

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 363

Revelation 3, Part 2

February 14, 2021

Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)

Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)

Episode Summary

Part 2 of our in-depth look into the role played by the Old Testament in Revelation 3 focuses the otherworldly “keys” in Rev 3:7 (“who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens” and its earlier counterpart, Rev 1:18 (“[I am] the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades). What are these keys? What does the metaphor represent? Are Death and Hades places or entities, or both? How does earlier Old Testament material help us understand what John is saying?

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 363: Revelation 3, Part 2. I’m the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he’s the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How are you doing?

MH: Well, Trey, I’m doing well. But I still don’t have an office.

TS: Uh oh. [MH laughs] So you’re...

MH: So I’m huddled here in my bedroom at my little desk, doing the Naked Bible Podcast. But hey, it’s not going to affect the content. But I still don’t have my office back.

TS: Yeah. But you’re expecting it next week, right?

MH: I am. I’ll be able to get in in a few days and start unpacking—digging out. It seems like I’m always digging out of holes or something. But such as it is.

TS: Yeah. There’s some comedy in there somewhere, but I’m going to restrain myself.

MH: [laughs] Right! We can’t quite find it right now. [laughs]

TS: I’m going to restrain myself.

MH: We can see it from a distance. [laughs]

TS: I'm going to be a good boy. Okay. [laughs] Hey, Mike, I got a question... Some people were having some confusion on following your logic through the first part of Revelation here. And...

MH: Oh, I can't believe that anyone would be confused [TS laughs] when we're talking about the book of Revelation. I can't believe it.

TS: I think you mentioned it in the Introduction of Revelation. So I think maybe people are just not following along here. But they're misunderstanding your angle that you're taking. They're asking about, if John is writing what he saw and heard, then why are you saying things like, "John wanted to hook back into the Old Testament." And that it sounds like you're saying that these are John's thoughts and his message to these churches, not John writing all he's experiencing or being told to write. So can you clarify that a little bit?

MH: Yeah, so if I can distill that question, the question is, "Is this a record—John's record—of a vision? Or is John thinking back into the Old Testament?" And the answer is, "Yes." Okay? Both of these things can be true at the same time. Now let's just put ourselves in real time with John (as it were). When John has a vision, he's not writing during the vision, because vision-like states (trance-like states—however we want to describe these things, they are what they are). He's not interrupting the angel and writing things down, like a stenographer or something like this. He's not capturing it on video. He's experiencing something. And then after the fact, he sets it to writing. And in the process of setting it to writing, it's going to dawn on him (either because of what he knows in terms of the Old Testament or biblical theology), or he's going to be prompted by the Spirit of God, to make connections. And he's going to make them.

I mean, let's just use an example from the Introduction: solecisms. There's a couple dozen of these where John's Greek grammar is wrong. It's incorrect, where everywhere else in the book it's perfectly fine. And again, scholars have figured out that when this happens, the explanation is there's something that John's drawing on back in the Septuagint that he could convert to correct grammar, but he doesn't because he wants you to think about, "Why is he saying it that way instead of the better way to say this?" He wants readers to go back and look at things. It's a way of drawing attention. And there are very clear instances in the book where John takes two, three, four passages from the Old Testament and mixes them. I mean, literarily these are just a matter of looking it up—looking up the Greek text that John has given us and going back and looking at the Septuagint. This is something that if you know Greek fairly well (1st or 2nd year knowledge), you can just go check for yourself. That doesn't mean that John didn't have a vision. Okay? It just means that both of these things can be simultaneously true. So John has this experience. Then after the fact, he has to relate that experience to his audience. And in so doing, he's going to be doing

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the kinds of things that we're talking about here. So one doesn't cancel out the other. They work in tandem. So that's my approach to this. Because A) I don't deny that visions can happen to people (like John)—visions from God. And B) you can actually go look this stuff up textually and see what's being done. So I'm not of the mode to deny either and don't see any compelling reason why I have to deny one or the other. Both of these things can be operative at the same time.

TS: Alright, Mike. Yeah, I think... I mean, he's got to convey what he saw, so what better way than to use the tools that he's familiar with and the people are familiar with?

MH: Right! He's going to discern what the point is of what he's seeing. Or he's going to be told by the angel. I mean, the angel could relate something in the Old Testament and John is going to be alerted to this fact. And so after he relates it to his audience, there's going to be some of this thing going on to make sure the audience doesn't miss the point. You know, inspiration is a human and supernatural enterprise. Both of these things are operative. One does not cancel out the other, nor *should* one cancel out the other. We shouldn't talk about the subject trying to avoid one or the other. This is going back to what I say frequently on the podcast. If we deny the human element of inspiration, we undermine the doctrine in very significant ways. And if that sounds a little strange (maybe to a new listener), the short path is to go google that and find the podcast transcript. But there's plenty of places on YouTube and whatnot where I'm talking about why we need a better view of inspiration, and you'll find out why I say that.

TS: Alright. Sounds good. Well, Mike, we're wrapping up Revelation 3. This is Part 2. So we might as well just get into it.

MH: Yes we are. We might as well get into it. I mean, this'll be a bit lengthy, but it's really interesting stuff. And again, it's the kind of stuff we like. [laughs] It's the weird stuff. So this episode... I've labeled it Part 2 of Revelation 3, and we're taking as our point of focus Revelation 3:7. But this is also going to be related back to Revelation 1:18. And what I'm going to do is basically start with Revelation 1:18 and then we'll hit Revelation 3:7 at some point and see how these two things go together. And the link between the two is this "keys" language. So let me just read the passages. Revelation 3:7 says:

⁷“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.’

