

# The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON LXXV : UNITY AND DIVERSITY WITHIN THE CONGREGATION OF BELIEVERS (4:1-16)

## **Ephesians 4:7~10 —**

*Vnto every one of vs is geuen grace acordinge to the measure of the gyft of christ. Wherefore he sayth: He is gone vp an hye and hath ledde captivitie captive and hath geuen gyftes vnto men. That he ascended: what meaneth it but that he also descended fyrst into the lowest parties of the erth? He that descended is even the same also that ascended vp even above all hevens to fulfill all thinges.* (Tyndale's New Testament, 1524)

*But vnto euery one of vs is giuen grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, Whe he ascended vp on hie, he led captiuitie captiue, and gaue gifts vnto men. (Nowe, in that hee ascended, what is it but that he had also descended first into the lowest partes of the earth? Hee that descended, is euen the same that ascended, farre aboue all heauens, that hee might fill all thinges)* (Geneva Bible, 1599)

*But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)* (King James Version, 1769)

*and to each one of you was given the grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ, wherefore, he saith, 'Having gone up on high he led captive captivity, and gave gifts to men,' — and that, he went up, what is it except that he also went down first to the lower parts of the earth? he who went down is the same also who went up far above all the heavens, that He may fill all things —* (Young's Literal Translation, 1898)

*But unto each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, And gave gifts unto men. (Now this, He ascended, what is it but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)* (Revised Version, 1885)

*But unto each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, And gave gifts unto men. (Now this, He ascended, what is it but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)* (American Standard Version, 1901)

*But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)* (Revised Standard Version, 1952)

*But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men." (Now this, "He ascended" — what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)* (New King James Version, 1982)

*But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN." (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)* (New American Standard Version, 1995)

*But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people." (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)* (New International Version, 2011)

*But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)* (English Standard Version, 2011)

Ἐνὶ δὲ ἑκάστῳ ἡμῶν ἐδόθη ἡ χάρις κατὰ τὸ μέτρον τῆς δωρεᾶς τοῦ Χριστοῦ διὸ λέγει Ἐναβὰς εἰς ὕψος ἠχμαλώτευσεν αἰχμαλωσίαν καὶ ἔδωκεν δόματα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τὸ δὲ ἄνεβη τί ἐστὶν εἰ μὴ ὅτι καὶ κατέβη πρῶτον εἰς τὰ κατώτερα μέρη τῆς γῆς ὁ καταβὰς αὐτός ἐστιν καὶ ὁ ἀναβὰς ὑπεράνω πάντων τῶν οὐρανῶν ἵνα πληρώσῃ τὰ πάντα (Stephanus Greek NT, 1550)

Ἐνὶ δὲ ἑκάστῳ ἡμῶν ἐδόθη ἡ χάρις κατὰ τὸ μέτρον τῆς δωρεᾶς τοῦ Χριστοῦ. διὸ λέγει· ἀναβὰς εἰς ὕψος ἠχμαλώτευσεν αἰχμαλωσίαν, ἔδωκεν δόματα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις. τὸ δὲ ἀνέβη τί ἐστὶν, εἰ μὴ ὅτι καὶ κατέβη εἰς τὰ κατώτερα [μέρη] τῆς γῆς; ὁ καταβὰς αὐτός ἐστιν καὶ ὁ ἀναβὰς ὑπεράνω πάντων τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἵνα πληρώσῃ τὰ πάντα. (NA28 Greek New Testament)

# DID PAUL TEACH JESUS CHRIST WENT TO HELL DURING THE THREE DAYS AFTER HIS DEATH?

I would like to spend the next couple weeks looking at Ephesians 4:7-10, specifically vv. 9 & 10. These verses are not just controversial within the book of Ephesians, these are some of the most controversial verses within the entire New Testament! Good men throughout the centuries have disagreed as to what Paul was saying and without doubt there will be disagreements amongst ourselves. **But that is acceptable; part of Christian maturity is accepting minor differences between our brothers and sisters in Christ.** As a review:

**v. 1 reminds us again that Paul is a prisoner and employs one of his favorite phrases for introducing ethical instruction:**

<sup>1</sup> *I call upon you (or: I beseech you, I exhort you), I, the prisoner of Christ, ("I" is emphatic)*

*to live worthy of the calling with which you were called,*

**vv. 2,3 set out in a general way how readers are to respond if the unity of the church is to be preserved:**

<sup>2</sup> *with all humility (or: lowliness) and gentleness (or: meekness),*

*with patience (or: long-suffering),*

*paying attention (or: 'bearing with, forbearing, showing tolerance') to one another in love,*

<sup>3</sup> *working zealously (or: 'making every effort, giving diligence, endeavoring, being eager') to preserve (or: maintain, keep) the unity of the Spirit*

*by means of the peace that binds (or: by the bond of peace, in the bond of peace).*

**vv. 4-6 picks up the theme of unity, providing a series of declarations in each of which unity is stressed through the use of the word 'one' and God's total government through the use of 'all' (v. 4 contains no verb and simply begins 'one body and one Spirit...'; the words 'there is' are often added for the sake of a smoother translation):**

