

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 440

The Afterlife, Part 1

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Episode Summary

It's expected that the Bible would have a good bit to say about the afterlife. But perhaps surprising are the number of different terms it uses to describe the destination of the dead and the way afterlife ideas develop from the Old Testament to the New Testament. In this episode of the podcast, Dr. Justin Bass introduces us to some of the terminology. What exactly are Sheol, Hades, the Abyss, and Tartarus? Listen in to find out.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 440: The Afterlife, Part 1 with Dr. Justin Bass. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike. What's going on?

MH: Oh, not a whole lot. It's good to have Justin back though.

TS: Yeah, absolutely. He's been on the show a few times, but we're going to be talking about where do you go when you die, right? The afterlife.

MH: Yeah, all that afterlife talk, yeah.

TS: Yeah, should be interesting.

5:00

MH: Yeah, we get these questions often enough that I figured, hey, we should just have some focused time on it so the next time we get the question we can just say, "Hey go listen to this episode or two from Justin." So, yeah all that afterlife terminology, both good and bad, favorable and unfavorable. That's what we're going to be talking about.

Well, we're excited once more to have Justin Bass on the Naked Bible Podcast. And Justin, even though you've been on before, I want you to introduce yourself to our audience. We always get new listeners so we're just going to start with the

basics. Who is Justin Bass? Where have you been? What do you teach? What's your degree in? Where'd you get it? All the basics. So if you could let us know and then we'll get started.

JB: Okay, what is a Justin Bass? That's what I'm going to answer here.
[laughter]

MH: There you go.

JB: Yeah, it's great to be back on. Blessed to be back on with you, and one of the things teaching-wise, I've been blessed to be able to teach some courses at the great school in Florida with you, Mike, so that's been wonderful.

MH: Yeah, you've been very helpful and the feedback has been good.

JB: Yeah, really, really thankful for that. Just, I guess, a bit about my history. The Lord opened my eyes in college. I was at Southern Methodist University (SMU). It was despite that school. It had nothing to do with that school because it was a godless campus; I think it still is. But I came to Christ there and jumped into Dallas Theological Seminary right after that. I had planned to go to law school, go to business school. I had no plans for any type of religious education. Everything changed after coming to know the Lord, and God gave me a hunger for studying his word, for theology, for apologetics, for evangelism, and so I got a THM at DTS. I went straight through. I did a Ph.D. in New Testament Studies. I planted a church soon after that. I did that for six years. And while I was there, I was also teaching part-time at DTS, teaching Greek in the summers. I had some great opportunities for apologetics debates with atheists and some Muslims. Then about 5 years ago the Lord called our family to move to the Middle East. So I taught at a great school, probably the largest evangelical seminary in the Middle East called Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary—JETS for short, since it's such a full name. So I was there for three years teaching there, and then came back just to promote my book that I came on the last time to talk to you about (*Bedrock of Christianity*). And I came back in 2020, and two days after I landed in the Dallas Airport they shut everything down because of COVID. So through about a six-month process, the Lord made it clear that he was calling us to transition back here. So now I've been back for two years and been teaching part-time, whether at the school in Florida or JETS or a great school in India as well and a Bible college here. I've been teaching part-time at a lot of different schools. I'm working on my next book right now, talking about dreams and visions of Jesus and how that is just a worldwide phenomenon all over the world, just some amazing accounts and stories, and really using that as a further apologetic for the resurrection and for the fact that Jesus is Lord of the world. So that kind of brings me up to now.

MH: Yeah, you're busy. You've got your hands full.

JB: Yeah, it's fun though. I'm blessed. I'm thankful.

MH: Yeah, it's a good kind of busy.

JB: It's good work God's given me.

MH: Well, in view of your prior work that we referenced when we were going through the book of Revelation, specifically on the underworld... I get emails all the time about, "Hey Mike, what's Sheol? What's the abyss? What about the Lake of Fire? What about Gehenna?" You pick your way through your email and you're like I can answer these sorts of questions briefly in an email format, but I thought, you know, I get this question enough...

JB: I get them, too. I know, it's such a... People are fascinated. It's like the descent. That was my first book/dissertation was on. People are fascinated by these subjects. That's why I wrote about it. I'm fascinated by it as well, and I know you are.

MH: Yeah. It's good you can do your dissertation on something you're actually interested in [laughs].

JB: This was great advice I got from Dan Wallace—Dr. Wallace. He told me early on, you know, he said, "Start early and pick something you like."

