

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 329

Binding and Loosing

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Episode Summary

In Matthew 16:19; 18:18 Jesus tells the disciples they have the authority to “bind” and “loose” in heaven and on earth. What does this language mean? What is being bound or loosed? In what way does the “binding” and “loosing” operate? Is “heaven” the afterlife residence of believers or something else? This episode of the podcast explores these passages with the help of parallels from the Bible and Second Temple Period Jewish literature and reaches a fascinating conclusion: Binding and Loosing refers to exorcism and authority over supernatural powers of darkness.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 329: Binding and Loosing. I’m the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he’s the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How are you doing?

MH: Pretty good. I’m still waiting for... There’s still a sports gap going on in my life, Trey.

TS: Yeah, you and me both. I should be watching the NBA playoffs right now, but I’m not.

MH: Yeah, well, I wouldn’t watch those anyway. But it’s the baseball and the football. I’m wanting football. So, you know, any one of those will scratch the itch. But here we are. What can you say?

TS: Not much. There’s not much *to* say, other than everything else is going crazy out there in the world. But at least everybody’s got the podcast to listen to to help make their lives easier, Mike.

MH: There you go. That’s absolutely true. [laughter] That’s the one thing we can hold on to, Trey.

TS: Brings some order to the chaos that everybody’s living in right now.

MH: Yeah. I have pugs too, so... They don't seem to be bothered by any of it. They can comfort us all while they pug. Pug is a verb, by the way. It's not just a noun; it's a verb.

TS: [laughs] Sure, yeah.

MH: [laughs] And my pugs are good at it. [laughs]

TS: That's funny. Yeah. Did you order your... Last time, Mike, we mentioned the Naked Bible masks that people could buy. Since you mentioned that...

MH: I did! I haven't gotten them yet.

TS: Yeah. A bunch of people have ordered some since then.

MH: Are you the holdup there, Trey? Are you putting them together with a sewing machine at your house, or what? [laughs]

TS: No. Not at all. [MH laughs] I want to give Jim a shout-out. He emailed me. I think he might have been the first one to order the face mask and he hasn't even gotten it yet. He said he ordered it a few weeks ago. But by the time this podcast comes out, I'm sure he will have had it by then. I asked him to send some pics with him wearing it. So I'm sure by the time this podcast airs, everybody will have gotten it and I probably will have posted some pictures of it. Including you, Mike. When you get it you can post pictures of you wearing it.

MH: Oh, I will. Absolutely. I will. And I'm thinking we'll get them by the next quarantine. [laughs] So we'll be ready.

TS: Yeah, by the next pandemic.

MH: The next shutdown, we'll have our stock of the Naked Bible masks there. But absolutely I'm going to take a picture of that. No doubt.

TS: That's awesome. We appreciate everybody that has bought some. Post pictures (hashtag #NakedBible) out there, so everybody can look at your pictures that you've taken. So, alright, Mike. Anything else going on in the world that you want to talk about?

MH: No, not really. We're prepping for the fall term for the School of Theology. I had to have everything done by the middle of July. So we're close to getting that in place. And then we have a few things that we can't necessarily bring up for discussion here yet on the podcast. But there are some other things out there that come fall I could be working on. So we're just about at the point where we can start making some of those decisions.

TS: Including your book? Give us an update about the third novel. Because I get tons of emails about that, when you're going to finish your third book. So just give everybody an update about that.

MH: Yeah, I'm hoping that it'll be written (the first draft)... And for me, the first draft is sort of a penultimate draft. Because I'm writing and rewriting the whole time that I'm creating what we would call a first draft. I'm hoping that's done by the end of the year. I'm into it now. Every time I look at and do something with it, I wish it was the only thing I had to do. But yeah, I'm loving it. [laughter] I enjoy it.

TS: Didn't you do a contest for the second book?

MH: Yeah.

TS: What was that contest?

MH: There were two people who solved the riddle of *The Portent*. So they both have characters in this third one. Yeah. I hope they like their characters, because they're not going to change at this point. [laughter]

TS: Too late now.

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MH: I didn't make any guarantees, you know? Good guy, bad guy, normal guy, crazy woman. [laughs] I mean...

TS: Well, Mike, we're going New Testament this week.

MH: Yeah, we are. Binding and loosing. So there'll be some people who will have seen or heard the title that are going to know right away what we're going to talk about here. But as promised, this is more material that wasn't in *Unseen Realm* that would be, whenever a follow-up happens (and that is *not* in process)... I have lots of things to pull from. And so this helps me take a look at some topics and do some more reading and thinking about things. But this one has a very obvious relationship to the kinds of things we talk about in *Unseen Realm*.

And in fact, we're going to start in Matthew 16, which is the gates of hell passage. And part of that passage... I never did anything with it in *Unseen Realm*. But you're going to see it has a very obvious relationship. However, historically in interpretation, scholars have not seen it. And it's really kind of shocking. There are a handful of exceptions, and the work of those people are the ones that I'm going to be using and I'll mention in the course of this episode. And I believe one of the articles I'm going to mention I put in the protected folder, so if you subscribe to the MIQLAT newsletter you can get access to this. But when we get to the end of this, you're going to think, "How in the world...? This looks obvious." And you're going to realize that, "Good grief, every time I've heard this passage talked about, I've heard it talked about in one or two different

ways that really just very obviously misses the boat.” So you’re going to have one of those experiences as well.

