

## **Naked Bible Podcast Transcript**

### **Episode 327**

### **The Old Testament Afterlife and the Psalms of Korah**

### **June 6, 2020**

**Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)**  
**Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)**

#### **Episode Summary**

The Psalms of (or to) the sons of Korah are a small subset of the Psalter. However, their content is significant to the matter of whether the Old Testament has a theology of a positive afterlife, where the righteous are present with the Lord. The sons of Korah were the descendants of the Levite named Korah who rebelled against Moses and Aaron (Numbers 16). When Korah was judged by being swallowed up by the earth into Sheol (the grave in the earth), Numbers 26:1 tells us specifically that the sons of Korah were spared from Sheol. In this episode we discuss how this tradition informs several psalms, which in turn inform us about the afterlife for the righteous.

#### **Transcript**

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 327: The Old Testament Afterlife and the Psalms of Korah. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How are you doing?

**MH:** Pretty good. Ready to jump into some topical stuff. I just love the topics. I'll confess here. I like them a lot better than book studies. But that's just me. Gotta do a little bit of both.

**TS:** Yeah, yeah. Well, since the book study took a *year* (or thereabouts)...

**MH:** [laughs] Right!

**TS:** ...I think we all enjoy these single topics.

**MH:** Jude is next. [laughter]

**TS:** Ruth! We'll get some of these...

**MH:** We did Obadiah, so... [laughs]

**TS:** Let's just knock off all the low-hanging fruit and do all the short ones. That'd be...

**MH:** Yeah, not a bad idea.

**TS:** That'd still take us... You have more than enough material.

**MH:** Yeah, but you can call it a book study.

**TS:** That's true.

**MH:** A good way to cheat.

**TS:** Well, Mike, what are we talking about today? The afterlife.

**MH:** Yeah. Old Testament afterlife and assorted, related things. But specifically with an eye toward the Psalms of Korah. Now... I have a big folder... Because once we were out of Exodus I was collecting things that I'd like to do topically. And if you haven't caught on to the logic here, I do these topics to get into the literature in topics that I know, down the road, if there ever is an *Unseen Realm 2*, that, "Okay, I've got to include this. Gotta include that. Gotta cover this. Gotta cover that." So I've got literally 18 pages of things that I want to do in a follow-up book. And let me just qualify this. Because I'll mention in interviews and here on the podcast, "That's *Unseen Realm 2* territory." Please do not conclude that I'm working on *Unseen Realm 2*. I am not. This is all preparatory. But it helps not to have to jump into so many things cold that I've made notes on maybe two, three, four years ago. "Hey, make sure you do this in the next one." Well, this is the chance to do that kind of thing. So I enjoy the topics because it gives you (the audience) a little bit of a heads up on, "Hey, we'll take a dive over here and do things that are related to this or that topic." When we get there, Lord willing, if there ever is a second book, then this is a heads up. And if there isn't a second book, then you got some information here, at least a little bit.

So this is one of those. It was prompted by my list (dipping into the pool), but it was also prompted by something I got in an email a week ago. I knew I was going to do this, but this thing I got in email really kind of said, "Yep, good time for this." I got an email from my friend, Tom Horn. All he sent was a link to a Yahoo News article, asking me what I thought. And the world was again blessed by the scholarship of Bart Ehrman. So on May 8<sup>th</sup>, Ehrman got something published in *Time* (at least *Time Magazine* online). The title was, "What Jesus Really Said About Heaven and Hell." And of course, what Bart says is that the Jews of Jesus' day didn't believe in an afterlife at all. You died and that was it. You read something like that, and there are so many examples (not only in the New Testament but outside the New Testament) to the contrary. I look at that and I just scratch my head like, "Is Bart writing this because no one in the popular audience will ever check?" Maybe. But there are people who have no theological commitments at all who would say, "What?!" [laughs] "What in the world is that?!" So I thought, "Yep, this is a good week to get into this to show... To take a little bit of a dip (and we've done this before in Q&A) into the contrarian material into

5:00

this thing we call the Bible—the sacred Scriptures of Jews (and of course Christians).”

So I want to cover a few thoughts on this, specifically the positive afterlife idea in the Old Testament (to be with the Lord). And as I’ve said before in Q&A and here and there and where it’s relevant in other episodes, there are a lot of scholars (including some evangelicals) that suggest or say that there is no such thing as a positive afterlife idea in the Old Testament. They won’t go as far as Bart, to say, like, this wasn’t even in Jewish consciousness in Jesus’ day. That borders on the absurd, to be honest. But with the Old Testament, there are a number of evangelicals even that will go in this direction.