MH: Yeah, yeah, that's very true. But I get the question enough. I thought we need to devote some episode time on the podcast to this. So I contacted you and that's what we're going to do. We're going to have two interviews. This is Part 1 (this episode) on, really, afterlife terminology in the Bible—Biblical afterlife terms. So we want to jump in here. Naturally the place to start is the Old Testament, but we're going to be going in both interviews... Because we're going to land on specific terms and they're going to both have an Old Testament sort of heritage and New Testament use—Second Temple Judaism. So we're going to jump around to all the chronological eras in both interviews, but we're going to start here with the logical place to begin, and that is Sheol in the Old Testament. So let's just jump in there with Sheol and then we'll get into Hades a little bit before we hit probably the abyss and Tartarus yet in this episode. So for those of you who are into this topic, we've got Justin here for two episodes and let's just start off, again, like I said, with Sheol. So Justin why don't you introduce this concept and this term to our audience?

10:00

JB: Yeah, part of the thing that really fascinated me about Sheol as I was working through this on my dissertation was just the kind of universality of "this is where everyone is going."

MH: Yeah.

JB: I mean, going back to Genesis, Sheol is used 66 times. I think they've nailed it down to 66 times in the Old Testament and it's used mostly in the Psalms. I think 16 times in the Psalms, but it's scattered throughout the books of the Old Testament. You see it already in Genesis and throughout the Torah and this is many times mentioned as the place as where Jacob goes, it's where Samuel goes, it's where...But it's also where Korah in his rebellion goes and where wicked kings are arising from their beds of maggots. So it's a fascinating place. We call it the "underworld." I think that's the best English word to use for it.

MH: Yeah, I would agree.

JB: It's just the place—the underworld—and it very well may be that the ancient Israelites and even maybe some of the Christians, you know, they thought of it as somewhere in the depth of the ocean or in the depth of some part of the world physically, but I think we all understand the idea that it is a different realm.

MH: Yeah.

JB: If you dig, you're not going to get to...

MH: Everybody knows you'll wind up in China. You're not going to wind up in Sheol. [laughter]

JB: Exactly, exactly.

MH: That's important because these afterlife terms, they don't have literal latitude and longitude in or around the earth.

JB: Right.

MH: But they are non-terrestrial places. Again, just like we think of the afterlife in general. We still have this sense of vocabulary. We pass over, we pass on, you know, we still use this kind of terminology. We go to X, Y, Z place after we die, and we all know intuitively that you can't just buy a road map or your GPS isn't going to work here.

JB: That's right. Exactly.

MH: We all know this, but yet somehow when it comes to the Bible some people, I think, temporarily forget it that it doesn't work this way physically. It works this way conceptually or spiritually, that both the righteous and the unrighteous go to this place, Sheol. So how would you describe it? What is it?

JB: On that point, I know you love to use the Upside-Down world imagery and I don't know if you caught up with the latest of *Stranger Things* but...

MH: Yeah, we have.

JB: My wife and I are watching it. We haven't finished the latest last season, but it's great. But I think it's a great image because I think it captures the idea also not only that it's not somewhere we can dig down deep into the earth and find, it's also not something that if we go deep into what the new Webb telescope has shown deep in the recesses of the universe... You know, if we keep going somewhere deep in the universe, we're not going to find it either. I like the Upside-Down world imagery because it's right here. Like it's heaven and earth and Sheol, this kind of three-part universe. They're interacting and yet they're distinct. They're distinct and yet they are interacting. And that's kind of the whole idea of Revelation 21 and 22, is that is when the veil will be opened and heaven and earth will be united in the new heavens and the new earth. But yeah, the question you asked, what is it?

MH: Yeah.

15:00

JB: I think the best way to say it is, you know, Hades (the word that is used to translate Sheol throughout the Greek translation of the Old Testament) literally means *ha-des*. It's like they have that *ha* in front of it. That's where we get Hades, but the alpha at the front is like *atheos*—without God. So *hades*, this word that goes back to Homer... He is using it as a way to describe the unseen world—the invisible world—and he even talks about the helmet of Hades. Personified Hades is a helmet that you wear that makes you invisible. So it's an invisible realm, it's a realm that souls go, it's a realm that the spiritual beings, angels, other beings that God created also go. So it's a place that, I think... It's a catch-all word that captures this realm that is not earth, that is not the heavens, and it's a place that at least before Christ... That is one of my main arguments—that this is a place where both the righteous and the dead go and I think it's interesting we do have a few exceptions. Enoch and Elijah, I think, can be seen as some fascinating exceptions, and maybe Moses as well.

MH: Yeah. Again, the difficulty of navigating the terminology is why I typically just use terms like, “This is where the afterlife dead go; it's the realm of the dead,” or something like that.

JB: Yeah.