Let me just jump into the passages. I’m going to read two passages so that those of you who haven’t quite put the binding and loosing language together as to where we’re going to be, you’ll get oriented here real quick at the outset. So the first one is Matthew 16. I’m going to read verses 18-20. This is the “gates of hell” passage. And Jesus says to Peter:

¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

The ESV is not the best translation here. “The gates of hell shall not withstand it” is better.

¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

And then two chapters later, in Matthew 18:18-20, we read this:

¹⁸ Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

Now in both of these passages... I’m going to just throw out some preliminary things that can be percolating away in your head. Both of these passages have this binding and loosing language. And that raises the obvious question: “What does the binding refer to? What’s being bound? What’s being loosed? What does loosing mean? What are the keys to the kingdom?” And here’s another question. I’m tipping a little bit of the hand here: “When we encounter the word ‘heaven’, should we think of heaven as the place where God is, like the afterlife?” I mean, there is a reference to the kingdom of heaven here. That’s true. But in the kingdom of heaven, if this is the way we’re supposed to think of all the references in heaven, what needs to be bound in the kingdom of heaven? It doesn’t make a whole lot of sense. What if heaven refers to the spiritual world—“the heavenlies,” to use language of other translations in other passages. So maybe instead of heaven (the place where believers are and where God is and everything’s perfect), maybe some of these references to heaven are just about the spiritual world (the heavenlies). Just store that away.

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Now as we go through this, one thing is going to become crystal clear to you, and I hope listeners grasp it fully. And this is why I'm telegraphing it up front, because I don't want you to miss it. This episode will be Exhibit A as to why we should be using Second Temple Jewish material to understand the New Testament rather than rabbinic material. The rabbinic material was written centuries *after* the New Testament. The Second Temple period literature was written *before* the New Testament and is a context for the New Testament. The rabbinic material is not. But yet you have scholars and commentators on these passages constantly trying to interpret them through the filter with the assistance of rabbinic material that hadn't even been written. And that is in large part why there is a lack of clarity on these passages and why attention has been deflected away from some pretty obvious interpretive trajectories. They're going to be obvious when we get to the end here. And you're going to ask, "How in the world did we miss that?" Well, we missed that because we were looking at the rabbis. That's why we missed it. We weren't looking at other New Testament contexts and we weren't looking at Second Temple Jewish material. We were thinking about the rabbis. This episode is going to be Exhibit A as to why Second Temple material should be used to help us think about the New Testament and not rabbinic material.

So with that prelude (and a little bit of a challenge) there, my touchpoint article for this (and this is the one I put in the protected folder)... There's going to be another article that comes up in the course of doing this that is important. But I think this is the most important of the two. It's an old one. It's over 30 years old. Richard H. Hiers, in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Volume 104:2 (1985), wrote an article called "Binding and Loosing: The Matthean Authorizations." So we're going to interact with this article. And he does just a beautiful job of showing how to intelligently navigate this language. Now here's his introduction. He says:

The sayings about binding and loosing reported in Matt 16:19 and 18:18 have given rise to a wide range of interpretations. Catholic scholars often have read them to mean that Jesus thereby authorized the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church, the primacy of Peter in its government, and the apostolic power of excommunication. Protestant commentators, on the other hand, tend to argue that the sayings either are inauthentic [MH: those would be liberal Protestants], since found only in Matthew, or else must surely mean something other than that Jesus bestowed sacerdotal authority on Peter or other apostles.

In other words, Protestants basically say, "Well, we can't do that Catholic stuff. So it's got to mean something else."

Protestants also have been eager to point out that nothing is said in either passage about the transmission of authority by apostles to any successors. [MH: That's certainly true.] What did Jesus authorize Peter and the others to do in these sayings?

That is the fundamental question. So what he does is he goes on from that introduction to survey interpretive proposals. And I'm going to give you a summary of most of what he covers here—the ones I think that are most relevant. I'm going to divide this up into two buckets here.

1. The first bucket is you have scholars that say the binding and loosing terminology must be understood in light of *later* rabbinic tradition. I've already telegraphed the fact that that doesn't make a whole lot of sense. But for a lot of scholars, this is where they're at to interpret the stuff in this passage. So Bucket #1: the terms binding and loosing must be understood in light of later rabbinic tradition. Now there are three variations to this approach—this appeal to the rabbinic writings.

A) The first one is, the language refers to the authority to release people from vows.

And again, they're getting this because the rabbis (the rabbinic literature) will have passages that talk about the leadership of the Jewish community having authority to release people from their vows. So New Testament scholars will look at that and say, "Well, the binding and loosing, this is probably what they're talking about." Hiers (the author of the article) and I (of course) are going to say, "No. This is barking up the wrong tree here." But just stay with us. This is the first angle for this first bucket. So some scholars will say, "When the rabbis talk about releasing people from their vows, this is what this binding and loosing language is about." So Hiers comments as follows:

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Matthew reports that Jesus told his followers to refrain from swearing at all [MH: taking vows—that's Matthew 5] (5:33-37). It is unlikely that Matthew understood Jesus to have authorized his followers to determine whether other followers should be released from vows.

In other words, Jesus wouldn't have approved of any of this. So why would he give the apostles the authority to decide, "Well, that's a good vow; this is a bad vow," when Jesus would've said, "Don't do this at all!" So it just doesn't make a whole lot of sense if you look at it that way. And Hiers is saying, "Why would we go and follow this trajectory?"

