

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

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

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]

WHAT HAVE WE SEEN THUS FAR? ... — With the Christmas holiday season and my missing Sundays due to work, it seems like a long time since we have discussed today’s topic. What have we seen thus far in our studies?

- as is highlighted in the verses above, one of the first differences of opinion we find is that the quote may be introduced by either ‘*he said*’ or ‘*it said*’; both are equally possible in the original language. While this is only a minor difference, a point might be made that the ‘*introductory formula*’ does not demand that the quote that follows is from Scripture. In our study 19c we looked at some of the times Paul quoted from writings other than the Scripture.
- Paul’s quote as recorded in Eph 4:8 has *at least some basis* on Psalms 68:18, yet Paul alters the quote enough that most Bible students admit the possibility that Paul may have been quoting something other than the original Psalm. But whether Paul was quoting from a hymn or a contemporary Jewish interpretation or from the original Psalm itself, **his rendering as given in Eph 4:8 is inspired by the Holy Spirit and we accept it as authoritative.**
- having breeched the topic of inspiration, we took an excursus for a week to consider how we got our Bibles. That study included the materials used in the making of ancient books (the most important as far as our study was papyrus and parchment), the format of ancient books (the scrolls and the ‘leaf books’), and the copying of ancient books (‘direct copying’ vs. ‘lector reading’) along with the difficulties inherent with each.
- as we returned to Ephesians, we saw that one of the major controversies within this passage concerns whether Jesus Christ went to hell during the time from His crucifixion and His resurrection. We therefore took another excursus to discuss terminology:

qeber = OT word for ‘grave’

sheol = OT word for the ‘unseen spiritual world after death, the place of the dead, the afterlife, the here-after’

hades = NT word equivalent for the OT word ‘sheol’

gehenna = NT word for the final destination of the lost, the ‘lake of fire’

hell = our English word which originally had to connotation equivalent to ‘sheol’ and ‘hades’; in our modern culture it is most often used to refer to the final destination of the lost

- one of the non-controversial items in verse 8 is that the phrase ‘*when He ascended on high, having ascended on high*’ is a reference to the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ as recorded in Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:9-11. Almost without exception everyone I have read accepts that understanding (the only exception I have discovered are a couple early church fathers who took the ascension to be the cross itself). Another non-controversial item is that the phrase ‘*and gave gifts to men*’ refers to the main thesis of this section: that the risen conquering Christ has the authority to give gifts, v. 7 (and/or gifted people, v. 11) to the churches.
- as we considered Paul’s quote in Eph 4:8, we took the time to look at the original context of Psalm 68 and Paul’s basis for using it in his quote.
- the question arose as part of Psalm 68 / Eph 4:8 concerning who or what is meant by ‘*He led captivity captive.*’ One thing we discovered is that ‘*He led captive*’ was probably simultaneous with ‘*He ascended*,’ therefore whatever is meant by ‘*He led captive*,’ it happened when Christ ascended into heaven or, as one commentator pointed out, what is definitely excluded is that the capture *preceded* the ascending!
- who or what are these captives? The answer depends upon what we believe about the ‘*descent of Christ*’ and could

refer to either *the OT saints being taken to heaven* or *the captivity of the 'powers': Satan, sin and death.*

- we are presently at the question of ***to where did Christ descend?*** As mentioned as we began this study, this is just not the most controversial question to consider in these verses but is one of the most unsolved controversies in the entire New Testament! There are **three major interpretations** to this question, the first being held by a minority is that ***the descent is that of Christ in the Person of the Holy Spirit and occurred after His ascension on the day of Pentecost.*** We looked at the pro's and con's of this interpretation and I believe as a class we generally dismissed this interpretation.
- what remains to be considered are the remaining two major interpretations: that ***Christ descended into hades between the time of His crucifixion and His resurrection,*** or ***Christ's descent is a reference to His coming from heaven to earth in His incarnation.*** *After 2000 years of studying the New Testament, this question still remains unanswered!*

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

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

It should be noted that the teaching of Christ descending into hades is also known as the ***'DESCENSUS CHRISTI AD INFEROS'*** (Latin for *'the descent of Christ into hell'*).

