**Psalm Sixty-Eight, Part 3**

***“Let God Arise”***

**Psalm 68:18**  ***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.***

**Structure**

A. The Prayer for the Conquering Christophany (vv. 1-3)

B. The Vindication by the Conquering Christophany (vv. 4-17)

**C. *The Victory of the* Conquering Christophany (v. 18) > Lk. 9:30-31!**

B.’ The Vindication by the Conquering Christophany (vv. 19-20)

A.’ The Prediction of the Conquering Christophany (vv. 21-35)

**Walk in Diversity (Eph. 4:7-12)**

***But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:***

Moving from the worthy walk in unity, the Apostle focused on the walk in diversity by referring to *“every one of us”* (*eni…ekasto hemon*). Each believer in the body has received a gift, and is therefore gifted, including leaders and saints, the writer averred. After giving an excursus on the incarnate and resurrected/ascended Gift-giver, Paul gave the reason for the giving of gifts—the edification of the assembly. Christ’s incarnation, death, burial, resurrection and ascension assured the divine ordering of His creation, including gift empowerment for His churches.

Using the *aorist* passive verb *edothe* (*“was given”*), the Apostle stressed that each believer, including himself, was the recipient of divine grace for service. This *“grace”* (*he charis*), although part of the grace of salvation (2:8), extends to the spiritual gifts (*charisma*) that the Lord Jesus Christ bestows on the saints. The Son of God is the Father’s gift to the world (cf. Jn. 3:16), and as the sinner receives by faith God’s gift of His Son, the saved sinner receives the individual *“measure”* (*metron*) of *“the gift”* (*tes doreas*) of Christ (*vide* Jn. 4:10).[[1]](#footnote-1) The writer emphasized *“measure”* in this passage, demonstrating that each church has the complete measure to minister to itself in edification (vv. 13 and 16). Paul elaborated on the truth that “*God hath dealt to every man the* ***measure*** *of faith”* (Rom. 12:3), that believers acquire upon receiving the gift of Christ, and His consequent *“gifts”* (*charismata*). These *charismata* for service in the body of Christ include seven specific gifts, namely, *“prophecy,” “ministry,” “teaching,” “exhortation,”* giving, ruling, and showing mercy. The grammar of the first four sets the pattern for all seven, indicating that Christ gives to each believer the singular gift[[2]](#footnote-2) of *“whether…or”* (*eite…eite…eite…eite* [vv. 6-8]) that of *“prophecy”* or *“ministry”* or *“teaching”* or *“exhortation”* and so on.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Verse 8

The Apostle Paul supplied biblical proof that Christ’s redemptive work empowered His authorization to give gifts (*domata*)[[4]](#footnote-4) to men (*tois anthropois*) in His churches.[[5]](#footnote-5) Starting with the biblical formula *“wherefore he saith”* (*dio legei*),[[6]](#footnote-6) the writer targummed Psalm 68:18, which states, *“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.”* This reference creates at least two immediate exegetical concerns, along with another interpretative issue in verse nine. These theological/exegetical “problems” are the following: 1) Why did Paul use and then make changes to Ps. 68:18? 2) Who makes up the *“captivity”*? 3) What did he mean by *“the lower parts of the earth”* (v. 9)?

