

# Ephesians: What's God Saying to You? What are You Going to Do About It?

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## I. Introduction

Do you sometimes feel like a born loser? What if you were actually a born winner? Many struggle with low self-esteem, even Christians. But did you know that you don't have to struggle with this, that those who place their trust in Christ are actually born winners, they're born-*again* winners. The millisecond you believe in Jesus, He wipes your history clean, hands you a personal gift and purpose in life and everything you needed to fulfill it—it's like having a brand new life with a giant new bank account. And there's nothing vague about this; it's the concrete reality of every Christian. But do we live like this or do we still see ourselves through our own mistakes or the negative comments and opinions of others?

## II. Ephesians: What is God Saying to You and What are You Going to Do About It?

In Ephesians 4:1-6, God makes a giant point of telling us that since we are now one with His Son, since there's an absolute oneness between us and God,<sup>1</sup> we must fight to keep the unity that His Spirit has given us. Thus, it sounds odd that after saying this, He goes on to talk about individuality and diversity. However, this individuality is connected to and serves the oneness of Jesus' Body. And as the Lord begins to discuss this, He reveals something wonderful that He's done with each one of us. One might say that He took a bunch of losers who were doomed to live lost and miserable lives and turned them into winners who have new lives with giant new bank accounts waiting to be spent.

### Chapter 4

**4:7-8**, earlier the Lord said that He gave a gift to the apostle Paul: God made him apostle to the Gentiles (3:2-8). But do you know that He's given you a gift too? Jesus is saying that He's given you a gift, a role to play within His Body, which He'll go on to discuss in greater detail. But first He quotes Psalm 68:18 to explain exactly what He means. But when we read the original wording of this verse, it appears that Paul—or rather the Lord, since this is His Word—changed the wording. Did Paul have a memory lapse or purposely misquote the psalm (the change is significant: from “You” to “He” and “received” to “gave”)? There are several explanations given: Paul reads into the psalm an incorrect meaning which required him to change its wording, he had a memory lapse (but the context of Ephesians 4 shows his word-change was deliberate), Paul used the Targums (Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible) which have “gave” instead of “received” (but the earliest of these were produced in 4-5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and Paul wrote Ephesians in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.), the Hebrew word in Psalm 68:18 for “receive” also has the sense of “to take in order to give” (but the data used to back this is weak), and the military language in Psalm 68 is not literal but poetic. Thus, the captives taken are not Gentile enemies but Israelites, the Levites of Numbers 8 and 18, where God takes them for Himself and later gives them back to Israel as gifts. But in Psalm 68 the captives are enemies, not individuals taken from the nation of Israel.

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<sup>1</sup> We are part of Him and everything He is: He's God's Son, we are God's children; God's power is available to Him, it's available to us; He will rule the world, we will rule the world; God's Spirit dwells in Him, it lives in us; He's in us, we're in Him; He's the Head, we're the Body (Ephesians 1-3).

Further, the Levites in Numbers 8 are not seen as captives, but people taken from among Israel to be used for Israel. And none of this answers why Paul changed the wording.

There's a better explanation as to why Paul changed the wording of this psalm: he wasn't trying to quote it verbatim nor did he have a memory lapse (after all, he was a Pharisee of Pharisees who knew the Scriptures perfectly, Acts 26:5; Galatians 1:14; Philippians 3:5). Instead, Paul was summarizing the entire psalm with this one verse, which is why he changed its wording. By changing the wording he was summarizing a pattern God exhibits in this psalm<sup>2</sup> and throughout Scripture on behalf of His people: *descent-victory-plunder-ascent-gifting*, i.e., when God's people are under attack from an enemy and they cry out to Him for deliverance, God descends from heaven, has victory over the enemy, plunders their goods, ascends back up to heaven, and gives the spoils to His people. You see this pattern in the Exodus (Exodus 3, cf. 3:8, 21-22; 12:35-36) and in the conquest of the Promise Land (Deuteronomy, cf. 6:10-11). We also see this pattern in what Jesus did for us as described in Ephesians: Jesus descended from heaven, defeated Satan, took us who were captive to Satan as plunder (2:1-3), ascended back up to heaven, gave us each a spiritual gift through His HS (4:7), then gifted us to His Body, the Church (4:11ff).

Now, if you're familiar with the topic of spiritual gifts and who it is who gives them, you might see another problem here. Because this says that Jesus is the one who gives the gifts, but we know from passages like 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 that it's the Holy Spirit who gives our gifts. How do we reconcile this? It's true, the Holy Spirit gives us our spiritual gifts but it's according to what Jesus says His Body needs (4:7). Then Jesus gives us, the gifted individuals, to His Body, the Church (Ephesians 4:11-12). So both are involved in our gifting.