CREDIT — It has been observed that ***'plagiarism is copying another's work, research is copying many people's work.'*** Giving credit where credit is due, these next few lessons are heavily dependent upon the following authors: Abbott, 114-116; Alford, 116f; Barnes' NT Notes on CD; Best, 383-386; Bruce, 343f; Caird, 73-75; Calvin, 274f; Ellicott, 91f; Foulkes, 115-117; Gill, Commentary on Whole Bible CD; Harris, ref throughout book; Hendriksen, 189-195; Hodge, 156-158; Hoehner, 530-536; Kent, 69-71; Lincoln, 244-248; MacArthur, 137-140; Moule, 107f; Muddiman, 192-196; O'Brien, 293-297; Robinson, 134; Salmond, 325-327; Snodgrass, 201f; Thielman, 268-272. Also referenced were the following systematic theology works:

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- Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (Banner of Truth, Carlisle, PA) first published 1871; reprinted 1996; 462f
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- Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, vol 2* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids MI) reprinted 1982; 615ff
- Strong, A. H., *Systematic Theology* (Judson Press, Valley Forge PA) originally published 1907; 32nd printing 1979; 707f

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- R. C. Sproul: <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/christs-descent-into-hell/>, Nov 23 2016
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Reformed Answers: article: 'Descending Into Hell' by Ra McLaughlin, Vice President of Creative Delivery Systems at Third Millennium Ministries; <http://reformedanswers.org/answer.asp/file/40273>; Nov 24, 2016

Reformed and Presbyterian news: 'The Aquila Report' article "What Does It Mean That Christ 'Descended Into Hell?'" by Joe Vusich, a minister in the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) and is the pastor of Emmanuel Reformed Church in Sutton, Neb.; <http://theaquilareport.com/what-does-it-mean-that-christ-descended-into-hell/>; Nov 24 2016

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Genevan Institute for Reformed Studies: article by Bob Burrige, 'Did Jesus Descend into Hell?'; <http://www.genevaninstitute.org/articles/did-jesus-descend-into-hell/>; Nov 24, 2016

WHY EVEN BOTHER WITH THIS? — *“As those who are at all familiar with the history of doctrine in the Church will know, the expression ‘the lower parts of the earth’ has provoked much discussion and has led to the propounding of certain doctrines. Many explanations of it have been suggested with which we cannot deal exhaustively. But we must glance at some of them because they are repeated thoughtlessly by many Christians. In churches where it is customary to recite Creeds people recite Sunday by Sunday the phrase, ‘He descended into hell’. We may well wonder how many of them know exactly what they mean as they do so. It is based upon a particular exposition of this statement in Ephesians 4, and as it is our business to worship intelligently we are forced to consider the exposition of this particular phrase.... It is my conception of the business of preaching and teaching that we should face these matters honestly and not skip over, or leave them unconsidered, because obviously this expression has some meaning.”* [D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, 'Christian Unity: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1-16' (Banner of Truth, Carlisle, PA) 1980; pp. 156,158] Cp. John 4:24, 'God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.' (NKJV) *While emotions are indeed a part of worship, first and foremost should be worshiping intelligently and responding willfully with any appropriate changes the Spirit may reveal!*

THIS HAS BEEN AT TIMES OVERWHELMING AND DIFFICULT INFORMATION TO PRESENT IN AN ORDERLY MANNER — One of the biggest struggles of this topic has been how to present the information in an orderly manner (as well as remaining within the time constraints of our Sunday School hour). I have probably been fumbling at this but for what remains, after much prayer and asking for the Lord's guidance, I have decided to look at the remaining two major theories ('Christ descended into Hades' vs. the incarnation) then conclude with how one believes concerning this topic affects other verses and some other minor issues. *May the Lord's Spirit give understanding, wisdom and grace, and open each of our minds to His Word!*

THOSE SUPPORTING EACH OF THESE THEORIES

Prior to looking at some who support each of these differing theories, it is important to remind ourselves why we are looking at these names.