And then Revelation 1:18... I'm going to loop verse 17 into it so it just sounds more readable. It says:

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

10:00 Now there are several really excellent resources on this passage (Revelation 1:18) and related passages like chapter 3:7 that give you its contextual roots. Now I'm going to give you two sources here—two resources—for those who are interested in really getting into the weeds. One of these is really easy to find and the other one not so much. And the one that's easy to find is also inexpensive. And I want to give a hat tip here and a thanks to one of our listeners (Robert Cruickshank) for these recommendations. And they are quite good for this passage. Now the one that isn't expensive and is easy to find is by Justin W. Bass. Its title is *The Battle for the Keys: Revelation 1:18 and Christ's Descent into the Underworld*. It's published by Wipf and Stock. It's part of the Paternoster Biblical Monographs series, and it was published in 2014. Now we're going to have Justin on for an interview (at least we're planning on in, so Lord willing that'll happen) in the future. We're not going to talk so much about *this* book. We'll be focused on a different book. But this is sort of an off-the-radar biblical theology book that really is... He does a great job with this. The book is blurbed and recommended by W. Hall Harris, who's a New Testament professor at Dallas Seminary and was a mentor to Justin during his dissertation process. And this is his dissertation. And some of you who've read *Unseen Realm* will recognize that name as well (Hall Harris). In the book (*Unseen Realm*) I take Hall's view of the descent of Christ to the underworld in Ephesians 4 and how that relates to Psalm 68 and all that kind of stuff. So this is going to be more of that. It's going to add more layers to it.

The second sources is by David Aune, whom I've referenced before in terms of his commentary on the book of Revelation. We dip into that almost every episode somewhere. But he has a book called *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity*. This is a Mohr Siebeck title from 2006. And this one is more expensive and a little harder to find. But both of these have a lot of really good contextual material from Revelation 1:18 and Revelation 3:7. And I'm going to be dipping into both during this episode—mostly Bass, but also interacting with Aune's work in this monograph. So let's take the two passages in the order they appear. They are, of course, related but they're not identical. I'll read Revelation 1:17-18 again just to refresh our memory.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

Now Aune, in this *Apocalypticism*, book (this monograph) says this:

The phrase "I have the keys to Death and Hades" refers to the cosmic sovereignty to which Jesus has attained following the act of God raising him from the dead. All three elements are featured in the brief description of the Lamb in Rev 5:6, which was "standing as though slain, with seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth" (5:6). Here "standing" refers to the fact that he is now living [MH: in other words, he's not laying over dead], despite the fact that he was slain, and the seven eyes understood as "the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth" is another symbolic way of emphasizing the sovereignty [MH: in this case] of Jesus Christ [MH: who is the Lamb].

Now we talked about the "eyes of the Lord running to and fro" in a couple of episodes and how that denotes God's oversight of everything—sovereignty. So that's familiar. But here, the language in Revelation 5 is transferred to the "Lamb who was slain but is now standing" (raised). And again, that language harkens back to Revelation 1:17-18. Now there's a grammatical issue that Aune points out in Revelation 1:18. He writes this (a little bit further):

The prophetic call narrative in Rev 1:9-20 is a complex pastiche of imagery drawn from various sources [MH: boy, don't we know that?]. A supernatural revealer "like a son of man" appears to John and claims to possess "the keys [MH: and he has here "to"] to Death and Hades" (1:18b).

He translates it a little bit differently. And he has a footnote here. This is the grammatical issue. He says:

Footnote 23: The genitives *tou thanatou* and *tou hadou*...

Let me just break in here. "Genitive" is a grammatical term for the relationship of two nouns that follow each other, or an article plus a noun. So for those of you who've had a little Greek, you know right away what we're talking about here. But there are different ways to understand the relationship of nouns (let's just put it that way) in not just Greek, but any language. So Aune says:

The genitives *tou thanatou* and *tou hadou* could either be objective or possessive genitives...

In other words, you could translate this "the keys to Death and Hades" (that would be the objective mode of understanding) or you could translate it "the keys belonging to Death and Hades" (that would be possessive). So one says the keys to Death and Hades, like they're a place that you can go and unlock something. And the other one is more possessive, that Death and Hades possesses these keys—they belong to them. Aune says:

If they are regarded as objective genitives, Death and Hades must be understood spatially (as in Rev 20:13-14) [MH: in other words they're places with spatiality], but if they are construed as *possessive* genitives, Death and Hades must be understood as personifications (as in Rev 6:8).

So let me just break in here again. Aune is saying, both of these things happen with Death and Hades in the book of Revelation. Sometimes it's a place. Sometimes they're like persons or figures—entities. Okay? Back to Aune:

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The first possibility is preferable [MH: this is his view] since Death is never (to my knowledge) [MH: to his knowledge] described in ancient texts as possessing keys, and there are few if any ancient texts in which Hades is so described (Pausanias [MH: he points out] 5.20.3 describes a decorated table showing Ploutos holding a key, but the same text distinguishes him from Hades whom he has locked up).

So Aune's saying, "I think it's..." He drifts away from the personification view. Now personally, I think that's unnecessary. And what we're going to go through in this episode is basically going to be pushback on Aune on this point. I've already hinted that I favor personification a little bit. Bass argues at length for it, and he has very good reasons for doing so. And you might say, "Well, this feels like a bit of a distinction without a difference, because hey, the personified Death and Hades are masters of a particular domain, so the other idea (of the spatiality) is still in play." I agree. I think both of these things belong on the table—both of these perspectives. But I want to focus a little bit on the personification angle, at least initially here.

