Running head: Ephesians 4.8-9

A Linguistic and Exegetical Analysis of Ephesians 4.8-9 from a Grammatical, Syntactical,

Contextual, and Historical Perspective

Jay Hamilton

A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Spring 2008

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the
Honors Program of Liberty University.

_____
Clive McClelland, Ph.D.
Chairman of Thesis

_____
Mark Hamilton, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
Wayne Brindle, Th.D.
Committee Member

_____
James Nutter, D.A.
Honors Director

_____
Date

Abstract

Ephesians 4.8-9 presents a challenging passage exegetically. The reference to Psalm 68.18 is ambiguous; it may picture Moses receiving the Torah or a king conquering an enemy army. Furthermore, Ephesians 4.9 is so closely linked to Ephesians 4.8 that one cannot validly interpret "the lower parts of the earth" (τα κατωτερα μερη της γης) from verse 9 without determining the meaning of the preceding verse. Therefore, Ephesians 4.8-9 is analyzed grammatically, contextually, and historically, in order to find the most likely interpretation for this particular passage. The study concludes that Paul in Ephesians 4.8 pictures a Davidic king conquering an enemy and applies this concept metaphorically to Christ as descending to earth, conquering sin, and ascending back to heaven.

A Linguistic and Exegetical Analysis of Ephesians 4.8-9 from a Grammatical,

Syntactical, Contextual, and Historical Perspective

The epistle to the Ephesians is arguably the most majestic of all the epistles in the

New Testament. It contains high and lofty theological concepts as well as rich vocabulary

that encapsulates the grandeur of the topics. Yet several areas of interpretive difficulty

exist in this epistle. One of the most difficult passages to interpret is found in the fourth

chapter, verses 8-9. In the New American Standard Version, the larger context of the

verses reads as follows:

7But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

8Therefore it says,

"WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH,

HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES,

AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN."

9(Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had

descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10He who descended is Himself also

He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

The broader context of the passage is crucial to aid in the reader's understanding.

In a general sense, the first three chapters of the epistle concern the believer's abundance

of spiritual riches, while the final three chapters discuss how to apply those riches. In the

beginning of the section on practical application (chapters 4-6), the author of Ephesians

begins by writing about every believer's unity in Christ and all the things which

Christians share in common, including the same Father, Spirit, baptism, and faith (Eph. 4.4-6).

However, in the next few verses (4.7-13), the topic shifts from the unity of the Church to its distinctions in spiritual gifts (called "δοματα"). Even though the overall idea of the passage is clear, the writer of Ephesians nevertheless seems to say several things that are interpretively challenging. Several reasons exist as to why this passage is so challenging to understand. Ephesians 4.8 is a reference to Psalm 68.18. Yet what is the context of the Old Testament passage? Who is the referent of the "he" in "he ascended on high"? Furthermore, how does verse 8 relate to verse 9 in its reference to Christ descending to the "lower parts of the earth"?

However, before determining the correct exegesis (or at the very least the possibilities) of verses 8 and 9, an important point to make is that this study presupposes Ephesians' Pauline authorship. This presupposition is important in that much of this passage will at points be compared to other Pauline works such as Colossians as weighty considerations, and so needs a brief defense. Many modern scholars have argued that Paul was not the author of Ephesians, but rather that the epistle is pseudepigraphal and based heavily on Colossians (O'Brien 10-11). Others have argued that a better view is that Paul wrote neither Ephesians nor Colossians, but that two authors took the persona of Paul, basing much of their material on his previous work (Best 72-96). Many reasons are posed as to why the epistle of Ephesians is non-Pauline, including arguments such as different and unique vocabulary, word combinations and syntax, more advanced theology, parallelism (in the sense of borrowed ideas) between Ephesians and Colossians, style, and the appearance that the author had not met the Ephesians (O'Brien 5-13).

Nevertheless, these reasons do not seem sufficient to discredit the Pauline authorship of either epistle for various reasons. In the first place, content determines vocabulary. Therefore, if Paul wanted to write about topics different than what he discusses in epistles like Colossians, Romans, or Galatians, he would necessarily use different vocabulary to convey his ideas. On the other hand, in some points the author of Ephesians deviates so drastically from the standard Pauline epistle that it would be far too dangerous for someone other than Paul to write the epistle if he wished for the readers to believe in its genuine authorship (15). Furthermore, the similarity between Colossians and Ephesians is very understandable if one assumes that Paul wrote both epistles around the same time to audiences close in proximity (16). For these reasons, as well as many others not mentioned, the rest of this study presupposes that Paul is the author of Ephesians.

<div align="center">Grammatical Analysis</div>

After arguing for the validity of Pauline authorship, a reasonable place to begin in the passage is analyzing the phrase "the lower parts of the earth" to determine what the verse would allow in meaning in terms of grammatical constraints. Rarely does the grammar and syntax of a verse leave interpretation unequivocal, but at the very least it can narrow the possibilities of valid options. In order to draw from the text the most probable meaning, one must examine both the general context of Ephesians and the grammar and syntax of the passage, as well as compare that grammar and syntax to other examples in the Bible with similar constructions.

Contextually, before listing some of the spiritual gifts of the church, Paul gives a brief theological background to explain the reason why Christians can have spiritual gifts.