<sup>4</sup> *One body and*

*one Spirit*

*just as you were also called in one hope of your calling (or: to the one hope of your calling),*

<sup>5</sup> *one Lord,*

*one faith,*

*one baptism,*

<sup>6</sup> *one God and Father of all*

*who is over all (or: above all)*

*and through all*

*and in all.*

**vv. 7-16 speaks to diversity within the unity; much of what makes us differ is our gifts as distributed by the sovereign hand of Jesus Christ Himself. In vv. 7-10 Paul begins with a proof-text showing Christ has the right to dispense gifts as He wills:**

<sup>7</sup> *However grace has been given to each one of us ('but, however' is a subtle change and not a 'strong adversative', what one commentator called a 'transitional contrast')*

*in accordance with the measure of the gift of Christ (or: in the proportion allotted by Christ's giving);*

<sup>8</sup> *therefore it says:*

*Ascending on high he led captivity captive (or: having ascended on high he led captive a host of captives);*

*he gave gifts to men.*

<sup>9</sup> *And what significance has 'He ascended'*

*unless he also descended [first] into the lower regions, that is, the earth? (or: into the lower regions of the earth)*

<sup>10</sup> *He who descended is himself also the one who ascended above all the heavens,*

*so that he might fill all things. (or: to fill everything, to fill the cosmos, to fill the universe)*

Paul then continues in vv. 11~16 to describe the Lord's giving of gifts to His people for our growth as believers. So this is important: **the emphasis of this passage is the exalted Jesus Christ as our Sovereign Lord giving gifts to believers; what vv. 9,10 means is entirely secondary to the main argument.**

**RECOMMENDED RESOURCES** — I again give reference to the resource I have mentioned in previous lessons: **E. Earle Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* [Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene OR] 1981.** In addition to Ellis' work, another important resource for these studies is **W. Hall Harris III, *The Descent of Christ* [Baker Books, Grand Rapids MI] 1996.** As I was studying my resources, I noticed many of those I read were referencing both of these titles. After seeing the importance they had placed on these works, I thought they would be worthwhile to purchase for my own library. *I would recommend both titles for any wishing to study these verses further.*

**v. 7-10** — **“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.’ (Now this, ‘He ascended’ — what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)” (NKJV)** — **“But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says, ‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.’ (In saying, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)” (ESV)** — **Ἐνὶ δὲ ἑκάστῳ ἡμῶν ἐδόθη ἡ χάρις κατὰ τὸ μέτρον τῆς δωρεᾶς τοῦ Χριστοῦ διὸ λέγει Ἀναβὰς εἰς ὕψος ἠχμαλώτευσεν αἰχμαλωσίαν καὶ ἔδωκεν δόματα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τὸ δὲ Ἀνέβη τί ἐστὶν εἰ μὴ ὅτι καὶ κατέβη πρῶτον εἰς τὰ κατώτερα μέρη τῆς γῆς ὁ καταβὰς αὐτός ἐστιν καὶ ὁ ἀναβὰς ὑπεράνω πάντων τῶν οὐρανῶν ἵνα πληρώσῃ τὰ πάντα [heni de hekastō hēmōn edothē hē charis kata to metron tēs dōreas tou Christou dio legei Anabas eis hupsos ēchmalōteusen aichmalōsian kai edōken domata tois anthrōpois to de Anebē ti estin ei mē hoti kai katebē prōton eis ta katōtera merē tēs gēs ho katabas autos estin kai ho anabas huperanō pantōn tōn ouranōn hina plērōsē ta panta]** — **“Paul’s interest in Christ’s triumph becomes explicit in his commentary on the psalm’s reference to an ascent to the height. What could the statement ‘he ascended’ mean, he asks rhetorically, except that ‘he also descended’? Paul’s use of a rhetorical question here shows that he thinks his conclusion is obvious, but what was obvious to Paul and his readers is no longer so clear.” [Thielman, 268]** There are three main theories concerning ‘the descent of Christ’:

- **The descent of the exalted Christ in the Person of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost**
- **The descent of the pre-existent Christ in His incarnation**
- **Christ descent into hades (hell) for the three days after His crucifixion**

The first two theories are fairly straight-forward with little variances between those who hold to these explanations, while the third has a variety of reasons for Christ’s visitation to hell. Some of these reasons are acceptable within the realm of Scripture while others are outright heresy. ***Prior to continuing, it should be noted that each of these theories have their problems and each have their strong points. That is the reason these controversies remain.***

