was originally a Phoenician hymn modified by the psalmist for inclusion in the psalter. Now Craigie (and others—Craigie is certainly not alone here) disputes that. It’s really an over-reach of the data. I think Craigie’s summary of the issue is fair. I’ll read it to you, just a sentence or two:

It is clear that there are sufficient parallels and similarities to require a Canaanite background to be taken into account in developing the interpretation of the psalm, but it is not clear that those parallels and similarities require one to posit a Canaanite/Phoenician original of Ps 29.

To me, that’s entirely fair. Just because there are similarities doesn’t mean that there’s a point of origin here. Why not argue that for Psalm 24? Ginsberg didn’t argue that for Psalm 24 and other psalms. It overreaches the data. It overstates the case. But you may see it somewhere. So onto a few observations. In verses 1-2, you have a call to worship. The sons of God (*bene elim*) are the ones that are being spoken to. They are called to worship Yahweh. In effect (think about this), in verses 1 and 2, the congregation of Israelites who would be singing this psalm in worship are calling upon the members of the divine council to join them in the praise of Yahweh. It’s kind of cool. As I point out in *Unseen Realm*, this is one of those verses that shows very clearly this subservient status and the lesser ontology of the members of the Divine Council compared to Yahweh. Yahweh is an *elohim*, but no other *elohim* is Yahweh. What makes Yahweh unique, and the

faith of the Israelite writers (the biblical writers) in the uniqueness of Yahweh—the one God among other gods—has nothing to do with the term *elohim*. What distinguishes him is the way that one *elohim* is talked about and described elsewhere that no other *elohim* are. And this is one of those instances. You'll never have... I would challenge anyone to come up with some data that would suggest that a biblical writer would think that Yahweh ought to be worshiping some other deity. No, it's never the other way around. It's always, "Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings (you *bene elim*, you sons of God in the council), bow the knee." It's never the other way around.

So this is one example of having really a data-less position to argue that Yahweh was interchangeable with other gods in the council. That's actually what polytheism says. And even henotheism assumes that. Biblical writers did not think that way. There's no data to suggest that they did. Now, Craigie is going to build off of this and riff off of this, and he's going to spend a lot of time talking about "the voice of Yahweh" in verses 3-9. But he says this:

The background is to be found in language associated with Baal and his "holy voice" (*qlh qdš*). Baal, the Canaanite weather god, was associated with the storm, thunder and lightning.

Doesn't that sound like verse 3? "The God of glory thunders." Doesn't that sound (a little bit later) like "The voice of the LORD flashes flames of fire?" Elsewhere, that's going to be regular language—a regular description—for lightning.

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He is portrayed in Ugaritic iconography with lightning as a weapon in his hand; in the Ugaritic texts, his *voice* is explicitly identified with thunder (CTA 4.vii.29–31). But the psalmist, who rejects the possibility of any real power of Baal over weather or the outcome of battle, adapts the language of storm and integrates it with his description of God's [Yahweh's] glory.

So the praise in the psalm begins with an affirmation that the Lord's voice is "upon the waters." It's in the superior posture position. He's over the waters.

At a primary level of interpretation, the words might be taken to imply that the psalmist is describing a thunderstorm at sea, perhaps a storm approaching the land from the sea.

Does that sound familiar? If you've read (I think it's in *Bible Unfiltered*) my little essay for Bible Study Magazine about the ancient Israelite context of Jesus walking on the waters, calming the storm, you get the idea. At a primary level of interpretation, it might be a storm approaching. But the undertones (I'm just trying to flesh this out a little bit) of the language go deeper and again reflect an adaptation of Canaanite/Ugaritic religious thought. In the Ugaritic texts, Yam ("sea") is the "god of the mighty waters" (I'm summarizing Craigie here. He gives

another reference to the Ugaritic tablets there), yet the chaotic god, Yam, was conquered by Baal.

An allusion to this mythological incident is already contained in the Song of the Sea, where the Lord is described as using “sea” (*yam*) as a tool of conquest (Exod 15:8). In Ps 29:3, the Lord is described not merely as a deity whose thunderous voice is heard, but as one victorious over the chaotic forces symbolized by the “mighty waters.” The poetry amplifies the theme of the Lord as “warrior” (Exod 15:3).