He references Psalm 68.18 and applies it as a Messianic foreshadowing. Paul understands

the verse in light of a risen and ascended Christ who gives gifts to men, referring in this

context to spiritual gifts given to His body, the church. At this point, Paul, in an evident

rabbinic style, takes a moment to comment on the word "ascended." He argues that if

Christ ascended, he must have also *descended* "into the "lower parts of the earth" ("εις τα

κατωτερα μερη της γης"). What does such a phrase mean?

Some scholars have understood "lower parts of the earth" as referring to the earth

(Wallace 99), while others believe that the phrase refers to the grave or possibly to hell

(Wuest 100). Still others argue a different view altogether, challenging the chronological

order for Christ's ascent and descent. Since there is uncertainty about whether the descent

comes before or after the ascent, some scholars hold that the descent of Christ refers to

the Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost (although this particular position will be discussed

in a later section) (Harris 196-97). The reason for the vast difference in the interpretation

of this text lies in part in how one understands the genitive phrase "της γης." Although

one may be able to give other interpretations, the three main uses of the genitive which

scholars have posed as a valid interpretation of τα κατωτερα μερη της γης are the

partitive genitive, the comparative genitive, and the genitive of apposition (Turner 215).

Valid Grammatical Interpretations

The first interpretation to examine, then, is the partitive genitive. A partitive

genitive has the semantic idea that the head noun is a part of the genitive phrase. An

example of the partitive genitive would be found in the sentence, "The kitchen is a room

(head noun) *of the house* (partitive genitive, the head noun is a part of the genitive

phrase)." Understanding τα κατωτερα μερη της γης in this way is certainly possible and

perhaps is the most straightforward. The New Testament has multiple examples of the

partitive genitive, although Koine Greek often seems to use prepositions such as

εκ instead of the partitive genitive (Harris 47). A good example of the partitive genitive is

found in John 2.1 with the phrase "εν Κανα της Γαλιλαιας (in Cana of Galilee)." In this

example, the head noun *Cana* is a part of the larger area *Galilee*. If one interprets τα

κατωτερα μερη της γης as a partitive genitive, with "lower parts" being the part of the

genitive phrase "of the earth," such an understanding would interpret the text to mean

that Christ descended into the earth's depths. The two possible specific locations to which

a partitive genitive might refer are either Hell or the grave (Hoehner 533-536). As shall

be discussed shortly, however, the more likely interpretation for this partitive genitive

would be as a reference to the grave.

Another valid way to interpret τα κατωτερα μερη της γης is as a comparative

genitive (48). To make a comparison in Koine Greek, a genitive is used as the noun

against which the head noun is compared (Wallace 110). For example, in 1 Peter 1.7, the

author writes "το δοκιμιον υμων της πιστεως πολυτιμοτερον χρυσιου (the genuineness

of your faith which is more precious than gold)." Since the word κατωτερα is indeed a

comparative adjective, the syntax of the phrase allows a comparative genitive as a valid

option of interpretation, rendering the phrase to mean "the parts lower than (or below) the

earth." Although the comparative genitive in this context would not seem to cause one to

understand the meaning to be any different from the partitive genitive, it differs in one

key aspect: its force is much stronger in being *below* the earth and therefore leaves little

room to understand the reference to be anything other than hell. In this sense, taking the

phrase as a comparative genitive nearly forces the exegete to conclude that Christ went to

hell after he died. However, Andrew Lincoln makes a valid point in his commentary on

Ephesians by mentioning that if the author of Ephesians had wished to reference hell

using a comparative genitive, he more than likely would have used the superlative form

"κατωτατα" instead of using the comparative form " κατωτερα," since such is the only

form used when referencing Hades in the Septuagint (245).

The final way in which many scholars will interpret this phrase is as a genitive of

apposition. The genitive of apposition is defined as a rough equivalent of its head noun.

In other words, the genitive of apposition clarifies or names more specifically that to

which the head noun refers (95). For example, the genitive of apposition occurs in the

sentence, "He lives in the country (head noun) *of the United States of America* (genitive

of apposition, clarifying 'country')." If applied to Ephesians 4.9, the phrase "τα κατωτερα

μερη της γης" would be rendered "the lower parts, namely, the earth." Of all three ways

to interpret this passage, this way would be the clearest in that there is no ambiguity as to

where Christ went. Understanding the phrase in this way says nothing more than that

Christ went to the earth from heaven.

Therefore, how one interprets the genitive use of της γης drastically affects the

location to where Christ went. Although the author seems to intend to contrast Christ's

ascent into heaven to his descent into the lower parts of the earth, the syntax nevertheless

remains ambiguous. One may understand the author to be making a contrast between

heaven and earth. Another may interpret the "lower parts of the earth" as a reference hell,

since the audience is composed of Greek Ephesians who may very well have understood

the idea of the "lower earth" to refer to Hades (the Greek word for the Jewish concept of

Sheol). Such a sense may indeed be how the early church understood the verse, since

several early church documents such as *The Apostle's Creed* state that Christ descended

into hell. Another interpretation, however, would take the phrase to mean that Christ had

to descend to *earth*, live, die on the cross, and resurrect from the dead in order to ascend

into heaven. Another interpretation understands the phrase to refer to earth and the Holy

Spirit's descent on the day of Pentecost (O'Brien 295).

The question, then, of whether the phrase "the lower parts of the earth" refers to

the earth (genitive of apposition), the grave (partitive genitive and possibly comparative

genitive), or hell (comparative genitive and possibly partitive genitive) greatly depends in

part on grammar and syntax. A possible angle from which to approach the issue is to

analyze the words "κατωτερα," ("lower") "μερη," ("parts") and the genitive form of the

word "γης" ("of the earth"). Analyzing these different words in their different forms may

very well give a better idea as to the more likely options of how one ought to interpret

this verse.