So let's start with the Old Testament. Here's the question. "Are Death and Hades (Hades, the underworld) ever personified? Are they ever portrayed as figures (entities, deities) elsewhere, especially in the Old Testament or in the literature that informs the terms used in the Old Testament?" And the answer to that is, "Oh, yeah. Yeah, they are."

Now I'm going to refer to DDD here (*Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*) and the article on Death is written by John Healey. And he gives us a good survey (sort of the background) to the Old Testament material. Now what you need to know here is that in Hebrew (the Hebrew Bible) the term for "death" (the noun, anyway) is *mot*. That is the same word in Ugaritic (*mot*) and in Ugaritic, Mot is a deity (part of a pantheon). So this is going to be the backdrop for the Old Testament use in certain passages of the term *mot* or "death." But first we've got to get the background material. So Healey writes:

Mot's absence from the Ugaritic cult [MH: in other words there's no rituals or sacrifices to Mot] and [MH: his absence in] personal names suggests that he was not a deity worshipped like others in the pantheon [MH: but he's nevertheless a deity figure]... In Ugaritic mythology Mot is one of the main enemies of Baal

(alongside Yam, the sea-god, who, unlike Mot, *was* the object of cultic veneration to some extent). He [MH: Mot] overcomes Baal and the latter has to descend into Mot's underworld domain.

So the Baal Cycle has this battle between Mot (Death) and Baal. Baal loses and Baal has to go into the underworld. Okay? So what we read afterward is Baal is reported dead in the Ugaritic tablets. I'm not going to give you the KTU numbers. It's not important now. But the goddess Anat hunts for him and she attacks Mot, who is vanquished. So she takes care of Mot.

Baal revives and the two protagonists fight. Eventually Mot is forced to concede, at least temporarily. The details are, of course, far from certain... The main characteristic of Mot is that he is a voracious consumer of [MH: both] gods and men. He has an enormous mouth and an appetite to match... In this voraciousness Mot is closely associated with the underworld. Mot dwells in the underworld, which is an unpleasant (muddy) place of decay and destruction... The role of Mot as a demonic force to be held in check is well illustrated [MH: in Ugaritic texts, and then he has a reference]... Although there is no certain iconographic representation of Mot [MH: there's no artwork that tells you what they thought Mot looked like], such suggestions as have been made involve images of a god or demon carrying a sceptre [MH: in other words he's a ruler]...

So this is the Old Testament Canaanite backdrop to Mot as an entity. And when you get into the Old Testament, Healey in the same article writes this:

In OT poetry Death is often personified (e.g. Hos 13:14)...

And I'm just going to read Hosea 13:14. It won't be the last time that we reference that, perhaps, in this episode. The speaker is God here.

**¹⁴ I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol;
I shall redeem them from Death.**

Now there it's kind of neutral, like a place, but then the verse says...

**O Death [MH: Death is being addressed—Mot is being addressed], where are your plagues?
O Sheol [MH: O Underworld], where is your sting?
Compassion is hidden from my eyes.**

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Now some of you automatically, even though you didn't know that was Hosea 13:14, you've heard that language before, and it's in Paul. "O Death, where is thy sting? O grave (the place where the dead go), where's your victory?" The point is

that death and the underworld here are portrayed as entities that can be spoken to (or in this case teased or mocked) by Hosea 13:14. Healey writes:

In other texts there is mention of specific characteristics of Death which have some sort of parallel in the picture of Mot painted by the Ugaritic texts. Thus in Hab 2:5 the insatiability of personified Death is mentioned (“whose greed is as wide as Sheol, and like Death he is never satisfied”) [MH: it’s sort of anthropomorphic language] and this may echo the background cultural tradition of Mot, but the comparison is with the insatiability of the arrogant man and does not directly touch on matters religious. The same idea, though applied to a personified Sheol [MH: the underworld], is found in Isa 5:14 (“Therefore Sheol has enlarged its appetite, and opened its mouth beyond measure”: and cf. Prov 1:12; 27:20; 30:15–16; Ps 141:7).

Again, this is anthropomorphic language used of Sheol. In some cases it’s Death and in other cases it’s Sheol. They’re portrayed as a person. And there are other passages that do this, but this is sufficient to make the point.

Healey goes on and says... Or let me just make the point here. Because I think something Bass says here is a little bit better. In the Old Testament (where you have this personification) and the rest of Second Temple literature, this is going to show up, too. But everybody goes to Sheol in the Hebrew Bible—the Old Testament theology. Because everybody dies. The only exceptions are people that God exempts from this. And there are only two of these in the Hebrew Bible. There’s Enoch and Elijah. So Bass, writing about the Old Testament Death and Hades (or actually Mot and Sheol), wants to make this point. Because he’s going to do something with it when he gets going here. He says:

There is no Old Testament instance of a true descent to and return from the underworld by a living human being...

Let me just read that again and let that sink in.

There is no Old Testament instance of a true descent to and return from the underworld by a living human being...