That’s also material from Craigie that... I’m just trying to summarize some of his thoughts because they’re important. They set the stage for something that I want to jump into now. We read a little bit of the Baal Cycle with Psalm 24. Let’s read a little bit of the Baal Cycle for this one. Think about the voice of Baal and this flashing lightning and the cedar forest, the waters, and the thunders—all that stuff. This part of the Baal Cycle is concerned with the fact that Baal doesn’t have a temple of his own, so there’s sort of a campaign (roughly speaking) to get Baal his own temple. Baal wants his own house and he’s not happy until he gets one. [laughs] So some of the members of the council go to bat for him. They have to get approval from El to do this. They’re on Baal’s side. He needs a temple. He needs a house. So with that in mind, let me just read you a little bit of the Baal Cycle:

(Voice of Baal backdrop)
 Let a house be built for Baal like the gods,
 and a dwelling like the sons of Athirat!
 And the Great Lady-who-tramples-Yam replied:

[laughs] This is going to be... I’m trying to remember if this is... I think it’s Athirat that gets that title. She’s beseeching El now to get permission to build this house for Baal. She’s sucking up to him.

‘You are great, O El!
 The greyness of your beard does indeed make you wise;
 the knowledge in your breast does indeed instruct you!
 And now
 the season of his rains may Baal indeed appoint...

Baal is in charge of the rain, and we don’t want to get him off schedule here. He’s distracted by not having a house.

...the season of his storm-chariot
 And the sound of his voice from the clouds, [MH: There’s the voice of Baal idea.]
 his hurling to the earth of lightning-flashes

A house of cedars let them build for him;
and let them build him a house of bricks.

...

Now Anat gets involved in the discussion.

Virgin Anat rejoiced:
she stamped her feet [MH: She likes the idea.]
and the earth shook.
Then she set her face towards Baal,
in the heights of Saphon, [Saphon in Ugaritic = zaphon in Hebrew (“north”)]
a thousand miles away,
ten thousand leagues off.
Virgin Anat laughed;
she lifted up her voice and cried:
‘Rejoice, Baal!
Good news I bring:
A house will be given to you like your brothers,
and a dwelling like your kinsmen!

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So she’s happy. Now let’s look at verses 3-9 again in light of that scene. So you have Athirat or Anat (I can’t remember which, in the earlier section) who brings the request to El. She butters him up a little bit. El is going to wind up saying, “Yeah, go ahead.” Baal is going to get his house, but Anat is thrilled with the news and she’s going to go back and tell Baal. The way she describes it, he’s in the heights of Saphon (the north). We’ve got his description of his voice from the clouds, hurling to the earth lightning flashes, the house of cedars, and all this stuff. She’s thrilled. Now, let’s go to verses 3-9 again in Psalm 29:

**³ The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD, over many waters.**

He is Lord over *yam*—over the waters—just generally. We don’t have the word *yam* here, but just waters generally. And as things are going to pick up at the end of Psalm 29, we’re going to see a reference to the flood over the world. That’s really what the waters are and that denotes kingship over the entire world. So instead of Baal being king of the world (because he’s king of the gods), no, in verse 3, the voice of the Lord (Yahweh) is over the waters. That’s where he lives. That’s where he speaks from. The God of glory is the one who thunders. It’s a direct borrowing of thunder language from Baal. “The Lord is over the many waters...”

**⁴ The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.**

These are clear allusions to Baal imagery, but it is Yahweh who is being described, not Baal.

⁵ The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;

Ouch. Yahweh is so powerful, he breaks the cedars (the stuff that Baal's house is made out of). In other words, Baal's house wouldn't last very long. It's vulnerable.