Word Analysis of κατωτερα and μερη

Using the computer program <u>Gramcord</u>, researching these words in their different

cases becomes fairly simple. The preliminary search consisted of finding every instance

of the word "κατωτερα" in order to better understand its meaning. Unfortunately,

according to <u>Gramcord</u>, "κατωτερα" occurs only once in the entire New Testament, in

Ephesians 4.9. Walter Bauer's authoritative Greek lexicon defines "κατωτερα" as simply

meaning "lower" without any special nuances (425). Therefore, the bulk of the research

relies on the two words of "parts" and "earth."

The next step is in researching the uses of the word μερος. However, before

researching this word, a caveat must be made in terms of textual criticism. In the fourth

version of the United Bible Societies' <u>The Greek New Testament</u>, the editors note that

the presence of the word μερη in the original autograph of Ephesians 4.9 is somewhat

questionable (<u>The Greek New Testament</u> 662). As some have pointed out, this word may

have been inserted in later versions of the text as an explanatory word, thus reflecting the

copyist's understanding of the text and not the original text itself (Harris 44). Therefore,

before examining this word grammatically, it is first necessary to examine it from a

textual level to determine whether or not it merits further study.

As already stated, the United Bible Societies (UBS) place a considerable amount

of doubt on whether μερη is authentic to the original text. From a category of A to D,

with A being very sure and D being very doubtful, the UBS classify the word μερη as

letter C, which they state indicates a fair amount of doubt (<u>The Greek New Testament</u> 2*).

Perhaps one of the soundest treatments of the textual issue of the presence or absence of

μερη is found in W. Hall Harris's book <u>The Descent of Christ</u>. He argues that the

manuscript evidence supports the word's presence (40-45). The reason is that there is a

greater number of manuscripts which are weighty in nature to provide evidence that μερη

ought to be included.

Before giving specific data for textual attestation, it is important to understand the

category system developed by Greek scholar Kurt Aland as a manner in which to weigh

the textual merits and authority of each manuscript based on factors such as age and

potential for outside influence (Aland 105-106). A category I is the weightiest category

for manuscripts, which always ought to be used in textual evaluation, followed by

category II (weighty but containing some outside influence) and category III (weighty in

authority, but less than category I and II). In addition, Aland includes category IV and V

manuscripts, but these are generally not weighty enough for special consideration. In

reference to Ephesians 4.9, only one category I manuscript (P46) supports the omission

of μερη, while five category I manuscripts support its inclusion (א, A, B, 33, 1739)

(Harris 42). Similarly, one category II manuscript and two category III omit μερη while

seven category II manuscripts and six category III include it, as do all the Byzantine

minuscules and lectionaries and the majority text (42). With no other variables present,

textual criticism usually prefers the shorter reading to the longer one, assuming that

copyists tended to add words and phrases to the manuscripts rather than omit text.

However, despite textual criticism's preference toward shorter text variants, the weight of

manuscript evidence in this specific case seems to greatly support the inclusion of

μερη rather than its omission.

Therefore, assuming that μερος is original to Ephesians 4.9, the first search in

Gramcord which returned results consisted of every occurrence in the New Testament of

the word "μερος" ("part") without a limit on the case, followed within two words' space

of any noun in the genitive. The search returned eleven results (Matt. 2.22, Matt. 15.21,

Matt. 16.13, Mark 8.10, Luke 15.12, John 21.6, Acts 2.10, Acts 23.6, Acts 23.9, Eph, 4.9,

and Col. 2.16), several of which were particularly helpful in determining the uses of

"μερος" with the genitive. The construction of "μερος" followed by the genitive

commonly occurs when referring to geographical locations. Five of the eleven verses

were of this nature (Matt. 2.22, Matt. 15.21, Matt 16.13, Mark 8.10, and Acts 2.10). For

example, in Matthew 16.13, the author writes, "ελθων δε ο Ιησους εις τα μερη

καισαρειας της φιλιππου…" ("Now after Jesus had come into the parts of Caesarea

Philippi…"). This passage, along with the other five verses, could be interpreted two

valid ways. First, it could be understood to refer to several specific parts of the greater

area of Caesarea Philippi, thus understanding the text as a partitive genitive. Second, one

could take this to mean the parts (or district), which is Caesarea Philippi (genitive of

apposition). Because both are possible interpretations, the text at the very least reveals

that such a construction is not ambiguous merely in the passage in Ephesians.

μερη as a Partitive Genitive

It seems that the New Testament contains only two verses which clearly illustrate

what appear to be clear uses of the partitive genitive (John 21.6 and Luke 15.12) and two

other verses which demonstrate the genitive of apposition. The first verse which seems to

show unequivocally μερος with the genitive as a partitive genitive is John 21.6, which

says, "βαλετε εις τα δεξια μερη του πλοιου το δικτυον" ("Cast your net into (on) the right

parts (side) of the boat"). Although one might be tempted to consider this a genitive of

possession ("the boat's right parts (side)"), it does not seem completely valid to consider

the right side as *belonging* to the boat, unless one allots for the possibility of personifying

inanimate objects. Greek scholar Daniel Wallace also makes a distinction between the

partitive genitive as applying to inanimate objects and the genitive of possession as

applying to animate objects (Wallace 84). A good understanding of John 21.6, then, is

that the right side is *part* of the boat. Therefore, the partitive genitive is not only a

possible interpretation, but indeed seems to be the most probable interpretation. In view

of its similarity to Ephesians 4.6, John 21.6 has a plural head noun followed by a singular

genitive, which is exactly the same as the Ephesians passage. In this regard, these two

verses share a very similar construction, so lending possible support to the partitive

interpretation.

