



## Ephesians 4:8

Bro. John Carter goes into an in-depth analysis of Ephesians 4:8, which shows that with much perseverance, curiosity, and consistent studying, the scriptures can provide answers to difficult passages. The passage below is quoted directly from The Letter to the Ephesians pages 82-89, in the section entitled "Diversity in Unity (4:7-16)"

"The appeal to walk worthy of the calling in the exercise of lowliness and meekness and forbearance, giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit, together with the enumeration of seven unities to enforce the appeal, has occupied the opening verses of chapter 4. But unity does not mean that each individual member shall be just like all others with exactly the same gifts. As the various parts of the body have different functions, but all work together for the well-being of the body of which they form a part, so is the body of Christ. There is a distribution of gifts, whether we look at the special gifts of the Spirit in the first century, or at the natural individual characteristics of the brethren of later centuries. The work to be done is of many kinds, and each one is called upon to do the part for which he is adapted in the spirit Paul has described in verses 1 and 2, the great object being the growth of the whole in Christ.

In explaining this diversity and the object of it, Paul begins, "But unto each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ." To Paul had been given "grace" for the ministry to the Gentiles. To them was given the same grace as to him, but in varying form, according to Christ's will. And then before he proceeds to explain why these gifts had been given, the word "gift" leads him to quote a verse from Psalm 68, prophetic of Christ's ascension and his bestowal of gifts, this in turn leading him to open up some of the things involved in the verse quoted. So he writes, "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended on high he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." Then comes the comment, "Now this 'He ascended,' what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things" (verses 8-10).

Two words in particular are remarked upon - "ascended" and "gave". He first argues that the words "He ascended" imply a prior descent. The English word carries no such implication. Weymouth translated it as "He re-ascended" and added a footnote in support of the idea that the prefix used by Paul can have the force of "up-again." But Weymouth's editors in the later editions have reverted to the A.V. and the R.V. in the text, and have cancelled his note. This does not alter the validity of Paul's inference, which does not rest upon the force of a Greek prefix but upon the meaning of the Psalm writer. We must look, therefore, at the Psalm.

David was the author of Psalm 68. The first verse recalls the words used when the ark of God set forward during the wilderness sojourn: "And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee" (Num 10:35). It has been thought that the Psalm was written in connection with the taking of the ark to Zion by David: all its allusions are appropriate to this occasion.

David recalls God's leading of His people through the deserts (verse 4, R.V.), and the wilderness to Sinai: "O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst march through the wilderness; the earth trembled, the heavens dropped at the presence of God: even yon Sinai trembled at the presence of God, the God of Israel" (verses 7, 8). The subsequent victories are touched upon (verse 12), and then reference is made to choice of Zion. Poetically, the other hills of the land are represented as being jealous of Zion. "A mountain of God (that is, a great mountain) is the mountain of Bashan; an high mountain is the mountain of Bashan. Why look ye askance, ye high

mountain, at the mountain which God hath desired for his abode? Yea, the Lord will dwell in it for ever" (verses 15, 16). This is the culminating point of God's work - He led them out of Egypt, settled them in this land to have a dwelling place among men. So David's mind is taken back from this to the beginning of their national life, to Sinai (verses 17, 18), and since God is a God of deliverances (verse 20), He will certainly deliver Israel from all enemies, even by a second exodus. Then all princes and kingdoms will serve the Lord, bringing presents to Him because of His temple at Jerusalem (verses 22, 29, 31, 32).

In the light of this broad outline, in which we see Sinai linked with Zion, we look at verses 17 and 18 in greater detail: "The chariots of God are twenty-thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the sanctuary. Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men: yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them."

The first thing to notice is that God was among them at Sinai accompanied by thousands of attendant angels. He went forth before his people; the earth trembled at the presence of God (verses 7, 8). God had come down. The force of this is not minimised when we recognise that he [sic] came down by means of a manifestation in an angel in whom His name was placed. When God exercised His power for the deliverance of His people He is said, in scripture style; to come down. Thus we read: "And the Lord said, I have seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt...and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians" (Exod. 3:7, 8). "be ready against the third day: for the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai...And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire...And the Lord came down upon mount Sinai" (19:11, 18, 20). Compare also Exod. 33:9; 34:5. There is a further allusion to these events in Nehemiah 9:13 - "Thou camest down also upon the Mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments and true laws, good statutes and commandments." Stephen quotes the word of God to Moses, "I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt...and I am come down to deliver them" (Acts 7:34). When God had accomplished the deliverance for which He was said to come down, then it might be said that He had ascended. Thus when God had effected the deliverance of Judah in the days of Hezekiah it was written, "God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet." (Psa. 47:5). The future manifestation of God in the person of the Messiah is the subject of petition by Isaiah: "Oh that though wouldst rent the heavens, that though wouldst come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence...When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence." (64:1, 3). In this passage the Exodus and the future redemption of Israel are linked together.