...the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

**⁶ He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf,
and Sirion like a young wild ox.**

In Ugaritic/Canaanite thinking, this is the far north, and this is where Baal lives. This is his turf. This is his territory. Sirion is interesting, especially because that's a clear allusion to Mount Hermon—the Hermon region and northern area of Phoenician rule. Remember, Baal was the big dude in Phoenician religion. Remember Ahab and Jezebel worshiping Baal? She brings Baal worship into Israel. This is his turf. And it's like Yahweh's voice is all that's needed to smash the place to bits. Sirion is the name used for Mount Hermon by the people of Sidon, which is in the north there with the Phoenicians. In Deuteronomy 3:9 (I'll just give you a few references) it says:

The Sidonians call Hermon “Sirion” while the Amorites call it “Senir.”

Deuteronomy 4:48:

**⁴⁸ ...from Aroer, which is on the edge of the Valley of the Arnon, as far as
Mount Sirion (that is, Hermon)...**

So it's very clear what this is being directed toward. Sirion is really a specific point of reference: Hermon—this whole region, the forests of Lebanon and all that.

⁷ The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.

It isn't Baal who sends fire from heaven. It's the voice of Yahweh. It's not the voice of Baal. The lightning doesn't come because Baal speaks. It comes because the LORD speaks. These are his weapons, not Baal's.

**⁸ The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.**

You could actually have a double reference here with the fire maybe being a reference to the burning bush and the Exodus, and Yahweh coming from the southern region (Kadesh). It could take the readers' minds back to that material as well.

**⁹ The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth
and strips the forests bare...**

Now, somebody should make a meme out of that, honestly: "At the shout of God, the deer just drop their young." [laughs] And the forests are just stripped bare. We don't want to make it cartoonish, but that would make a good meme.

**¹⁰ The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.**

So think of the cosmology. You've got this dome over the earth. You've got waters above, in reference to Genesis 1:6-7, separate the waters above from the waters below by the firmament. The firmament is called heaven—the skies. So you have these waters above and that's the domain of God (Yahweh). It isn't Baal who is above the waters or who had subdued the waters and is in charge of this stuff. And since the dome covers the entire earth, it covers all of the nations. So who is king of the world? In Canaanite Ugaritic religion, it's Baal. In Psalm 29 it's like, "Pardon us, but no." And Baal gets picked on through the whole psalm. The conclusion is, "It's Yahweh who sits enthroned over the flood. It's Yahweh who sits enthroned as king forever."

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**¹¹ May the LORD give strength to his people!
May the LORD bless his people with peace! [Shalom.]**

The whole psalm just lifts little things out of the Canaanite/Ugaritic context, specifically out of the Baal context, and burns Baal with them by doing so. This is how these things operate.

Now another little sidebar here. This is going to address something that sometimes I get email on or some point of contact here. Those of you who are going to be familiar with some of the things I'll refer to here will know why I'm bringing this up. I'll try to explain it to those to whom this might be new. I'm going to read a little bit from one of my articles. The article is from the *Bulletin of Biblical Research*, the first one I did (Volume 18, #1, 2008). It's called "Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible". The idea that Yahweh is king over all of the

earth is, according to the critical consensus scholarly opinion, a late Israelite idea that emerged once the evolution to monotheism out of polytheism had taken place. Let me repeat that. The critical consensus says that Israelite religion, including the theology of the biblical writers, evolved from polytheism to monotheism. And when they finally got the enlightened monotheistic view in their heads, then they had to kill off the other gods “because we don’t believe they’re real any more.” They’ll say that’s what Psalm 82 is about. You kill off the gods, and now you have Yahweh over all of the nations, and so Yahweh is king over the nations. And they wouldn’t be thinking about that unless they had evolved out of polytheism. And we want to date all this material late, even though there’s really no way to do that.

Basically, it’s circular reasoning. “We’re going to date this psalm late, because we think the idea is late, and therefore the psalm must be late.” That’s how it’s done. Unfortunately, that’s how critical consensus scholarship is done. And in my dissertation at Wisconsin-Madison, I specifically argued against this—that this was circular reasoning. It’s illogical because there’s so much that comes after that takes the “presumed polytheistic language” that they supposedly got rid of and evolved away from. It shows up in lots of places later. What happened? Nobody got the memo, or what?