We could stop right there, and you probably are going to be already seeing the significance of Revelation 1:18 and 3:7 with this Death and Hades thing. Because Jesus does that. He *does* descend and he *does* return to the land of the living. He’s not just revived in the underworld like Osiris or something like that. What happens with Jesus goes well beyond that. And it’s something that just didn’t happen in the Old Testament. So Bass, continuing, says:

In fact, Enoch and Elijah are the only exceptions who can be found to have gone to Heaven (and remain there) instead of Sheol/Hades before the NT times. Jewish

and Christian writings after the time of Jesus begin to speak of the OT saints in heaven such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Job's children, and the souls of the righteous go to the third heaven [MH: language like this]... [Deliverance from Sheol] is the great hope of the faithful Israelite and there is no evidence [MH: in the Old Testament] that it had been fulfilled... [The righteous] are at peace in death (Isa 57:1-2), and hope to be united with their bodies for a physical resurrection (Ezek 37:12-14; Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2).

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But his point is that in the Old Testament, that never happens. They never get to experience that in terms of what's written in the Old Testament. Now that doesn't mean that we've got soul sleep, or anything like this. Because there are these expressions of hope: "I'm going to go be with my fathers," "buried with his fathers." And you know, we know from archeology... We've been through this material elsewhere on the podcast, when we talked about psalms of Korah and deliverance from Sheol and all this stuff. This ought to be familiar territory. But in case it's not, I just want to hit a little of it. Again, the point is, everybody goes to Sheol, because everybody dies. There were only two exceptions: Enoch and Elijah. Okay, we got them. And once you're in Sheol (in the Old Testament) nobody ever gets out. There's hope that you *will* get out at the last day, that the Lord will take you out, will redeem the righteous. But there's no passage that says they do. In the Intertestamental period, people start writing in this way, about that the deliverance from Sheol is now real, like their perspective on the afterlife shifts a little bit or it develops a little bit to include this. And of course, in the New Testament this is very plainly articulated in various passages. But it's Jesus who makes it a reality for everybody, all the righteous anyway. So there's this growth in the way this is thought about—the afterlife is thought about—growth in understanding. The hope becomes reality. And if you're looking at the Old in the New Testament, it's very clear who the One is who makes it a reality. That would be Jesus. Okay? "First fruits of them who sleep." I mean, these phrases actually mean something in the context of the Hebrew Bible and just how this whole subject is thought about. So Bass, going on, notes that in some passages (at least one, explicitly), Sheol and... Let me just read it:

...being "gathered to one's fathers" [MH: this idea of going to be with your loved ones] is parallel with Sheol (Gen 49:29). If being "gathered to one's fathers" and "sleeping with your fathers" is parallel with Sheol then it is clear that [MH: even] the righteous went to Sheol.

Even the ones who expect a positive experience, maybe expect something more, to be with the Lord, as certain psalms say. So everybody goes to Sheol, righteous and unrighteous. Nobody gets out in the Old Testament, even though that is the hope of the righteous. So that's sort of a summary of Old Testament thinking when it comes to what happens when you die.

Now Bass wants to make that point, because he's later going to point to how Jesus is the unique factor here. He's the one that makes it a reality. In biblical

theology, Jesus is the turning point. He's the lynchpin to all this. But then he goes on and he says, "We need to say something about personification language, too."

Now just think about it, before I even get into this. We've talked a little bit about personification already, but I'm going to do a little bit more here with what Bass has written. Everybody goes to this place. Everybody dies. So there's the death problem. Everybody goes to the underworld. Okay? And it's not really a great place. I mean, yep, if you're fortunate, you might get to see your loved ones and all that, but you're still there. You're still, like, a prisoner. You're still never going to get out. You *hope* to get out to be with the Lord directly, to experience his presence. Okay? That's even better than being "gathered to your fathers." You want to be with the Lord that you serve, that you worship, that you believe in. So on and so forth. That's the hope. But Death and the underworld are in your way. They hold you prisoner. It's as though you're in a cell and they have keys. It's a prison metaphor. It's inescapability—this kind of metaphor. Think in those terms. Wouldn't it be great if somebody could come down there and basically take the lunch money from Death and the underworld—take the keys and let those people out that are aligned with him, that are righteous, that follow him? I mean, when you start thinking in those terms, you're thinking of spiritual warfare. You're thinking of divine warrior conflict. You're thinking of some kind of battle thing. You're thinking of somebody going down there and, like I said, taking their lunch money. Okay? "I'm here now. Hand 'em over. The keys are *mine*, not yours any longer." There's a spiritual war, a spiritual battle, with Death and Hades. And Jesus is going to win that fight. That's the imagery that is lurking behind Revelation 1:18 and Revelation 3:7.

But now that I've tipped the hand here, let's go back to the Old Testament. Bass has a nice summary of personification language, and part of it reads as follows. This is Old Testament stuff now.

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Many see this personified figure [MH: Death] as Mot, the Canaanite god from Ugaritic texts with very similar characteristics to Death in the OT [MH: we've already hinted at that with Healey's article]. To illustrate, Death uses waves of the sea against his victims (2 Sam 22:5-6), cords and snares (Pss 17:5-6 [18:4-5]; 114:3 [116:3]; Prov 13:14; 14:27; 21:6), ascends through windows (Jer 9:21), kills (Job 18:13; Jer 18:21), terrorizes [MH: people] (Ps 54:5 [55:4]), consumes (Job 15:21), is never satisfied (Hab 2:5), crushes (Job 30:23), speaks (Job 28:22), shepherds [MH: people under his ownership] (Ps 48:15 [49:14]), is the enemy of man (Can't [MH: Song of Solomon] 8:6), has weapons (Ps 7:13), is sent by God (Isa 9:7; Hab 3:13), meets people (Prov 24:8; Dan 2:9), can be called upon (Job 17:14; Prov 18:6)...

It's all personification language.