**WHAT IS NOT CONTROVERSIAL** — There is a general agreement on the following portions of v. 8:

- **‘WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH’ or literally as an aorist participle, ‘HAVING ASCENDED ON HIGH’ (YLT)** — The original quote from Psalms 68 is probably a reference to God whose presence was symbolized by the ark, ascending to Zion the place of His earthly rest after achieving victory for His people; or God ascending to His heavenly habitation after achieving victory for His people. Paul’s use of this quote is an obvious reference to Christ at His heavenly ascension. I have read none who does not agree with this reference.
- **‘AND GAVE GIFTS TO MEN’** — As discussed in lesson 19d, the original quote from Psalms 68 is *‘You have taken gifts for men.’* The psalm is about God being triumphant, taking captives, and receiving gifts from people (or possibly receiving people as gifts). This is what the captor distributes to his accompanying army in accordance with ancient custom. [Best, 383] Paul’s use of this quote could be to the charismatic gifts (v. 7), the church leaders (v. 11) or both. ***“They are given to people in 4:7, but in 4:11 people are also given as gifts to the church. That people are recipients of grace makes them gifts to the church.”*** [Snodgrass, 201] “Upon arriving in heaven, He gave gifts to men. Paul here uses yet another term for gifts (domata) to express the comprehensiveness of this gracious provision. Like a triumphant conqueror distributing the spoils to his subjects, so Christ takes the trophies He has won and distributes them in His kingdom. After His ascension came all the gifts empowered by the Holy Spirit (John 7:39; 14:12; Acts 2:33). When the Savior was exalted on high, He sent the Spirit (Acts 1:8), and with the coming of the Spirit also came His gifts to the church.” [MacArthur, 137f]

But there is great disagreement as to what Paul means by ‘when He led captivity captive’ – v. 8, and ‘now this, “He ascended” — what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?’ – v. 9. This morning we will look at one of the theories of Christ’s descent, followed in the weeks to come by the other theories, the Lord willing. After the theories we will close this section by looking more into the particulars of these verses.

## **THEORY: JESUS CHRIST’S DESCENT IS IN THE PERSON OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND FOLLOWS THE ASCENT**

***This theory has the ascent first, followed by the descent of Christ (in the Person of the Holy Spirit) on the day of Pentecost. Main sources: Harris; Abbott, 116; Lincoln, 245ff; O’Brien, 295f; Hoehner, 532f; Muddiman, 194f; Thielman, 268f.***

# PROS

- **THE 'ASCENT FOLLOWED BY THE DESCENT' MAINTAINS THE EMPHASIS UPON THE GIVING OF GIFTS**

— If the descent is subsequent to the ascent and thus as a descent in the Spirit, the ascent and the giving of gifts can maintain their central function in the passage. The descent is seen to be a necessary and logical deduction in connecting the one who ascended to heaven with the gifts he has given to his Church on earth. Some would argue the movement of thought from Christ's ascent to the giving of gifts requires a descent of the Holy Spirit. Paul, having spoken of the Spirit's work in unifying the body in vv. 3,4 is then following up his thinking since the gifts are part of the unifying of that body.

- **THIS WOULD FOLLOW THE CONNECTION OF PSALM 68** — This also coincides with the Psalm 68 quote in relation with the ascension followed by the giving of gifts. If the descent into hell or the descent to earth at the incarnation were meant, the allusion has been left undeveloped in what follows.

- **VV. 9,10 WOULD NOT HAVE TO BE TREATED AS A PARENTHESIS** — Since Christ's descent in the Spirit fits neatly between the two main foci of the passage, namely, his ascent and his giving of gifts, vv. 9,10 would continue and support Paul's main line of thought.

- **THE 'ASCENSION – DESCENT' SEQUENCE FOLLOWS THE ACCOUNT IN ACTS 1,2** — In the Acts account, the ascension of Christ in chapter 1 is followed by the giving of gifts at Pentecost in chapter 2, corresponding with Paul's sequence of events, first ascent then descent.

- **THE 'ALSO DESCENDED' (THE INSERTION OF THE 'KAI') SUGGESTS THIS ORDER** — While this may be argued by those knowledgeable in the original languages, some suggest that Paul's use of the word 'kai' (*'even, also, and'*) before the word 'katebē' (*'descended'*) may indicate (though it obviously does not necessitate) that the chronological order of an ascent and then also a descent was in view.

- **IT FOLLOWS THE MOTIF OF THE JEWISH BELIEF OF MOSES IN PS 68** — There is incontrovertible evidence that the Jews later identified Psalm 68 with the giving of the law by Moses as well as with the Pentecost festival (see below). What is not so evident is if that belief was prevalent during the first century of the churches. After Moses ascended he 'captured' the words of the Torah (in connection with the Feast of Pentecost) and then descended from Mount Sinai to distribute to the people the 'gifts' of the law (cf. Exod 19:3, 14; 19:20, 25; 24:18 and 32:15; 34:4, 29). Some would therefore say that Psalm 68 is no longer to be viewed as a Jewish Pentecostal psalm concerning Moses but as 'a Christian Pentecostal psalm, celebrating the ascension of Christ and his subsequent descent at Pentecost to bestow spiritual gifts upon the church.'

- **THE GIVING OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS BY THE SPIRIT COINCIDES WITH OTHER NT PASSAGES** — This descent of Christ in the Spirit to give gifts would be in line with other NT passages, specifically 1 Cor 12 where, in regard to the variety of gifts within the one body, the Spirit is most prominent in their distribution (vv 4, 7, 8, 11, 13).