- ***Bible truth is not dependent upon who supports or denies a certain point of view. If the Bible speaks a truth and the entire world is against it, it would be wise to side with the Bible truth!***
- As we consider the differing names associated with each of these theories, it is important to recognize ***there are good men that support each of these theories***. So this is not an issue of truth vs. heresy, rather our task is to see which of these theories closest fits the Scriptures as a whole. Since there have been disagreements amongst believers for the entirety of church history, it would be foolish not to expect differing opinions even amongst ourselves. It is important to understand

these differences are minor and that *we are to respect our brethren even if they accept a theory different from our own personal favorite.*

CHRIST DESCENDED INTO HADES

MOST THE EARLY CHURCH FATHER'S HELD TO THIS DESCENT INTO HADES — *It is widely recognized this interpretation was the one held by most of the early church fathers* (e.g., Tertullian, Irenaeus, Origen, Chrysostom, Pelagius, Ambrosiaster, Erasmus, Jerome, and the majority of Popish expositors) and is the view favored by the Coptic and Ethiopic Versions. The church father Tertullian, who wrote in the early third century, expressed the common belief in this division of hades: “That souls are even now susceptible of torment and of blessing in Hades ... is proved by the case of Lazarus” (On the Resurrection of the Flesh, ch. 17). The church father Ignatius, writing in A.D. 107, said something similar in his Epistle to the Trallians: “By those under the earth, [I mean] the multitude that arose along with the Lord. For says the Scripture, ‘Many bodies of the saints that slept arose,’ their graves being opened. He descended, indeed, into Hades alone, but He arose accompanied by a multitude; and rent asunder that means of separation which had existed from the beginning of the world.” In the middle ages the Church Fathers’ opinions had become more—or—less accepted: Theophylact (11th century); Italian Dominican friar Thomas Aquinas (1225 ~ 1274) taught the captives led captive were saints who died before Christ. The Reformers were less clear although Zwingli seems to follow the church fathers. H. A. W. Meyer speaks of the descent to death and the grave (1843) but in his later commentary (1862) changes his mind and speaks of hades; other supporters would include Alford, Ellicott, Robinson, Dunn, Arnold. *“Although this interpretation of Christ’s descent into the realm of the dead has had a long and considerable influence in the history of the exegesis of Ephesians, it has less support today.”* [O’Brien, 294]

CHRIST DESCENT = INCARNATION

THIS IS THE MAJORITY VIEW TODAY — *While this is the majority view today, it is also not a new theory.* In substance this theory can be found at least as far back as Theodore, Bishop of Mopsuestia (250 ~ 428) and the French philosopher and theologian Peter Abelard (1079 ~ 1142). In the Middle Ages and the Reformation, proponents included Italian Catholic priest and reformer Thomas Cajetan (1469 ~ 1534), Swiss Protestant theologian Benedictus Aretius (1505 ~ 1574), French Protestant reformer Augustin Marloratus (or Marlorat; 1506 ~ 1562), German Reformed theologian Johannes Piscator (1546 ~ 1625), Dutch jurist and theologian Hugo Grotius (1583 ~ 1645), German Calvinistic minister Ludwig Crocius (1586 ~ 1653), French Protestant theologian Theodore Beza (1519 ~ 1605), Scottish Biblical scholar Robert Rollock (c. 1555 ~ 1599), German Lutheran theologian Daniel Cramer (1568 ~ 1637), Roberti Bodius (17th century), German Biblical scholar Johann Schöttgen (1687 ~ 1751), Dutch Protestant theologian Campegius Vitringa (1659 ~ 1722), Prussian Biblical scholar Johann David Michaelis (1717 ~ 1791), German Protestant theologian Gottlob Storr (1746 ~ 1805), et. al. Calvin held the ‘descent’ to be a reference to the supreme humiliation of the cross. Calvin’s patience with all this was wearing thin one Sunday morning in 1558: *“Many have made glosses much too strong on this passage, saying that Jesus Christ went down not only into the grave, but also even into limbo, a place forged out of their own brain.”* *By 1883 John Eadie could say that this interpretation was the position of ‘the majority of expositors’ and a century later Schnackenburg claimed that the old ‘descensus ad infernos’ understanding had ‘now been abandoned.’* [Thielman, 270] *That statement may be a little exaggerated since there are those we can quote who still believe in Christ descending into hades but that gives the direction of the modern trend.*