These passages interpret the language of David in Psalm 68: "Thou hast ascended on high." Looking back to the events of the Exodus when God came down, David speaks of the return of God to heaven when the deliverance was accomplished. And this being the historical basis of this Psalm-prophecy, we can easily follow out the meaning of the successive items by turning back to the events associated with the deliverance from Egypt.

"Thou hast led captivity captive." *The Companion Bible* comments that "captivity" is metonymy for "captives." Rotherham translates, "Thou hast led in procession a body of captives"; the American R.V. gives us, "Thou hast led away captives"; and so others, to the same effect. In Paul's quotation of this verse the A.V. margin reads, "He led a multitude of captives." The reference is to the leading out of Egypt of the hosts of Israelites, who had been bond-slaves and captives in Egypt.

"Thou hast received gifts for men." Once more the early history of Israel provides the explanation. God arranged a service of worship for the nation and appointed the tribe of Levi as priests. The language of the Psalm has its source in the description of the separating of the tribe and its

appointment for the work assigned to it. It is written, "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him. And they shall keep his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation...to do the service of the tabernacle...And *thou shalt give* the Levites unto Aaron and to his sons: *they are wholly given* unto him out (on behalf, R.V.) of the children of Israel" (Num 3:5-10). This appointment of the Levites is described as a "gift unto God." "And thou shalt bring the Levites before the tabernacle of the congregation... and thou shalt bring the Levites before the Lord...and the Levites shall be mine. For they are wholly *given unto me* from among the children of Israel...And *I have given* the Levites as a *gift* to Aaron and to his sons from among the children of Israel." (Num. 8:9-19). It is further written, "And I, behold, I have taken your brethren the Levites from among the children of Israel: to you they are given as a gift for the Lord (they are a gift, given unto the Lord, R.V.), to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation" (Num 18:6).

It would appear that the tribe of Levi is at the same time regarded as a gift to the Lord, and as given unto the people. This corresponds with the Psalm: "Thou hast received gifts for men." The word translated "received" has "a twofold meaning, *i.e.*, receiving and giving." The two sides of the word come out in the Psalm and the Epistle. The Psalm has "received gifts"; Paul quotes it as "gave gifts." The whole of the facts remove the difficulty that some have found in Paul's change of words; he is stressing another aspect of the word.

"Yea, and for the rebellious." How this describes the nation, whether in the wilderness or in their subsequent history! "I know their imagination which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I swear." (Deut. 31:21). "Ye rebelled against my word at the waters of Meribah" was even said concerning Moses, and Aaron (Num 20:24). "Ye would not go up (into the land) but rebelled against the commandment of the Lord your God" (Deut. 1:26).

"That the Lord God might dwell among them." God arranged as the outcome of the deliverance of Israel that there should be dwelling place for Himself in the midst of them. The order of events in Exodus is most instructive in this connection. In the night of the Passover sprinkled blood was the basis upon which divine protection was afforded the firstborn of Israel. They were led out of Egypt into the wilderness. Bread from heaven was provided, and water from the smitten rock. The terms of the covenant were made known and the assent of the people received. Then the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai to the terror of all, even Moses saying, "I exceedingly fear and quake." Bounds were put around the mount lest the people should approach too near, the penalty for disobedience being death. The next even was the confirmation of the covenant by shed blood, and this was immediately followed, in contrast to the previous prohibition, by the ascent of Moses and the others appointed into the mount. "THEN (after the blood had been sprinkled upon the people) went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and the seventy of the elders of Israel: and they saw the God is Israel...And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: and they saw God and did eat and drink" (Exod. 24:8-10). The contrast in Israel's relationship to God is emphasised by the noting of the fact that upon the nobles he laid not His hand; previously none could come near, all being effectually held at arm's length by the threat of death for touching the mount. The once captive nation, now the people of God, are next required to make Him a sanctuary (chapters 25-27).

What a striking order of events, typical of redemption, detailing the elements necessary! Passover, the Bread of life, the Water of life, the blood of the covenant shed - all these before God dwells with men. And then, not before, is appointed the priesthood to intercede for the redeemed people (chapter 28-29). When the tabernacle was erected the glory of God descended upon it, and the Lord dwelt among His people. The nation was called upon always to bear in mind that God was in their midst: "Defile not therefore the land which ye shall inhabit, wherein I dwell: for I the Lord dwell among the children of Israel" (Num. 35:34). How deplorably Israel forgot, and rebelled again and again!

When the tabernacle was superseded by the temple, that became God's dwelling place (1 Kings 6:13). The glory which had filled the tabernacle descended upon the temple (8:11).

All these matters to which the Psalm we are considering refers, were patterns of greater things: and thus it is that the passages which are based upon such a history become prophecies of "good things to come." The history helps to define the meaning accurately, and guides us in our look forward. We therefore turn now to Paul's exposition of these verses in which he shows their relation to Christ, who is the substance of it all.