MH: Because it is portrayed as this alternate reality that you can't actually go to and visit with our physical tools. So we need to just sort of get that out of the way right up front. Now, like everything else in the Old Testament, it seems that this is going to have some Ancient Near Eastern backdrop to it. Can you comment a little bit on that?

JB: Yeah, it seems that when it comes to the unseen world (like you said the afterlife of the dead), you have this strikingly similar picture of what that life is like. You know, the Rephaim, the shades...

MH: The cadaverous existence, yeah.

JB: The shadowy, gloomy...It doesn't look very fun. Achilles isn't very happy in Hades. It's just pictured as a shadowy, gloomy existence and it just seems across the board this seems to be... At least from the Ancient Near East and even Egypt, this seems to be the way that they're picturing the afterlife. I don't know what you think about this, but I'm interested (especially in light of some of the things I'm doing with my book, like near death experiences, NDEs)... And there's a great story in Plato's Republic where they have The Myth of Er, and Er was this soldier who really was killed and was thought to stay dead, and he was found among all these soldiers and he came back to life. They thought he was dead for a while and then he came back to life and he was able to describe what the afterlife was like. And, of course, the imagery was similar to the picture we're talking about of Sheol or Hades. And I wonder if that is how maybe some of these people actually got an image of the afterlife (an accurate portrayal of the afterlife that the Bible put its stamp of approval on), because maybe some of them had some type of NDE experience. I'm not sure on that, but you do see this agreement across the board of what it's going to look like in the afterlife. I think you get fuller revelation as you move forward that there is this, as I argue, very positive experience as well in the afterlife for the righteous. But that is not fully expected and not fully known, I think, in the early stages.

MH: Yeah, I mean, it's overwhelmingly negative. Sometimes like with Egypt you'll get some exceptions, and that's just for the pharaohs because they're going back to be with the gods and Egyptian religion. But even for them, it can still be a fearful thing they have to successfully navigate Apophis and some of these other threats. It's not easy even for them [laughs].

JB: That's right.

20:00

MH: So it's overwhelmingly negative. And in the Old Testament regarding both the unrighteous and the righteous... You brought up examples in Genesis with Jacob, when he hears about his son or what he thinks happened to Joseph and he says, "Now I'm going to go down to Sheol to my son mourning" in Genesis 37:35, and you get it in Genesis 42 and 44. He just assumed that Joseph is in the realm of the dead because of what his brothers had concocted and told him. So he just assumes that this is where Joseph is, it's where he is going to go. And for all the Biblical portrayal, these are positive characters. I mean, Jacob has some shady episodes in his life; we know that.

JB: Yeah.

MH: But Joseph, I mean, certainly Joseph is portrayed very positively, but he goes to the same place.

JB: And even the prophet Samuel. I mean, I think his account is very fascinating.

MH: Yeah, there you go. Yeah, yeah, 1 Samuel 28 there, yeah.

JB: The way he describes it, he is saying, “Why are you disturbing me?” So you get an indication that there is some sort of maybe rest on his part, but definitely not anything to go real deep on. Josephus when he tells that story, he uses the word “Hades” there. So another parallel.

MH: Yeah, there you go. Another parallel.

JB: This is the same realm. And that’s what is interesting, is Samuel is not coming...As Saul is calling upon him, he is not coming from heaven speaking to him; he’s coming up.

MH: He’s coming up, yeah.

JB: Then it parallels Isaiah 14:9, where you have these kings on beds of maggots and things and they’re all stirred up and they say, “You are going to become weak like us.” That definitely has that clear parallel to Odysseus and the Homeric imagery of the way the kings now feel in the underworld, but these would definitely be...They’re being presented as if this is the unbelievers’ experience.

MH: And for those in the audience interested in things like NDEs, I mean, in the evangelical world I think Gary Habermas is the one who has paid most attention to this stuff.

JB: Yes.

MH: But I’ve read enough of it to know that you still... Even in modern day accounts, you still get this cadaverous kind of existence in a number of... in at least parts of episodes. “There was my lifelong friend, my pet dog, that I lost when I was 10.” It’s just not...It’s not always this rosy picture.

JB: That’s right.

MH: You do get some of the other side for sure. I don’t think we should be drawing our theology from NDEs.

JB: Right, right.

MH: But they can be helpful in terms of just what people experience.

JB: Yeah.

MH: And then, like you said, to align...

JB: And they argue, I think, in a lot of ways that there is *something*.

MH: Yeah, something that transcends death.

JB: Exactly. It's not what Sam Harris wants to say, that we can just turn it off like a computer.