HOW DID PAUL USE THE GENITIVE ‘OF THE EARTH’?

The last part of Eph 4:9 may be understood in a variety of manners as can be seen by looking at the different Bible translations. Each of these translations is equally viable so this does not help us choose which theory is correct; rather, which theory one believes about this passage would determine which translation to use.

Forgive the grammar technicalities but the beginning Greek student learns that nouns have *gender* (masculine / feminine / neuter), *number* (singular / plural) and *case* (nominative / genitive / dative / accusative / vocative). As a place to start, the beginning student is also taught that the cases are used as follows:

nominative = the subject of the sentence = ‘*a man, men*’

genitive = possessive = ‘*of a man, of men*’

dative = indirect object = ‘*to / for a man, to / for men*’

accusative = direct object = ‘*a man, men*’

vocative = direct address = ‘*Man*’

But like most things, there is so much more to the topic than the beginning student is given (one Greek tutorial website ‘*fine tunes*’ the different uses of the genitive into twelve categories, with some of those categories even having sub-categories!

[http://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/classify-genitive.htm; 3/4/2016]). As concerns our present topic, *Bible students and commentators say there are three possible manners in which we may understand the genitive phrase τῆς γῆς [tēs gēs, ‘the earth’]:*

- **‘PARTITIVE GENITIVE’** — this use (only applicable when the noun is preceded by the article) can indicate the whole of which the head noun is a part; i.e., the ‘whole’ would be ‘*the earth*’ and the ‘head noun’ would be ‘*the lower parts.*’ This use of the genitive requires the head noun to imply or indicate in some way a portion, e.g., ‘*a piece of pie,*

some of you, a tenth of something,’ etc. This could be translated using *‘which is a part of,’* thus this verse would be understood to mean *‘the lowest parts of the earth itself.’* One NT example of such usage would be *‘half of my possessions’* (Luke 19:8). ***Most do not favor this understanding but rather favor one of the following two understandings.*** [Harris, ‘Descent of Christ’, 46]

● **‘GENITIVE OF COMPARISON’** — this use always comes after a comparative adjective (like *‘more, less, greater,’* etc.). It is a relatively common use of the genitive case and should be translated using *‘than.’* Taking the grammar in this manner would understand the verse to mean *‘the lower parts than the earth / the regions below the earth.’* NT examples include *‘He is mightier than I’* (Matt 3:11) and *‘Is not your life (worth) more than food?’* (Matt 6:25). ***Those understanding this verse to refer to hades would understand it in this sense.*** But Hoehner quotes Greek scholar Wallace that “a comparative gen. is syntactically improbable, if not impossible: the comparative adjective is in attributive position to [the Greek word ‘parts’].” [Hoehner, 534] But Hoehner is the only person I have read who makes that observation, plus some of our versions do not have the word ‘parts’ in the text.