Two words principally in the Psalm are the subject of comment by Paul. We have already noticed that it is the word "gift" which leads him to quote the Psalm. He comes back this word, but before doing so he builds up an argument upon the words "He ascended." "Now this 'He ascended,' what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?" The history upon which the Psalm rests supplies the explanation. When God moves for the help of His people He is said to come down. The deliverance effected, God is then said to have ascended. When the Psalmist says God ascended it is evident that He must have first descended to earth.

The greatest work of God on behalf of His people is their eternal redemption, and this work is bound up with the mission of His Son. All other theophanies look forward to this, the greatest of all. Christ's mission is to lead an exodus. Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration spoke of the decease (exodus) which he would accomplish at Jerusalem. Surely the use of the word there means more than death, or "departure" from life, as in the R.V. margin. It takes the mind back to Israel's exodus, so typical of Christ's work; for what he accomplished was a departure from the bondage of the grace.

We must now observe that the divine origin of Jesus is described in the style of past theophanies as a descent from heaven. God dwelt among the nation in the person of His son. "The word was made flesh and dwelt among us." "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me...I am the bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:38, 41). And to the stumbling disciples Jesus further said, "What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" (Verse 62). "He that cometh from above is above all" (3:31). "I am from above" (8:23). These were hard sayings for the Jews, and many Gentiles find them equally hard. Jesus ascended. But "no man had ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven" (John 3:13). The ascent indicates an accomplished work of redemption; but redemption is God's work; therefore Christ is from God, and "descended out of heaven." Only one who was a theophany, if we can put it that way, could ascend to heaven. Christ ascended, herefore [sic] he was a manifestation of God, and in Scripture language, was "from above." The statement that he ascended involves his prior descent to the lower parts, even to earth - a phrase taken from the prophecy of Christ's birth in Psa. 139:15.

But Paul takes the argument a step further, and links it with the theme of the epistle: "He that descended is the same also that ascended far above all heavens, that he might fill all things" (verse 10). There had been derangement in the relationship of man and God. Man could not restore the harmony; God only could do that. And "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." The One who descended for this work, is the same that ascended; for God does not manifest Himself in vain. This is the same as saying that God who descended at the birth of Christ ascended in him. The reconciliation effected, He will at last "fill all things." In 1:23 the body of Christ is called "the fullness of him that filleth all in all." "God was in Christ," and by and through Christ God will be "all in all."

Lest this language should still prove a hard saying, let us prosaically relate it to the simple facts. Jesus is said to have come down from heaven because his birth was the result of the operation of

the Spirit of God as recorded in Luke 1. He was raised from the dead, and quickened by the Spirit, becoming the Lord the Spirit and life-giving Spirit. During his lifetime God was with him, and from his baptism he was filled with the Spirit without measure. He therefore spoke of this words as being the Father's, and his works as the works of Him that sent him. "I will put my words in his mouth" God had said long before (Deut. 18:18).

Dr. Thomas has expressed it thus: "The Spirit breathes where he pleased and thou, Nicodemus, hearest his voice; but thou perceivest not how he is come, and in what he goes away; thus is everyone who has been born of the Spirit.' Nicodemus and his contemporaries heard the Voice of the Spirit, breathed forth in the words of spirit and life, uttered by Mary's Son, who they knew was a teacher come from God. But they did not perceive that this teacher was the Eternal Spirit, not did they comprehend how he came. Judging by flesh-appearances, they only saw Mary's son, as they saw Isaiah or one of the prophets, as teachers from God. They did not perceived that Jesus was 'a body prepared' by special Spirit-creation, the Cherub upon which the effluent power of the Eternal Substance rested: and that upon him and through him, he walked through the country, breathing forth his voice in the doctrine taught, his power in the miracles performed; not perceiving this, still less did they comprehend that the Effluent Power would so thoroughly change the constitution of the 'Body Prepared' that is should be no longer corruptible flesh perpetuated in life by blood and air, but should be transformed into spirit-flesh and spirit-bones, constituting a Spirit-Body - a material, corporeal substance - essentially incorruptible, glorious, powerful, deathless, and quickening; that in this, as corporealised spirit, the Effluent Power that had 'come down from heaven'-from the abode of the Eternal Substance, 'which no man can approach unto' - would 'ascend where he was before.'"

Only a few words are needed now to trace out the parallel between the Exodus and the work of Christ. He is the Passover Lamb; the Living Bread from heaven; the smitten Rock from whence flows the water of life; his blood is "the blood of the new covenant, shed for many for the remission of sins." We come into relationship with Christ when we understand the elements of truth connected with the various aspects of Christ and his work as unfolded in the Scriptures, and when we render obedience in the waters of baptism. We then enter into covenant fellowship with God, and become part of His house, with Jesus appointed as priest for us.

The bondage from which we are delivered is the bondage to sin and death. This is a house of servitude. We yielded ourselves as bond-slaves to sin (Rom 6:16-20). But we are now made free from sin's servitude (verse 22). The hosts of captives led from this house of bondage by Christ are those who respond to the call to "come out" from that which is "spiritually called Egypt" (Rev. 11:8)."