First, like the other NT writers and the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul targummed many OT passages, under the process of inspiration. They cited OT Hebrew texts, giving Greek paraphrase (since the writers were bi or tri-lingual), either tight or loose, and applied them to their respective literary scenario (cf. Lk. 4:16 ff.).[[7]](#footnote-7) Although Psalm Sixty-eight demands careful exegesis, it is clearly Messianic and Millennial, proleptically adding revelation through the inscripturation of David. The Apostle made three changes in his rendering of Ps. 68:18. 1) He changed the suffix *“thou”* (*tha*) into the verb-imbedded pronoun *“he.”* 2) He transformed the verb *“hast ascended”* (*`aliytha*) into the participle *“ascended up”* (*anabas)*. 3) He altered the *Qal* perfect verb *laqachta* (*“thou hast received”*) to the *aorist* verb*“*[he] *gave”* (*edoken*) gifts. On this final point, some posit the biblically weak suppositions that Paul misquoted the Scripture, drew on some unknown oral tradition, or used an uncommon version of the *LXX*.[[8]](#footnote-8) Apparently, the Apostle Paul recognized that for the Lord Jesus Christ to give gifts He must first receive them. The giving of gifts is implied in the receiving of gifts.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Second, the expression *“*[*led*] *captivity captive”* (*echmaloteusen*[[10]](#footnote-10) *aichmalosian*) is controversial. It occurs three times in the *KJV*, not only here in Eph. 4:8, but also in Judg. 5:12, and in the cited Ps. 68:18. This Davidic psalm (cf. title), albeit difficult in structure and interpretation, gives some general features that suggest the motivation of Paul’s usage. Generally, it summons praise to Jehovah (vv. 4-6; 32-35) for His judgment on the rebellious (vv. 1-3; 11-14) and His deliverance of the Jews (vv. 7-10; 19-23; 28-31). Jehovah’s ascent on His holy mountain (vv. 15-18; 24-27) depicts God’s ultimate victory, presumably to be enacted during the Millennium. That God *“bringeth out those which are bound with chains”* (v. 6), an obvious historical reference to His deliverance of Israel from Egypt (cf. Ex. 13:3; Dt. 5:6; 6:12; 8:14; 13:5, 10; Judg. 6:8), sets the backdrop to the expression *“thou hast led captivity captive.”* In other words, the captives that the Lord would lead in the victory ascent up His Holy Mountain would be His people, not His enemies. This not only fits the immediate context of Psalm Sixty-eight, but also the first biblical reference to the deliverance of captives. Abram delivered Lot, who was taken captive by the Chedorlaomer faction, and gave the booty back to Lot and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 14:9-24). Abram received (Lot and the spoils) in order to give Melchizedek *“tithes of all”* (v. 20). Furthermore, Isaiah revealed that the Messiah’s redemption of sinners would enable Him to divide this spoil with others, saying, *“Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors”* (Isa. 53:12).

In affirming Christ’s sovereign privilege to give gifts to men, the Apostle inserted inspired comments worthy of examination for fuller redemptive revelatory truth. The Lord Jesus’ victory ascent *“on high”* (*hupsos*) included captives in His *“train”* (cf. Isa. 6:1). Presumably *hupsos* is equivalent to *tois epouraniois* (*“high” = “heavenly places”* [*vide* Lk. 1:78; 24:49]),[[11]](#footnote-11) and so the captives would be saints going to heaven. Although the Lord Jesus Christ was victorious over Satan (Jn. 12:31-33), sin (Mt. 20:28; Rom. 5:8), death (I Cor. 15:53-55; Rom. 5:10), and demons through His ministry on the cross and by the resurrection, Eph. 4:8 reveals His ascension ministry. Concerning demons, the Lord *“spoiled principalities and powers…made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it* [i.e., His death on the cross]*”* (Col. 2:15). The cross was the Lord’s victory “chariot” on which He publicly defeated and displayed His enemies (i.e., the *“principalities and powers”*). Christ’s ascension ministry did not take Satan, sin, death, or demons to heaven, but the OT saints captive in *she’ol*.

The *“captives”* (*aichmalosian*) then, were not the Lord’s enemies but His saints, presumably the OT saints in *she’ol*[[12]](#footnote-12) or *hades.*[[13]](#footnote-13) The interpretation that the Lord took “the good compartment” of *sheol/hades* with OT saints to paradise in heaven at His ascension follows these lines of argumentation.

1) The OT teaches that saints had the expectation of going to *she’ol*, and in fact did go to *she’ol* in death.[[14]](#footnote-14) For instance, Jacob bemoaned the fact that he would go down to the *“grave”* (*she’ol*) with sorrow (Gen. 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31, 34).[[15]](#footnote-15) Job expected to go to *“the house appointed for all living”* in his death (Job 30:23). David knew he would go in death to be with his deceased son, presumably in *she’ol* (II Sam. 12:23; cf. also Ps. 16:10). Incontrovertibly, Samuel came back from the dead and affirmed what Saul and the witch at Endor believed, that he indeed did ascend *“out of the earth”*[[16]](#footnote-16)(*vide* I Sam. 28:13 with vv. 11, 12 and 14). As one back from the dead, Samuel testified, saying, *“Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up* [*leha`aloth*]*?”* (v. 15).

2) The NT corroborates this teaching, especially in the biblical illustration[[17]](#footnote-17) of the Lord Jesus Christ (Lk. 16:19-31). He taught that the rich man went to *“hell”* (*hades*) and Lazarus went to *“Abraham’s bosom”* (cf. Gen. 25:8) in their respective deaths. The rich man was in torment but could see Abraham and Lazarus, albeit a great gulf was fixed between the two compartments (vv. 23, 24, 26). With biblical inference, one may conclude that this is a reference to the two compartments in *she’ol/hades*; at the same time a place of torment (cf. Prov. 15:11; *“hell and destruction”* [*she’ol wa’avaddon*]) and of comfort (Lk. 16:25)

3) Apparently living OT saints came out of *she’ol* via the opened graves and received their resurrection bodies following the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt. 27:50-53). The unusual experience nevertheless contributes to the overall interpretation.