So my launching point, specifically, is an article I came across a few months ago that I just put in the hopper. It’s by a scholar in Belgium named David C. Mitchell. His article is from 2006, so it’s an older article, but the title is “God Will Redeem My Soul from Sheol: The Psalms of the Sons of Korah” and this is from the *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 30:3 (2006). And it’s about 20 pages in that journal. So the article’s title uses a phrase from these psalms of Korah, “God will redeem my soul from Sheol.” I’ve mentioned certain psalms before when we’ve gotten these Q&A questions about the afterlife, but Mitchell has developed the phrase and the idea (its surrounding ideas and its contexts) pretty nicely in this article. This is not publicly accessible, so I will put it in the protected folder for newsletter subscribers. So this article (if you’ll pardon the pun) ought to put to rest the idea that there is no positive afterlife in the Old Testament.

Now this is a narrow look. He’s just looking at the psalms of Korah. There are other things that we could talk about. For instance, would a people who really believe that you just died and that’s it, no afterlife, really bury people with personal items? Would they really do that? Bart? Hello? No, they wouldn’t. Nobody does that who believes that idea. So you have archeological evidence. You’ve got things outside the psalms that refer to the hope to be taken out of Sheol at some point and to be with the Lord. It’s not just the psalms of Korah, but this is where we’re going to focus today to kind of narrow the episode. And even within the psalms of Korah, I’m only really going to look at three psalms (that part of Mitchell’s article), just to get us into this.

So I’m going to read you the abstract (or at least part of it) from Mitchell’s article. This is essentially what it’s about. He says:

After defining the Korah collection, this study shows that biblical tradition about the Korahites is marked by the theme of redemption from Sheol. [MH: Sheol, of course, is the Hebrew term for the grave or the realm of the dead.] This theme is discussed, particularly in regard to the resurrection of the dead. Then an examination of the Korah Psalms shows that the theme appears there also... [MH: So the article starts a little bit wide and then he funnels it to these specific psalms.] Correspondences are drawn between these traits of the Korah Psalms

and the author's proposed eschatological programme in the Psalter [MH: as a whole].

So what Mitchell's going to do here is he's going to talk about some Korah psalms. He's going to set the context first: Who was Korah and why would this be a theme associated with his sons, who are linked to certain psalms in terms of authorship? Why would that make sense? And then after he discusses that, he's going to say, "Hey, if you look at the whole Psalter, there's something eschatological going on in the way it's arranged." So I want to hit these things today. I think it'll be a good episode just to provide some contrarian material to that wellspring of biblical scholarship, *Time Magazine*. And I'm going to jump in here and I'm going to read a little bit from Mitchell as to how he gets into this as far as the context. So he writes:

Eleven psalms bear the heading '*Of / For the sons of Korah*'. They are set in two groups. The first group forms an almost complete sequence from Psalms 42 to 49. Only Psalm 43 has no heading, but it can be taken as a Korah psalm because of its affinity with Psalm 42; they seem, in fact, to be one psalm which has been deliberately split, perhaps to bring the Korah Psalms up to the talismanic twelve. [MH: Twelve is an important number.] The second Korah group also forms a sequence from Psalms 84 to 88, but is divided by David [MH: the Davidic psalm] Psalm 86. Then Psalm 89 comes immediately after the Korah collection to close the third book of Psalms. So Psalms 86 and 89, because of their editorial placement, and because they share—as we shall see—other Korahite traits, should be considered affiliates of the group. Therefore, including Psalm 43, there are twelve Korah psalms and two further psalms which fall within their orbit, Psalms 86 and 89.

10:00

The Korah collection opens Book II of the Psalms and, with coda Psalm 89, closes Book III. Moreover, the first group of Korah psalms opens the Elohist Psalter—that is, the group of Psalms 42 to 83, in which *elohim* predominates—while the second Korah group re-opens the YHWH psalms. [MH: Different divine names predominate in those two collections.] The two Korah groups are separated by a tranche [MH: group] of Asaph and David psalms, Psalms 50–83.

They're interspersed there. So that's a little bit of a summary as far as what the Korah psalms that he talks about (and that we're going to talk about here) are. And of course, it raises the question right away, "Which Korah are we talking about?" Because the Bible has a number of Korahs. So Mitchell summarizes this, too, real nicely. He says:

[T]here are several Korahs in the Bible—Edomites (Gen. 36.5, 16), a Levite (Exod. 6.16-21; Num. 16.1; 1 Chron. 6.7 [22]), and perhaps clans of Judahites (1 Chron. 2.43) and Benjamites (2 Chron. 12.6)—the Korah of the heading [MH: the Korah

identified in the headers of the psalms] is usually identified with the Levite [MH: the one mentioned in Exodus 6:16-21 and Numbers 16].

This is because the Bible's only mention of *the sons of Korah* refers to this clan (Num. 26.11); Korah the Levite is the only Korah whose story is told in detail; the Korahite Levites were musicians and singers in the temple cult; and the Korah Psalms actually refer to their functions as singers and gatekeepers. As Levite musicians would both compose and sing, the question of whether these psalms are *of* or *for* the sons of Korah does not really arise. The heading is probably best taken as simply denoting psalms from the collection of the sons of Korah.

