

lives forever and ever” (Revelation 4:10; 10:6). In the estimation of Leon Morris, “we have another example of the use of identical qualities of the Father and the Son.”²⁷

Yeshua was resurrected from the dead, and possesses dominion over death and the netherworld. He says, “I hold the keys of death and *Sheol*” (Revelation 1:18b, TLV). Not only does Yeshua have supremacy over these realms, but it also demonstrates the utter insufficiency of pagan figures like the goddess Hekate, who ruled in Hades.²⁸ **Yeshua is Lord of the living and the dead** (Romans 14:8-9). Yeshua holding the keys of death and the netherworld once again appropriates a role which the One God of Israel alone is depicted as having. The Jerusalem Targum on Deuteronomy 28:12 notably says,

“Four keys are in the hand of the Lord of all the world, which He hath not delivered into the hands of any secondary power: the key of life, and of the tombs, and of food, and of rain; and thus did Mosheh the prophet speak:— The Lord will open to you His good treasure which is with Him in the heavens, and will give you the rain of your land in its season; the early in Marchesvan, and the latter in Nisan; and will bless you in all the works of your hands; and you will lend to many peoples, but shall have no need to borrow.”²⁹

Wisdom 16:13 in the Apocrypha further states, of the Lord God, “For you have power over life and death; you lead mortals down to the gates of Hades and back again” (NRSV). Yet, in Revelation 1:18b, Yeshua the Messiah says “I hold the keys of death and the underworld” (Goodspeed New Testament).

The Apostle John is simply told to write down the things he sees (Revelation 1:19). For those investigating the nature of Yeshua from the Book of Revelation, they are to continue to catalogue and review the statements and activities of the Messiah, as they see Him portrayed in close association with God the Father.

REVELATION 2:8

“And to the angel of the [assembly] in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this.”

Yeshua’s message to the assembly at Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11) does have some controversy associated with it,³⁰ but it is Yeshua’s self-introduction which bears importance as to His nature and identity: “To the angel of Messiah’s community in Smyrna write: ‘Thus says the First and Last, who was dead and came to life’” (Revelation 2:8, TLV). Here, Yeshua is first given the titles *ho prōtos kai ho eschatos* (ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος). The title “first and last” is significant, given its self-designation of the God of Israel in Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12. Evangelical Christian examiners of Revelation, cataloguing statements and self-descriptions of Yeshua the Messiah, take Yeshua being “the first and the last” in Revelation 2:8 as a definite indicator of a high Christology:

- Grant R. Osborne: “This title is used only of Christ in the book (1:17; 2:8; 22:13) and in 1:17 is connected to God as the Alpha and Omega (1:8; 21:6; the two occur together in 22:13, where they depict Christ). Both titles mean that God and Christ are sovereign over history, in control not only of the past but of the future. Christ

²⁷ Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 55.

²⁸ Cf. Boring, 84; Witherington, *Revelation*, 82.

²⁹ BibleWorks 9.0: Targum Pseudo Jonathan on the Pentateuch. MS Windows 7 Release. Norfolk: BibleWorks, LLC, 2011. DVD-ROM.

³⁰ The issue of the “synagogue of Satan” is addressed, in various parts of the author’s book *Israel in Future Prophecy*.

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is the eternal one, guaranteeing vindication for his suffering followers. The title is drawn from Isa. 44:6 and 48:12.”³¹

- Gordon D. Fee: “He is **the First and the Last**, which as noted regarding this phrase in 1:17, is language borrowed from Yahweh’s self-identification in Isaiah 44:6. Thus Christ is presented first of all as the Eternal One, to which is added the most significant event of his incarnation—**who died and came to life again.**”³²

REVELATION 3:1-6

“To the angel of the [assembly] in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: ‘I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. So remember what you have received and heard; and keep *it*, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the [assembly].”

The assembly at Sardis is told by Yeshua the Messiah, “I know your works; you have the name of being alive, and you are dead” (Revelation 3:1, RSV). Sardis was a very wealthy and prosperous city of antiquity, which had surely benefitted from Rome. Robert H. Mounce offers the following, important summary in his commentary on Revelation:

“Sardis was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia, the most obstinate of the foreign powers encountered by the Greeks during their early colonization of Asia Minor. In 546 BC it fell to Cyrus and became the seat of the Persian governor. Later it became part of the Seleucid kingdom, then passed to Pergamum and subsequently to Rome (133 BC). In AD 17 Sardis suffered a catastrophic earthquake, but it was rebuilt with considerable help from the emperor Tiberius (10,000,000 *sesterces*—about a million dollars—and five years of tax remission; Tacitus, *Ann.* ii.47). Nine years later (in AD 26) it competed with ten other Asian cities for the privilege of building an imperial temple but lost out to Smyrna, which stressed its practical services to Rome (Tacitus, *Ann.* iv.55-56). Situated at the western end of a famous highway from Susa to Asia Minor, Sardis was a city of wealth and fame. Under Croesus gold was taken from the Pactolus. Jewelry found in the local cemeteries indicates great prosperity. It was at Sardis that gold and silver coins were first struck. It claimed to be the first to discover the art of dyeing wool.”³³

When seeing the admonition to be revived (Revelation 2:2a), it is not difficult to postulate how the problems present in Sardis involved the influences of paganism, corruption, and spiritual deadness. Mounce draws the conclusion, “The [assembly] at Sardis comes under the most severe denunciation of the seven. Apparently untroubled by heresy and free from outside opposition, it had so completely come to terms with its pagan environment that although it retained the outward appearance of life, it was spiritually dead.”³⁴ Perhaps for the assembly at Sardis, the professing Believers became so comfortable and at ease with the wider pagan society, that they all backslid into broad conformity with paganism, losing the sure edge that they needed so that they could be accomplishing the tasks of God’s Kingdom. Keener notes a

³¹ Osborne, *Revelation*, 128.

³² Fee, *Revelation*, 30.

³³ Mounce, *Revelation*, 109.

³⁴ *Ibid.*