- **AGAINST THE INCARNATION THEORY** — Those accepting this theory argue that a reference to the incarnation would be superfluous in the present context where the pre-existence of Christ was assumed, nor does it explain the emphasis on the identity of the one who ascended with the one who descended since that would have been obvious from the incarnation.

- **THIS THEORY MAY HAVE ANCIENT ROOTS** — Some would argue against this theory due to its 'recent' development. Most would advocate this theory was first proposed in the mid-1800's by a German minister and professor of divinity, Hermann von Soden (1852-1914) and is followed by only a few proponents when compared with the other theories. Harris argues against that however: "It is clear that in this passage Origen described a descent of Christ subsequent to his victorious ascent.... Thus we have clear evidence that the interpretation of Eph. 4:7-10 proposed in modern times by T. K. Abbott and H. von Soden does indeed have early patristic support, a fact which has apparently gone unnoticed before now. Such an interpretation involving a subsequent descent may no longer be dismissed as merely recent innovation." [Harris, 121]

- **REBUTTAL TO 'NOT CHRIST AT PENTECOST' – THE CLOSE ASSOCIATION OF CHRIST AND THE HOLY SPIRIT IN EPHESIANS** — One of the 'cons' against this theory is the separation between Christ and the Holy Spirit in the book of Ephesians (see below). Some would deny such a separation as being an issue. "Yet a close association, and indeed virtual interchange, between Christ and the Spirit is evidenced elsewhere in Ephesians. In 1:13 the believer is sealed in Christ with the Spirit, while in 4:30 he or she is said to be sealed in the Spirit. In 3:16 the Spirit is in the 'inner person,' while in the following verse, 3:17, Christ dwells in the heart. In 1:23 the Church is the fullness of Christ, while in 5:18 believers can be exhorted to be filled with the Spirit. In Paul, in 1 Cor 15:45 the last Adam is said to become life-giving Spirit, and in Rom 8:9-11 Christ and Spirit are used interchangeably." [Lincoln, 247]

- **REBUTTAL TO 'THE CLIMAX IS THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST, NOT A SUBSEQUENT ACTION'** — Again, one of the 'cons' is the climatic emphasis upon Christ's ascension. Some would debate this issue. "But to this it can be replied that, once the inference of a subsequent descent has been made, [Paul] returns to the ascent as his main notion and the one explicit in the psalm. In addition, the assertion of v 10b no more rules out a subsequent descent than it rules out a subsequent giving of gifts." [Lincoln, 247]

## CONS

- **SOME MSS HAVE THE WORD ‘FIRST’** — Several manuscripts insert the word *‘first’* after the word *‘descended’* which would present an insurmountable difficulty for this view if it was part of the original text. However the majority of modern textual scholars agree that *‘first’* appears to have been added by later copyists to clarify the meaning (see below).
- **NO MENTION OF MOSES ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST** — A strong support of this theory is the rabbinic tradition of Moses’ ascent to receive the Torah, Psalm 68 and the Feast of Pentecost. But at least in the recorded text of Acts 2 there is no mention of Moses in Peter’s explanation to the people of Israel regarding the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. If this rabbinic tradition was so well known in Israel why was there no mention of it when Peter addressed the Jews in Jerusalem?
- **IT ASSUMES THE RECIPIENTS WERE FAMILIAR WITH MOSES AND PS 68 MOTIF** — As mentioned above in the ‘pros,’ part of this theory assumes the recipients of Ephesians would have been acquainted with the rabbinic traditions necessary for this view. Although there is some evidence of these rabbinic teachings being dated in the first century, much of it is later. Furthermore, even if these elements existed in the first century, how much was there and how much would the Gentile audience in Ephesus be acquainted with them?
- **THERE IS NO EXPLICIT REFERENCE TO THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT** — Although the Holy Spirit was mentioned by Paul while speaking on unity (vv. 3,4), there is nothing obvious to the readers that the Christ who ascended has subtly changed to Christ-in-the-Spirit in the descent. This would be especially true if the readers were familiar with the Moses motif since the Moses who ascended was the Moses who descended from the Mount.
- **PENTECOST IS ‘THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT’ NOT ‘THE DESCENT OF CHRIST’** — If Paul is making a reference to Christ ‘descending’ on Pentecost, this would be the only Scriptural reference that makes this emphasis. Pentecost in Acts is precisely *not* the descent of Christ but of the Spirit in his place, for Christ Himself *‘will come again in the same way as you have seen him go’* (Acts 1.11).
- **NO SPECIFIC MENTION OF THE GIVING OF GIFTS ON PENTECOST** — In Acts 2:33 Peter states Jesus is exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, poured out what the people then saw and heard. There is no mention of the giving the gifts as mentioned in the present context and in Ps 68:18.
- **EVEN IF PENTECOST WERE TO BE IDENTIFIED WITH THE GIVING OF GIFTS, IT IS NOT IDENTIFIED WITH THE GIVING OF OFFICES, SPECIFICALLY THE OFFICE OF AN APOSTLE** — Although some might argue that the gifts come through the Spirit (cp. 1 Cor 12) and there was at least the gift of languages (what some refer to as the gift of tongues) evident when preaching to the multi-national crowd, apostleship is definitely not one of those gifts. Being an apostle depends on the knowledge of the historical Jesus and not merely on inspiration. The NT speaks of the apostleship as the gift of the risen Christ Himself. Thus it may be argued the giving of gifted people to the churches (Eph 4:11) cannot be part of the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost.
- **CHRIST ASCENDED TO FILL ALL THINGS, NOT TO DESCEND AGAIN TO BRING GIFTS** — Another objection to this view is that the climactic statement in v. 10 to the effect that the ascent is in order to fill all things rules out the thought of a subsequent descent to bring gifts. As one writer said, this would be the epitome of anticlimactic. If one accepts Christ’s descent on Pentecost as the correct exegesis of v. 9, it makes verse 10 useless.
- **THE INTERCHANGE OF CHRIST AND THE HOLY SPIRIT IS NOT IDENTICAL IN EPHESIANS** — While proponents of this theory suggests there is virtual interchange between Christ and the Spirit in Ephesians, others would argue these functions are not identical if one examines the verses. In the present context the same person (Christ) has descended and ascended as is emphasized by the use of the personal pronoun ‘himself’ in v. 10.