● **‘GENITIVE OF APPPOSITION’** — this takes the word in the genitive case to refer to the same thing as the word it modifies and uses words such as *‘which is, namely, who is’* in the translation. Taking the grammar in this manner would take the verse to mean *‘the lower regions, the earth / the lower parts, namely, the earth / the lower parts which are or make the earth’* and is equivalent to mean *‘the earth below, this lower earth.’* One example of this is *‘He is the head of the body, namely, the church’* (Col 1:18; note this could not be translated *‘He is the head of the body of the church’*). Similar to this is *‘and he received the sign of circumcision’* (Rom 4:11, meaning *‘he received the sign which is circumcision’*) and *‘Who has given us the earnest of the Spirit’* (2 Cor 5:5, meaning *‘Who has given us the earnest which is the Spirit’*). John Eadie in his commentary says this has the sense of “those lower parts which the earth forms or presents in contrast with heaven, as we often say, – ‘heaven above and earth beneath.’” ***“Such an understanding of the genitive phrase τῆς γῆς [tēs gēs, ‘the earth’] has become increasingly popular among interpreters and grammarians in the twentieth century.”*** [Harris, ‘Descent of Christ’, 15; see also O’Brien, 294; Abbott, 115; Salmond, 326f; John Eadie, Commentary on Ephesians]

CHRIST DESCENDED INTO HADES

‘DOWN TO THE UNDERWORLD’ WAS A COMMON UNDERSTANDING IN THE CULTURE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT — That heaven was ‘up’ and hell was ‘down’ was a common belief, not only in the culture of the NT but even in our present day verbiage. ***“While direct influence cannot be proved it is difficult to deny the existence of contemporary stories of descending and ascending redeemers; these would predispose Gentile believers to accept the idea in respect of Christ.”*** [Best, 384] “Greco-Roman culture, moreover, was awash with stories of descent to the underworld: Dionysus, Aeneas, Orpheus, and Pythagoras, among others, visited the underworld and lived to tell the tale. Relatively ordinary visionaries could sometimes do the same, at least by means of trances and dreams. The myth of Hades carrying Persephone down to the underworld was widely depicted on the coinage of Asia Minor in the first century, and locals in Hierapolis pointed a steady stream of tourists to a nearby gas-emitting cave where, they said, the famous abduction had taken place. Other ‘springs, rivers, lakes, caves, chasms, and volcanoes’ could also provide access to the chambers of the underworld. Thus everyone knew that one went ‘down’ to get to the underworld, and various words beginning with the preposition [‘down’] were frequently associated with the realm of the dead. One was brought ‘down’ (e.g., Gen. 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31; 1 Sam. 2:6; 1 Kings 2:6, 9) or simply ‘went down’ (Gen. 37:35 LXX; Num. 16:30, 33 LXX) to hades (cf. Rom. 10:6-7), and the path to hades went ‘downward,’ below the earth’s surface (e.g., Deut. 32:22 LXX). Not surprisingly, then, the place of the dead could be referred to simply as [‘the (parts) below’]. ***It seems extremely unlikely that Paul would use the phrase [‘go down into the lower parts of the earth’] in such a cultural environment and expect his readers to understand by it anything other than a descent to the realm of the dead.... When he speaks of Christ’s descent to the underworld, he is similarly not concerned with geography but with the common association in antiquity between the realm of the dead and the fear that many people felt of the evils harbored there....*** Paul did not need to use the term ‘hades,’ therefore, to make a reference to the realm of the dead understood, nor did he need to use the superlative form [‘lowest’] (Pss. 62:10 LXX [63:10 MT; 63:9 Eng.]; 138:15 LXX [139:15 MT, Eng.]) to draw a contrast with the phrase ‘far above all the heavens’ in 4:10.” [Thielman, 270ff]

PAUL FOLLOWS CHRIST’S DESCENT WITH ‘THE HIGHEST HEAVEN’ IN v. 10, THUS THE DESCENT WAS PROBABLY TO ‘THE LOWEST PARTS OF THE EARTH’ — Some note that Paul’s emphasis on heaven in v. 10 (*‘the One who ascended far above all the heavens’*) is to be in genuine contrast with the destination of Christ’s descent and thus “requires a reference to the underworld.” [Lincoln, 245] ***“Thus, since he went to the highest part of heaven, he must have gone to the lowest part of the earth. Consequently, Christ’s triumph included the farthest extents of the universe.”*** [Hoehner, 534; see also Salmond, 327; Hoehner, 534; Muddiman, 192]