Now as a side note here, just in case it still isn't clear, this is the Korah who led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron. That's what Numbers 16 is about. And we're going to quote a little bit from Numbers 16 as we proceed. But this is that guy. If you remember the story, there's this rebellion against Moses and Aaron, and Yahweh (the God of Israel) judges Korah and other people involved by opening the earth and it swallows the rebels. They go down alive into Sheol. I'm going to read Numbers 16:30-33:

**<sup>30</sup> But if the LORD creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the LORD."**

**<sup>31</sup> And as soon as he [Moses] had finished speaking all these words, the ground under them split apart. <sup>32</sup> And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah and all their goods. <sup>33</sup> So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly.**

So that Korah is the guy that the phrase "sons of Korah" is referencing. You say, "That seems really odd. How is that a fit?" Well, unlike the children of Dathan and Abiram, who were involved in this rebellion, the sons of Korah *did not die* in this judgment. And that is a note that is given to us specifically in Numbers 26 in verse 11. So I'm going to go up to Numbers 26, and this is a reference back to Numbers 16 (the judgment of Korah and his associates). So let's just go back to Numbers 26:9 (this is some genealogical stuff or some census stuff—numbering).

**<sup>9</sup> The sons of Eliab: Nemuel, Dathan, and Abiram. These are the Dathan and Abiram, chosen from the congregation, who contended against Moses and Aaron in the company of Korah, when they contended against the LORD <sup>10</sup> and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up together**

15:00

**with Korah, when that company died, when the fire devoured 250 men [MH: so there's a different detail], and they became a warning. <sup>11</sup> But the sons of Korah did not die.**

So hold on to that thought. It's actually going to become important. Mitchell says something to the effect that the phrase is really significant, that the Korah event is like a sign pointing presumably to things to come. That why would we single out this group and make sure that people knew that they didn't die? Korah and his other associates go down into Sheol (into the earth) and it swallows them up and they of course die (they perish), as Numbers 16 said. But then it has to make this note that "But the sons of Korah didn't die." Mitchell spells out the implication here. Let me just quote a little bit more from him. He says:

The sons of Korah...

Therefore... Because we have this specific note that they did not die. They didn't suffer the judgment that everybody else suffered...

...The sons of Korah then were redeemed from Sheol. [MH: They were spared.] The Reubenites, their children and households, their own father's household, and perhaps their father too, fell alive into the underworld. But the sons of Korah, who might have expected the same fate, survived. They bore this memory high on their heart, recalling it in their names. [MH: Now catch this. These are all relatives of Korah. And he's going to go through a number of names here that commemorate the fact that they were redeemed from Sheol.] Korah's own sons were Elkanah ('Whom God Redeemed' or even 'Jealous God', Exod. 6.24; 1 Chron. 6.8-12 [23-27]; cf. 19-22 [34-37]); 14 Assir ('Captive', Exod. 6.24). . . . And their descendants were Naḥath ('Gone Down', known also as Toaḥ: 'Low Down', 1 Chron. 6.11 [26], 19 [34]); Zuph ('Overwhelm', 1 Chron. 6.20 [35]); 16 Aḥimoth ('Brother of Death', known also as Maḥath: 'Taken Away', 1 Chron. 6.10 [25], 20 [35]); and Taḥath ('Underworld', 1 Chron. 6.9 [24], 22 [37]).

So he goes through this list and it's kind of obvious that the people who extend from Korah and his sons (specifically his sons, because they're the ones who are redeemed from Sheol), they didn't die. They didn't suffer this judgment. They remember the event And they name people in their family to be a reminder that "we weren't sent to Sheol. We weren't left there. We were redeemed from Sheol." Mitchell also points out at one point in his article the story of Hannah. He says, "The redemption from Sheol is also hinted at in the song of Hannah." He observes:

Hannah was a Korahite, perhaps by birth, certainly by marriage to Korahite Elkanah. Most of all she is a Korahite in spirit... Like her Korahite forebears, she

speaks of redemption from Sheol: 'The Lord kills and makes live; he brings down to Sheol and raises up' (1 Sam. 2.6).

That's the song of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:6). Now the question for the rest of our time is signaled by Mitchell in this way. He goes through this background and he's going to launch off into these psalms. He says:

Redemption from Sheol is, then, a dominant theme of Korahite tradition. But what might such an idea have meant to its writers? Clearly there is a range of possibilities.