The second verse which is perhaps best understood as a partitive genitive is Luke 15.12, which says, "πατερ, δος μοι το επιβαλλον μερος της ουσιας (Father, give to me the part of [your] property that falls to me)." In this verse, the phrase μερος της ουσιας is best understood as a partitive genitive, meaning that the son was asking the father for a portion (or part) of the property that he owned. Thus, this example also demonstrates how the partitive genitive can occur very easily with μερος. Although this verse is not as similar in nature to Ephesians 4.9 as is John 21.6 in terms of plurality, this passage nevertheless demonstrates the clear grammatical *possibility* that Ephesians 4.9 could be interpreted as a partitive genitive.

μερη as a Genitive of Apposition

A notable verse which seems to demonstrate well μερος used as a genitive of apposition is Colossians 2.16: "μη ουν τις υμας κρινετω εν βρωσει και εν ποσει η εν μερει εορτης η νεομηνιας η σαββατων" ("Therefore do not let anyone judge you in regard to food and in drink or in a part [or matter] of a feast or new moon or Sabbath day"). The word "μερει" (in the dative case) is followed by the word "εορτης," or "of a feast." It seems that the best translation here for the word μερει is to use the word "matter" or "affair," according to the options that are listed in Walter Bauer's Greek lexicon (506). Paul is specifying the word "part" or "matter" by using the genitive words for feast, new moon, and Sabbath day. In other words, he is saying "do not lest anyone judge you in a matter of a feast or new moon." In this context, the matter (or possibly "issue") *is* the feast or new moon or Sabbath day. Thus, it seems that the best understanding for μερος in this context is as a genitive of apposition. This verse may also be particularly significant because of its Pauline authorship and the overall similarity shared between Colossians

and Ephesians, as mentioned previously. Therefore, this verse appears to illustrate an example wherein Paul uses the genitive of apposition with the word μερος.

The second example of the genitive of apposition is found in Acts 23.9, which reads, "τινες γραμματεων του μερους των Φαρισαιων διεμαχοντο (some of the scribes of the part of the Pharisees began to protest violently)." The phrase μερους των Φαρισαιων is translated in several versions of the Bible as the "Pharisaic party" (NASB and ESV). In essence, the word μερους is a general category followed by the more specific noun των Φαρισαιων, a very strong construction to suggest a genitive of apposition. Although some might initially interpret this phrase as a genitive in simple apposition (since the head noun is also in the genitive), this understanding would be inaccurate because μερους must be in the genitive only because it must modify either γραμματεων or τινες (both of which are valid options). Nevertheless, the best option seems to be to interpret this phrase as a genitive of apposition.

From the results, the evidence in pure statistics suggests that the interpretation for μερος followed by a genitive noun can justifiably go either way for a partitive genitive or genitive of apposition. Therefore, while the results are somewhat disappointing in that they do not suggest any sort of overwhelming tendency toward one particular interpretation, they are at the very least informative, indicating that both interpretations are seemingly valid.

Word Analysis of γη

The second search involved finding any noun in any case which immediately precedes the genitive form of the word "γη" (earth). This search yielded a much larger sample of forty-three verses. The uses of the genitive were much broader, such as the use

of the objective genitive in Revelation 11.4 ("κυριου της γης" or "Lord of (over) the earth"). Examples of the partitive genitive occur in this sample as well, but they do not seem as obvious. One example of the partitive genitive is in Mark 13.27 with the "farthest end of the earth" (ακρου γης). In this verse, the end certainly appears to be a part of the earth. Other instances of the partitive genitive seem to occur in verses like Matthew 12.40, 12.42, Luke 11.31, and Hebrews 1.10. Although a closer inspection may yield possible variants in interpretation, no obvious use of the genitive of apposition occurred in these forty three verses with the possible exception of Ephesians 4.9. This finding may be significant, since it may suggest a tendency for Greek speakers to shy away from using the genitive of apposition with the word "γης." On the other hand, since content and context ultimately determine grammatical structures, one might argue that the New Testament does not discuss such an idea elsewhere, and so would not use such a grammatical construction.

The third Gramcord search was an attempt to see how many comparative adjectives in any case preceded within two words' space the word γη in the genitive. The intent for this search was to see if any other verse or verses in the New Testament uses some form of comparative adjectives with the earth to describe either Sheol or, more likely, hell. This search returned no results. The lack of results is revealing in that it seems that the New Testament does not tend to use any comparative adjective with γη to refer to hell.

Grammatical Conclusions

In view of the pure grammatical and syntactical data available, it seems more probable, statistically speaking, for the partitive genitive to be the correct interpretation.

It appears that while Greek speakers do not mind using the partitive genitive or genitive of apposition with the word μερος, the genitive noun γης is almost never used in apposition in the New Testament. Nevertheless, the possibility remains for the partitive genitive, the genitive of apposition, and the comparative genitive, although the option of the comparative genitive seems least likely both from the data and from the other logical considerations.

