

# The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON LXXVI : 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 heuens 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 ἤχμαλώτευσεν 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)

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# 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. As has been already mentioned in class, 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 and part of Christian maturity is accepting minor differences between our brothers and sisters in Christ. And it *should* be remembered that vv. 9,10 are a minor issue within this whole context.

## PSALM 68 ORIGINAL INTENT

**DIFFICULT PSALM** — *“The difficulties of interpreting Ps 68 are almost legendary. H. J. Kraus’ comment is repeated in essence by almost all commentators: ‘There is in the Psalter scarcely a song that, in its textual corruption and disconnectedness, presents the interpreter so great a task as Psalm 68.’ The amount of textual corruption is, however, in some dispute because of the high number of hapax legomena and low-frequency words in the psalm. How can we be sure that a word is corrupt when it does not appear elsewhere in MT? More than fifteen words and expressions in this psalm do not appear elsewhere in biblical literature. As many as two dozen words are used which are found less than twenty times in MT; half of them less than ten times.... W. F. Albright wrote that ‘Psalm 68 has always been considered with justice as the most difficult of all the Psalms.’”* [Marvin E. Tate, *Word Biblical Commentary vol 20: Psalms 51-100* (Thomas Nelson, Nashville TN) 2000; p170] *“Psalm 68 is a complex psalm that has baffled commentators for some time. The topic concerns the entry of God into his sanctuary, using the background and images of the conquest and settlement of the land and the occupation of the city of Zion. It traces God’s triumphant march through the desert, his conquest over the kings of Canaan, and finally his ascension to the holy mount to reign in majesty.”* [Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms, vol 2, 42-89* (Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids MI) 2013; p464] *“Ps 68 is reckoned ‘as textually and exegetically the most difficult and obscure of all the psalms,’ and various attempted interpretations have been proposed.”* [Hoehner, 524f]

**A DOUBLE FULFILLMENT** — *We need to remember the concept that there is typically an OT direct, historical application with the possibility of another greater meaning behind the direct application (e.g., Psalm 22).* “The ‘first reference’ of Psal. lxxviii. is a large and difficult question.... It is enough here to say that the Psalm celebrates, apparently, some great sacred triumph, or triumphs, at the Sanctuary of Zion; an occasion on which the supreme Conqueror, JEHOVAH, is represented as ‘ascending’ after battle to His throne. One type of criticism will see in this nothing beyond a national Ode of Victory, and will regard the Apostle’s quotation as an ‘unscientific’ accommodation. For ourselves, believing that our Lord taught a very different view of the Ancient Scriptures, *we feel free to recognize any ‘first reference’ fairly provable, but also bound to believe that the Divine Author worked through the human author, so as to convey eternal and permanent truth through his imagery and words, and so as to make the whole terminate on CHRIST, whether or no the human author was aware of it. And we believe that the same Divine Author worked here through the memory and thought of the Apostle, so as to secure, in his quotation an exposition, the true development of the Divine intention of the earlier passage.*” [Moule, 107] “With the question as to the occasion and intent of that Psalm [68:18], we are not here concerned. It is a song of triumph, as vers. 1 (cf. Num. x. 35) shews, at some bringing up of the ark to the hill of Zion. It is therefore a Messianic Psalm.... The partial triumphs of David and Solomon only prefigured as in a prophetic mirror the universal and eternal triumph of the Incarnate Son of God.” [Alford, 115]