## PSALMS 68 AND MOSES

Thoughts from W. Hall Harris III, *‘The Descent of Christ’*:

Although whether this was true during Paul’s day or later in church history, Jewish synagogues correlate the giving of the law with Pentecost, using Psalms 68 and Exodus 19 being the Jewish lessons for Pentecost. If this was familiar during Paul’s day, the descent of the Holy Spirit could have been the reference to the ‘descent’ of Christ. [Harris, 19]

It may be possible to associate Ps 68 with Pentecost in pre-Christian Jewish tradition using the ‘Book of Jubilees’, the annual covenant renewal ceremony of the Qumran community, and the early Jewish synagogue liturgy. [Harris, 30] Warning: extreme caution must be exercised when appealing to rabbinic interpretations of Ps 68 to validate any interpretations of the descent in Eph 4:9-10. Any extant written sources are dated at the earliest 4th century AD and while there are ‘vague appeals’ to ‘prior oral tradition,’ there is insufficient evidence to establish with reasonable amount of certainty the antiquity of these traditions. Bottom line: Paul may or may not have been aware of such Rabbinic traditions on Ps 68.

Targum Ps 68:19: ‘You ascended to the firmament, Prophet Moses; you led captive captivity; you learned the words of Torah; you gave them as gifts to the sons of men.’ [Harris, 65]

“R. Phinehas has said: Indeed Moses, who ascended on high and took the Torah captive and brought it down, was able to do so not by virtue of his own strength, but by virtue of Israel’s merit, as is said *‘Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive, thou hast received gifts by virtue of men’* (Ps 68:19) — that is, by virtue of Israel’s merit, to who it is said *‘And ye My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, are men’* (Ezek 34:31).” [Harris, 78]

Midrash Tehillim 68.11 — “*‘Thou has gone up on high, thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men’* (Ps 68:19). These words are to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *‘A wise man goeth up to the city of the mighty, and bringeth down the strength wherein it trusteth’* (Prov 21:22). This *‘wise man’* is Moses, of who it is said *‘And Moses went up unto God’* (Ex 19:3); the words *‘thou hast received gifts for men’* refer to the Torah which was bestowed upon Israel as a gift, at no cost. The words *‘The rebellious dwell but in a parched land’* (Ps 68:7) refer to the nations of the earth who were unwilling to accept the Torah; on the other hand, in the words *‘Yea, among the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them’* (ibid. 68:19), *‘among the rebellious’* refers to the children of Israel who had also been rebellious, but among whom, the presence of God came to dwell after they accepted the Torah.” Note verses added to help understand the passage in the Psalms, no specific mention to heaven, emphasis upon the Torah given without cost, no mention to angelic opposition. [Harris, 78f]

Shir haShirim Rabbah 8.11.2 — “So when the Holy One, blessed be He, sought to give the Torah to Israel, the ministering angels tried to thrust Israel away, and they thrust themselves before the Holy One, blessed be He, and said: ‘Sovereign of the Universe, it is Thy happiness, Thy majesty, Thy honour that Thy law should be in the heaven.’ He replied to them: ‘You have no concern with it. It is written therein, *‘And if a woman have an issue of her blood many days’* (Lev. xv, 25). Is there any woman among you? So you have no concern with it.’ Further it is written therein, *‘When a man dieth in his tent’* (Num. xix, 14). Is there death among you? So you have no concern with it. And so the Scripture praises him [Moses] with the words, *‘Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast taken thy captive’* (Ps. lxxviii, 19), on which R. Aha said: This refers to the rules which apply to human beings, such as those relating to men and women with an issue, unclean women, and women in childbirth. So ‘you have no concern with it.’” Noteworthy in this Misrashic exegesis is the first time angels are mentioned in the giving of the Torah, and they feared that if it were given to men, sooner or later the Divine Presence would leaven heaven to abide on earth as well. [Harris, 82]