Since γη does not seem to be used appositionally in the New Testament (except perhaps in Ephesians 4.9), one must consider other factors which would validate interpreting κατωτερα μερη της γης in such a way. Another notable factor to consider is the stylistic tendency of the author of Ephesians. As some have noted, Paul seems to use the genitive of apposition relatively frequently in this epistle, nearly fifteen times by some estimations (Wallace 100). Possible examples of the author's use of the genitive of apposition are found Ephesians 2.20 (although this may also possibly be subjective genitive), and Ephesians 1.1 and 1.2 (as an example of simple apposition). Furthermore, Paul uses the genitive of apposition in other epistles as well, such as in Romans 4.11 ("και σημειον ελαβεν περιτομης" ["and he received the sign of circumcision"]), and 2 Corinthians 1.22 ("και δους τον αρραβωνα του πνευματος" ["and gave the guarantee of the Spirit"]). Therefore, because of the author's tendency toward using the genitive of apposition, the pure statistical data ought not skew the interpretation one way or the other. Rather, it ought to demonstrate the valid possibilities of interpretation: the genitive of apposition, the partitive genitive, and (less likely) the comparative genitive.

Contextual and Historical Background of Ephesians 4.8 and Psalm 68.18

After having discussed the grammatically possible options for interpreting

κατωτερα μερη της γης, it becomes necessary to broaden the scope of the passage to the

context of the previous verse, Ephesians 4.8. This verse is a quotation of Psalm 68.18,

although some modified language exists in the quote, most notably in changing the word

"received" to "gave." In Ephesians, Paul quotes the Psalmist as saying "When He

ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives and gave gifts to men." However, the

NASB translates Psalm 68.18 as follows: "You have ascended on high, You have led

captive Your captives; You have received gifts among men, Even among the rebellious

also, that the LORD God may dwell there."

Upon comparing Psalm 68.18 with Ephesians 4.8, it seems that Paul misquotes or

distorts the verse by replacing the word "received" with the word "gave"—two seemingly

very different words in meaning (at the very least to the English speaker). The question

that arises, then, is this: How can one justify changing a verse so drastically to prove a

point? In order to answer the first issue of the translation of Psalm 68.18, its context and

historical background need to be examined, followed by the different possible

interpretations, including traditional rabbinic interpretations in order to best explain this

difference. Such information will provide understanding of the issues involved both in

Paul's quotation and how he applies the verse to Christ's ascent and descent in Ephesians

4.9.

The Context of Psalm 68

First, then, it is important to look at the context from which Paul draws his

reference in order to determine the proper idea to which he compares Christ

metaphorically. Psalm 68 is largely a psalm of praise to God for what He has done in the history of Israel. According to the superscription in Psalm 68, this is a "Psalm of David." If one interprets this superscription in a traditional way, the meaning is that the psalm was written by David. In part because of the superscription, many believe that David is the subject of much of this psalm, including verse 18. However, not all commentators agree on such an interpretation for verse 18.

Psalm 68.18 in Reference to Moses

Assuming Davidic authorship, some commentators, including several ancient Jewish rabbis, maintain that in the context of the passage, the event that best fits the description of ascending on high and leading captivity captive is not in reference to David, but rather refers to Moses receiving the Torah (Gruber 449). The argument some scholars have made is that Paul would have had this understanding in his mind when referencing this verse because of the rabbinic literature of the time and its influence on his thinking—though they will also admit that dating this literature before the time of Ephesians is difficult (Harris 64).

Contextually, there is merit in understanding the passage in this way. Psalm 68.7-10 speaks of Moses receiving the Torah and verse 17 again references Yahweh's presence at Mt. Sinai. Thus, the phrase "You have ascended on high" speaks of Moses ascending Mt. Sinai, while "You led captive your captives" refers to him leading the Israelites through the wilderness. The reference to "receiving gifts among men" is a reference to receiving the Torah from God and then in turn giving the words to the people (65). Some will also state that even though the "rebellious" mentioned in verse 18 may seem to more appropriately fit war captives, they will note that viewing the Israelites as

rebellious is certainly valid in the context of the chapter—especially in verses 5-6

(O'Brien 292). Another interesting point about viewing the verse in this light is that it

makes the descent *subsequent* to the ascent. Such an observation is significant because it

would allow the verse to be interpreted to mean that the descent could symbolize the

Holy Spirit descending on the Christians on the day of Pentecost after the ascent of Christ

(Harris 180).

Psalm 68.18 in Reference to David

However, several discrepancies exist with this hypothesis. Even though Mount

Sinai is referenced in the preceding verse, it is used only as a simile in the broader

context of the presence of God at Mount Zion and a war scene with a multitude of

chariots, later followed by a glorious procession (Psalm 68.15-27). Therefore, it would

seem to be a rather drastic change in thought even though the chapter does at one point

speak of Mount Sinai.

Secondly, the purpose of ascending on high, leading captivity captive, and

receiving gifts is that God might have a place to dwell. Mount Sinai, although certainly

filled with the presence of God in Exodus, would not seem to fit well as a location where

God would dwell in any permanent sense. Mount Zion, on the other hand, is much more

logical as a permanent dwelling place for the Lord, since it would soon be the location for

the temple which held the Ark of the Covenant.

Lastly, leading captivity captive fits more naturally in the context of those who

have been conquered in war. Since Moses led the children of Israel as those already freed

from slavery in Egypt, it would seem unusual to refer to Moses leading them as one

leading a host of captives. This argument is perhaps the strongest argument against the

hypothesis that the verse refers to Moses and the Torah. This point becomes even clearer

when one understands in greater detail the context of slavery and, in particular, war

captives in the Old Testament.