In other words, this neat picture about evolution from polytheism to monotheism that supposedly finally reached its apex moment during the exile or a little bit after the exile (because the exile had to beat the polytheism out of the Jews, and all that kind of stuff)... “From that point on, we are intolerant monotheists. We’re never going back to this other-gods crap. We’re just not doing that.” Well, why do you have 180 references to plural *elohim* or *elim* in the Dead Sea Scrolls—a dozen or so of which are clearly, overtly, in Divine Council context? “That’s supposed to be pre-exilic primitive religion—primitive polytheism—and the biblical writers eventually broke through and they saw the light of monotheism.”

Honestly, I just think it’s hokum. That might be a little harsh. I think it’s illogical. I think it implodes on itself. It does not conform to a lot of data. It conforms only to selected data. If you exclude some of the other stuff that gets in the way, well, then you have a nice picture. I don’t think we should do that.

Why do I mention this? I mention this now because I’ve gotten a few emails. “Hey, have you listened to Pete Enns’ podcast, where he just had Mark Smith on, and they’re talking about this stuff?” Mark Smith is the main voice... And he’s not an anti-Christian guy. Mark is a Catholic. I’ve had several conversations with him. He’s really a nice guy and I think he’s a good-hearted guy, too. But he is the main spokesperson for the consensus view. I just don’t buy it, and Mark knows that. We’ve been at the same conferences. I even read a paper which he sat in on, which was a lot of fun, because basically we took the whole Q&A time to go back and forth over the whole thing. But he’s just a nice guy about all of that. This is what academics do. But when you have... I think there’s a propensity in some

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circles of evangelicalism to think that if critical scholars take a position, that's the only position that's coherent. That's the only position that makes sense because they're scholars, and our scholars maybe have an ax to grind, or they're too confessional, or they're afraid to go there. No, this is a scholar that isn't afraid to go there. And yeah, I could file this into the "progressive revelation" bucket, like some evangelicals do. God doesn't have to reveal everything about himself to all of the biblical writers the same way at the same time. I get it. I could file it under progressive revelation, and say, "Okay. Some of the early biblical writers, maybe they were polytheists, and then eventually they weren't." I don't, because it just doesn't make any sense. The logic of it implodes.

Let me give you one anecdote. Maybe somebody who heard that other podcast will listen to this. I was in my last semester at the U of W in Madison. We're in an Isaiah seminar. Second Isaiah was the title of it. And Second Isaiah is supposed to be this apex moment of the breakthrough to monotheism. So one day, we had Peter Machinist in, who was the Hancock professor of Oriental Languages at Harvard—another just super guy. Just a really pleasant guy—really likeable and, of course, a top-notch scholar. And he is viewed as *the* scholar for Second Isaiah.

So he's in teaching our grad seminar that day. And in between the two sessions, we're sitting around our table and I was mulling over a dissertation topic, and Peter Machinist asked, "Where are you in the program?" and I told him, "I have to take prelims over the summer in a few weeks, and then I've got to nail down the dissertation topic," and so on and so forth. And I said, "I have a question." Because I had been thinking about what to do as a topic. I said, "If there's this neat evolution from polytheism to monotheism that culminates in the time of Second Isaiah, why do we get so many references to divine plurality, plural *elohim*, plural *elim*, in Divine Council settings? In other words, all the pre-exilic language—why does it show up in later texts so frequently? There's like 180 of these in the Dead Sea Scrolls alone. Why is that, if we have this evolution?" And he looked at me (and I'll be forever grateful for this) and he said, "You know, I don't know. That's a good question." [laughs] And that was the moment for me... And I was blessed by his honesty and his candor. That was the moment for me when I thought, "Okay, I've got my topic." It doesn't make any sense to me.

And let's go back to Psalm 24. I'm going to give you another reason why it doesn't make any sense, from this psalm. Now, you have this idea of this evolutionary trajectory and the idea that Yahweh is king of all the nations, which means that he has to get rid of all of the other gods because the gods are over the nations (Deuteronomy 32 and all of that stuff). "We've got to get rid of those guys so that Yahweh can be the only God over the nations. That's a *late* idea. They had to *evolve* toward that. During or after the exile"—that's what we're told. Well, Psalm 29 is, by everybody's account, pre-exilic. In fact, Psalm 24, Psalm 29, and Exodus 15 are among the earliest Hebrew Bible material, according to the consensus critical scholars, and most of these guys (not all of them) are

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going to be non-confessional. (They don't take any theology position at all.) So what do we have at the end of Psalm 29? [laughs] How is it that we're saying that before the exile Yahweh wasn't king over the nations? Because that's what Psalm 29 says! [laughs] Psalm 29 is part of this. I'm going to read you the bottom of page 3 and some of page 4 of my BBR article. I'm going to just read this section. I'm talking about Psalm 82 in the context.