IF PAUL HAD MEANT A DESCENT TO THE EARTH, THERE ARE BETTER WAYS IN WHICH HE COULD HAVE STATED THIS — One observation pointed out by those who believe Paul is saying Christ descended into hades is that if Paul was referring to the incarnation of Christ, why did he use such a convoluted manner with which to make that statement? Paul could have merely written that Christ *‘descended’* or even if he wanted to expand on that, he could have said that in a much more natural way such as *‘He descended to the earth,’* or *‘He descended to the earth below’* (cp. Acts 2:19, *‘I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapor of smoke.’*). Instead Paul uses a phrase which seems to imply

more than the earth. [Hoehner, 533f; see also Muddiman, 193; Thielman, 270; Salmond, 327]

THIS VIEW PROVIDES A REFERENCE TO CHRIST'S DEATH WHICH IS MISSING IN THIS PASSAGE — If Paul was speaking about Christ's descent to hades then it provides an allusion to the death of Christ which might otherwise be thought to be missing in this passage. [Muddiman, 193]

EPHESIANS HAS NO REFERENCE TO THE INCARNATION; ONE WOULD ASSUME IF MENTIONED IT WOULD BE MORE THAN JUST A PASSING REFERENCE — “While the resurrection to heaven of Christ is indeed emphasized elsewhere in Ephesians (e.g. 1.19f), there is no other reference to his incarnation, and one might have expected such a momentous idea to receive more than a passing allusion.” [Muddiman, 193]

IF A REFERENCE TO THE INCARNATION, IT DOES NOT COVER THE KEY POINT OF THE DOCTRINE — “[T]o refer to the incarnation simply as a descent to earth does not cover the key point in the doctrine, which is the assumption of human flesh (Rom. 8.3; John 1.14; 1 John 4.2) or human form (Phil. 2.8).” [Muddiman, 193f]

JESUS TOLD THE DYING THIEF NOT THAT HE WOULD BE IN HEAVEN BUT ‘PARADISE’, THE ‘BLISSED’ HALF OF HADES — While debatable (see the comments on the opposing theory), it must be noticed that those holding to this theory accepts ‘paradise’ not as a reference to heaven but to the half of hades without torments. What follows is John MacArthur's answer to the question of the OT saints:

“The question went on then and said what about those who died before Christ arose? Were they with the Lord? The Old Testament teaches that the people who died went to a place called Hades or Sheol. It can be translated the grave. It means a waiting place. Apparently, this was not the prepared Heaven that our Lord spoke about; but in the Old Testament, you have a rather limited view of life after death. The best we can assume is that when the saints in the Old Testament died, they went to a compartment or a part of Sheol or the grave. I'm sure it was a place of joy and fulfillment, a place of blessing, a place of enrichment, a place where the godly would go.

“It is referred to as Abraham's bosom, isn't it? And you have the picture that the Lord gives of one individual being tormented in a flame; and the other one being sort of at ease in Abraham's bosom. So whatever the two parts of Sheol were, one was where the ungodly were, and it was torturous. The other was where the godly were, and it was comforting.

“When Jesus died on the cross, He said to the thief, ‘This day shalt Thou be with Me in Paradise.’ And Paradise would have reference to that place, the holding pattern, as it were, for the Old Testament godly; but when our Lord died, the Bible says that He entered into this place; and I believe that when He entered into it and declared His victory over the demons, in one part of it, He then went back through the holy part of it and scooped up all the souls of the saints and took ‘em to Heaven. You say, ‘Where do you get that?’ I get that out of Ephesians chapter 4 verse 8 and following, which says that Christ led captivity captive. It seems as though Christ descended, led captivity captive. That is, took all of those who were being held there and took them with Him to the presence of God, and their souls now are with Him. I believe the souls of Old Testament saints are right now in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe they're the invited wedding guests at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