Slavery in the Old Testament

Indeed, one of the most critical aspects in understanding Psalm 68.18 is the idea

of captivity and slavery. Although to the modern reader slavery may seem foreign,

uncivilized, and unethical, nearly all cultures have, in some form or other, imposed

slavery on other people (Hopkins 6). The ancient Hebrew culture was no exception. The

Old Testament records instances wherein the Hebrew people would both enslave and

become enslaved to other nations (e.g., Lev. 25.39-55, Deut. 20.10-14, 1 Sam. 4.9, 30.3,

II Chron. 28.8).

Slavery during the Old Testament period was a common practice. Indeed, the

Ancient Near East was full of slavery in countries such as Babylon, Assyria, and Egypt

(Mendelsohn 2). Primarily, these slaves were used as laborers for all aspects of simple

labor in society (3). Ancient Eastern countries obtained slaves through methods such as

conquering other cities and taking captives, buying slaves from their own countries as

well as from other countries, and obtaining them through dowries and inheritances. The

Hebrews, too, also practiced slavery as a cultural norm of their time. The Old Testament

certainly makes provision for the Hebrews to have slaves, but what was the nature of

slavery?

Leviticus 25 is perhaps the single lengthiest legal discourse on Hebrew slavery,

including the boundaries to which the slave owners must adhere. Although Hebrews

could own both fellow countrymen and pagans as slaves, the law imposed fewer

restrictions on those who owned slaves from other nations. For example, Hebrews could take those who were from other countries as permanent slaves, whereas a Hebrew slave could not become a permanent part of the family inheritance (Leviticus 22.44-66). Thus, this section in the Mosaic Law makes a clear distinction between those slaves that could theoretically be gained through war with foreign nations and those which were "domestic" slaves.

A final point to make in addressing the issue of slavery is how the Hebrews were allowed to obtain slaves. According to Leviticus, one could purchase slaves from among the nation of Israel as well as from foreigners (Lev. 25.39-44). However, another way to gain slaves was indeed to capture them through battle and take them as war captives. For example, in 1 Samuel, the Philistines feared that the Israelites would fight against them, conquer them, and take them prisoners as captives of war (1 Samuel 4.9). Likewise, in this passage the Philistines mention that the Hebrew people had already served them as slaves.

However, taking war captives and making them slaves was not a practice limited only to the Hebrews and Philistines. Indeed, the Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, and other ancient cultures practiced this tactic as well (Mendelsohn 1). When ancient kings went to battle against another nation and were victorious, they would take the survivors of the losing side hostage, bring them back to the conqueror's country, and force them to serve as slaves (1). Therefore, this practice was not by any means foreign to the ancient world, but rather was common both among the Hebrews as well as other nations.

This concept of capturing foreigners and enemies of the kings and returning them to the country as slaves is important to the context of Psalm 68. Since this was a practice

that would have been well known to the Hebrew people, when Psalm 68.18 says, "You have led captive your captives," the images that this passage would evoke may well have been more closely associated with slavery than with the Israelites wandering in the desert. It may indeed be more probable that this phrase is a picture meant to allude to war captives who have lost a battle. Therefore, in view of the cultural practice of slavery and how well it would fit into the context of Psalm 68.18, along with the other reasons previously mentioned, it seems more reasonable to assume that David in this psalm has in mind a military victory rather than the Hebrews in the wilderness at Mount Sinai.

Spiritual Spoils

Psalm 68.18 also speaks of receiving gifts among men. Again, in the historical context the concept of obtaining spoils from the war (including the captives themselves) seems to fit better than Moses receiving anything from the children of Israel. The picture here is that the army has descended Mount Zion, defeated the enemy, taken the spoils of the war, and now distributes those spoils to those in the city. In view of some of the "spoils" being those captured from the opposing army, the immediate reference to the "rebellious" seems better understood as those who were David's enemies than as the children of Israel.

While some scholars may still maintain that this verse references Moses receiving the Law, others understand the passage to refer specifically to David ascending to Mount Zion in the context of bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (Barnes 202). This historical event is recorded in 2 Samuel 5.6-10 and 1 Chronicles 11.4-9, wherein David travels with his army from Hebron up to Jerusalem in order to conquer the Jebusites who live in the city. However, 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles both record very little of the details

of the battle—especially in reference to whether they took anyone from the city as captives and made them slaves. The most that the books state of the battle's details is that Joab and his soldiers penetrated the Jebusites' defense by climbing through the water shaft to gain entry into the city (1 Samuel 6.8; 1 Chronicles 11.6). Nothing, however, is explicitly said about David taking slaves from Jerusalem.

The only note that might hint toward any sort of slavery is that David "took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem, after he came from Hebron; and more sons and daughters were born to David" (1 Samuel 5.13). Although this verse does not directly record David as having slaves, it seems at least to open the possibility that David may have led a group of captives from the conquered city. If such is the case, then when David comes from the house of Obed-Edom with the Ark of the Covenant and ascends the Mount Zion, it may be that David led a host of captivity with him. Such a hypothesis would certainly shed light on the background of the psalm and thus make one's exegesis much more straightforward.

