

I. TEXTUAL ISSUE: APPARENT CONTRADICTION BETWEEN PSALM 68:18 AND EPHESIANS 4:8

A. ORIGINAL HEBREW AND GREEK TEXTS

- **Psalm 68:18 (Masoretic Text):** "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast **received** gifts among men..."
- **Psalm 68:18 (Septuagint):** Matches Hebrew, emphasizing "received gifts among men."

B. PAULINE ADAPTATION IN EPHESIANS

- **Ephesians 4:8:** "When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and **gave** gifts unto men."
- Paul explicitly changes wording from "received" to "gave," creating an interpretive challenge.

II. HISTORICAL VIEWPOINTS ON "CAPTIVITY CAPTIVE"

A. JEWISH INTERPRETATIONS (RABBINIC TRADITION)

- **Targum Psalms (an Aramaic translation of Psalms) and Midrash:**

- Moses ascended Sinai, captured the Torah from angels.

"You ascended to the firmament, O prophet Moses; you captured captives; you taught the words of Torah; you gave gifts to the sons of men, even among the stubborn who are converted."

- "Captivity" = Torah; "Gifts" = Teachings distributed among Israel (including rebellious).

- **The Rabbinical View**

The rabbis saw Psalm 68 as poetically alluding to the single greatest ascent and descent event in Israelite history—Moses' ascent up Sinai to receive the Torah. This event became a core symbolic and theological paradigm for God's interaction with Israel:

- The Torah was viewed as the ultimate heavenly gift.
- The "ascent" imagery matched Sinai perfectly, being the one major event where a human figure literally climbed to God's presence and returned with revelation.
- "Captivity" became a poetic metaphor for heavenly treasures inaccessible to humanity until Moses' intercession.

Thus, even though Psalm 68 does not explicitly name Moses or the Torah, rabbinic hermeneutics commonly looked for scriptural passages that could poetically encapsulate the Sinai revelation, and Psalm 68:18 fit remarkably well.

B. EARLY CHURCH FATHERS (PATRISTICS)

- **Christus Victor View:**
 - "Captivity" = Sin, death, Satan (humanity's captors).
 - Christ conquered these powers, turning captors into captives.
- **Harrowing of Hell View:**
 - Harrowing in its earlier sense was "to raid or plunder."
 - "Captivity" = Souls of righteous held in Hades.

- Christ liberated them and led them triumphantly into heaven.
- **Augustinian (Conversion and Grace):**
 - Humans as captives of sin liberated and willingly captured by Christ's grace.

C. MEDIEVAL THEOLOGY

- **Western (Roman Catholic):**
 - Affirmed literal "harrowing of hell," freeing souls.
- **Eastern Orthodox:**
 - Emphasized Christ's cosmic triumph over Hades, vividly depicted in icons.
- **Scholasticism:**
 - Strong Pentecost connection: "gave gifts" interpreted as spiritual graces/ministry offices.

D. REFORMATION & POST-REFORMATION

- **Calvin and Protestant Reformers:**
 - Primarily Christus Victor emphasis—sin, death, devil conquered.
 - Skeptical of literal Hades descent; spiritualized "captivity."
 - Highlighted conversion: believers freed from sin's bondage.
- **Post-Reformation Commentators (Spurgeon, Matthew Henry):**
 - Continued spiritual victory emphasis.
 - Mixed views on literal freeing of righteous souls.

E. CONTEMPORARY EVANGELICAL AND ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVES

- **Evangelical Mainstream:**
 - Christus Victor widely affirmed: spiritual enemies conquered.
 - Emphasis on "captivity" as sin's power over humanity.
- **Continuing Literal View:**
 - Some retain harrowing of hell interpretation (Dispensationalists, Orthodox, Catholic).
- **Critical Scholarship:**
 - Paul's reinterpretation viewed as deliberate, reflecting Jewish exegetical tradition (Targumic influence).
 - Possible typology: Christ greater Moses, giving Spirit as Moses gave Torah.

III. A COHERENT ARGUMENT: IDENTIFYING CAPTIVITY AS SIN AND DEATH

A. RESOLVING THE TEXTUAL DIFFERENCE

- Psalm 68 context: victorious king receives spoils, then distributes them—even to the rebellious (cf. Rabbinic interpretation).
- Paul's adaptation ("gave gifts") clarifies theological truth implicit in Psalm 68: true victory includes giving gifts (grace, Spirit) generously after triumph.

B. THE ESSENTIAL NECESSITY OF CHRIST'S DESCENT (EPHESIANS 4:9-10)

- Paul explicitly mentions descent: "Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?"
- Implied truth: Victory (ascent) logically requires prior confrontation (descent) with captors—sin and death.

C. SCRIPTURAL EVIDENCE: SIN AS THE FUNDAMENTAL CAPTIVITY

- **John 8:34** – "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant (slave) of sin."
- **Romans 7:23** – Paul personally captive to "law of sin."
- **Romans 5:12-21** – Sin and death universally reigning from Adam onward.

D. CHRIST'S VICTORY AS LIBERATION FROM SIN AND DEATH

- **John 1:29** – "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."
- **Hebrews 9:26** – Christ appeared "to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."
- **2 Corinthians 5:19** – "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."

E. CAPTIVITY TURNED CAPTIVE: SIN'S POWER NULLIFIED YET PRESENT

- Sin, humanity's universal captor, decisively conquered (nullified), yet remains experientially present:
 - Believers freed from sin's dominion (Romans 6:18) yet still capable of sin (Romans 7:23).
 - Sin's ultimate claim (death and condemnation) destroyed, but ongoing struggle persists.

F. HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL INTEGRATION

- Aligns with **Christus Victor**: Christ conquers spiritual enemies (sin, death).
- Aligns with **Augustinian Conversion View**: Believers freed from sin's bondage become Christ's willing servants.
- Compatible with Jewish Tradition (typology): Christ's ascent analogous to Moses—distribution of blessings even to rebellious humanity.

IV. CONCLUSION: A UNIFIED UNDERSTANDING

- Paul's reinterpretation of Psalm 68 in Ephesians 4 is deliberate and inspired, emphasizing Christ's generous victory.
- "Taking captivity captive" powerfully expresses Christ's conquest over humanity's fundamental enemies (sin and death), liberating believers into grace and righteousness.
- Humanity, once captive to sin yet able to choose righteousness, now lives freed from sin yet retains capacity to sin—reflecting ongoing tension until Christ's return.