Similarly, Sheol/Hades [MH: not just Death, but Hades the place] is predominantly the realm of the underworld, but also can be personified as a being that

unleashes terror. Sheol/Hades is personified throughout the OT as seizing his victims (Job 24:19), never being satisfied (Prov 27:20; Hab 2:5), an irresistible power (Cant 8:6), terrorizes with weapons (Pss 17 [18]:6; 114:3 [116:3]), has a house (Job 17:13; 30:23), has a hand (Pss 48:15-16 [49:14-15]; 88 [89]:49; Hos 13:14), has a belly (Jonah 2:3), has a mouth to feed on his victims (Isa 5:13), can be embittered ([MH: at least in the Septuagint] LXX Isa 14:9), can make a covenant (Isa 28:15), is naked before God (Job 26:6)...

So again, this is all personification language. This is his point. Now you take all that and you see the same thing in Second Temple Jewish literature and Greco-Roman literature. Bass has a whole chapter dedicated to the personification of Death and Hades in Greco-Roman literature and Second Temple material. Here's a short paragraph from it:

Beginning in Homer, Hades is personified as the god of the underworld and is the brother of Zeus. Moreover, the underworld is predominantly personified as the god Hades. Hades is "horrible" and "the most hated of all the gods." Hades was worshiped in a temple near Elis in Greece. He is also pictured as the judge of the dead. Hades is simultaneously portrayed not only as the god of the underworld, but also the very realm of the underworld that houses the souls of the dead. The dead are frequently referred to as entering the house of Hades. There is a river or lake that is the boundary between the dead and the living and a ferryman takes the dead across to pass through the gates of Hades. In Greek mythology, even Death is personified as a demon or monster from the underworld who is the "sacrificer of the dead." It is clear that the Greeks sometimes personified Hades as a god of the underworld and simultaneously understood Hades as the abode or realm of the dead [MH: In other words, to the Greek mind, yeah, they're both on the table, just like we said earlier]. I believe this Greek portrayal of Hades as ruler over the dead and realm of the dead find clear parallels in the OT and especially in Revelation.

Second Temple writers noted all this stuff. I'm not going to bother to read the whole section here. I'll just read a few sentences. Here are some Second Temple Jewish examples:

The book of Wisdom makes clear that God did not create death (Wis 1:13) and it was through the Devil's envy that death entered into the world (Wis 2:24; cf. Sib. Or. 1:40). Death can be seen as a realm or state of being or personified. To illustrate, Death can be summoned by mankind to make a covenant (Wis 1:16), Death is summoned by God to take Abraham (T. Ab. 8:9-12; 16-20), Death decrees (Sir 41:2-3), has a hand (Song of the Three Jews 1:88) [MH: so on and so forth]... swallowing up sinners (1 En. 56:8; Apoc. Ab. 31:3-4), oppressive (1 En. 63.11), destructive (Sib. Or. 3.393), a dragon that feeds on the wicked (3 Bar. 4:6), and must be tamed (Apoc. Ab. 10:11).

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Just on and on and on. The whole point is that when you get up to the New Testament, there's a long history of that Death and the underworld (we'll use the Revelation language: Death and Hades) as being both a place and an entity (a supernatural being). They're both in view. When you get to the New Testament, Bass writes this:

More specifically, the book of Revelation "uses Hades four times (always paired with death) and the two of them are personified agents of evil that Christ will (has) overcome (Rev 1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14) [MH: those are the four passages where they're paired]. However, Hades as a city with gates and souls dwelling within is still clearly present in Revelation as well (Rev 20:13)... Death is [also] personified throughout the NT...

In a footnote he lists these references: Romans 5:14, 17; 6:9; 1 Corinthians 15:26, 54-55; 2 Tim 1:10; Hebrews 2:14; and then you get into Revelation (1:18; 6:8; 9:6; 20:14). He says, "So Death is personified a lot..."

... but only Hades is personified in Revelation (1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14). These [MH: four passages where they're paired] are also the only four places in the NT where Death and Hades appear together [MH: so it's only those four]. The author of Revelation is the only writer of the NT who continues to portray Death and Hades as a duo of terror against mankind as has been shown to be somewhat normative in the OT and the Second Temple Literature.

So all of that to say, "Look, what he's going to say about this has deep roots in the Hebrew Bible, Second Temple Jewish literature, and Greco-Roman thinking." And that is this whole idea that Christ is going to descend to this realm and defeat Death and Hades in terms of spiritual warfare, like divine entities, supernatural agents, and I'll use the phrase again, "take their lunch money." He's going to take the keys by force, as it were, and they're going to be dethroned. They're going to be put out of a job. They are no longer going to be owners of these keys. So again, this is the imagery to keep in mind.

Keys had a very important place in the ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman world. The Jewish, Roman, and Greek writers wanted to present their gods as the one who holds the keys to the underworld. The imagery used to describe both the underworld and heaven is consistent in the ancient world. The underworld was presented as protected by strong and impenetrable gates that required keys to enter [think of the prison metaphor and you get the idea]. Therefore, we have numerous angels, gods, and goddesses who are said to possess the keys to these gates [MH: in various ancient religions]...

Another predominant figure in the ancient Greco-Roman world who is said in multiple places to have the keys of the underworld is the goddess Hekate (also

known as Persephone, Artemis, and Diana). In fact, Aune argues that Jesus holding the keys to Death and Hades is a polemic against the Hellenistic conceptions of the goddess Hekate. Hekate was the primary figure in the ancient Greco-Roman world to be associated with having the keys to Hades...