MH: Truth be told, I just read a part of a book on animals and NDEs. I'm sure there are going to be some people out there in the audience that are laughing. Like, "Mike, really, you actually spent time reading that?" Yeah, because I thought it was interesting. Again, I've read enough about NDEs to know that animals actually show up in these things and what is really interesting is you get some cases where the animal NDE does not have any earthly connection to the person having the NDE, but it will be like a neighbor's cat. And the person who is dead will know that the neighbor's cat has died while he or she is supposed to be dead. So, like, how does that happen?

JB: Interesting.

MH: You know, how do they get this knowledge when, for all intents and purposes, they are dead? Then the next door neighbor's cat or whatever passes away and then they wake up with this knowledge. I mean, there are things like that... I agree with you that they have value in apologetics—that there is something going on here that transcends just a materialistic worldview. You could put it that way.

JB: Definitely.

MH: Yeah. So what do you think Yahweh's relationship is to Sheol?

JB: Yeah, that's my favorite when it comes to those passages that deal with what is going to happen—how Yahweh not only has power and complete control over the underworld... This is not some dark side that he is completely on the other side of and has no control over. And it's definitely pictured in Proverbs 15:11, for example, where Sheol and Abaddon are completely open; they lie naked before Yahweh. He sees all. 1 Samuel 2:6, you know, he puts to death and he raises to life. He can put them into Sheol and he can take them out.

MH: Yeah and Psalm 139, the famous Psalm there, “If I ascend to heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.”

JB: You can’t get away from him.

MH: Yeah.

25:00 **JB:** You can’t get away from God. And I think this goes to the expectation, too, because you do have this... And especially with the patriarchs, what’s Jacob’s expectation of this afterlife? He has hope in Yahweh, but he clearly has this understanding of a gloomy existence in this realm called Sheol and he’s anticipating that he is going to go there. And we believe he did go there, but did he get a surprise? Was it a little bit better than he thought?

MH: Or did he have to stay?

JB: And ultimately, did he have to stay and did he have this knowledge and hope of one day being rescued out? That is the kind of idea I think you get like in Psalm 73 and the end of Psalm 22 and then, of course, the big resurrection passages like Isaiah 26 and Daniel 12—that ultimately Yahweh is going to take me out of here. Ultimately, he’s going to rescue me.

MH: Yeah.

JB: You get this anticipation and this hope of that happening. And even people who didn’t know that, I think, would have learned that in the afterlife and also been pleasantly surprised. I think Qoheleth in Solomon probably was happy to see that it wasn’t as bad as maybe he thought the underworld would be like. And then I like the parallels with Sheol and Mot, that death and Sheol are lock-step. They’re together in a lot of ways. And you have that imagery of Sheol as this huge, enlarged throat swallowing up humanity, swallowing up things.

MH: Yeah, and then they get swallowed up by death, yeah.

JB: That’s in Isaiah 5. And then in Isaiah 25 it says that Yahweh will swallow up death, swallow up Mot. And so I just love that. Yahweh is actually the great swallower.

MH: Yeah, it’s nice wordplay there.

JB: Yeah. I mean it’s a beautiful picture. And then Hosea 13 would be another—the one that Paul quotes, of course, in 1 Corinthians 15. But it does not seem like Paul uses “Hades” there, which is interesting. In Hosea 13, it does say Sheol there and so you have this idea that ultimately Sheol and Hades will be conquered. They will be.

MH: Yeah, it's very clear in Hosea 13,

**¹⁴ I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol;
I shall redeem them from Death.
O Death, where are your plagues?
O Sheol, where is your sting?**

And again, this is language we associate with Paul, like you said, but right there it is out of Hosea. I agree with you. I take a bit more of a positive view of the Old Testament afterlife, and I know some even evangelical testament scholars do. I'm not sure why that is. There just seems to be more universal negativity here, but I think some of these passages are pretty clear that there was an Old Testament hope—an afterlife hope—of being delivered from Sheol.

JB: That's the picture I see. They had a hope—if not... As Gandalf would say, “a fool's hope,” but they had a hope.

MH: Yeah.

JB: Some of them might have thought of it as a fool's hope, but they did have this strong hope and I don't see how they couldn't have, especially when they saw the power of Yahweh and this experience—the experience with him in their lives.

MH: You already mentioned the Greek background with the Septuagint and how the Septuagint is going to render this as *hades*. What about speaking more broadly? Just branch out in intertestamental literature—the Second Temple material. I know you've already mentioned Josephus, but can we talk a little bit about that? One obvious question is, is Sheol or Hades hell? How much of our sort of church concept of this is accurate or really aligns with what we see in texts, especially as we're creeping into the New Testament period?