**A ‘PSALM OF CONQUEST AND VICTORY’** — *“The Psalm in which this magnificent description of the victorious march of Israel’s God occurs, celebrates the establishment of Jehovah’s kingdom in the past and proclaims the certainty of its triumph over all enemies and in all nations in the future. It does this in connection with some great event in the history of Israel. All possible opinions have been expressed as to the particular occasion of the Psalm. It has been identified with the removal of the Ark to Zion in David’s time (2 Sam. vi. 12, etc.; 1 Chron. xv.); with some unnamed victory of David or with David’s victories generally; with the placing of the Ark in Solomon’s Temple ; with the victory of Jehoshaphat and Jehoram over Moab (2 Kings iii.); with the check given to the Assyrians in Hezekiah’s time; with the consecration of the Temple of the Restoration; with the return from the captivity; with the struggle between Egypt and Syria for the possession of the Holy Land towards the close of the third century B.C.; with the victories of Jonathan or Simon in the Maccabean wars; with the struggle between Ptolemy Philometor and Alexander Balas (1 Macc. xiv.), etc. But all this uncertainty as to the particular date and occasion does not affect the fact that what is dealt with is some great passage in the history of the Jewish nation.”* [Salmond, 326] *“Psalm 68 originally depicted Yahweh’s ascent in triumph to Mt Zion leading a train of previously captured enemies, to receive tribute from the rebels. One implication of the psalm was that Yahweh must have earlier descended to help fight Israel’s battles on earth.”* [Muddiman, 188f] *“The notion that God has triumphed over the enemies of his people is also a prominent theme in Ps. 68. The psalm begins with a request that God arise and scatter his enemies (vv. 1-2), continues with a historical review of God’s military triumphs over Israel’s enemies from the exodus to the battle of Deborah and Barak against the forces of Sisera (vv. 7-10; cf. Judg. 5:4-5, 21), and as it reaches its climax, pictures God as sweeping all his enemies before him in a dramatic military drive from Mount Sinai to Mount Zion (vv. 17-18). It concludes with references to God’s continued triumph over his enemies and the enemies of his people in the future (vv. 21-23, 28-30). Paul’s quotation comes from the psalm’s triumphant climax in verses 17-18.”* [Thielman, 268] “In its original context Psalm 68 is a call to God to come and rescue his people (vv. 1-3). He is to be praised (vv. 4-6) for his past acts of deliverance and provision for his people. After the

exodus he went in triumph before them (v. 7), so that Mount Sinai shook (v. 8) and kings were scattered (vv. 11-14). The Lord desired Mount Zion as his dwelling (v. 16), so he came from Sinai to his holy place (v. 17), and ascended the high mount leading captives in his train. The ‘you’ in v. 18 refers to God’s ascent of Zion, probably in the person of the victorious king (or perhaps in reference to the establishment of the ark, which symbolizes the invisible presence of the God of Israel, on Zion). He led his captives in triumphal procession as they made their way up the temple mount.” [O’Brien, 288] “The psalm as a whole, or at least this section of it, is, as Calvin called it, ... a victory ode. One may picture a military leader returning to Jerusalem at the head of his followers, after routing an enemy army and taking many prisoners. The victorious procession, with the captives in its train, makes its way up to the temple mount, preceded by the sacred ark, which symbolizes the invisible presence of the God of Israel. To him a sacrifice of thanksgiving will be offered when the procession reaches the temple precincts, and the tribute received by the victor from the vanquished foe will be dedicated to him.” [Bruce, 341] “Psalm 68 is a victory hymn composed by David to celebrate God’s conquest of the Jebusite city and the triumphant ascent of God (represented by the Ark of the Covenant) up Mount Zion (cf. 2 Sam. 6-7; 1 Chron. 13). After a king won such a victory he would bring home the spoils and enemy prisoners to parade before his people. An Israelite king would take his retinue through the holy city of Jerusalem and up Mount Zion. Another feature of the victory parade, however, would be the display of the king’s own soldiers who had been freed after being held prisoner by the enemy. These were often referred to as recaptured captives-prisoners who had been taken prisoner again, so to speak, by their own king and given freedom.” [MacArthur, 138]

**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 Ἀναβάς εἰς ὕψος ἠχμαλώτευσεν αἰχμαλωσίαν καὶ ἔδωκεν δόματα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τὸ δὲ Ἀνάβη τί ἐστὶν εἰ μὴ ὅτι καὶ κατέβη πρῶτον εἰς τὰ κατώτερα μέρη τῆς γῆς ὁ καταβάς αὐτός ἐστιν καὶ ὁ ἀναβάς 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 echmalōteusen aichmalōsian kai edōken domata tois anthrōpōis 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] — There are three main theories concerning ‘the descent of Christ’:

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

The first and third theories are fairly straight-forward with little variances between those who hold to these explanations, while the second 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 heresy.