20:00

What are these possibilities? Well, there's really fundamentally two. One would be: in regard to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible), any talk about deliverance from Sheol is always figurative for being rescued from *physical* death or danger. Now it's fair to say that is the dominant view of scholarship. Even evangelical scholars have bought into this view. And this is, in Mitchell's own words, an extreme. It's extreme. And the other extreme (the other view), if you're going to make them polar opposites here, would be to say that *all* the passages are talking about physical resurrection. He says that's also just not the case. That's an extreme as well. So obviously, he's going to angle for the truth being somewhere in the middle.

Let me illustrate the tension here with a psalm. I'm going to go out to Psalm 16:7. This isn't something that Mitchell gets into, but this psalm always comes up in this discussion. So Psalm 16 is a *miktam* of David. I'm going to read starting in verse 7. Just listen to this:

**<sup>7</sup> I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;  
in the night also my heart instructs me.**

**<sup>8</sup> I have set the LORD always before me;  
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.**

**<sup>9</sup> Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;  
my flesh also dwells secure.**

**<sup>10</sup> For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,  
or let your holy one see corruption.**

**<sup>11</sup> You make known to me the path of life;  
in your presence there is fullness of joy;  
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**

Now it's pretty obvious in verses 10 and 11 there... They get referenced of Jesus (the messiah) and specifically in the context of the resurrection. Now there are those (to illustrate the tension)... There's one side that would say, "Look, in Psalm 16, this doesn't have resurrection in view at all. It doesn't have afterlife in view at all. What David is praising God for is deliverance from some physical

calamity. The guy's always getting chased by Saul. He has numerous enemies. People are always trying to kill him. So when he says, 'You will not abandon my soul to Sheol,' it's a way of saying, 'God won't let people kill him. God won't let him get killed. He won't end up in the grave like this.'"

Now you notice, even probably in the way I'm saying this, that the question might pop into your head, "Well, that just doesn't seem consistent, because if you're really taking the reference to Sheol as only physical deliverance from death, why not just say that the psalmist is saying something crazy like, 'You won't ever let me die.'" And of course, the answer would be, "Well, that would be silly." David's not going to think that. David knows he's going to die. So he has to be here just referencing God's protection in some time of crisis.

Now when Old Testament scholars say that, whether they do this intentionally (and some do) or not (they just let it on the table and maybe they hope people don't notice), it creates this question of, "Well then did the New Testament writers misuse this when they used the psalm about Jesus (*the* son of David) and his resurrection? Did the New Testament writers just abuse the text here?" Because if this is what you're saying, that this text rightly understood means only physical deliverance from some danger (some calamity), then it sure looks like they're just pillaging the text, like they're taking it out of context.

Now the other view, of course, would affirm that, "No, they're not taking this out of context because these references to being delivered from Sheol in the Old Testament do refer to bodily resurrection." (In other words, I'm doing the polar opposite thing here now, in the discussion.) So they would go back to Psalm 16 and say, "What David's really talking about here is his own physical resurrection." Well, you know, that seems to be a little bit of an overreach, too. Maybe. "You will not abandon my soul to Sheol," I personally think that there's at least a hint there that David *hopes*... Maybe he doesn't know, like, "I'm putting money on it", but he at least *hopes* that the Lord will look favorably on him and remember him and remove him from Sheol. I think that's legit. But again, we're doing the polar opposite thing here.

So people will try to force physical bodily resurrection into every reference like this. Again, my view is that some of them, I think, really do suggest this. This is why we're doing this episode. Because there is a Korahite tradition especially (but it's not just in Korahite psalms—this is Psalm 16, which isn't a Korahite psalm) that have this hope expressed of being *with* the Lord. "At your right hand are pleasures forevermore." Telegraph to Bart Ehrman: If you're saying something like that ("at *your*—God's—right hand are pleasures forevermore"), you're not just thinking that when you die, that's it. You just aren't. [laughs] Okay? So nobody at *Time Magazine* is going to fact-check Bart. I understand that. I just kind of wish Bart would fact-check Bart occasionally. Because it's just such an exaggeration on the other side.

25:00



But again, I'm hoping you get the idea that you have these two polar opposite opinions. I'm going to suggest that... We don't want to overread the psalms in either direction, but I think that in Psalm 16, there is this hint. When David's talking about "his holy one," is David really referring to *the* eschatological messiah? Probably not. He's the king. He's chosen. He is God's elect—that sort of thing—your holy one. That idea could be part of psalm kingship language or something like that. People can try to make that... I think there might be a tangential relationship there. Because if you remember in *Unseen Realm*, I have a whole chapter on how Adam parallels Israel parallels David parallels the messiah parallels Jesus... The servant *is* corporate Israel, who also is connected back to Adam, who also is connected forward to the singular messiah... All of these things are connected. These are interlocking. It's the old (as I like to say) "matrix of ideas." So you can see kingship kind of stuff in a title like holy one, but elsewhere it's very clear that holy one is a reference to God himself.