B) The second way that some scholars would say we need to follow the rabbis is this: They will argue that the binding and loosing language refers to the authority to tell people what activities or behaviors they can or cannot do.

Typically, the idea is that this pertains to what Scripture has already revealed. So the idea is put forth in terms of enforcement of what Scripture teaches. This casts the apostles now like the Israelite judges or the interpreters of Scripture. The apostles become this body (this group) that when there's a difference of opinion

about the law or about some teaching or something, they're the ones to go to and appeal and check that out. Or when it comes to a behavior that the apostles can say, "Thumbs up. Thumbs down. Do that. Don't do that." That they're a locus of authority now in terms of doing exegesis—in terms of biblical interpretation. Now that sounds a little more reasonable. But Hiers counters this by noting Matthew 23:8, which basically seems directly opposed to the idea. So I'll read Matthew 23:8 to you:

⁸ But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers.

Well, that kind of runs in the face of this other idea. Jesus is saying, "Look, you're not rabbis." So Matthew 23:8 runs right into that. Hiers also would argue that there's really nothing in the immediate context about teaching or discipline within the church community. He writes:

Matthew and Luke report that Jesus sanctioned obedience to the law, not its interpretation...

And he makes a few references here so we can tell what he's talking about. For instance, in Matthew 5:17, Jesus says,

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. Truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota or dot (jot or a tittle) will pass from the law till all is accomplished."

So Jesus is stressing obedience there. He's not, like, "Look. You don't have to worry about this or that interpretation or whatever." Jesus becomes the fulfillment of all these things.

"Whoever relaxes one of these least commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven,"

Jesus adds in Matthew 5:19,

"But whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

"So your job is each of you individually. You're not supposed to be rabbis. You are just supposed to obey. You're supposed to follow me. *All* of you." So that's just an example where Hiers would say, "Look, if Jesus wanted to establish a teaching magisterium here, he wouldn't have said, "You're not rabbis," and he wouldn't have said, "Look, just follow me. Just love God and love your fellow man

and follow me.” He doesn’t establish a school of a little group of scholars that’s going to parse every passage and all this kind of stuff. So Hiers adds more to it, but I’m summarizing here. He’s saying, “Eh, this is maybe a little better than the first one, but it’s not really that good. It’s got problems.

- C) The third variation of “Hey, we need to let the rabbis tell us how to read binding and loosing” is that the authority of church leaders is given to them to exclude people from the church and the believing community.

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So it’s sort of a church discipline idea, that the binding and loosing here refers to who gets in the church and who stays in and who gets kicked out. There are a couple of problems with this. The verbs that are used here... Binding is *deo* and loosing is *lyo*—these basic verb forms. And there are variations of that that use those roots. But the verbs here really don’t have the semantic range of putting you in a community and kicking you out. A meaning of the verbs to speak of a ban or an expulsion would be exceedingly unusually. And honestly, I would say (he doesn’t use this word but you can tell he’s angling for it) basically, this is *contrived*.

And another problem is, who would determine this standard (who stays in; who gets kicked out) for every congregation? How do you do that? You’re always going to have things come up that, for churches today that still remember that there is a thing called church discipline... First Corinthians 5 is where Paul gets into this. That’s not the only passage. But you do have these things come up where someone needs to be expelled from the community. When you go to those passages, it’s not a grocery list. There are some broad principles there. So how would this passage in Matthew 16 (which doesn’t really specifically say this anyway, and the verbs don’t really mean this elsewhere), how would we know how to take this pretty vague language and make it applicable everywhere? How would we know that? Of course, the Catholic Church is going to solve this, because they have the Apostolic succession of the Pope and all this stuff. And they literally just made a list (and even that varied historically about excommunication and all that kind of stuff). But this is, in part, how they would argue the authority to do that. And Hiers is saying, “It’s really hard to make the verbs point that direction.” Now evangelical commentators (I’ve only pulled out one example here, but I looked at several just out of curiosity) are in one of these three trajectories as well (the “let’s appeal to the rabbis” bucket). This is where you’re going to find a lot of evangelical commentators. Köstenberger, for example, says:

In a Jewish context, the expression “binding and loosing” described the activity of a judge who declared persons innocent or guilty and thus “bound” or “loosed” them from the charges made against them.

Well, is that really what’s in the passage? How do we go from this language to just assuming it’s judicial? Well, you appeal to the rabbis—that stuff that was

written hundreds of years later. Again, it doesn't make a whole lot of sense. You have to read that into the New Testament.

What this is really going to come down to is, there's just a much easier way to parse this. But this is where a lot of people are. Carson is somewhere in the orbit here. Other New Testament scholars... There's sort of a fixation on one of two things, to be honest with you, if you look this up in commentaries. People are either fixated on appealing to the rabbis (rabbinic literature) or they spend all their time talking about the verb tenses. "Well, is it ongoing authority? Is it a perfect tense? Is it a present tense? What would it be if this was the condition you would expect this form or that form...?" They spend all the time talking about the verb forms and the grammar (or the appeal to the rabbis) and they fail (as we'll see) to do something pretty simple.