JB: Yeah, this is one of probably the greatest misunderstandings of Hades—that Hades is hell. And many English translations of the Bible perpetuate this misunderstanding because they'll translate Hades... and even as we will talk about Tartarus they'll translate that... In 2 Peter 2:4, they'll translate that as “hell.” It is really misleading to put those as “hell” because I think theologically we want to think of... I think the Old Testament and New Testament is consistent that what we think of as hell is a future punishment that is still really unoccupied. It's something that will be filled by devils and demons, Satan, and unbelievers—but after the final judgment. So the place of punishment... There is still a place of temporary punishment, and that would be within what we're talking about as Sheol (or in the Greek, Hades), and I think that works out. We already see that kind of development and I think it is because of this kind of tension already there in the Hebrew scriptures—the intertestamental authors like Josephus. 1 Enoch

30:00

22 is a key chapter. I encourage those listening to just go and read that chapter. It's fascinating because he's really... You're seeing this picture of the underworld that is pictured with the righteous separated from the wicked and they have two very different experiences, very much likening to probably what we'll talk about later, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus that Jesus tells. So I think Jesus isn't being really original there. He's bringing in this understanding of the afterlife that goes back to the Old Testament.

MH: We might as well jump into that. If you want to jump into Luke 16, go ahead.

JB: Yeah, Luke 16:19 through...

MH: Do you think it matters if it's a parable or not?

JB: Yeah, what I like to say is... One thing that's fascinating is it's the only parable of Jesus that names someone.

MH: Mm-hmm.

JB: So I always find that interesting, but I always say because people like to say, "Oh, well it's a parable so you can't build your theology off the parable," which is true, but to me it's similar to the parable of the Good Samaritan. If there's not that path to Jericho, right...

MH: Mm-hmm.

JB: It doesn't matter as much whether that actually happened, but the path to Jericho has to really exist for the story to make sense.

MH: Yeah.

JB: So in the same way, this geography of the underworld needs to be true for this parable to make sense is what I would say. So was there actually a person named Lazarus and did he actually have this conversation with Abraham? I'm open to arguments on both sides. I think it actually did happen; I'm on that side. But that's not necessary. But I think the cosmic geography for Jesus' point to be made (the situation in the afterlife)... Because Jesus is pretty much threatening, again, not hell, but a serious punishment and really actually hell, but a future hell. But a temporary place of punishment is where they're going to go immediately for these Pharisees that he is talking to in the context of Luke 16—those who are greedy and worshiping money rather than God. If their whole life and love is of money and not of God like this rich man, they're going to end up in this place. And so if that place does not exist, if it's not like that, then it just doesn't make sense to me. I think the threat becomes kind of meaningless.

MH: Mm-hmm.

JB: So I take it as an actual story, an actual reality that Jesus is kind of pulling back the curtain and showing us what happened in this instance. But again, I think the cosmic geography of the unseen world is... I think that needs to be accurate.

MH: Mm-hmm.

JB: And it goes back to seeds in the Old Testament and then places like 1 Enoch 22, and Josephus says this is actually what the Pharisees believed. He actually specifically says the Pharisees believed that there were punishments and rewards for the righteous and the wicked in Hades.

MH: Yeah, again, because it's just a general afterlife location, yeah.

JB: That's right. So I think Jesus would be authenticating this picture of the afterlife that was already pretty widespread, at least among Jews in that intertestamental timeframe.

MH: Yeah [audio breaks up] some good interesting passages.

JB: So, you know, Hades is used ten times in the New Testament. It's got a wide variety here. And it's interesting, if you just go to a concordance you can see the ten uses of it and look up each passage. I encourage those listening to do that. So it's a very informative way to do it. When Jesus parallels the heights of heaven to the depths of Hades, how this is going to be the judgment for these nations who reject him—who reject his miracles.

MH: Mm-hmm.

35:00

JB: This is in Matthew 11 and Luke 10. That, again, is just a straight parallel use of the Old Testament use of Hades/Sheol and also a quotation in Acts 2. This is one of my key texts for the descent of Christ into Hades—that God will not abandon Christ's soul into Hades. He will not leave him there. He will rescue him out of there. That is Acts 2:27-31 quoting Psalm 16—again, just picturing the realm of the underworld.

MH: And there you go. I mean, Jesus winds up there temporarily.

JB: Right.

MH: So, again, it's very similar to Sheol, where the righteous and the unrighteous both go to the same place. They're going to have different

experiences, ultimately, but it's interesting that that is a key text for you because it's so transparent. I mean, it's Jesus, for goodness' sake! [laughter]

JB: That's right, yeah. Yeah, to me it's...

MH: What better example could you have?