Pirqe de Rabbi Eliezer 46 — “The ministering angels said to him: Moses! This Torah has been given only for our sakes. Moses replied to them: It is written in the Torah, *‘Honour thy father and thy mother.’* Have ye then father and mother? Again, it is written in the Torah, *‘When a man dieth in the tent.’* Does death happen among you? They were silent, and did not answer anything further. Hence (the sages) say: Moses went up to the heavenly regions with his wisdom, and brought down the might of the trust of the ministering angels, as it is said, *‘A wise man scaleth the city of the mighty, and bringeth down the strength of the confidence thereof.’* When the ministering angels saw that the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah to Moses, they also arose and gave unto him presents and letters and tablets for healing the sons of men, as it is said, *‘Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led they captivity captive; thou hast received gifts among men.’*” Note the angels seek to dissuade Moses from taking the Torah but here it is Moses himself that disputes with them, not the Lord. It is also the first time we see other gifts given to Moses. [Harris, 83f]

Shemoth Rabbah 28.1 — “*‘And Moses went up unto God’* (Ex. xix, 3). It is written, *‘Thou has ascended on high. Thou hast led captivity captive’* (Ps. lxxviii, 19). What is the meaning of *‘Thou hast ascended’*? — Thou hast been exalted, because thou didst wrestle with angels on high. Another explanation of *‘Thou hast ascended on high’*: No creature on high has prevailed as Moses did. R. Berekiah said: The length of the Tablets was six handbreadths; two were — could we but speak thus! — in the hands of Him who called the world into being; two handbreadths were in the hands of Moses, and two handbreadths separated the two pairs of hands. Another explanation of *‘Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive’*: One who enters a city usually takes away something unnoticed and unprized by the inhabitants, but Moses ascended on high and took away the Torah on which all had their eyes — hence: *‘thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive’*: Lest you think that because he captured it, he took it gratis, the Psalmist adds: *‘Thou hast received gifts among men’* (ibid.), that is, it was given to him for a price. Lest you think that he actually paid money, the Psalmist assures us that it was *‘gifts’*, namely, that it was given to him as a gift. At that moment, the angels wished to attack Moses: ‘It is only for the sake of Abraham that the Torah is given to you,’ as it says, *‘Thou hast received gifts among men’* (be-adam). The word *‘adam’* in this verse refers to Abraham, for it says, *‘Which Arba was the greatest man among the Anakim’* (Josh. xiv, 15). Hence, *‘And Moses went up to God.’*” Note the angelic opposition to Moses, the mention of Abraham, and the Torah being that which was taken captive. This midrash is a commentary on Exod. 19:3, note how it immediately uses Ps 68 as the primary text employed in the exegesis. [Harris, 86]

ben Shabbat 88b–89a — “R. Joshua b. Levi also said: When Moses ascended on high, the ministering angels spoke before the Holy One, blessed be He, ‘Sovereign of the Universe! What business has one born of woman amongst us?’ ‘He has come to receive the Torah,’ answered He to them. Said they to Him, ‘That secret treasure, which has been hidden by Thee for nine hundred and seventy-four generations before the world was created, Thou desirest to give to flesh and blood! *What is man, that thou art mindful of him. And the son of man, that thou visitest him? O Lord our God, How excellent is thy name in all the earth! Who hast set thy glory [the Torah] upon the Heavens!*’ ‘Return them an answer,’ bade the Holy One, blessed be He, to Moses. ‘Sovereign of the Universe’ replied he, ‘I fear lest they consume me with

the [fiery] breath of their mouths.’ ‘Hold on to the Throne of Glory,’ said He to him, ‘and return them an answer,’ as it is said, ‘*He maketh him to hold on to the face of his throne, And spreadeth his cloud over him*’, whereon R. Nahman observed: This teaches that the Almighty spread the lustre of His Shechinah and cast it as a protection over him. He [then] spake before Him: ‘Sovereign of the Universe! The Torah which Thou givest me, what is written therein?’ ‘*I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt.*’ Said he to them [the angels], ‘Did ye go down to Egypt; where ye enslaved to Pharaoh: why then should the Torah be yours? Again, what is written therein?’ ‘*Thou shalt have no other gods*’: do ye dwell among peoples that engage in idol worship? Again what is written therein?’ ‘*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy*’: do ye then perform work, that ye need to rest? Again what is written therein?’ ‘*Thou shalt not take [the name ... in vain]*’: is there any business dealing among you? Again what is written therein?’ ‘*Honour thy father and thy mother*’: have ye fathers and mothers? Again what is written therein?’ ‘*Thou shalt not murder. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal*’: is there jealousy among you; is the Evil Tempter among you? Straightway they conceded to the Holy One, blessed be He, for it is said, ‘*O Lord, our Lord, How excellent is thy name*’, etc. whereas ‘*Who hast set thy glory upon the heavens*’ is not written. Immediately each one was moved to love him [Moses] and transmitted something to him, for it is said, ‘*Thou hast received gifts on account of man*’: as a recompense for their calling thee man thou didst receive gifts. The Angel of Death too confided his secret to him, for it is said, ‘*and he put on the incense, and made atonement for the people*’; and it is said, ‘*and he stood between the dead and the living,*’ etc. Had he not told it to him, when had he known it?” The series of quotes from the Torah is the longest of any rabbinic account. Note the gifts given by the angels to Moses and their initial disputing with Moses. New elements include the mention of the throne of God, the shekinah glory, the Angel of death and the plague of Num. 17:11-13. Also note there is no mention of Abraham. [Harris, 88ff]