	DESCENT = HADES	DESCENT = INCARNATION
Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high, (NKJV) Therefore it says, ‘When he ascended on high (ESV)	The ascension of Christ as recorded in Acts 1	
He led captivity captive, (NKJV) he led a host of captives, (ESV)	Satanic beings, OT saints, or both	The powers; or sin, death, Satan
and gave gifts to men.’ (NKJV) and he gave gifts to men.’ (ESV)	Either the gifts to all believers as recorded in v. 7, the gifted men as recorded in v. 11, or both	
(Now this, ‘He ascended’ — what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? (NKJV) (In saying, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? (ESV)	The descent into Hades; a variety of reasons given for this to be done.	The descent from heaven to earth in the incarnation.
He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) (NKJV) He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) (ESV)	Emphatic explanation that the One who descended is the One who ascended to the exalted position at the right hand of the Father.	

**OVERVIEW OF HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION ON THE PASSAGE** — “The doctrine of the ‘*descensus ad inferos*’ was well established in the early church. However, recent commentators have not reached a consensus as to whether the doctrine of the ‘*descensus*’ lies behind Eph 4:7-11 or not. Most modern interpretations agree with regard to the meaning of verses 7-8. Verse 7 introduces the section 4:7-16, which consists primarily of the well-known enumeration of spiritual gifts (or more accurately, gifted individuals) intended to facilitate the growth of the church to maturity. The giving of gifts is substantiated by the quotation in verses 8 of Ps 68:19 LXX (68:18 English versions). Virtually all interpreters would agree that verse 8 is here intended to refer to the victorious ascent of Christ following his death and resurrection (a topic previously mentioned in Eph 1:20-23). This event was accompanied (or followed) by the distribution to the church of the gifts described in 4:11-16.

“The meaning of verses 9-10, a midrash on the quotation from Psalm 68, has created the major exegetical difficulty in the entire section. [footnote: In assigning the label ‘midrash’ to the Pauline exegesis of Ps 68:19 found in Eph 4:8, it is recognized that as a method of rabbinic exegesis the term midrash itself has been subject to a variety of definitions. In general the term is used in the present work to refer to an interpretation method which takes as its point of departure the biblical text itself and seeks to explain the hidden meanings contained therein by following agreed upon hermeneutical rules in order to arrive at a relevant contemporary application for the audience.] Two questions, if they can be answered, will point to a resolution of the problem: (1) to where did Christ descend?, and (2) when did this descent take place in relation to the ascent mentioned in verse 8? As we have seen, almost all recent interpreters have held with respect to the first question that the descent was either from earth to the grave (i.e., Sheol, the place of the dead) or from heaven to earth (i.e., the incarnation or a descent subsequent to the ascent of verse 8 to distribute the gifts mentioned in 4:11-16). With respect to the second question, most would agree that the descent introduced by the writer in the midrash found in Eph 4:9-10 preceded the ascent of verse 8.” [Harris, ‘Descent of Christ’, 30f]

**GRAMMAR WILL NOT BE THE DECIDING FACTOR** — Whatever we determine to be Paul’s meaning in Ephesians 4:8-10, grammar will not be the deciding factor in our determination. Each of the remaining arguments take the exact same verbiage but understands it in a different manner. **“It must be said in the first place that neither grammar nor textual criticism gives a decisive answer.”** [Salmond, 326f] “Any discussion of Christ’s going to Hades to release Old Testament believers is motivated by theological issues in the church’s history and not by the text of Ephesians.” [Snodgrass, 202]

## ‘HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES’

**‘HE LED CAPTIVE’ PROBABLY SIMULTANEOUS WITH ‘HE ASCENDED’** — The introductory participle (‘He ascended’) is almost certain to be taken to denote an action simultaneous with the main verb (‘He led captive’), therefore ***the captives are brought up with Christ as He ascends.*** [Best, 382] Muddiman: **“[T]he past participle ... can describe an action that is coincident or identical with that of the main verb, i.e. ‘by ascending he captured’. What is definitely excluded is the idea that capture precedes ascension, and yet surely this would have been the most natural order to expect in a Christianized version of Psalm 68.”** [Muddiman, 189] Against the captives being the OT redeemed: “But this does not agree with the construction by which the *αἰχμαλωσία* [aichmalōsia, ‘captivity, a state of captivity’] must be the result of the action of the verb. Besides, the captives are distinguished from *ἄνθρωποι* [anthrōpoi, ‘men’]. The same objections hold against the view that the captives are the souls of the righteous whom Christ delivered from Hades.” [Abbott, 114]