“Now, anybody who dies today goes immediately to be with the Lord, because there's no waiting place. You see, Christ was the first one to lead those people out of Hades. It was His death. He became the leader, the protass [sic], the preeminent, the first; and He led the godly into the presence of God in the fullness of all that Heaven could be. And so, from now on, there is no waiting place. Absent from the body, present with the Lord since the resurrection of Christ.” [John MacArthur, Bible Questions and Answers, Part 6]

PAUL'S EMPHASIS IS THEREFORE THAT CHRIST'S TRIUMPH EXTENDS TO THE FARTHEST EXTENTS OF CREATION — *Regardless of whether one accepts this theory or not, this emphasis is entirely Scriptural and worthy of promotion! “Consequently, Christ's triumph included the farthest extents of the universe. Hades or the abyss is the lowest part of the earth (Rom 10:7), the place of the departed (Phil 2:10), and the place of the evil spirits (Luke 8:31).”* [Hoehner, 534] *“[T]he reference to a descent below the earth and an ascent above the heavens is a way of emphasizing the reach of God to every corner of the universe (cf. Jer. 23:24; Jon. 2:2-9; Rom. 10:6-7). In this case, the reach is that of Christ, and its purpose is the defeat and captivity of all the malevolent powers of the universe.”* [Thielman, 271] *“[T]hat justice is done to the peculiarity and the amplitude of the various expressions only by taking Paul's idea to be that as Christ rose in order to fill the whole world, He had first to pass in His victorious power through all the great divisions of the universe – heaven above, earth beneath, and even the subterranean world, in the assertion of His universal sovereignty.”* [Salmond, 327] “[B]ecause the object was to present Christ as the One who fills the whole universe, so that, with a view to His entering upon this His all-filling activity, He has previously with His victorious presence passed through the whole world, having descended from heaven into the utmost depth, and ascended from this depth to the utmost height – a view, which of necessity had to extend not merely to the earth, but even into the nether world, just because Christ, as was historically certain for every believer, had been in the nether world, and consequently, by virtue of His exaltation to the right hand of God, really had the two utmost limits of the universe, from below upwards, as the terminos a quo [‘a starting point’] and ad quem [‘the point at which something ends or finishes’] of His triumphal progress.” [Heinrich Meyer's Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; <http://m.studylight.org/commentaries/hmc/ephesians-4.html>; Nov 24, 2016]

SUMMATION: BY JOHN MacARTHUR — Being one of the most well-known of the modern proponents of this theory, I thought it proper to allow John MacArthur to explain the viewpoint from his vantage point. As I have mentioned in class, I prefer the view that Paul is making a reference to the incarnation but I also want to be as fair and unbiased as possible. John MacArthur:

“In explaining the application of the Old Testament passage, Paul says, Now this expression, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean except that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth? The He of whom Paul is speaking is the One who will fill all things—Jesus Christ, ‘who fills all in all’ (1:23). Ascended refers to Jesus’ ascension from earth to heaven (Acts 1:9-11). He ascended from earth to heaven to forever reign with His Father.

“Paul is quick to explain that the expression He ascended cannot mean anything except that He ... also descended. If, as seems clear, ascended refers to our Lord’s being taken up to heaven, then descended must refer to His coming down from heaven to earth. The captain of our salvation was first abased and then exalted. Divestiture came before investiture, incarnation before glorification (see Phil. 2:4-11). This truth is repeated in proper chronological sequence in verse 10: He who descended is Himself also He who ascended.

“The depth of Christ’s descent in incarnation is said to be into the lower parts of the earth. This reference is presented to provide a striking contrast in terms of His ascent far above all the heavens, emphasizing the extreme range of our Lord’s condescension and exaltation. To understand the phrase the lower parts of the earth we need only examine its use elsewhere in Scripture. In Psalm 63:9 it has to do with death, being related to falling by the sword (v. 10). In Matthew 12:40 a similar phrase, ‘the heart of the earth,’ refers to the belly of a great fish where the prophet Jonah was kept. In Isaiah 44:23 the phrase refers to the created earth containing mountains, forests, and trees. Psalm 139:15 uses it in reference to the womb of a woman where God is forming a child. The sum of these uses indicates that the phrase relates to the created earth as a place of life and death. In the majority of the uses it appears in contrast to the highest heavens, as here and in Psalm 139:8, 15 and Isaiah 44:23.