“In Moses’ vision in the ‘*Exagoge*’ there is only one throne, which is God’s throne. Moses is told to be seated on it — not at God’s side, but alone on God’s throne. This scene appears to be unique in early Jewish literature and according to van der Horst ‘certainly implies a deification of Moses.’ This tends to confirm the conclusions reached by W. A. Meeks that in some Jewish circles Moses was regarded as a divine being and that this was associated with a heavenly enthronement at the time of the Sinai theophany.” [Harris, 127] The ‘*Exagoge*’ is a tragic drama from the hellenistic period and describes the exodus of Israel from Egypt under Moses. It was written by Ezekiel (not the Biblical prophet) and cited by Eusebius.

#### OBSERVATIONS FROM OTHERS:

**Andrew Lincoln:** “This use of Ps 68:18 in regard to Christ is in contrast to the use made of it in rabbinic tradition where it could refer to an ascension to heaven by Moses. Ps 68:18 was linked with Moses going up Sinai and interpreted as an ascent to heaven to receive not only the Torah but also other heavenly secrets. The ‘Moses mysticism’ with which this interpretation of the psalm is to be associated was widespread. It can be found elsewhere in the rabbinic writings. Already Philo had used this tradition to speak to Hellenistic cosmological concerns, and it is possible that it was current in the religious syncretism of Asia Minor and used to support a penchant for heavenly visions. If this were the case, [Paul] might be relating Christ to the similar interests of his readers and in a ‘new Moses’ typology showing that Christ has provided a link with the heavenly world that could not be matched by Moses. As a greater than Moses, Christ has ascended far above all heavens in order to fill all things (cf. v 10). His gift is not the Torah but his grace (v 7). Nor are his various special gifts heavenly secrets for the enlightenment of a few but people whose ministries will build up the whole body (vv 11-16).

“The application of Ps 68:18 to Christ’s ascent and his distribution of gifts by the Spirit may well have been aided by the psalm’s association with Pentecost. As we have seen, the psalm citation was connected with Moses and the giving of the law, and Pentecost, besides celebrating harvest, was more and more coming to be regarded as the feast which commemorated the law-giving at Sinai. There is good reason to believe that this association existed from the middle of the second century B.C.E. The *Book of jubilees*, which is usually dated between 135 and 105 B.C.E., makes Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks the most important of the annual festivals in the Jewish liturgical year, associating it with the institution of the various covenants in Israel’s history but above all with the covenant at Sinai (cf. 1.5; 6.11, 17; 15.1-24). The Qumran community followed the calendar of the *Book of Jubilees* and celebrated an annual renewal of the covenant, in all probability combining it with the annual renewal of the members’ own oath of entry into the community which took place at Pentecost. Additional evidence is available from the synagogue liturgy, which *may* have been in existence at the time of the writing of Ephesians. In the triennial cycle of readings, both Exod 19, 20 and Num 17, 18 were read at Pentecost, while according to the *Megilla*, representing the tradition which replaced the triennial cycle, the psalms for the day were 29 and 68. Together with these factors, the two central themes of the Christian interpretation of the psalm citation, the exaltation of Christ and his distribution of gifts, suggest that Pentecost lies in the background of the citation’s use here. It is also worth noting that a number of scholars hold that Ps 68:18 lies behind Acts 2:33.” [Lincoln, 243f]

**Peter O’Brien:** “The application of Psalm 68:18 to Christ’s ascent and subsequent distribution of gifts stands in contrast to the rabbinic tradition as reflected in the Targum which associates Psalm 68:18 with Moses’ ascent of Mount Sinai, an ascent that was understood as a going up to heaven to receive the Torah and other heavenly secrets. The ‘Moses mysticism’ associated with this interpretation of the Psalm was widespread and apparently early, appearing in the rabbinic writings and Philo. If this background is in view, Paul may be deliberately presenting Christ as greater than Moses. He ascended far above all the heavens in order to fill all things (v. 10). His *gift* is not the Torah but grace (v. 7), while his special gifts of ministry are for building up the whole body (vv 11-16), not heavenly secrets for an elite few. The liturgical custom in synagogues associated Psalm 68 with Pentecost, which was increasingly regarded by Jews as the feast which commemorated the giving of the law to Moses on Mount Sinai. This has suggested to some Christian scholars that Pentecost lies in the background to the apostle’s handling of the Psalm here. ‘Paul’s use

of [Psalm 68] ... in reference to the Christian Pentecost then makes a remarkable analogy. As Moses received the law and gave it to Israel, so Christ received the Spirit and gave him to his people in order to write God's law in their hearts and through the pastors he appointed (v. 11) to teach them the truth'. The idea that 'giving' and 'receiving' belong together is appropriately illustrated in Acts 2:33: 'Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.'" [O'Brien, 291]