So again, if you just do exegetical math along those trajectories... If David is referring to either himself as king or people would say it's an eschatological king... David obviously knows that God has given him a promise that his seed is going to occupy... It's the only one legitimate for the Jerusalemite throne. David's not foreseeing what's going to happen—the divided monarchy and the exile and all this stuff. But you could do the exegetical math that *the* son of David is spoken of like this, and so is God. So, like, maybe those two thoughts go together. Because we've seen God as man in the Old Testament. God comes to his people. He's trying to kickstart the restoration of Eden, coming to be among his people. It's very easy, if that God is a warrior, to tie that into messianic stuff. This is how it works. This is how the messianic profile works. You don't get to just remove one element and call what's left the messianic profile. That's cheating. Right? But on the other side, you don't get to say things like, "Well, David (or some other Old Testament writer) could see the whole picture." Like he wouldn't have needed hindsight like the apostles did. Well, that's way overstated too. So we don't want to be given to overstatement. So again, Mitchell's going to angle for this. I've already telegraphed this, that I think the truth is somewhere in the middle. So Mitchell then from this point talks about... He gives a little bit (a few pages) of ancient Near Eastern context. I'm just going to pull out two things he says here. He writes:

Our view on such issues [MH: this afterlife idea—this deliverance from Sheol] should surely be influenced by what we know of Israel's cultural milieu. [MH: Well, that would be nice.] Some form of resurrection belief was widespread in the Near East from early times. In Old Kingdom Egypt Pharaoh was to rise to happy immortality in the Elysian 'field of rushes'. Nearer Israel, resurrection was familiar among the Canaanites in the second millennium BCE. At the Ugaritic New Year Festival, Baal and his retinue of *rp'um* [Rephaim]—deified royal ancestors—appeared from the underworld on chariots as the stars of heaven and the 'warriors of Baal and Anat'.

So in Canaanite religion, there was this belief that Baal died and then came back because he's the grain deity and all this kind of stuff. But they were familiar with the idea with Baal and the Rephaim that even though these royal ancestors had died, they were still living. And they would come out annually. This was Canaanite religion. So death wasn't just the end, even for Canaanites, is his point.

As a side note, the reference to Egypt: yeah, that's true of pharaoh. Mitchell writes:

In the Old Kingdom, afterlife was the prerogative of royalty [MH: that's certainly true], but later the lower classes increasingly expected and included...

30:00

...the notion of a positive afterlife. We have something called *The Book of the Dead*. *The Book of the Dead* is not just for pharaoh. It expresses an afterlife belief among the Egyptians. And we also could point out that even though Canaanites were thinking that there was life beyond the grave... And that's still not physical bodily resurrection. We understand these things. I'm saying this more or less for people who might listen to the podcast. But at the very least, what we're commenting on here is that bodily death was not *the end*, like no conscious existence. Almost nobody's thinking that. The question is not, "Is there conscious existence in Sheol?" Because everybody's thinking that. The question is, "Will the righteous get delivered from the cadaverous existence of Sheol?" And especially for the Israelite. It's this cadaverous existence. And since the Israelites take a term like Rephaim and also associate it with the giants who come from the Nephilim and the spawn of Genesis 6 and the chaos forces and all that, if you're left in the underworld, that's a really unpleasant place to be. Because there's (for lack of a better term, I'll just use the later term) *demonic* guys down there. This is where they live, too. "So I sure don't want to get stuck there" is the point.

So the righteous in this context are hoping for deliverance. They want to be removed from Sheol. So is that a legitimate part of Old Testament theology? Do you have this hope if you're among the righteous (those who are loyal to Yahweh)? I'm not going to lapse into a rabbit trail about believing loyalty. If you listen to the podcast or have read *Unseen Realm*, you know what we're talking about there. So circle back to our main question: does the Old Testament *exclude* (is another way of putting it) the idea of being rescued from Sheol after death? If you're Bart Ehrman, you'd say yes. But we're trying to look at the text here, so... [laughs] You know, another way of saying it is, "Does the Old Testament in its talk about 'deliver me from Sheol' *include* the notion of a positive afterlife?" So "does it exclude" or "does it include"? The dominant view of course says if you're in the Old Testament... (We're not doing the Bart that all Jews didn't think there was an afterlife. That's just a hopeless exaggeration.) But if you're Old Testament scholarship, most Old Testament scholars are going to say, "Nope. You're including Sheol. Everybody goes there. That's where you

stay.” Mitchell, me, and other scholars (we’re not alone here) say that goes too far. So if *we’re* correct, psalms like Psalm 16 that get applied to the messiah (the eschatological son of David) are *not* misinterpretations on the part of the New Testament writer. The New Testament writer is reading that psalm, not only in hindsight of what happened with Jesus, but he’s also reading it in the context of the matrix of ideas that are in Old Testament theology.