Hekate also known as Artemis in magic papyri texts [MH: where she's referred to (get this) as], "Mother of all things, for you frequent Olympos, and the broad and boundless chasm you traverse. Beginning and end are you..."

Does that sound familiar? "I am the beginning and I'm the end."

Beginning and end are you, and you alone rule all. For all things are from you, and in you do all things, Eternal one, come to their end... And you hold in Your hands a golden scepter [MH: so there's lordship and authority]." She is given multiple titles here that are exclusively used for God and Christ in Revelation. Hekate is the "beginning and end" (cf. Rev 21:6; 22:13), she alone rules all and holds a golden scepter (cf. Rev 4:11 [MH: for that imagery]).

Now Bass... Again, there's just a lot of material. He goes and he talks about Egyptian stuff and Anubis, other Greco-Roman deities. When he moves to Second Temple material, there's an interesting couple of sentences here. He says:

When we move into the Jewish literature before and after the time of the NT, angels are predominantly said to possess the keys, [MH: among these angels are] Metatron, Iaoel, Eremiel/Uriel, and the archangel Michael are all said to possess the keys to either the underworld or the kingdom of heaven. Instead of having the keys to the levels of Heaven, other angels are said to have the keys to Hades.

40:00 **Now for me, the most interesting one there is Iaoel [pronounced Yah' Oh El'], which is Yahoel. If you've ever heard me lecture on the Two Powers in Heaven in Jewish literature, you know that name. Metatron is another. They're the most interesting because Yahoel was the Second Power to a number of Jews. So if you're thinking that, you've got Two Powers thinking, you've got binitarian thinking—binitarian Jews monotheism. But for the New Testament and John, who really holds the keys? It's Jesus. Okay? [laughs] I mean, it figures right into this flow—this trajectory of thought. Now Eremiel is interesting, though. And I'm going to read a little bit about him, what Bass says about his imagery, this other angel. He says:**

The Apocalypse of Zephaniah has striking parallels with the first vision of Revelation (1:12-18). Zephaniah says, Then I arose and stood, and I saw a great angel standing before me with his face shining like the rays of the sun in its glory since his face is like that which is perfected in its glory. And he was girded as if a

golden girdle were upon his breast. His feet were like bronze which is melted in a fire. And when I saw him, I rejoiced, for I thought that the Lord Almighty had come to visit me. I fell upon my face, and I worshiped him. He said to me, "Take heed. Don't worship me. I am not the Lord Almighty, but I am the great angel, Eremiel, who is over the abyss and Hades, the one in which all the souls are imprisoned from the end of the flood, which came upon the earth, until this day."

Now clearly, Eremiel has replaced Christ in this vision. [laughs] Bass notes that Christ has replaced Eremiel if Revelation was written after the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, or they're both using a common source if it's before. Either way, Christ is presented as *deity* in Revelation because he accepts worship from John (1:17). Did you catch that difference? See, everything that I just read to you sounds really like Revelation 1 except for one detail: Jesus doesn't say, "Oh, don't worship me." [laughs] I mean, this is just really clever. If you are a literate Jew and you're familiar with the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* and the keys stuff and all this stuff we've been talking about to this point, and you get to Revelation 1 and you're familiar with this *Apocalypse* passage, "Ah, it's just like this other guy wrote! Except for one thing. Jesus does not refuse to be worshipped." In fact, he's equated with... The imagery of him is aligned with the Ancient of Days. We've already talked about this. *He* is the one who has the keys of Death and Hades. And he's God. Okay? I mean, how many ways can John say it? How many ways can John take a familiar idea to his readers... Because he has to describe what the angel has shown him, whether it's a vision or something the angel shows him or both. Like six of one and half a dozen of another. And it's strategic. I'm sure when John's having the vision, the angels doesn't say, "Now, when you go back down, when you get in your right mind here, here's a great passage to look up to help you out." No, he's showing him things, but John is familiar enough with the material, and he thinks, "How do I get the point across? How do I describe what I've seen? Oh, yeah! There's that *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* thing. That's really useful." Or Daniel 7 or whatever. So he's going to use *something*, whether it's Old Testament or some other text that his readers know, to illustrate what this was like, what he was actually seeing. But he's going to tweak it too. He's going to make sure the theology of the deity of Jesus doesn't get lost. And even then, he's going to show it's consistent with Jewish Two Powers in Heaven thinking. This, the risen Christ, is the Second Power. Not some angel, whether it's a biblical angel or Second Temple Jewish literature angel. It's not these. It's none of these. It's *him*. Okay? It is the risen Christ who is the Second Power. And now he's the holder of the keys, because of the resurrection. All of this is happening in the book of Revelation.

So you get to this and, "Well, how does this inform our reading of Revelation 1:18? Four observations:

1. It's absolutely clear we have a *risen* Christ in view. Revelation 1:18:

But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last,¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

So it’s absolutely clear we have a risen Christ in view.

45:00

2. It’s also clear there is a sequence implied. “I died, I am now alive again forevermore, and I have ‘the keys of Death and Hades.’” One, two, three. This follows that.

3. Now third (and this is important), this suggests (both the risen Christ and the sequence that’s implied) that before Jesus rose from the dead, he *didn’t* have the keys to Death and Hades, somebody else did. And what these sources (especially Bass) are going to argue is that Jesus descended into the underworld at death (“I died”), he was there three days, during which time he did certain things... We’ve talked about this before in *Unseen Realm*. We’ve talked about 1 Peter with this—the descent into Sheol (into the underworld). So he’s there three days, during which time he did certain things, one of which being that he conquered Death and Hades (personified as supernatural enemies), and he took the keys from their domain (from their hands, as it were), rising from the dead. Now after he rises, now *he* is now Lord of the living and the dead. *He* holds the power of life and death, something Revelation will make quite clear in judgment scenes later that involve the second death. So consequently, what Revelation 1:18 is describing is Christ’s descent into the underworld, his combat with and victory over Death and Hades. This would have been crystal clear to ancient literature readers, and the history of the Church in this regard is telling.