4) Paul revealed that *“paradise”* is now in the third heaven (II Cor. 12:2, 4).[[18]](#footnote-18) The Lord’s ascension ministry transported the OT saints in Abraham’s bosom, out of *she’ol* and into *paradise* in the third heaven. The deceased wicked still go to *hades* (*“hell”*) to await judgment and the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:13-14), and the deceased righteous now go *“to be with Christ; which is far better”* (Phil. 1:23).

5) Paul’s emphasis on the fact that the descent must first precede the ascent underscored Christ’s uniqueness. The Apostle John recognized this truth and stated, saying, *“And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the son of man which is in heaven”* (Jn. 3:13). He also revealed that angels were distinct from the incarnate God, ascending first from earth to heaven and back again, stating *“And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man”* (Jn. 1:51).[[19]](#footnote-19) The Apostle Peter averred that David in fact did not go to heaven after his death, since Ps. 110:1 prophesied Christ, and not David, as the fulfillment of the psalm, saying, *“For David* ***is not ascended*** *into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand”* (Acts 2:34). The incarnational descent of the Lord Jesus Christ confirmed the Father’s love for the world (Jn. 3:16). The ascension of Christ revealed His supernatural power and sovereign authority over creation (cf. Eph. 1:19-23 with 4:7-8).

Verse 9

The writer included the parenthetical explanation of verses nine and ten, elaborating on his use of Ps. 68:18 and its application to Christ’s ascension. Accordingly, the ascension of Christ presupposes His descent, as Paul stated, saying *“he also descended first”* (*kai katebe proton*[[20]](#footnote-20)). The descent must refer to God’s incarnation in the Lord Jesus Christ during His first advent (cf. I Tim. 3:16). The reference *“into the lower parts of the earth”* (*eis to katotera*[[21]](#footnote-21) *mere tes ges*) requires interpretation. Exegetes interpret the Greek genitive *tes ges* as either a partitive genitive (e.g., “the lower parts of the earth”) or an appositional genitive (e.g., “even the earth”). The former finds its interpretation in the faulty view that Peter alluded to Christ’s descent into *hades* to preach to the prisoners (I Pet. 3:18-20; 4:6).[[22]](#footnote-22) Supposedly, during Christ’s internment He descended into *hades* to preach the gospel to the unsaved giving a second chance, or He taunted the wicked in hell. The first view receives Scripture’s rebuttal that judgment comes after death, and not a second chance (Heb. 9:27). The second hypothesis fails because Christ had no resurrection victory with which to taunt until *after* the three-day internment.[[23]](#footnote-23)

The latter view, that Paul used the genitive of apposition, stating that Christ descended to the lower parts, even the earth, is correct. The obvious contrasts are heaven and earth, and ascent and descent (the incarnation). The ascent/descent motif occurs in Rom. 10:6-8, but the descent is to *“the deep,”* not to the earth, confirming the genitive of apposition interpretation of the current passage. Centuries before Paul, Isaiah prophesied the contrastive ministries of the Messiah, explaining His exaltation/humiliation, saying, *“Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonied at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men”* (Isa. 52:13-14). Finally, the Apostle is his best interpreter as he explained the ascent/descent motif. He clearly revealed that the Lord’s exaltation (ascent) contrasted with His humiliation (incarnation descent) by the humbling cross, saying, *“Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he* ***humbled*** *himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly* ***exalted*** *him, and given him a name which is above every name”* (Phil. 2:6-9).