**SHOULD WE EVEN ASK WHO THESE CAPTIVES ARE?** — “The citation itself requires little comment. The double use of the root *αἰχμαλ-* [aichmal-, ‘captive’] is Semitic; the transference of the text to Christ fits in with much NT theology. ***Who however are the captives whom Christ leads captive? ... [Paul] himself provides no explicit clues and perhaps it is wrong even to pose the question. [Some commentators suggests Paul] had never even thought about the matter. Yet since most commentators make some attempt to answer the question, we probably ought to do the same. Any answer is inevitably linked to the understanding of vv. 9f.*** [Best, 382] **“The phrase is a general one, meaning nothing more than that He made captives (cf. Judges v. 12), and suggesting nothing as to who these captives were. Neither in the Psalm nor in Paul’s use of it here is there anything to warrant the idea that the captives are the redeemed, or men in the bonds of sin on earth, or souls detained in Hades. The most that the words themselves, or passages more or less analogous warrant us to say is that the captives are the enemies of Christ; just as in the Psalm they are the enemies of Israel and Israel’s God. But these are left quite undefined, and the whole idea of the clause is subordinate to that next expressed, viz., the giving of the gifts.”** [Salmond, 324] **“[I]t is unnecessary to define the enemies; the figure is general, that of a triumphant conqueror leading his conquered enemies in his train. To press the figure further would lead us into difficulties.”** [Abbott, 113]

**THE ‘CAPTIVES’ ARE THE APOSTLES** — While an interesting take on this verse, John Muddiman is the only person I have read that suggests this possibility. “At this point, it is worth remembering that Paul can use the images of capture in war and a triumphal procession in a very different and even more paradoxical way than Col. 2.15. For instance, at 2 Cor. 2.14 he prays: ‘Thanks be to the God who always triumphs *over us*’. Paul is calling himself not a fellow-victor, but a victim of the vanquishing God! In the same vein, Paul writes at 1 Cor. 4.9: ‘For God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though under sentence of death, a spectacle to the world, to angels and humans.’ The term ‘fellow prisoner of war’ (derived from the same root as ‘capture’ and ‘captivity’ here) is used to describe apostles at Rom. 16.7; Phlm. 23; Col. 4.10. The description of Paul as ‘the prisoner of Christ’ (3.1; cf 4.1) should also be remembered. In Ephesians, although Christ is exalted over the powers (cf 1.21) and reveals things to them through the church (3.10), he is not said elsewhere to have yet captured or conquered them – indeed, they are still at work (see 2.2; 6.12). The interpretation that takes apostles *par excellence* as captives of Christ not only fits the context well, it

also explains why this part of the psalm text seems to be ignored, for then ‘he took captives’ and ‘he gave the people gifts’ both refer to the same thing. i.e. the provision of the apostolic ministry in the Church (cf. v. 11). The lack of any conjunction between these two clauses of the quotation may also imply that they have the same referent.” [Muddiman, 190f]

**THE ‘CAPTIVES’ ARE THE OT REDEEMED** — *“If his descent involves his journey to Hades, then he will have brought the captives from there and they may well be the souls of the dead, or, more generally, Satan’s captives; this is the opinion of most of the Fathers.”* [Best, 382] *“In His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus Christ conquered Satan, sin, and death (cf. Col. 2:15), and by that great victory He led captive a host of captives, who once were prisoners of the enemy but now are returned to the God and the people with whom they belong.* The picture is vivid in its demonstration that God has yet-unsaved people who belong to Him — though they are naturally in Satan’s grasp and would remain there had not Christ by His death and resurrection made provision to lead them into the captivity of His kingdom into which they had been called by sovereign election ‘before the foundation of the world’ (Eph. 1:4). Compare Acts 18:10, where the Lord tells Paul to stay in Corinth and preach because there were people in that city who belonged to Him but were not yet saved from bondage to the king of darkness (see also John 10:16; 11:51-52; Acts 15:14-18).” [MacArthur, 138]