After considering all the different possible options, it seems the most likely that a correct exegesis understands Psalm 68.18 in the context of a king returning victoriously from battle, and possibly in the context of David ascending Mount Zion to prepare the way for the Ark of the Covenant. With this understanding, Paul's metaphorical application of this verse in Ephesians 4.8 for Christ becomes vividly descriptive. Therefore, in view of all the topics covered including the grammatical, syntactical, contextual, and historical aspects of this verse, the exegetical and theological implications can now be articulated much more intelligently.

Piecing the Information Together

As mentioned earlier, Ephesians 4 addresses the practical application of how one ought to live in view of the abundant spiritual blessing that God has given (which Paul discusses in chapters 1-3). Specifically, after having listed in verses 5 and 6 all the aspects which believers have in common such as one Lord, faith, baptism, and God, he then shifts to the spiritual differences among the church, namely, the spiritual gifts. In order to prove from Scripture that Christ gives gifts to each member of His body, Paul quotes Psalm 68.18. The New King James Version translates the passage as follows: "Therefore He says: '*When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.*'" These three clauses seem to represent metaphorically three aspects of Christ's work of salvation and in the church.

First, the ascension almost undoubtedly references Christ's returning to heaven after having been crucified. Just as the Hebrew king returned from battle victoriously and ascended Mount Zion as a conqueror, so Christ ascended into heaven having returned victoriously. It seems that the majority of scholarship interprets the clause in this way (Lloyd-Jones 284). Thus, as Paul later points out in the next verse, His ascent into heaven also implies descending to the "lower parts of the earth" and conquering the enemies of that territory. In view of war captivity, the correct interpretation of the κατωτερα μερη της γης seems more evident. However, exactly who comprise the "captivity" in the second clause?

Two views seem possible. One interpretation, in view of historical captivity and slavery, is that the enemies of Christ are seen as fallen angels who have been conquered through His death, resurrection, and ascension (Eadie 287). This view is certainly

plausible, especially considering that Paul also speaks of a similar topic in Colossians when he refers to the enemies as "principalities and powers," stating that "[Christ] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2.15 NKJV). Such an interpretation implies that this verse means that Christ has, in one sense, conquered all of His enemies—both physical and spiritual—through His work on the cross.

Another view, held by many of the early church fathers, maintains that the captivity is composed of those who had formerly belonged to the enemy army (Satan and the sinful nature) and have now been made captives to Christ (287). Such an understanding would seem to correspond well with the overall theology of Ephesians, which emphasizes the reconciliatory work of Christ who redeemed those who "formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2.2). This interpretation is also reasonable in that it harmonizes with Ephesians 4.11, which says, "και αυτος εδωκεν τους μεν αποστολους, τους δε προφητας, τους δε ευαγγελιστας, τους δε ποιμενας και διδασκαλους (And He Himself gave some to be apostles, and some to be prophets, and some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers)." Because of the proximity of the war captives in verse 8 to the "τους (some)" in verse 11, it seems most reasonable to interpret this definite article as anaphoric, referring to the members of the captivity. An important point to mention is that the list of gifts in Ephesians 4.11 are not meant to be exhaustive. Thus, the "captivity" in verse 8 would include those with other gifts as well. The point is, however, that the members of the captivity include the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and others.

On this point, scholar Ernest Best also believes that the "gifts" are actually the

people themselves, not gifts *to* the people (197). Therefore, the verse appears to indicate

that Christ descended from Heaven and fought a battle in which He took captive those

enslaved by Satan. It would be more reasonable to assume, then, that the battle Christ

fought was on earth, since the captivity consists of the redeemed church (the alternative

theoretically being that Christ went down to hell itself to take out the captivity who

would later become apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers—an

unconventional and far less appealing proposition). In light of this understanding, and

because of the valid possibility for understanding κατωτερα μερη της γης as a genitive of

apposition, the best exegesis seems to be that Ephesians 4.8-9 does not speak of Christ

descending into hell, but rather of his descending to earth to conquer sin and redeem His

church through the cross and the resurrection.

The final issue in the passage, as seen earlier, is that Paul writes, "gave gifts to

men," instead of, "received gifts among men." Semantically, these two ideas would

appear to be opposite. If, then, Paul wishes to convey a metaphor of Christ conquering,

one wonders how he can rationally change the word "received" to "gave" without

damaging the text in its accuracy or even validity. Because the Septuagint translates the

word for "receive" as λαμβανω (take or receive), one cannot appeal to the Septuagint as

the reason for the change, since λαμβανω cannot be understood to mean give in any

sense (Bauer 464-465).

Scholars have posed several options which might reconcile this seeming

inaccuracy, including interpreting the Hebrew word for "receive" as "give," suggesting

that Paul had a faulty memory or a bad manuscript, or that he was reading the quotation

from a translation of the Psalms which used the word "give" instead of "receive"

(O'Brien 290). However, in view again of the historical context of war captivity, perhaps

the best explanation is simpler than the previous suggestions. Some scholars hold that

Paul is not intentionally misquoting or using a faulty manuscript as reference. Rather, he

is merely broadening the scope of what Psalm 68.18 speaks of, and pictures Christ both

receiving gifts as the spoil from the defeated enemy and distributing the gifts to those

among His army (Lloyd-Jones 150). The theological implication with this view, then,

would be that Christ has not only conquered His enemies, but has also, because of His

victory, distributed the "spoils" (symbolic of spiritual gifts) to those of His kingdom.

Such an interpretation seems to fit well using the metaphor of ancient Hebrew captivity.