4. Here’s the fourth point. Bass points out in detail that the idea that Christ descended into the underworld (“descended into hell” is the more familiar language through something like the Apostles’ Creed) was a belief embraced by the confessing Church across the world until the late 1400s/early 1500s. Everybody believed this. Everybody got it. And if you were an ancient reader, the supernatural outlook of all this in terms of spiritual warfare and the conquering of supernatural agents and taking the keys from them... you know what it means. But we may have lost the detail in the history of the Church, but we didn’t lose the point (at least up until just right before the Reformation). Now I think one of the reasons that it is so... It’s so obvious when you see it, when you talk about it, when you think about it, and especially if you know the backgrounding of the Old Testament—Second Temple record. I mean, this is just obvious. That doesn’t mean that Jesus went to hell, as in he gets a cell where he’s going to be punished. See, that’s the obstacle for a lot of readers today. He died. He goes to the place where the dead go: the underworld. We have to think of that place in that way. Again, what could be more obvious? But he doesn’t remain there. He descended to hell (descended to the underworld is the better way to think about

it) to the realm where the dead go. Well, duh. If he died, then where else would he go? Yeah, exactly. It's quite obvious. And again, everybody was locked in until the late 1400s. Okay?

So this adds weight to what I'm articulating in *Unseen Realm* on 1 Peter 3, where there I talk about how Enoch was a type of Christ in his descent. So not only does Christ preach to the imprisoned Watcher spirits, reiterating their doom, but he also takes the lunch money from Death and Hades. Okay? He's got stuff to do when he goes down into the underworld. "First, I've got to tell the Watchers, 'You ain't getting out.' Or 'You might think you've won after all this time and that your buddy somewhere—some other evil spirit—is going to let you out of here. Well, I've got news for you. Yeah, you might be surprised to see me here, but I ain't going to be here long. You still lose.'" [laughs] Okay? And, "Mission accomplished here. My work here is done. Now I'm going to go over to the gatekeepers (Death and Hades) and I'm going to take the keys from them. And sayonara. I'm outta here." You know? He does certain things.

And again, the early Church, you could... Bass does a really nice job of showing this. They're locked into this. This wouldn't be news to them. But in our day and age, we've had a history of this or that tradition or denomination, maybe even some that have removed the line from the Apostles' Creed or fiddled with the language or taught against it or something like that. They just missed the point. And just like with 1 Peter 3, they in some way kind of eviscerate the passage of its intended meaning. When Christ takes the keys, he takes control of everlasting life (or death) through his resurrection victory. What could be more obvious? Only he, from that point forward, has the authority over the living and the dead in the form of everlasting life and death. Again, what could be more obvious?

50:00

And we have to ask here... We've got to transition to Revelation 3:7. How does this inform Revelation 3:7, the keys of David? First of all, there is an intended parallel literarily in the way John writes this. If you compare the flow of Revelation 1 (the elements of what's described there) with the flow of Revelation 2 and 3, this comes out. For example, if you're thinking about Revelation 1:17-18, just think about the sequence of the elements.

I am the First and the Last, even the Living One, and I was dead, but behold I now live for ever and ever, and I have the keys to Death and Hades.

If you go over to chapter 2, in verse 8 you read:

Thus says the First and the Last [MH: that's a parallel to Revelation 1:17], the one who died, but came to life.

Ah, there's a parallel with 1:18. If you go to chapter 3, you get this, verse 7:

Thus says the Holy One, the True One, the One who has the key of David...

See, you would expect “keys of Death and Hades” because they’re parallel, but it changes. The wording slightly changes in 3:7.

[I’m] the One who has the key of David, who opens so that no one can shut, and shuts so that no one can open.

So the parallel was intended to be noticed (the sequence). Now Beale and Carson write this:

Whereas the keys in 1:18b are called the “keys of death and of Hades,” in 3:7b a quotation from Isa. 22:22 is substituted for “of death and of Hades” [MH: so now we have]: “the one having the key of David, who opens and no one shuts, and who shuts and no one opens.”

Isaiah 22:22. I mean, it’s pretty obscure. Let’s go to Isaiah 22. And I’m going to read starting down in verse 15. This is sort of a really obscure passage with an obscure person in it. But I’m going to read Isaiah 22:15-2[2]. It says:

¹⁵ Thus says the Lord God of hosts, “Come, go to this steward, to Shebna, who is over the household, and say to him: ¹⁶ What have you to do here, and whom have you here, that you have cut out here a tomb for yourself, you who cut out a tomb on the height and carve a dwelling for yourself in the rock? ¹⁷ Behold, the LORD will hurl you away violently, O you strong man [MH: God is angry with this particular steward]. He will seize firm hold on you ¹⁸ and whirl you around and around, and throw you like a ball into a wide land [MH: look, it’s almost like a Bugs Bunny cartoon]. There you shall die, and there shall be your glorious chariots, you shame of your master's house [laughs] [MH: gosh, that’s brutal]. ¹⁹ I will thrust you from your office, and you will be pulled down from your station.

How would you like that on your job review? “You’re a shame of your master’s house.”