*‘Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?’* (2 Cor 2:14-16 NKJV)

**THE ‘CAPTIVES’ ARE THE POWERS, THE ENEMIES OF CHRIST: SATAN, SIN AND DEATH** — This may be found as early as Chrysostom. *“If the ascent is taken to be that to the cross (so Oecumenius, Ambrosiaster) in the light of Col 2.14f the captives would be the powers.... If the descent of v. 9 is to earth in the incarnation and the ascent that of the ascension, then in the light of 1.21f the captives will again be the powers. This solution goes back as far as Irenaeus who calls them the rebellious angels.”* [Best, 382; see also Lincoln, 242] *“Clinton Arnold ... claims that vv. 8-10 provide supplementary evidence to Ephesians 1:19-22 in establishing Christ’s supremacy over the powers of evil. They are the ‘captives’ whom Paul had in mind when he applied Psalm 68:18 to Christ’s ascension. The text ‘underlines the cosmic supremacy of Christ in a fresh way’, and this would have brought further comfort to the readers in their spiritual warfare with the hosts of darkness.”* [O’Brien, 289] John Gill goes further in his explanation: *sin, Satan, the world, death, the grave, every spiritual enemy of His and His people.* [Gill’s Commentary] *“In the Psalm, the captive foes of David. In the antitypical meaning, the foes of Christ the Son of David, the devil, death, the curse, and sin (Col 2:15; 2 Pe 2:4), led as it were in triumphal procession as a sign of the destruction of the foe.”* [JFB, Commentary on Whole Bible] Harold Hoehner states the word for ‘captives’ is consistently used of military captives who are captured.

*‘And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.’* (Col 2:13-15 NKJV)

**THE ‘CAPTIVES’ ARE BOTH CHRIST’S ENEMIES AND THE OT REDEEMED** — *“The Messiah is represented by the Psalmist as a conqueror, leading captives in triumph, and laden with spoils which he distributes to his followers. Thus Christ conquered. He ‘destroyed him that hath the power of death, that is, the devil. He delivered those who through the fear of death were subject to bondage.’* Heb. ii. 14, 15. *‘Having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them.’* Col. ii. 15. *‘When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he cometh upon him, and overcometh him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoil,’* Luke xi. 21, 22. Such is the familiar mode of representation respecting the work of Christ. He conquered Satan. He led captivity captive. The abstract is for the concrete — captivity for captives.... Comp. Judges v. 12, *‘Awake, awake, Deborah; awake, awake; utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam.’* These captives thus led in triumph may be either the enemies of Christ, — Satan, sin, and death, which is the last enemy which shall be destroyed; or his people, redeemed by his power and subdued by his grace. The former is perhaps the more consistent with the figure, and with the parallel passages quoted above. Both are true; that is, it is true that Christ has conquered Satan, and leads him captive; and it is also true that he redeems his people and subdues them to himself, and leads them as willing captives. They are made willing, in the day of his power.” [Hodge, 152] *“The ‘captivity’ will denote whatever persons or powers are in any way His conquest; whether as ‘enemies under His feet’ (1 Cor. xv. 25, &c.), or self-surrendered rebels reconciled to His will (2 Cor. x. 3-5, &c.).”* [Moule, 107] *“‘Captivity’ is a collective noun for ‘captive enemies’; and the plain meaning is, that God reduced his enemies to subjection, which was more fully accomplished in Christ than in any other way. He has not only gained a complete victory over the devil, and sin, and death, and all the power of hell, — but out of rebels he forms every day ‘a willing people,’ (Psalm 110:3) when he subdues by his word the obstinacy of our flesh. On the other hand, his enemies — to which class all wicked men belong — are held bound by chains of iron, and are restrained by his power from exerting their fury beyond the limits which he shall assign.”* [Calvin, 272f]