**Frank Thielman:** "With remarkable consistency ancient Jewish interpreters took Ps. 68:18 as a reference to Moses's ascent to heaven to receive the Torah from God. The 'you' in the text was not God but Moses; the ascension was not up Mount Zion but to heaven; and 'captivity' was not a collective noun referring to prisoners of war but the Torah.

"The phrase 'you received gifts among humanity,' however, created a problem for this interpretation. If the text speaks of Moses's receiving the law from God, then the gifts must be equated with the law. But if the gifts are the law, then they should come from God rather than from people, and Moses should receive them in heaven, where God dwells, not on earth 'among humanity.'

"One strategy for solving this problem takes the phrase as a reference to 'the Torah which was bestowed upon Israel as a gift, at no cost.' This interpretation assumes that Moses received the law after ascending to heaven in order to give it to God's people. The targum on Ps. 68:19 MT makes this assumption explicit by substituting 'he gave' for 'you received' in its paraphrase of the text: 'You ascended to the firmament, Prophet Moses; you led captive captivity; you learned the words of Torah; you gave them as gifts to the sons of men.'

"If we simply substitute 'Christ' for Moses and 'gifts' for Torah, the targum's rendering of Ps. 68:18 (Eng.) is close to Paul's quotation. Few scholars would say that the author of Ephesians was familiar with the targum as we now have it, since its present form comes from several centuries after Ephesians was written. Many scholars, however, think the author appealed to an exegetical tradition on Ps. 68:18 that also stands behind the targum. Others think that Paul used the Mosaic interpretation of Ps. 68:18 in a polemical way to draw a contrast between Moses and Christ. Moses gave the people law, but Christ gave them grace, and Moses ascended to heaven, but Christ ascended 'far above the heavens' (v. 10).

"A variant of this approach says that Eph. 4:8 is indebted to an early Christian argument against the association of Moses, the Torah, and Pentecost with Ps. 68:18. For Paul, as for the early Jewish Christians before him (cf. Acts 2:33), Christ's ascension to heaven and subsequent gift of the Spirit at Pentecost had trumped Moses's ascent to heaven and subsequent mediation of the law to Israel." [Thielman, 265f]

**John Muddiman:** "The Aramaic translation (Targum) of Psalms accordingly obliges with a radical reinterpretation: 'You have ascended to heaven *that is Moses the prophet*, you have taken captivity captive, *you have learnt the words of the Torah*, you have given it as gifts to men *and the Shekinah of the Glory of the Lord God dwells also with the rebellious, if they turn in repentance.*' In this expanded version, the one who ascends is no longer God but Moses, and he ascends not just to Sinai but to heaven to have a mystical encounter with God. (Such an interpretation may have been encouraged by the allusion in the preceding verse of the psalm (68.17) to 'the chariots of God', a stock theme in Jewish mystical speculation, following Ezekiel 1.) Above all, it should be noted that, as in Ephesians, the Targum has changed 'You received gifts' to 'You have given it as gifts'. While we have no evidence that this way of reading the psalm was actually current in the first century AD (the Targum on Psalms is of a much later date), Moses-mysticism as such is early and widespread, and it is possible that the interpretation was known in early Jewish Christian circles. This would account neatly for the alteration of the verb in the psalm text from 'receive' to 'give'. And Eph. 4.8 could then be understood as a contradiction of the Targumic interpretation: it was Christ, not Moses, who 'ascended' and his 'gifts' were not Torah but Christian salvation (cf. John 6.32f.; 6.62). The Johannine community was particularly interested in portraying Christ as a prophet like, and superior to, Moses." [Muddiman, 189]

**TEXTUAL VARIANT: 'FIRST'** — "The manuscript evidence favors the omission of [prōton, 'first'] in Eph 4:9. The earlier date of the shorter reading, indicated by P46, is a major factor favoring the omission. When the quality of the manuscripts which support the shorter reading is also considered, we may conclude that the evidence from the manuscripts themselves suggests that the omission of [prōton, 'first'] from the original text of Eph 4:9 is much more probable." [Harris, 37] "The addition of [prōton, 'first'] after [katebē, 'descend'] (ⲛⲉ B c° K P Ψ 88 614 Byz Lect al) appears to be a natural expansion introduced by copyists to elucidate the meaning. The shorter text is strongly supported by P<sup>46</sup> ⲛ\* A C\* D G 1739 al." [Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek NT, 537]