**4:9-10**, these next verses seem cryptic. Some believe it says that Jesus, after His death, went to hell to either atone further for our sins or to preach/witness to demons or unbelievers who refused to believe in Him. The idea that Jesus went to hell originated with the Apostles' Creed, which says that Jesus descended into hell. The Creed is not in the Bible nor was written by the apostles, who had all died before the Creed was written. Did Jesus go to hell after He died and if He did, did He suffer further for our sins or preach/witness to demons or unbelievers? It's a misnomer that Jesus went to hell. The problem is that in Scripture the place where the dead go is sometimes called "hell." But it's more accurate to call it the place of the dead; the Hebrew word for it is Sheol; the Greek word for it is Hades and both mean the same thing: the place of the dead. And Hades has two sides: the place of Torments where people suffer (Luke 16:19-23) and Paradise/Abraham's Bosom which is where those who don't suffer go (Luke 16:22). Paradise is where Jesus went after He died (Luke 23:43)—but Paradise is no longer there. Now, when those who have believed in Jesus and possess eternal life die, they go directly to heaven to be with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23).

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<sup>2</sup> David calls on God to (descend and) destroy His enemies and the people to rejoice before God, whose domain is heaven, 68:1–6. David recalls God's victory over Israel's enemies and the plunder Israel got from His victory, 68:11–14. David notes God's triumphal march as He ascends to His dwelling place and leads the captives and the plunder He receives from them, 68:17–18. David calls on all the nations of the earth to praise God because He's God almighty who controls the heavens (which are His domain) and whose people is the mighty nation of Israel 68:32–35. Thus, this psalm is about God coming down (descending) from heaven, defeating His foes, taking them captive, plundering them, going back up (ascending) to His sanctuary, and then blessing Israel with the spoils (giving them gifts).

Thus, Jesus didn't go to hell to suffer further for our sins, which by the way is impossible because Jesus' one sacrifice on the Cross paid for all sin for all time (Hebrews 9:23-28; 1 John 2:2). Did Jesus preach/witness to those in hell? There are three passages used to say that Jesus went to hell: Psalm 16:10; Ephesians 4:8-10 and 1 Peter 3:18-20. The first two say nothing about Jesus preaching/witnessing. The third says Jesus preached, but the question is, to whom? Psalm 16:10 is talking about Messiah, Jesus (Acts 2:22-28) but as we noted, Jesus went to the Paradise side of Sheol/Hades and this passage says nothing about Jesus witnessing to anyone in hell. 1 Peter 3:19 does say that Jesus preached "to the spirits in prison." Who are these spirits? The next verse tells us: they were the demons, the fallen angels, who had sexual relations with the women of earth in the days of Noah and thus produced a wicked race that corrupted the entire world (Genesis 6:1-5). Therefore the Lord condemned them to everlasting chains under darkness until the day of judgment (Jude 6). Where's the prison that Jesus went to in order to preach to these spirits? It may be in Hades, in Torments or somewhere else unknown to man, but we're not told.

Did Jesus witness to unbelievers after He died? No, in fact, "it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27)—after you die, there are no more chances to believe in Jesus. Thus, Jesus preached to demons, but not to unbelievers. What did He preach? We don't know, He may've said something like, "I've defeated your ruler Satan and death....so your day of judgment is coming." But this is a giant guess.

Does Ephesians 4:8-10 say that Jesus went to hell? No, it does not. And it all depends on how you translate "lower parts of the earth." It sounds like it's talking about Hades, which is located in the heart of the earth (Luke 10:15; 1 Samuel 28:13-15). But what does the context tell us? There are several questions we need to ask to discover what Paul means by these verses: why does Paul quote psalm 68:18, what's his point in quoting this and what does it have to do with Jesus handing out gifts? Who is Paul talking about descending and ascending? When did this person descend? When did this person ascend? Where did this person descend from? Where does this person ascend to? The person in question is Jesus (4:7). And when Jesus first came to earth, He descended from heaven to earth. Thus, after He was done with the mission His Father gave Him, He ascended back up to heaven. That's what these two verses are saying and that's why Paul quoted Psalm 68:18, i.e., this psalm encapsulates God's pattern throughout Scripture and what Jesus did for us: He descended from heaven, defeated Satan, took away his plunder (us, Satan's captives), ascended back up to heaven when His victory was over, gave each of us a spiritual gift through His Holy Spirit, then He gifted us to His Body, the Church.

**You're a winner, not a loser**, whatever you thought you were before Jesus found you, that's not you anymore. Jesus personally left heaven to rescue you and give you a brand new life and everything you need to live it.....do you hear Him whisper this into your life or are you still being deceived by Satan?

### III. Conclusion

*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.).*