2. Now the second bucket. The first bucket is we appeal to the rabbis. The second bucket is... Hiers puts it this way. There are those who would say, "No, don't look at the rabbis, but the meaning is to be understood in terms of John 20:23, and thus refers to the authority of the disciples to forgive or withhold forgiveness of sins." Let me just read you John 20:23. I'll go back to verse 19:

¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews [MH: this is post-resurrection here], Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

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Now you'll notice there's no binding and loosing language there. But there are commentators who will say, "We need to parse Matthew's statements by this passage and link this binding and loosing to this forgiveness or non-forgiveness of sins." So this is the second bucket. Now Hiers, in his article, isn't buying this. He writes:

Elsewhere Matthew seems to say that Jesus expected his followers to forgive those who offended them without need for special authorization or benefit of clergy: Matt 5:23-26; 6:12-15; 18:21-35. Matt 18:18 may refer to forgiving sins committed against someone else, though nothing in the context so indicates.

So he's like, "What would this mean?" You ask the question, "Why should we go from the binding and loosing passage (that language) over to John 20:23?" And the answer is, "Well, we just do that." [laughs] "Because Jesus gives an

authorization in both passages, so both of those passages must be talking about the same thing.” Well, that’s a *huge* assumption, for one thing.

A little sidebar here. We’ll get back to our binding and loosing here. A sidebar on John 20:23, because I know people are going to say, “What does it mean?” I pulled two selections from two commentaries that I think summarize the point in John 20:23. And it isn’t that humans have the power or authority to forgive sins (like in a salvation or even a moral sense). The idea is basically the right to cast judgment on who is embracing Jesus (and his work on the cross) and who isn’t. Here’s from Andrew Lincoln. This is his commentary on John (2005). He writes this:

In this Gospel’s discourse sin is primarily failing to acknowledge the revelation of God in Jesus...

And of course, he’s referring to John’s Gospel because John’s all about showing that Jesus is the Son of God. That’s the whole theme of the book. So he’s saying, “In the Gospel of John, the discourse about sin (when sin’s talked about) is primarily failing to acknowledge the revelation of God in Jesus.”

Jesus’ words and works have been depicted as bringing about a judgement which the recipients make on themselves, as they either respond in belief or expose their sinful state of unbelief. The same holds for the future work of the Spirit, about whom Jesus has said that ‘when he comes, he will convict the world of sin... because they do not believe in me’...

That’s the Lincoln quote. So orienting the talk about forgiving and not forgiving sin to “do you believe in Jesus or don’t you? We’re going to judge you on the basis of whether you embrace Jesus as the Son of God, or you don’t.” The next quote is from J. Ramsey Michaels, his commentary on *The Gospel of John* (2010). Michaels writes:

What exactly, then, is Jesus promising his disciples [MH: in John 20:23]? It appears to be a corollary of 13:20, “the person who receives whomever I send receives me, and the person who receives me receives the One who sent me,” while taking into account as well the negative equivalent now preserved in Luke 10:16: “The person who hears you hears me, and the person who rejects you rejects me, but the person who rejects me rejects the One who sent me.” In short, the disciples are being given authority to act as Jesus’ agents in the course of their mission, and consequently as agents of God himself. Through them the Holy Spirit, or Advocate, will both “convict the world of sin” (16:8) and forgive sin. The sins they will forgive are not sins against them personally...

So Michaels is saying that this isn’t what Jesus is talking about when he says this to the disciples. “The sins they will forgive are not sins against them personally.”

And he cites these passages from Matthew that Lincoln cited and Hiers cites as well (Mt 6:14–15, 18:21–35, Mk 11:25; Lk 17:3–4).

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...but [MH: they are rather] the sins of the world generally (see Lk 24:47), unbelief in particular... [MH: and he refers back to John 16:8-9] but sins of every kind. Those whom they forgive (because their message is accepted), God will forgive; those whose sins they “retain,” as Jesus sometimes did (because the message was rejected), God will not forgive. In short, God will ratify and validate their mission [MH: the mission of the apostles] because God is their Father [John 20:17]. He has given them “authority to become children of God” (1:12), and consequently to act on his behalf.

So what’s John 20:23 talking about when he tells the disciples, “Whoever you forgive, they’ll be forgiven. Whoever you don’t forgive, won’t?” These two commentators are saying, “Look, what this language really has to do with is: as you go out into the ministry, as you go out and preach what you’ve seen and heard (this is a post-resurrection scene), those who believe are going to have their sins forgiven. And you can tell them that. They will have their sins forgiven. ‘Your sins are forgiven if you believe this message.’ And God will forgive them, because they believe the gospel. If they don’t believe, you have every right to stand there and say, ‘Your sins are not forgiven. They can only be forgiven if you believe this. But you don’t believe it, so therefore do the math.’”

So I think that is the most coherent way to look at John 20:23. And I’m obviously with Hiers, and we would both say that this has nothing to do with Matthew 16 and Matthew 18 (the binding and loosing). So let’s go back there. So Hiers comments, after going through other views... He has one or two. But these are the big ones: the appeal to the rabbis, or you appeal to John 20:23. So he goes through this section about the other views, and then he writes this sort of by way of a summary at that point in his article... [laughs] I love this paragraph. Because it’s so, like, “Yeah, no kidding.” He says:

It is surprising that none of these interpretations attends to passages where terms for binding and loosing appear in intertestamental Jewish sources or elsewhere in the NT.