So let’s go to a couple of these Korahite psalms. And for the sake of abbreviating the episode (staying within a reasonable time limit here), we’re only going to talk about a few of the Korahite psalms, specifically Psalms 46 and 48, maybe drifting over to Psalm 49. We’ll see as we go here. But the Korah psalms recall the ancestral experience of the Korahites. They did not die when Sheol opened and swallowed up their forefather and other people. The sons of Korah did not die. They were redeemed from Sheol. So Mitchell writes:

In Psalm 46 the deliverance seems to be by an earthquake...

Which is interesting given the Numbers 16 context. But let’s go to Psalm 46 and pick up with a little of this.

**God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.  
<sup>2</sup>Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,**

This is a psalm of Korah. “We’re not going to fear that the earth gives way.”

**though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,**

That’s actually a reference to Sheol as well, because Sheol was thought to be a watery place. It was the abyss, but there’s also water there because it was under the earth. Think Israelite cosmology here.

**<sup>3</sup>though its waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble at its swelling.**

We’re not going to be afraid. We’re not going to be afraid. So you get this earth quaking, earth shattering, earth upheaval imagery. And Mitchell points out that the same verb is present here in Amos 9:5. Let me read you that. Just giving you an idea of what Mitchell does in this article.

35:00

**<sup>5</sup>The Lord God of hosts,  
he who touches the earth and it melts,  
and all who dwell in it mourn,**

**and all of it rises like the Nile,  
and sinks again, like the Nile of Egypt;**

So there's this up and down motion to the earth. The reason why the Amos reference is interesting is because Amos 1:1 actually refers to an earthquake in Uzziah's reign. Mitchell continues:

Likewise Psalm 48 tells how the invaders are seized upon by 'trembling', that is, by analogy with Psalm 46, the trembling of the earth (48.7). Amid this cataclysm Jerusalem stands unshaken (46.5-6; 48.4, 9), which makes known the name of God to the ends of the earth (46.11; 48.11)...

[repeating] So Jerusalem is unshaken. It makes known the name of God to all the ends of the earth (Psalm 46:11, Psalm 48:11).

Zechariah tells of the destruction of an invading alliance by an earthquake like that of Uzziah's time, which shall split the Mount of Olives, and by plague (14.4-5, 12); thereafter all nations shall worship YHWH... It is just such an event that Psalms 46-48 seems to anticipate [MH: (some cataclysmic, earth-shattering event)]. As in Korah's rebellion of old, the fluid earth will convulse and reveal the gaping underworld of Sheol; rebels will fall alive into the depths but the righteous will be redeemed (46.3, 7).

Now at this point he goes back to Psalm 46. Let me read the verses that he references.

**<sup>3</sup> though its waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah***  
**<sup>4</sup> There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
the holy habitation of the Most High.**  
**<sup>5</sup> God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;  
God will help her when morning dawns.**  
**<sup>6</sup> The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;  
he utters his voice, the earth melts.**  
**<sup>7</sup> The LORD of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah***  
**<sup>8</sup> Come, behold the works of the LORD,  
how he has brought desolations on the earth.**  
**<sup>9</sup> He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;  
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;  
he burns the chariots with fire.**

It's very clear Day of the Lord imagery here.

- <sup>10</sup> **“Be still, and know that I am God.  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth!”**
- <sup>11</sup> **The LORD of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress.**

That's the end of the psalm. Now if you're a Korahite and you have this tradition of being delivered from Sheol and Sheol is something you associate with earthly upheaval (like an earthquake—the earth splitting open and swallowing the sinners), when that happens some time down the road to Jerusalem, “the Lord will be with us...” “See, we [the sons of Korah] are the ones that didn't die back then, and when that happens again, when Sheol opens its mouth, we're not going to be swallowed then either. The Lord will be with us.” Now is that the kind of thing that someone who believes that “you die and that's it” would say? Of course not. They're saying the opposite. They're expecting that God will deliver them once more. If you go over to Psalm 48...

- <sup>14</sup> **that this is God,  
our God forever and ever [*ōlam*].  
He will guide us forever.**

That's the ESV. Now interestingly enough, the Hebrew has “He will guide us *‘al-mût.*” Let me read the previous line again. “[O]ur God forever and ever” is *‘ōlam.* “He will guide us forever.” It's not *‘ōlam.* It's a different phrase. It's *‘al-mût.* Now a lot of English translations will translate that *forever.* And if you read the commentaries, basically they do that because they're following the Septuagint. That's the way the Septuagint translator read it. But if you keep the words separate instead of combining them... If you combine them, you can make an argument that it means forever—*‘al-mût.* If you put those two words together then you can sort of get *‘ōlam* with a t on the end. But that isn't the way the traditional Masoretic Text has it. It has *‘al-mût.* It's a prepositional phrase. If you keep them separate, guess what you have: “He will guide us *above death.*” In other words, he'll deliver us from Sheol. He'll take us out. Mitchell, of course, spends a little time on this and he argues that this reading is confirmed by Psalm 49:15. This is another Korahite psalm. Let's go there real quickly. And it's really explicit here. Let's go back up to verse 13. This is a psalm of Korah, the ones who were redeemed from Sheol.