Concerning the second viewpoint, that polytheism is being used rhetorically in Psalm 82 [MH: we're killing off the gods here], much is made of the last verse in that psalm, where God is asked to rise up and possess the nations (82:8). This is interpreted as a new idea of the psalmist to encourage the exilic community—that, despite exile, Yahweh will rise up and take the nations as his own having sentenced the other gods to death. [MH: So this is a new idea.] This view ignores preexilic texts such as Psalm 24 and 29, long recognized as some of the most ancient material in the canon.⁶ For example, Ps 29:1 contains plural imperatives directed at the bene elim, pointing to a divine council context. Verse 10 declares:

“The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits enthroned as king forever.”

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In Israelite cosmology, the flood upon which Yahweh sat was situated over the solid dome that covered the round, flat earth. Since it cannot coherently be asserted that the author would assert that Gentile nations were *not* under the dome and flood, this verse reflects the idea of world kingship. The Song of Moses, also among the oldest poetry in the Hebrew Bible, echoes the thought. In Exodus 15:18 the text reads, “The Lord will reign forever and ever.” As F. M. Cross noted over thirty years ago [MH: Frank Moore Cross was the guy that Machinist replaced at Harvard], “The kingship of the gods is a common theme in early Mesopotamian and Canaanite epics. The common scholarly position that the concept of Yahweh as reigning or king is a relatively late development in Israelite thought seems untenable.”

And I would agree. I would absolutely agree. So the point is, in Israelite cosmology, the flood waters above the earth (the waters above the firmament in Genesis 1:6-8 language there) and those waters that presumed a dome covering the ENTIRE earth (not just Israel)... That framework means that we have here in Psalm 29 a claim to world kingship over the nations, and of course that means over their gods. The evolutionary arc narrative (from polytheism to monotheism, and lumping the biblical writers in there) to me just does not account for a number of data points, which is why I just don't buy it. And some people who correspond with me are disturbed by the idea that we have an evangelical talking about this evolution. Yeah, they're going to talk about it because that's the consensus view. And to be honest with you, I really don't think they've spent much time looking at the data that don't conform to it and that really undermine

the evolutionary trajectory. Again, I could put this in the “progressive revelation” bucket. That’s easy. But I don’t, because it just doesn’t make sense.

So I wanted to throw that in as a sidebar. We’re wrapping up here. So these two psalms have value, not necessarily for getting us into the sidebar talk, although I’m sure somebody out in the audience is going to find that useful or interesting. Psalm 24 and Psalm 29 are good examples of how being aware of the Canaanite/Ugaritic material allows you to get a lot more out of these psalms. And these aren’t unique. There’s a lot of other stuff, obviously, in the Hebrew Bible like this and in the psalter itself. But I wanted to have a place where I could at least try to illustrate this.

The main import of this episode is not so that your head can be into debates between scholars. Because that’s what scholars do. They go back and forth with each other, arguing this or that point. That’s just part of the enterprise. And all of the people that I’ve mentioned here are good people. There’s nobody in the bunch that is just grinding an ax against the Christian faith or something like that. There’s nobody like that in this list—in the people that I’ve mentioned. It’s just that there’s honest disagreement among scholars. But I wanted to have a place where at least you know why this is one evangelical who is not afraid of this material. I love it. This is where I spent my time in my dissertation. And to my advisor’s credit, he rolled with it. He allowed me to do it. He allowed me to challenge the consensus view. And I think he would admit that, “Hey, it probably needs this. It probably needs some challenge.” I don’t know if I won him over. Probably not. He’s going to be part of the mainstream. But to his credit, he let me do this. So peer-reviewed scholarship, this sort of thing at the dissertation level—at the publication level—there’s no monolithic belief system that everybody has to conform to. That’s not what scholars do. And so it’s a good exchange. It’s a friendly exchange. I like everybody in the mix here that I’ve met, so let’s be clear on that. You’re not going to be able to caricature me as being antagonistic toward anybody. I like them all. I enjoy them—everybody that I’ve included in the discussion here. But I wanted a place where I could at least talk a little bit about why I don’t buy this stuff and also the value of these ancient contexts for these two psalms, and of course by extension, lots of other passages, too.