JB: Exactly. I mean, to me that's just one of the go... There's a few others, but that would be a go-to text. I don't see how you can read that... Especially in the Greek, you cannot read that without understanding it as the soul of Jesus was in Hades for a time. So then you have to explain, well what does that mean? And are there other passages that help us illuminate what Christ did? So one of the things I do argue that I think Jesus did do when he was there is he is rescuing those. Just like they had hoped, he is rescuing those souls from the place of Abraham's bosom that is pictured in that parable. It's different language for that realm, but if you used the parable, those who are in Abraham's bosom (Abraham obviously, but Isaac, Jacob)... Jacob's going to be real happy here, Samuel, David... David says, "I'm going to my son who is in Sheol." So I think the evidence is that Jesus went there and one of the things he did is he took them from that realm to...

MH: Yeah, he fulfills the hope of the righteous, yeah.

JB: Yes. He is Yahweh in the flesh—in the resurrected flesh—actually rescuing them just like you said, and one day... When we talk about kind of the beginning and the end of Hades/Sheol is this idea that one day he will call all the dead from that realm (and that's Revelation 20) for the judgment. So even the wicked will be called from that realm to be united to their resurrected bodies and then they will be righteously judged by Christ and then they will be cast into the Lake of Fire if their names are not written in the Book of Life. That is kind of the picture we get with Revelation 20, but it's so powerful because it's, again, Jesus who is Yahweh in the flesh now doing this with the entire... I think this would be the fulfillment of Isaiah 25, swallowing up those realms. The realms will ultimately be not needed. They will be completely done away with, and that is why they're pictured as personified, being thrown themselves onto the true hell, which Revelation pictures as the Lake of Fire.

MH: What do you think about the personification of Hades in Revelation 1:18? I mean, this is kind of your sweet spot with your earlier book. Can you talk about that a little bit?

JB: Yeah, I do kind of just a background of that because you have death and Hades together—Mot and Sheol—and you see them together a lot. In the Old Testament, you see them a lot together and in the intertestamental literature. And most of the time death is a state of existence and Hades or Sheol is a realm. It's

like a house. It's pictured as like a fortified castle with gates, but they're also personified. So I think, again, they're not actually specific beings. I think they are personified to...

MH: To make a point, yeah.

JB: The Jews and the Christians are using the imagery that is common to their Greco-Roman audience of "Hades is a god" as personified, and so it's a way of giving Jesus kind of these powers to conquer. But there is a reality even behind those powers. And, of course, that reality would be the Satanic forces that ultimately Jesus (or the Christus Victor idea of what Jesus did at the cross and even after the cross)—that triumph that continued into the underworld. So that's what I'm arguing in Revelation 1:18, that when he talks about the keys, he's wresting the keys from these powers which, depending on who was reading it (whether an Egyptian, whether a Greek, whether a Roman, whether a Jew), they would have all had different imagery in their minds of the powers in the underworld that Jesus would have had to conquer. And the point is that he conquered them all. Whatever you can imagine as the power there, he conquered them, and now He has control. Jesus is Lord.

MH: Yeah, he has the keys, yeah.

JB: The dead and the living.

40:00

MH: When do you think we get the beginning of Sheol and Hades, I mean, the realm of the dead?

JB: Yeah, I was going to see what you think about that. I was thinking about that myself. My guess would be when death enters the world—so Genesis 3, kind of the Fall.

MH: Yeah, that's how I think of it, too.

JB: Yeah. You do have the rabbis will place some of those, I think, in kind of eternity, right? In some of the rabbinic writings, I think they want to say like one of the things God made before the creation of the world was Gehenna.

MH: They're just kind of winging it [laughs].

JB: Yeah, exactly. And when we talk about Gehenna, we'll talk about the errors of the rabbis. That's the fascinating thing is how the rabbis, because they're so separate... This is what frustrates me so many times when scholars try to parallel what the rabbis are saying post-Bar Kochba to the Jews of the first century. It's almost like they're from completely different worlds. I mean, the first century Jews

are very different in their thinking than the rabbis of the second and third centuries.

MH: Yeah, I agree. So you mentioned Tartarus. So how is Sheol/Hades different or similar to the abyss and Tartarus? I mean, are these just terms for the same place? Do we get sort of neighborhoods in the afterlife? Is one a subset of another? I mean, how do you approach this?

JB: Yeah, what I see is, again, I think the seeds are there in the Old Testament, so *abyss* would be the Greek word that is used to translate *tahom* and some of the other terms for the deep or the ocean. *Abyss*... Obviously again, just that alpha in the front means “without bottom, bottomless,” which gives credence to them who came up with this. Because using it for the ocean, that’s kind of cool because even today with all our technology, how much of the ocean have we actually discovered? There’s still so much of the depths of the ocean we haven’t even been to. So it really is like the abyss even to us in the 21st century. So I was thinking about that. But I think what they’re doing is they’re describing the locale specifically of where these disobedient angels went.