<p align="center">Conclusion</p>

The findings, then, of the entire study lead to a conclusion which must take into

account the grammar, context, and history of the text. After considering numerous

relevant aspects to this passage, the best interpretation seems to be that Ephesians 4.8

speaks of a Davidic King descending from Mount Zion, conquering the enemy, ascending

Mount Zion with captives from the enemy army, and then distributing the war spoils,

which are captives, to his army as gifts. Paul then takes this image metaphorically to

represent Christ descending to the lower parts, namely, the earth, conquering sin,

returning with those who had been enslaved by Satan, ascending back to heaven, and

delivering the "gifts," namely those who were captives, to the church.

Because modern readers are generally unaware both of the grammatical

possibilities for interpretation as well as the culture and history behind Hebrew life in the

Old Testament, the metaphor which Paul uses might easily escape their full

comprehension. Only after one understands the grammatical, syntactical, contextual, and historical aspects of the passage can one begin to grasp both the meaning and some of the finer nuances to the text of Ephesians 4.8-9. Admittedly, even a study such as this does not automatically reveal the exact meaning of a verse. There is certainly the possibility of error in understanding even after evaluating so many different valid options. Nevertheless, such a study undoubtedly sheds light on important aspects to consider. To remove a passage from its culture is to remove a vital aspect of context. To ignore grammatical considerations is to search blindly for meaning. However, when one takes time to investigate a text at each level of exegesis, one will undoubtedly reap better insight into the finer meanings of the Scriptures.

Works Cited

Aland, K., and B. Aland. <u>The Text of the New Testament</u>. Trans. E. F. Rhodes. Grand

    Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987.

Barnes, Albert. <u>Psalms</u>. <u>Notes on the Old Testament</u>. Vol. 2. Grand Rapids, MI:

    Baker, 1870.

Bauer, Walter. <u>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early

    Christian Literature</u>. Trans. William Arndt, Felix Gingrich and Frederick

    Danker. Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1958.

Best, Ernest. <u>Ephesians: A Shorter Commentary</u>. New York: Clark, 2003.

Best, Ernest. "Who Used Whom?" <u>New Testament Studies</u> 43 (1997): 72-96.

Eadie, John. <u>Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians</u>. Edinburgh: Clark,

    1883.

Harris, W. H. <u>The Descent of Christ: Ephesians 4:7-9 and Traditional Hebrew

    Imagery</u>. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998.

Hoehner, Harold. <u>Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary</u>. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002.

<u>The Holy Bible, English Standard Version</u>. Wheaton, IL: Good News, 2001.

Hopkins, John Henry. <u>A Scriptural, Ecclesiastical, and Historical View of Slavery</u>. New

    York: Negro UP, 1969.

<u>Gramcord</u>. Vers. 2.6. Vancouver, WA: 2005.

<u>The Greek New Testament</u>. Aland, Barbara, K. Aland, et. al. (eds.). 4th ed. Münster:

    Biblia Druck GmbH Stuttgart, 1993.

Gruber, Mayer. <u>Rashi's Commentary on Psalms</u>. Leiden, Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill

    NV, 2004.

Lincoln, Andrew. Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians. Vol. 42. Dallas: Word, 1990.

Lloyd-Jones, D. M. Christian Unity: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1 to 16. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980.

Mendelsohn, Isaac. Slavery in the Ancient Near East. New York: Oxford UP, 1949.

The New American Standard Bible. La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995.

The New King James Version. Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1982.

O'Brien, Peter. The Letter to the Ephesians. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

Wallace, Daniel. Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.

Wuest, Kenneth. Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament. Vol. 2. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973.

Works Consulted

Abbott, T. K.. <u>A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the</u>

    <u>Ephesians and to the Colossians</u>. Edinburgh: Clark, 1897.

Barnes, A. <u>Barnes' Notes</u>. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1870.

Blass, F. & Debrunner, A. <u>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other</u>

    <u>Early Christian Literature</u>. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961.

Brauch, M. <u>Hard Sayings of Paul</u>. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989.

Calvin, John. <u>Sermons on Ephesians</u>. Golding and Banner of Truth Trust, trans.

    Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1562.

Criswell, W.A. <u>Ephesians: An Exposition by W.A. Criswell</u>. Grand Rapids:

    Zondervan, 1974.

Delitzsch, F. and R. Bolton. <u>The Psalms</u>. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955.

Leupold, H. C. <u>The Psalms</u>. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959.

Mitton, C. L. <u>The Epistle to the Ephesians: Its Authorship, Origin and Purpose</u>.

    Oxford: Clarendon, 1951.

Moule, H. C. G. <u>Ephesian Studies</u>. London: Pickering & Ingles.

Parker, J. <u>The Epistle to the Ephesians</u>. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956.

Paxson, R. <u>The Wealth, Walk, and Warfare of the Christian</u>. Old Tappan, NJ: Revell,

    1939.

Simpson, E. K., and F. F. Bruce. <u>Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and</u>

    <u>the Colossians</u>. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957.

Synge, F. C. <u>St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians: A Theological Commentary</u>.

    London: S. P. C. K., 1954.

Talbot, L. T. Ephesians: An Exposition. Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen, 1937.

Van Roon, A. The Authenticity of Ephesians. S. Prescod-Jokel, trans. Leiden: Brill, 1974.

Vaughan, C. & Gideon, V. E. A Greek Grammar of the New Testament. Nashville:

    Broadman, 1976.