Let me just stop there. Hiers is, like, “You know, it’s kind of surprising that the scholars who are discussing this and they’re talking about the rabbis and a couple of them are going to talk about John 20:23, it’s like they don’t look up the terms in Second Temple Jewish literature! And they don’t even look them up where they appear elsewhere in the New Testament!” Remember that John 20:23 didn’t even have the binding and loosing language in it. So Hiers is, like, “That’s kind of surprising.” I would say, “Yeah. Yeah, it really is.”

He continues and he says, “Interpreters who rely on Strack and Billerbeck's commentary (*Kommentar*)...” They have a very famous collected set of works on how rabbinic material and New Testament material intertwine. It's like a rabbinic commentary on the New Testament. They ferret out all that material.

Interpreters who rely on Strack and Billerbeck's *Kommentar*, which is primarily based on the Talmud and Midrash...

They don't ever get to this other stuff.

This view [MH: this dependence on the rabbis] often seems to suppose that the intertestamental literature is of little or no importance as background for NT terminology and beliefs. Terms for binding and loosing appear with a wide range of meanings in the Septuagint. For example in Judg 16:6, 13; Job 38:31; Isa 22:21, 66:1; Ezek 20:37; Tob 3:13, 7:11 (cf. 1 Enoch 6:4). None of these passages anticipates the later putative rabbinic usages.

Basically, what he means by that is, “Hey, if you look at the Second Temple stuff, it doesn't support any of these rabbinic trajectories.” So, hey, a suggestion. Pro tip. Interpretive pro tip here: Let's look at the Second Temple Jewish material instead of the rabbinic stuff. And this is what he does in his article. He shifts at this point to the view he's going to argue for and how to defend it. So he basically says this. In one sentence, here's what he's going to argue for:

Binding and Loosing refers to exorcism and authority over supernatural powers of darkness.

That's what it is. It's not the rabbi... Turning the apostles into judges, and about excommunication and setting up apostolic succession. It's not about any of that.

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Binding and Loosing refers to exorcism and authority over supernatural powers of darkness.

And here's how he builds the case. We're going to go through what he does here. And you know what? It's a lot more transparent than you would think. Because when I say that, to somebody this might sound intuitive, and that's good, because when we get to the end, you're going to feel that way. Everybody, I think, is going to feel that way. But some of you are mentally already there. But others will say, “Boy, really? Binding and loosing. Isn't that just pop culture language for demons?” Well, let's see.

So his first leg on this journey is, “Let's look at passages that use the terminology, and we'll find that there are passages that use these same verbs in Second Temple Jewish material (intertestamental material) that do, in fact, use it

to describe binding of demons and loosing demoniacs (people who are oppressed by demonic powers—supernatural evil). So he writes this:

Most commonly, however, in intertestamental writings and in the NT the terms "binding" and "loosing" refer to the binding of Satan or satanic beings (e.g., demons) and the loosing of such beings or their erstwhile victims.

So he's saying, "Hey, most of the time, if you actually go look at these words where they appear in the New Testament and elsewhere, guess what? It talks about binding demons or exorcising demons from people and releasing them" (loosing the demon from the person and delivering that person). So some examples that he offers here, using the same verbs, are... Tobit. Tobit is kind of the obvious one, if you've ever read the Apocrypha. Tobit has a big buildup to a scene where there's an angel in the story (Raphael) who binds the demon Asmodeus. This is Tobit 3:17 and Tobit 8:3. When Asmodeus is bound, the woman he was afflicting (whose name is Sarah) is freed. Now when she's freed, the part about her freeing doesn't use the same *loosing* verb, even though the *binding* is the same. But the *loosing* verb *is* used of exorcisms elsewhere in literature of the same period. The cognate verb *apolyō* is used with respect to the freeing of persons from demons in Josephus's description of exorcisms. For example, it's in Antiquities 8.2.5, paragraph 46. Then he goes to Enoch and writes this section in his article:

Several instances of such terminology [MH: he's talking about the binding and loosing Greek verbs now] occur in 1 Enoch, Jubilees, and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, mainly in connection with accounts of the previous "binding" of evil spirits in the days of Noah and of the prospective binding of Satan or Belial at the end of the age. Certain of the "watchers," notably Azazel and Shemyaza, had corrupted the world of human beings. Consequently, God commanded Raphael [MH: there's Raphel again—now he's showing up in Enoch], "Bind Azazel hand and foot, and cast him into the darkness ... and let him abide there forever.... And on the day of the great Judgment he shall be cast into the fire" (1 Enoch, chaps. 6-9; 10:4, 11-13). In 1 Enoch 88 we read that the "fallen" angels, described as "stars" and "beasts"—evidently the "sons of God" from Gen 6:1-4—"were bound hand and foot and cast into an abyss of the earth," apparently by the angels Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Phanuel. Such also was to be the fate of sinners who had not experienced judgment during their life on earth.

So that's his little paragraph about, "Hey, we get this binding and loosing language in Enoch and Jubilees and some of these other books where the referents are very clear." So then he moves on. I'm just trying to summarize it. It's a lengthy article, so this is just my effort to summarize this. If you want to read the article, subscribe to the newsletter, go to the protected folder, and you can have it there. So Hiers moves on to what he calls the most significant parallel to Matthew's language. He writes this:

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Perhaps the most significant intertestamental [MH: Second Temple] references to the binding or overpowering of Satan and the demons are found in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. The classic passage in [Testament of] Levi 18:10-12 refers to the activities of the "new priest" whom God would raise up as king in the era to come [MH: it's an obvious messianic reference]:

And he shall open the gates of paradise,
And he shall remove the threatening sword against Adam.
And he shall give to the saints to eat from the tree of life,
And the Holy Spirit shall be on them
And Beliar shall be bound by him,
And he shall give power to his children to tread upon the evil spirits.