MH: Mm-hmm.

JB: And we’re in agreement on the interpretation of Genesis 6.

MH: This is where they’re under house arrest.

JB: Yeah, and what’s really interesting is pictured as... So in one sense you could say the abyss is a part of Sheol, but it’s at the bottom. Or you could say it’s its own realm below Sheol. I think the language allows for both, but the idea is its depth. It’s the very, very bottom of the cosmic geography of this realm, and who is housed here is not human souls. This is the place for the disobedient spirits.

MH: Yeah, the proverbial “special place.”

JB: So this is a place of certain angels who fell, or as you like to say, *elohim*. Certain *elohim* who rebelled and fell, they are housed here and really housed in chains. So it’s fascinating that we have a lot of fallen angels that are roaming and actively waging spiritual warfare on earth and in the heavenly realms, but these particular ones are now there in the abyss.

MH: Yeah.

JB: They’re at the depths.

MH: To the end of days. There’s an eschatological release, but that’s going to be short-lived as well.

45:00

JB: Yeah, exactly. So they'll also be released. We get the picture of them being released, and it's being pictured as a place that needs a key. So you have a certain presumably good angel coming down and he has a key to the abyss and he opens it up. This is in Revelation 9. Then you even have this named after the god Apollo. You have an angel (clearly a fallen angel) that's over the abyss that's kind of their leader of the demons below. And then he comes out to do their worst, to unleash hell on earth in a way of the tribulation. That's in Revelation 9. But again, the word "abyss" in the New Testament is used nine times. It is used nine times in the New Testament and all of them except one are specifically talking about the realm of demonic spirits or fallen angels. The place where it is kind of parallel to Sheol is Romans 10. So again, it's another descent passage and Paul is kind of putting the contrast of the highest of heavens to the depths of the underworld. So he uses the abyss there, but other than that, you have most of the uses in Revelation where demons are dwelling. But even there is a passage in Luke 8 that is really interesting, and you don't find it in the parallel Synoptics. And it's when the legion of demons are begging Jesus to let them go into the pigs, but at one point they say, "Are you going to send us into the *abyssos*?" He uses that word and so you get this picture that the demons are aware of where they're compatriots have gone.

MH: Yeah, "Don't send us there!"

JB: "Wherever. Just not there!" And interestingly, Jesus answers their prayers. When I preach on that passage, I like to say demons pray to Jesus and he answers them and they're still damned. We can pray to Jesus and he says no us and we're saved. So the answer to the prayer isn't everything.

MH: What about Tartarus? Do you think that is essentially a synonym for the abyss?

JB: Yeah, so that's what I think.

MH: That's what it's sounding to me, and I would agree.

JB: Yeah. I mean, Tartarus is only used once in the New Testament and it's 2 Peter 2:4.

MH: In the verb form.

JB: And so my view on this is, yeah, Tartarus is the same as the abyss. It's just Peter is speaking to a Greco-Roman audience primarily. In 2 Peter, I would say he's using the imagery that they would most understand and, of course, Tartarus is in their cosmic geography of Hades. In the Greek world, this was the place below Hades that housed the Titans who had rebelled against Zeus. So I like to parallel it. We could even say it's like us talking about the Upside-Down world of

Stranger Things because people are familiar with that term. So it helps them understand the picture that the Bible is presenting of the unseen realms of the underworld or of heaven. Or we could say this person was thrust into the ninth circle of Dante's hell. That would be kind of what, I think, Peter is doing. He is using a term that is familiar to his audience to describe what the Biblical text is teaching.

MH: Yeah, and even to use that current contemporary parallel—the Upside-Down... Even in this latest season, it is very clear that the creators of the show... There are different places in the Upside-Down. I mean, some are more awful than others. You get the cadaverous existence. That's pretty obvious in so many scenes. But it's more (if I could use the word) "hellish." There are parts of it that are more evil than even just the general existence. So you still get this neighborhood kind of feel or these places within places, subsets and sets, and so on and so forth. They do a decent job of that.

JB: Yeah, I agree. Isaiah 26 uses the word "chambers."

MH: Yeah.

JB: I can't remember the Hebrew word there, but I like that English translation—"the chambers." There are different chambers of these realms. I'd like to bring in the 1 Peter 3 passage. I just wanted to parallel that there, too—1 Peter 3 and then Jude 6, I think, again, this is both talking about... Now they're referring directly to the Genesis 6 fallen spirits and where they dwell. 1 Peter 3 specifically uses that word in the Greek "*phylake*," which is the word for prison, which interestingly is the same word used in Revelation for the prison of these spirits. So you have a lot of these parallels here. So I think that's the same as Tartarus and same as the abyss.