40:00

- <sup>13</sup> **This is the path of those who have foolish confidence;**

The stuff that's happened before. It's basically perishing—death.

**...yet after them people approve of their boasts. *Selah***

**<sup>14</sup> Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol;  
death shall be their shepherd,  
and the upright...**

This is an Ehrman flash here. Does the rest of the verse say, “And the upright will be in the same place, because everybody knows you die and that’s it”? No.

**...and the upright shall rule over them in the morning.**

**Their form shall be consumed in Sheol, with no place to dwell. [MH: It’s going to swallow them up.]**

**<sup>15</sup> But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol,  
for he will receive me.**

Now that sure sounds like a positive hope of afterlife in the Old Testament. “God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol.” I mean, you can’t just read the verse... Look at what it’s *contrasted* with.

**Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol. Death shall be their shepherd, and the upright shall rule over them in the morning. *Their form*” [MH: not *our form*—*their form*] shall be consumed in Sheol with no place to dwell. But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me.**

It seems just abundantly clear. Mitchell again spends a little time in his article talking about Psalm 49. He makes a comment like it references Sheol three times, whereas no other psalm mentions it more than once. It’s obviously a point of focus in this psalm.

**God will ransom *my soul* from the power of Sheol...he will receive me.**

Interestingly enough... Let’s just think about it. If the point of verse 15 is physical deliverance only, this is tantamount to the psalmist claiming he’ll never die. “I’m not going to die! God’s going to ransom my soul from the power of Sheol. Any physical threat out there against me God’s going to keep me from.” Really? It just doesn’t make sense.

Mitchell has a whole section of his article comparing some of the Korahite vocabulary (believe it or not) to Enoch and Elijah. And this is one of the points. I’m not going to rabbit trail into this. But in that last verse (Psalm 49:15: “God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol...he will receive me”) the verb is *laqah* (he will *take* me). *Laqah* can be translated *take* or *receive*. It’s the same verb used in Genesis 5:24, which ought to be familiar at least to this audience. “Enoch

walked with God, and he was not, for God *laqah* him.” God *took* him. He received him. Whatever way you want to translate it. It’s the same verb. 2 Kings 2:3-10. This is the Elijah episode about Elijah being (wait for it...) *taken* by God. It’s the same verb used in those verses.

So this is what Mitchell does in the article. I wanted to expose you to this just to... Again, this is a very abbreviated form. And I’ll admit, this is a scholarly journal article. It’s technical. But again, I’m still putting it in the protected folder because I think some of you can pick around the Hebrew stuff and still get a lot of benefit from it. But you need to realize that the next time you hear or see something on YouTube or the internet about how the Old Testament has no concept of heaven (believers being with God forever) and the New Testament does, and therefore the two testaments of the Bible are contradictory, just laugh. Okay? Just have a good time with that, or lament—I don’t know. Sometimes you don’t know whether to laugh or cry. But again, this is why we’re here: to expose you to this. Now the last point that Mitchell makes I think is an interesting one. I’ll toss it in here as we wrap up. He writes this:

Within the context of the Psalter’s eschatological programme, the Korah collection’s Sheol theme works in different ways. Low-key Sheol imagery first appears in Psalms 42 to 44, where it represents Israel’s exile...

45:00

So part of his article he’ll deal with how, when Israel goes into exile it’s like a death. So you get this Sheol imagery that gets attached to Israel going into exile. So it represents Israel’s exile...

...from which they long and pray to be redeemed.

Now catch this about Psalm 45! Just look at the ordering. And this is Mitchell’s point. Look at the ordering of the stuff. Okay? So Psalm 42-44, Israel’s exile is compared to Sheol.

Psalm 45 represents the coming of a bridegroom-king, the *mashiah* (v. 8 [7]). [MH: And that term is actually in Psalm 45:8.] With the opening of Psalm 46 we begin to hear the distinctive rumble of Korahite Sheol imagery [MH: And that’s where we’ve been today (Psalms 46, 48, and 49)]. It tells of a cataclysmic day when, as in the desert of old, the earth will convulse and open up, revealing the underworld... In Psalm 47, after delivering Jerusalem amid cataclysms, the king [MH: the bridegroom king] receives the homage of the nations at his Jerusalem throne. Psalm 48 then returns to the Jerusalem deliverance...

Remember Psalm 48 from *Unseen Realm*? I’ll read you the first two verses. Psalm 48. It’s good stuff.

**Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised  
in the city of our God!  
His holy mountain, <sup>2</sup> beautiful in elevation,  
is the joy of all the earth,  
Mount Zion, in the far north,  
the city of the great King.**

Remember the chapter in *Unseen Realm* about *yarketey tsaphon* (the heights of the north)—how that was language for Baal’s council? The seat of the gods in Canaanite religion. The ones that they thought ran the show. Again, the psalmist says, “Ah, not so much. The heights of the north is Mount Zion. That’s where everything is focused. That’s the center of the cosmos, as it were, as far as what matters and who is king and who is in charge of history.” This is Psalm 48. This is in the mix of the Korahite psalm stuff and the deliverance from Sheol.

Psalm 48 then returns to the Jerusalem deliverance. God will redeem his people and carry them over Death-Sheol. [MH: Remember that *‘al-mût* comment we made? “He will carry them over death. He will carry them above Sheol.”] Finally, to close the first Korah group, Sheol language appears full-on in Psalm 49 [MH: yes, it does—three times it’s mentioned] where the psalmist speaks for faithful Israel who will be redeemed from Sheol on that day.

This was the hope of every Old Testament person. Now of course in this audience, we have mostly Christians here. And they’re going to say, “That sounds like it’s all Day of the Lord and eschatological and blah blah blah.” We’re back to the “already and not yet” because who is the bridegroom? It’s Jesus. When do people get delivered and why? It’s the resurrection. This is where you’ve got to take the resurrection language; you’ve got to take statements of Paul (“to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord”); you’ve got to look at scenes like the transfiguration where Moses and Elijah are already with the Lord... It’s not just all this stuff put into the remote future. There’s lots of stuff going on both in Second Temple Jewish tradition and also in the New Testament that basically says that when the messiah comes (and of course for the New Testament, the messiah *has* come), all of this stuff is launched. It’s inaugurated. It begins. It is already present, but it is not yet consummated. It’s “already, but not yet.”

So this is yet another one of those things that is presented in this dual way. Already reality, but not yet. There *will* be an end resurrection. There *will* be a Day of the Lord. There *will* be this final judgment—the final resurrection on both sides. This is what we read in Revelation. Okay? And again, all of that’s consistent with Day of the Lord language. But what we have to factor in is that there are certain scenes in the New Testament where you get Day of the Lord imagery quoted of the *first* coming and the resurrection and the ascension. But then you’ll get other



passages that still put it out into the future. That's because New Testament eschatology (and frankly Old Testament eschatology) is "already-but-not-yet" in its thinking.

50:00

So again, I wanted to take a little time and do this topic, because yep, it's on the list. And you can see, this is just a little introduction, a little smattering here. There are resources like Mitchell's article that in subsequent books... If there's an *Unseen Realm 2* or *3* we're going to drill down into different psalms and do this or that. This is just getting your feet wet here. But even more so than that, this is the kind of thing that you need to remember when you're out there in the hinterlands of Middle Earth and you're running into Bart Ehrman and others who will dramatically overstate the position that they're fond of, regardless of the contrarian material. They just do that. It's just part of the game. So I wanted to introduce you to this. You can pass it on to others. Get people to listen to the podcast. Certainly not only this episode but others. But also just to have and to re-reference again when people need it.

**TS:** Alright, Mike. Do you have any idea what we're going to be discussing next week?

**MH:** I'll tell you what I'd like to discuss next week. This is kind of a really... Okay, Trey, let's be honest. *All* of our topics are interesting. [laughter] But this is an odd one. And you know how we like odd ones. Okay? Luke 24:42. I'm taking the time to read it for a specific reason. Because this is going to depend on your English translation. But it's really odd. This is Jesus, when he appears to his disciples and he's cooking a meal for them. And he eats, as well. So this is part of the resurrection proof. It says:

<sup>42</sup>They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup>and he took it and ate before them.

Now that's ESV. Some of your translations will add this phrase: "They gave him a piece of broiled fish and some honeycomb. And he took it and ate it before them." I'd like to do an episode on the honeycomb. You think, "Well, what can you get out of that?" Again, it's not in every manuscript. It's kind of like the John 5 thing with the angel troubling the water and all that stuff that isn't in a lot of translations. But this is actually a really interesting rabbit trail for those of you who have that phrase in your Bibles. So that's what I'm angling for for next time (Luke 24:42). Really it's going to take us into how the New Testament writers will characterize some parts of the resurrection of Jesus' body. So there you go.

**TS:** Sounds sweet. [drum sound, a.k.a. rim shot] No pun intended.

**MH:** Oh, that's just... Yeah. [laughs] We need to insert a rim shot there, Trey.

**TS:** I know! We need sound effects. I need to get on that.

**MH:** Can you do that?

**TS:** I *could*. Let me just pencil that in on all the lists of things that I have to do. Add sound effects.

**MH:** There you go.

**TS:** Alright, Mike. We look forward to that one. And we enjoyed this one. And with that, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.