²⁰ In that day [MH: God says, “when I punish this guy, in *that* day”] I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, ²¹ and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your sash on him, and will commit your authority to his hand. And he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. ²² And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.

There you get the part that John repurposes in Revelation 3. So Isaiah 22 has God getting rid of this one servant that's just "the shame of your master's house" [laughs] and replacing him with Eliakim. And he says part of what he's going to do for this guy is, "I'm going to give him the key of the house of David." So this guy's going to be, like, over the Davidic dynasty, where they live. This guy is, like, over the house. Okay? This is a big deal because it's the king. Okay? "He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open."

55:00 Now going back here to Revelation 3. What in the world is John angling for, and how does this relate to the keys of Death and Sheol—Death and Hades? Let's think about what we just read. Eliakim. Probably none of you named your kids Eliakim. But it's a name formed from *'el* (which is God) and the verb *qûm* (which is "to raise up" or "rise up"). Oh, now it's getting interesting. See, his name means "El (or God) will raise up." Boy, that's interesting in a passage that just referred to Jesus. Boy. Kind of interesting. John saw significance in Isaiah 22:15-25 because of the name and because of how Eliakim was described. So Beale and Carson write this:

The substitution ["key of David" for "keys of Death and Hades"] is meant to amplify the idea of the original phrase in 1:18b by underscoring the sovereignty that Christ holds over the sphere "of death and Hades." Isaiah 22 describes Eliakim's absolute control over the kingdom of Israel, though eventually he is deposed from his office [MH: Eliakim doesn't work out as well as God had wanted him to]. The reference to Eliakim as "my servant" [MH: did you catch that? "my servant"] in Isa. 22:20 would have been easily associated with Isaiah's servant prophecies of chaps. 40–53, since the phrase occurs there thirteen times (the same phrase occurs only twice elsewhere in Isaiah, in reference to the prophet himself [20:3] and to David [37:35]). The description of placing "the key of the house of David [= administrative responsibility for the kingdom of Judah] on his [Eliakim's] shoulder," the allusion to him as a "father" [MH: did you catch that?] to those in "Jerusalem and to the house of Judah," and the reference to him as [MH: catch the phrase] "becoming a throne of glory" would have facilitated such a typologically prophetic understanding of Isa. 22:22, since this language is so strikingly parallel to that of the prophecy of the future Israelite ruler of Isa. 9:6–7 ("the government will be on his shoulders ... and his name will be called ... Eternal Father," who sits "on the throne of David"). Thus, Eliakim's temporary control of the kingdom [MH: historically] as "prime minister" to the king of Israel was a prophetic historical pattern pointing forward to Jesus Christ's greater and eternal sovereignty over a greater kingdom.

The kingdom, of course, is what? How is the kingdom... How does that work out in the book of Revelation for John? What's the kingdom? *It's the new Eden*. And how does this relate to having the keys of Death and Hades? Because in the new

kingdom, the kingdom coming, the new Eden, *there is no more death*. Hence the key of David and the keys of Death and Hades point to the same thing: Jesus is Lord of everlasting life and death. He alone has the authority to decide who goes where. “Are you going to be in the new Eden? Are you going to be in the kingdom? Are you going to be in my house, or not?” So it’s Jesus who offers and secured eternal life by defeating death. Everlasting death can only be experienced by rejecting that offer and the love of the key-holder. I mean, these passages actually are speaking the same language. They’re describing the same not only destiny... “You’re not going to die anymore. There is no more death.” The key-holder is going to deal in terms of finality with both death... Just go to the end of the book of Revelation. I mean, Death itself is destroyed, okay? The key-holder is going to deal with death and he’s going to grant everlasting life to those who are aligned with him. It’s the key imagery. It’s sovereignty. It’s eternal life. And that’s why we get the David language. It’s just another way of expressing this idea.

1:00:00

Again, this is just fantastic stuff, that, I think this’ll be one of those episodes where you look back and you go, “Boy, there was just a *lot* planted in some simple phrases where, if you know the wider context, how Death and hell (the underworld) are perceived as demonic figures, and you have the descent idea... Because you have a sequence here. “I was dead. I died and now I’m alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.” There’s this sequence here. Well, if there’s a sequence here, then during the time he was down there, he took the keys away, which denotes kingship and authority. And he’s the Lord of the living and the dead. And he gets to decide who goes where. And all this stuff is packed into these phrases. And if you can grasp that wider context, this is one of these other examples of Christ doing spiritual warfare, announcing the defeat of the keepers while he’s down there. Just (I’ll go back to the phrase) “taking their lunch money.” [laughs] Okay? He’s just smacking them around. They no longer have authority because of the resurrection. So it’s just a fantastic set of images that emerge from a few simple phrases in these verses.

TS: Alright, Mike. Another weird one. But that’s awesome. [MH laughs] I love ‘em.

MH: If it’s weird, it must be important. [laughs]

TS: I love it. I love it. So next week, we’re getting into chapter 4. Any insights into that?

MH: I don’t want to tip anything off yet, other than to say, we’re not trying to prop up or undermine any specific End Times systems. But Revelation 4 and 5, of course, are a unit. We’ve talked about this a little bit before. It’s going to be a Divine Council scene, so we’re going to revisit some of what we discussed when Alan Bandy was on the podcast. So that whole scene, we’ll get into it specifically with an eye to Old Testament contributions to what’s going on there.

TS: Alright, sounds good. I can't wait to go back and listen to this episode, Mike. And we look forward to the next one. Alright, with that I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.