Similar hope [MH: this ultimate messianic hope] comes to expression in T. Sim[eon] 6:5-6 and [Testament of] Zeb[ulon] 9:8. The assurance that human beings will have power to "tread upon" or subdue the evil spirits means that these spirits will no longer be able to harm them. Such clearly seems to be the meaning of Jesus' statement to the seventy when they return from their mission, reporting that they have found the demons subject to them in his name: "Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you" (Luke 10:19). The "enemy" here, of course, is Satan.

Now let me just break in here. He's given you a few examples here. He's talked about, "Hey, we might want to look in the New Testament. Because when we look up binding and loosing in other places in the New Testament, you get the binding of Satan and demons and you get loosing of demons from people." And he goes out to Second Temple literature and he comes up with these examples here.

You could stop right here and I think you could say you've made the case. It just makes good sense. The parallels are quite strong. They make it clear that, in Second Temple Judaism, the language of binding and loosing was commonly associated with binding supernatural evil powers and the loosing referred to the deliverance from those powers. But the New Testament itself... I mean, there's *more*. There's even more to this than the examples he's given. The New Testament itself uses the same verbs of exorcism, which includes the binding and loosing language. And it's amazing how commentators miss that. The New Testament itself uses this same verbiage in these contexts other places that Hiers hasn't even gotten to yet. Nowhere in very good commentaries on Matthew (even my personal favorite, France's commentary)... You don't even see this discussed. I look through them and it's like, "Why aren't you guys discussing this?!" And what you see, again, is they're fixated on the rabbinic material or some grammatical form in the passages. They're literally missing the forest for

the trees when it comes right down to it, and they're appealing to anachronistic material (the rabbinic stuff).

So Hiers goes on. And just listen to this. I mean, it's just remarkable. He says:

The terms "binding" and "loosing" also appear in the Gospels in connection with exorcisms. The locus classicus for "binding" is Mark 3:27 and parallels, the parable about binding a strong man and plundering his goods. The context makes it clear that the strong man represents Satan and/or his demons. In many of the reported exorcisms, the demon is ordered or thrown out; to "cast out" evidently means much the same thing as to "bind" a demon. [MH: In other words, you have the power over it now.] Matthew follows Mark in describing Jesus' exorcism of demons in terms of "binding" (Matt 12:29). Through exorcism or binding, the demon is brought under control by one who has superior power. The sense of Mark 3:27 is that by binding the demon the erstwhile demoniac is liberated from his afflicting demon. Thus binding and loosing occur simultaneously: the demon is bound while its victim is loosed. The term *lyein* ("to loose") occurs with just this meaning in Luke 13:16: "And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan has bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?" Here the terms *dein* ("to bind") [MH: that's the infinitive form of *deo*] and *desmos* ("bond") relate to Satan's activity, presumably through the demons, in afflicting his victims...

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A related idea is expressed by the verb *phimoun*, used in the exorcism story in Mark 1:25 [MH: which is the same as Luke 4:35]. Literally it means "to tie shut" or "silence." Silencing the demons elsewhere seems to have been part of Jesus' technique in "rebuking," that is, overpowering them... The term "to bind" is used, then, both with respect to the affliction of a person by Satan (or by demons) and to the binding of a demon (or of Satan) by an exorcist who thereby frees or looses the erstwhile victim.

Now, goodness, that looks obvious. [laughs] You know? You almost want to tell the commentators, "If you would just put Strack and Billerbeck down (put it back on the shelf) and just used your Bible software to concord the lemmas, you would have found these passages. If you would have looped in Greek texts of the Second Temple period, you would have found more." And it's like, "Problem solved." It just seems so obvious. And I would say, it *is* obvious. But again, like I said at the beginning of the episode, this is Exhibit A of how interpreters can get distracted by the rabbinic material (which is later) and it's like they never get around (the methodology is backwards) to the Second Temple material.

Now in the process of what Hiers is doing in the section about exorcism, he refers to another article. And I'm not going to get into this one necessarily. I think... I may have put this in the folder too. I'll have to go look after the episode. If I haven't, I'll put it up there so you can go look for it. But this is by H.C. Kee.

The title is *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel*. It's an essay in this book. And he writes on page 108:

Jesus' exorcisms have the effect of binding the 'Strong Man' and thus presage the end of his control.

He also has a journal article. This is probably one I'll put in because I don't know that I even have the book. I'd have to go look at it and photocopy it. But I know I have the article. The article is entitled (and it's really the same subject) "The Terminology of Mark's Exorcism Stories". That's from *New Testament Studies* 14:2 (1968). It's an old article. But it goes through the language. Now again, this really looks just painfully obvious. You've got this language in the New Testament. You've got it in the Second Temple period. What are we doing looking at the rabbis? It just happens. I suspect sometimes... And it really sort of hit me with this one and I've suspected it other times. But you know, I understand. Everybody's human here. But sometimes I think that commentators really only look at what other commentators have said. And they wind up imitating that. And in this case, I think that's pretty obvious. Everybody sort of defaults to the rabbinic stuff. And it would be nice if somebody would've just run the searches and looked at the Second Temple period stuff. They would've gone in a totally different direction and one that actually makes sense.