“The intent of the phrase in this letter is not to point to a specific place, but to refer to the depth of the incarnation. It is interesting that each of the uses of the phrase outside Ephesians can also relate to the depth of Christ’s incarnation. He was formed in the womb (Psa. 139:15), lived on the earth (Isa. 44:23), referred to His own burial as a parallel to Jonah’s being in the fish (Matt. 12:40), and His death is consistent with the use of the phrase in Psalm 63:9.

“It should be noted further that our Lord’s descent went even beyond the womb, the earth, the grave, and death — to a descent into the very pit of the demons. Peter sheds light on the meaning of He also descended into the lower parts of the earth. In his first letter he says, ‘For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison’ (1 Pet. 3:18-19). Between Jesus’ death on Calvary and His resurrection in the garden tomb, He was ‘put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.’ He was physically dead but spiritually alive. During the three days He was in that state He also descended ‘and made proclamation (from kerusso) to the spirits now in prison.’ This does not refer to preaching the gospel (from euangelizo) but to making a triumphant announcement — in this case Christ’s announcement of His victory over the demons even while they tried to hold Him in death.

“The Old Testament refers to the place of the departed dead as Sheol (Deut. 32:22; Job 26:6; Ps. 16:10; etc.). Part of Sheol was a place of torment and evil, occupied by the unrighteous dead and by the demons who had been confined and bound there because of their wicked cohabitation with women during the period before the Flood (see Gen. 6:2-5; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). When Christ descended to Sheol, He proclaimed His victory, because ‘He had disarmed the rulers and authorities [and] made a public display of them, having triumphed over them’ (Col. 2:15; cf. 1 Pet. 3:19). At that time came the announcement to the demons, both bound and loose (the ‘angels and authorities and powers’), that they all were subject to Christ (1 Pet. 3:22; Eph. 1:20-21). To ascend to heaven, He also passed through the territory of Satan and his demons in the air (Heb. 4:14 uses dia, through) and no doubt celebrated His triumph over them. Whether or not Paul had this event in mind in his reference here is difficult to establish; nonetheless, it does demonstrate the depth of Christ’s descent.

“Another part of Sheol, though not clearly distinguished from the other by Old Testament writers, was believed to be a place of happiness and bliss, inhabited by the righteous dead who had believed in God. ‘Abraham’s bosom’ (Luke 16:22-23) and ‘Paradise’ (Luke 23:43) apparently were common designations for Sheol at the time of Christ. Early church dogma taught that the righteous dead of the Old Testament could not be taken into the fullness of God’s presence until Christ had purchased their redemption on the cross, and that they had waited in this place for His victory on that day. Figuratively speaking, the early church Fathers said that, after announcing His triumph over demons in one part of Sheol, He then opened the doors of another part of Sheol to release those godly captives. Like the victorious kings of old, He recaptured the captives and liberated them, and henceforth they would live in heaven as eternally free sons of God.

“It must be suggested that such a view seems strained in the Ephesian context, because the lower parts of the earth is a general phrase and cannot be proven to refer to Sheol.

“Paul’s point in Ephesians 4:8-10 is to explain that Jesus’ paying the infinite price of coming to earth and suffering death on our behalf qualified Him to be exalted above all the heavens (that is, to the throne of God), in order that He might rightfully have the authority to give gifts to His saints. By that victory He gained the right to rule His church and to give gifts to His church, that He might fill all things.

“Does all things mean all prophecies, all assigned tasks, all universal sovereignty? Surely the answer is yes in regard to each of those aspects. But the context would dictate that His filling all things primarily has to do with His glorious divine presence and power expressed in universal sovereignty. He fills the entire universe with blessing, particularly His church, as the next verse illustrates.” [MacArthur, 138ff]