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TS: Yeah, Mike, probably one of your biggest criticisms from other people is that they think that you’re saying you need external resources to understand the Bible. And it’s ridiculous how they have this argument that without all this extra literature, you can’t understand the Bible. And that’s not really what you’re saying.

MH: No. No. You can get the core ideas out of scripture just reading an English Bible. You *can’t* have a firm grasp of a lot of things without situating the Bible in its own context. The Bible did not just drop from heaven as though it has no context at all, like it just materialized. God used people. He used people at a certain time, a certain place, a certain worldview, a certain culture. These are

God's decisions. So if you don't like the external context being part of the interpretive process, go complain to God because these were his decisions.

TS: Yeah, absolutely. I find that it enhances my faith. All this extra material...

MH: Me, too.

TS: ...it enhances it. So it's funny, when I get people who've been to seminary (some of my friends) and they've asked me since diving into this material what has it done to my faith, because we've all heard the stories that students enter seminary and they lose their faith or get discouraged... And I'm like, "What are you talking about? This has only enhanced it." So I question people's faith going into it if all of this extra material starts to break down their faith. I think it adds to it.

MH: Yeah. I think the real underlying problem to that is they go to seminary with certain views of certain things. Let's just say, for the sake of the discussion, how we got the Bible. How the thing we call the Bible was produced. They've been taught so minimally about that topic that when their professors start bringing in other data or asking important questions like the superscriptions in the Psalms and the whole idea of editing... Or maybe it doesn't mean "of David," maybe it means "for David." That whole thing. They have never heard any of that before and so they don't really know what to do with it. And some of that is going to feel so counter to the way they have been thinking about the topic to that point that they're going to feel tension. And what you need (and unfortunately what's lacking in a number of instances) is a professor sensitive to that who can think through how this stuff makes sense and actually works with the theology that they already came with. In other words, you have the same theology, but let's just change how that theology is talked about (how we talk about how we got the Bible and God's role and God's responsibility and stuff like this). This material should not squeeze God out of the equation; it should actually help us think better about how God did things. But you need a professor who's capable of that. You need a professor who's willing to do that—who will take 10 or 15 minutes of a class to do that, rather than making sure they cover pages 3 through 8 in their syllabus. There's a disconnect there that I think is really unfortunate. And some students might end up in a hostile context where the professor loves to trouble his or her students. That happens. I know people like that. That happens. So I understand students coming away with their faith harmed, and there's a number of reasons why that might happen, but my point is that that is not a necessary result (or at least it shouldn't be). None of this stuff has made me like, "Oh, boy, is any of this real?" To me, it just makes things a lot more exciting, because (I don't know how this is going to sound)... One of the best tools for biblical scholars and theologians is to have a little bit of imagination. What I mean by that is not so that you can add stuff to scripture, but so that you can take it apart and put it back together again. You can re-imagine how God would have done this, how God's interaction with human beings works, how he could have used them

to make this thing come to pass. But some people just can't do it. Their faith is a series of propositions, a series of sentences, a very strict "this is the way we talk about this topic." And when they are unable to talk about the topic that same way again, they have nothing to substitute for it and it creates tension and distrust and all these other things, which is really unfortunate. It just doesn't have to be that way.

TS: Well, hopefully they listen to the Naked Bible Podcast to help. [laughs]

MH: Yeah. Really, if they did, they would get some of that, and I think it *would* help.

1:15:00 **TS:** Alright, Mike, another good episode. Again, listeners, be on the lookout for updates for this week in Denver, whether we will have that live Q&A Friday or not. Again, Mike, your family is in our prayers for your dad. And I want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast. God Bless.