MH: This stuff is so clear. I'll ask an opinion question here. You can trace the thought. The development of the thought parallels just all the commentary that you've been giving us here. I mean, there's not a whole lot here that is mirky as far as who's where and the whole Genesis 6 thing and 1 Peter 3.

JB: It's consistent, yes, consistent.

MH: It's very consistent.

JB: It's fascinating.

MH: It's one of the few things in Biblical studies that is consistent.

JB: That's true. I mean, it is amazing. You'd think that they would kind of mess up the details on some of this, but they don't. They're very consistent on these.

MH: They're very consistent, but yet there's this resistance within even evangelical circles of owning up to this. Why do you think that is?

50:00

JB: You know, one of the things I talk about in the dissertation and in the book *The Battle for the Keys* and one of the things I found fascinating was it was really post-Reformation or beginning at the Reformation was the first time that the Christians anywhere started doubting the descent—this idea that Jesus went to these realms.

MH: I remember this from your book. Yeah, go ahead, please say something about that, yeah.

JB: And it did seem like what was interesting is it was as if... They were, of course, rejecting a lot of things that I think were wrong in the Roman Catholic system at the time, but they were throwing the baby out with the bath water and going so far as to deny things that I think are clearly scriptural like this. And yet what is interesting, though, is they kept heaven [laughter]. They kept heaven. They kept Jesus at the right hand of God. They kept all these ideas of angels and heaven. So they're fine with an unseen realm and all these things on kind of the good side and the heavenly realms, but for the underworld they just kind of said, "Oh, no, no, Jesus just went to the dead or he's just in the grave."

MH: Yeah, yeah.

JB: "There's nothing to that descent language. Let's just throw that out." And it just seems like, yeah, the vast majority in the Protestant side, it just seems like they've kind of kept that kind of unwarranted skepticism about the realms of the underworld. It started at the Reformation and so that kind of makes sense of the origin, but you just would think that more would question that once they got to the text and started to see how clear this really is.

MH: Yeah.

JB: And some are pushing back on it. You know, a professor at Oklahoma Baptist University, Matthew Emerson, he wrote a book called *He Descended to the Dead*, but he's arguing pretty much what I'm arguing about Christ's descent. And he uses my book a lot, and in the Baptist world that has gotten a lot of people more interested in the subject and changing their views on it. So I have seen some changing on this.

MH: Well, that's good.

JB: And that needs to happen.

MH: Yeah, that's good. Wow. Well, this is a good place to wrap up this episode. We'll transition into some of the other vocabulary the next time that we have a conversation about Part 2. But I just want to thank you for your work. I think people in this audience are just going to be glad to know that hey there's somebody else out there besides Mike who takes this stuff seriously. [laughter]

JB: And may God raise up many more!

MH: Right. Yeah, it kind of helps, but yeah, just thanks for being on with us and I'm looking forward to continuing the discussion.

JB: Yes, me too. This was great.

TS: Alright, Mike, a great conversation about hell and Hades and Tartarus and all that. Can you wrap it all real quick? Summarize it? Hades is not hell. There are compartments in Hades. Sheol is the lowest portion or chamber of Hades. I mean, can you give me a high summary view?

MH: Yeah, yeah, I think by way of sort of a cursory summary, you get this vocabulary for the afterlife in both testaments, but especially the New, that isn't the "Lake of Fire" (hell as we think of it) because that is something that is sort of formed and created in the book of Revelation. So it's more eschatological. So that's the basic distinction that Justin is angling for. Not everybody goes that direction, but I think it has some advantages to certainly doing that. As far as compartments and neighborhoods and things like that, yeah, I mean, if we just think of the afterlife in general there is a proverbial "special place" in hell in the afterlife for the sinning angels, the sons of god who sinned. That would be the abyss and Tartarus. The abyss and Tartarus are two ways of referring to the same thing. So you do get these places within places—these neighborhoods or subsets in the vocabulary which makes it interesting, but we have to remember it is not physical. Again, your GPS isn't going to work there. We don't have a specific latitude and longitude. I like the way Justin made the comment real briefly about *hades* in Greek—Hades—and how in Greek that just means a place that is unknown. There are some words in Greek when they begin with the letter alpha (ah) like this and it's actually *hades* or *ahdes*. It has that specific letter. It is what is called a privative. It negates something, and in this case the rest of the term means a place that can be known or seen. So it's like an invisible place. That's how we need to think about these sorts of terms and this kind of language.

TS: Sounds good. Great episode. Don't forget to visit our sponsors at logos.com/nakedbible. Support our show by going there and signing up for

Logos. It is the Bible software we recommend. And we look forward to continuing the conversation with Dr. Justin Bass next week. And with that, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.