So Hiers goes on. He discusses other things in this article. I'm going to read a few other passages just so that you can get the feel for some of the other things he's talking about here. He writes on one page, quoting the statement about Luke 10:

Behold, I have given you authority (exousia) to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you" (10:18-19). This statement, in effect, summarizes the substance of the kind of authorization reported in Mark 6:7 and parallels. This assurance and also, probably, Jesus' saying in Matt 10:16b, are echoed by Paul in Rom 16:20: "I would have you wise as to what is good, and guileless as to what is evil; then the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." What is new for Jesus' disciples is that they have found this power effective: they have been exorcising demons. Jesus' own authority over the demons had been a source of amazement from the beginning of his public activity (Mark 1:23-27 = Luke 4:33-36). Now the disciples too have authority over the demons—not, as often is asserted, because Satan has been bound, but because, as stated in Luke 10:19 and elsewhere, Jesus has given them this power...

Further support for our hypothesis may be gained from the wider context of the synoptic and other NT accounts of Jesus' activity. According to the synoptic reports, Jesus' pattern of activity consisted primarily of preaching repentance and the future coming of the kingdom, and healing and exorcising demons. These

activities are inherently inter-related. Both the preaching and the healings and exorcisms were preparatory to the coming of the kingdom of God.

Now he's going to take all this back to Matthew 16, which is really founding language of the Church and the kingdom. ("The gates of hell are not going to be able to withstand you.") And it seems obvious in hindsight that he would connect all these things. And it refers to the authority given to believers over the powers of darkness (exorcisms, breaking the bonds of demonic entities, and so on and so forth), which he did in the Gospels. He gave them authority to do this. And if you actually look up the terminology, the binding and loosing language shows up in all these other passages where Satan and demons are mentioned. We don't have Satan and demons mentioned specifically in Matthew 16 or 18, but his point is that, "Look. All these other passages have it. It makes good sense in the contexts of both of those Matthew passages. We've got a Second Temple Jewish textual trail of evidence that the terms are used this way. So *that's what it means.*" Now he actually goes on to connect this with Revelation 12. This is the "war in heaven" passage that everybody thinks is some primeval rebellion. I've commented on this many times—that the war in heaven there breaks out in response to birth of Jesus (and the birth of the messiah) and the messiah is caught up to heaven. That's a reference to the resurrection—basically, the birth and the ministry and the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus in a couple of verses in Revelation 12. It's encapsulated there—the birth and then the return to the Father. So Hiers connects this binding and loosing language to that heavenly conflict as well. He writes this:

In Luke 10 [MH: that's "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven," which again I've commented a lot on on the podcast and written about], the connection between exorcism of demons and the fall of Satan is this: through the defeat of his demons on earth, Satan, who is still powerful in heaven [MH: or in the heavenlies], is being over-come. The defeat of the demons means that Satan himself is doomed. This apparently is also the sense of Rev 12:7-11: the seer is assured that Satan will be defeated in heaven [MH: (the spiritual world)], though his final afflictions must after-wards be endured on earth (12:12). As in the saying in Mark 3 about binding the strong man, so it would seem also in the sayings in Matthew 16 and 18: the defeat of the demons on earth has its counterpart in the overcoming of Satan in Heaven.

Again, just to summarize, when you think about Luke 10 ("I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven"), I've commented and written about this a lot. Basically, the message is, that statement is made in conjunction with Jesus beginning his ministry. He inaugurates the kingdom ministry in Luke 10. He sends out the 70, which indicates that he is the messiah (not just for the Jew, but also for all the nations—the 70 nations that were disinherited at Babel). The disciples come back and they're excited. "The demons are subject to us!" And all this sort of stuff. Then Jesus says, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." As I have

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argued elsewhere, this is about the delegitimization—the defeat—of Satan’s agenda. If you are a member of the kingdom of God... This is basically what Luke 10:18 is about. If you’re a member of the kingdom of God (the kingdom of Christ), then Satan has no more claim on you at all. If you’re a member of God’s kingdom... And in New Testament theology, you loop all this other stuff in. You’re in Christ. You’re in union with Christ. You’re one with Christ. If you’re in *that* kingdom... If you’re in *that* body, you *will* have eternal life, which means what happened at the fall no longer applies to you. You will conquer death. You will have eternal life because Christ is going to rise (and he did rise). And Satan has no more legal claim over you at all. You are no longer estranged from God. You have been brought back into relationship with him. So the Genesis 3 problem is fixed. And this is what Jesus is alluding to in conjunction with the announcement of the kingdom of God. And that announcement operates in tandem with demonstrations of power over Satan and demons. All these things (as Hiers has said) go hand in hand. And when you go to Revelation 12, the war breaks out in heaven and the satanic forces are defeated and whatnot because they can’t stop the child who’s born to bring this kingdom, the one who will rule the nations with a rod of iron. That passage is quoted in Revelation 12. They can’t stop him from rising from the dead, going back to the Father, and sitting down at the right hand of power. It’s done. They’re toast.

And so these things operate in tandem. These passages operate in tandem. And this takes us to the “keys of the kingdom” reference. Because we’re going to see that in Revelation as well. So Hiers writes this:

The reference to "keys" of the kingdom of heaven in Matt 16:19 also has possible exorcistic connotations. In Revelation 20 an angel is seen coming down from heaven at the end of the age, "holding in his hand the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain," in order to seize and bind Satan and imprison him in "the pit" for a thousand years. Here, as in Matthew 16, "key" is associated with "binding" and also with "the pit," that is, Hades, and it is clear that all this has to do with overpowering Satan. In the one case, it is the key to the pit; in the other, the key to the kingdom of heaven. In Rev 1:18, the risen Jesus declares, "I have the keys of Death and Hades," again suggesting power over against the forces of evil. The connection between the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" and "binding and loosing" in Matt 16:19 then may well be this: when the disciples bind Satan and the demons, the latter's erstwhile victims are loosed and made ready for their new life in the kingdom of heaven.

The binding, the loosing, the keys, the kingdom language... It all refers to the same thing. If you believe—if you are a member of this kingdom... If you take this Jesus to be the messiah of Israel and you believe in his death, burial, and his resurrection—if you are a member of that kingdom—then Satan’s hold on you is broken. His authority is broken. *He* is the one bound now, not you. And you are released. You are loosed. And Jesus is telling the apostles, “This is your

message. This is your ministry. And when you go out, you have the authority. You have the authority, not only to resist and confront... If you get into a situation where you're dealing with a demon or whatever, know that you have this authority because you are residents of the kingdom. You are children of God. You have the authority to be called the children of God. Know all these things and go forth and do this. And if anyone believes, you can look at them in the eye (we'll loop John 20:23 into this) and say, "Your sins are forgiven, not because I say so, but because you believe in the message that we have, and you're a member of this kingdom. And Satan no longer has any hold over you or any authority. If you don't believe, your sins are not forgiven and you are still bound." It's a simple, coherent kind of messaging.

And again, even this isn't the whole article. He goes on into Aramaic incantation texts from the Second Temple period—more exorcistic, demonic confrontation texts and language. And he shows the binding and loosing terminologies there. He has a section on the early Christian writers. They're saying the same thing. They connect the binding and loosing with what we just talked about (the authority over Satan and demons and so on and so forth). Again, none of that early stuff (Second Temple, early Christian community)... Nobody's saying, "Let's go check with the rabbis." [laughs] Nobody's doing that. But this is where you wind up in commentaries on this passage. And it's a distraction. It's a deflection. And ultimately, it leads to confusion. So this is what you have.

I'm going to end the episode this way. I think this is the best quote from the article. Because it's... You know, if I had written this, it would probably not be as nice. [laughs] But he writes this:

Strange as it may seem to many modern interpreters, Jesus evidently took Satan and the work of exorcising demons literally and seriously. At all events, we have no basis in the texts for supposing otherwise.

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Those are wonderful two sentences. But I love it. "Strange as it might sound to modern interpreters, Jesus actually took this stuff seriously!" Yeah. Yeah, he did. You know? So I wanted to do this episode. I'm hoping this is helpful, because I do get questions on this passage (the binding and loosing thing). I did not address it in *Unseen Realm*. But I think this article (by Hiers)... If you get it, if you're collecting these sorts of things and using them for reference for your own study, that's great. It has lots of source citations. But I *really* wanted to get into it because, like I said at the very beginning, this is Exhibit A. It just makes sense to first look in the New Testament for these terms, and then we might want to widen the search to the Septuagint. That takes us into the Second Temple period. And what about that other Greek stuff being written in the Second Temple period? Are these terms used in a particular way there? *That's* what we should be doing. *Those* are the things that frame the New Testament—the things that are preceded and the things that operate alongside, especially when they have a very clear, intimate relationship (attachment) to the Hebrew Bible from which and

out of which and on the basis of which we get New Testament theology. It ought to have seemed obvious, that this is a terrific example (and I use “terrific” in a two-edged sword way), both in terms of its clarity and its instructive power here, to show that we should not reflexively be thinking about what the rabbis are thinking when it comes to the New Testament. They’re chronologically removed. And in this case, it’s very clear that they’re not helping. Sometimes they *do* help, because they might interpret a passage in the Hebrew Bible a certain way that sets your mind off in a certain direction. It gives you something to check. “Is that interpretation workable in the Old Testament’s own ancient Near Eastern context? Yeah, it is! Wow, that’s really helpful.” Sometimes that happens. Other times it takes you 180° away from where you need to be. So this is a good example—a good topic for illustrating that. And again, I hope this is helpful.

TS: So, Mike, is it safe to say that this podcast episode is *Unseen Realm 2*? Is this going to be in a book form...?

MH: Well, yeah, there would be some discussion of Matthew 16 and Matthew 18 and this other stuff. It would be expanded upon. Because we can go to all these passages. We can show this or that connection. Stuff’s always better in written form, because there it is and you can re-reference it. Here we have to kind of watch our time, even though we typically throw that to the wind. But yeah. This kind of stuff is going to be in that book if it ever exists. But the good news is, even if that book never exists, at least it exists here, which is why we’re trying to cover some of this ground.

TS: I’ll keep pushing to make sure it exists. And we’ll be looking for it.

MH: [laughs] You might want to call it a Sisyphean burden. Do you know who Sisyphus was?

TS: Oh, yeah.

MH: In Greek mythology, he’s punished by having to push the big stone up the mountain every day and he never gets to the top. [laughs]

TS: Oh, yeah. We’ll be looking forward to Exhibit B next week, Mike.

MH: [laughs] Alright.

TS: And with that, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.