Verse 10

The writer attempted to draw the reader back to the significant point of the purpose of the ascension. The One Who ascended has first descended, and now that descended One has ascended, giving Him authority to receive and give, Paul affirmed. Of course, the identity of the ascended/descended One is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Eph. 1:20). To focus on the Person, the Apostle employed the intensive pronoun *autos*, stressing the subject of the two substantival participles *ho katabas* (*“he that descended”*) and *ho anabas* (*“*[he] *that ascended”*). Because of the incarnation, death, burial, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, He is in the exalted place, *“far above all heavens”* (*huperano*[[24]](#footnote-24) *panton ton ouranon*), to exercise His authority over all (Eph. 1:19-23). He is in the highest exalted position possible, as Paul declared to the Colossians, saying, *“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God”* (Col. 3:1).[[25]](#footnote-25)

In His high, exalted, superior position, the Lord Jesus is the only one qualified to fulfill *“all things”* (*ta panta*), the writer asseverated. Using the *hina* (*“that”*) plus the subjunctive verb *“plerose”*[[26]](#footnote-26)(*“he might fill”*), Paul predicted that Christ, Who already fills all things (cf. 1:23) will continue to do so, accomplishing His divine purpose as sovereign head of His creation. This teaching parallels and complements the truth that the exalted Lord Jesus Christ, being *“the Head over all things to the church”* (cf. 1:22), has the sovereign enablement to dispense gifts to His churches.

Christ’s redemptive work accomplished *“the manifold wisdom of God”* (Eph. 3:10). Through the cross, He reconciled sinners to God (Eph. 2:15) and Gentiles to Jews (Eph. 2:16), defeated Satan (Jn. 12:31-33) and sin (Mt. 20:28; Rom. 5:8), and publicly triumphed over demons (Col. 2:14-15). In His resurrection, He gave victory over death (I Cor. 15:53-55), spiritual empowerment to the saints (Eph. 1:20; Rom. 6:3-9), and became Head over all things (Eph. 1:22-23). In His ascension, He led captivity captive (saints in *she’ol/hades*) to *“paradise”* and received gifts to give to His churches (Eph. 3:8).

1. Peter declared that repentance (and faith) brings the reception of *“the gift of the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 2:38). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Scriptures teach consistently that the NT saint receives only one spiritual gift. Paul had one gift (I Cor. 13:2; see also 7:7), Timothy had one gift (II Tim. 1:6), and the Petrine audience of saints had one gift each (I Pet. 4:10). Although believers may have more than one ministry, the individual saint has only one gift to use in the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:4-6). Church members need each other’s gifts so that the body can function to the glory of God (Rom. 12:4-5). This need requires believers humbly to minister one to another. Ultimately, the Christian will give an account to Christ for his gift stewardship (cf. I Cor. 3:9-15; I Pet. 4:10). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Thomas M. Strouse, *Having Then Gifts: A Practical Guide to Spiritual Gifts* (Newington, CT: Emmanuel Baptist Publications, n.d.), pp. 1-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. the only other occurrences of *doma* (Mt. 7:11; Lk. 11:13; and Phil 4:17). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. These would be the gifted men in the given offices of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors [within the ministry of teachers] (v. 11). The only other biblical office is that of “servants,” the office of deacons. Since Scripture gives the qualifications for only two offices, bishop and deacons, these must be the only two continuous church offices (*vide* I Tim. 3:1-13). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Cf. Eph. 5:14 and Jam. 4:6 for the only other references to *dio legei*, one of Paul’s *tris legomena* expressions. For the Apostle, God and His Scripture were inextricably linked together (cf. Gal. 3:8). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Thomas M. Strouse, “Christ’s Usage of Targums,” *Emmanuel Baptist Theological Journal* 3 (Spring 2007): 9-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. These hypotheses run counter to the Scripture perseveration passages such as the Lord’s promise, which states, *“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away”* (Mt. 24:35; *vide* Ps. 12:6-7). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For instance, the Lord Jesus Christ received words from the Father and gave them to His disciples, as He affirmed, saying, *“For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them…”* (Jn. 17:8). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. This *aorist* verb comes from *aichmaloteuo*, one of Paul’s *dis legomena* words (cf. II Tim. 3:6). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Cf. Eph. 4:10 where the Lord’s ascension was *“far above all heavens.”*  [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *She’ol* is the Hebrew word coming from the verb *sha’al* meaning, “to ask” and refers to “a place of inquiry” (i.e., the underworld), occurring 65x. The *KJV* rendered itas *“grave”* (31x), *“hell”* (31x), and *“pit”* (3x). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The *KJV* translated the Greek *hades* as *“hell”* (10x) and *“grave”* (1x). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. It is true that Elijah *“went up by a whirlwind into heaven”* (II Ki. 2:11; although cf. Jn. 3:13), and Enoch *“walked with God: and he was not; for God took him”* (Gen. 5:24). Both of these saints are exceptions. All that the Scripture reveals concerning the former is that he went up into the first and second physical heavens. Concerning the latter, Scripture does not reveal to where God took him. They may have gone to God for temporary disposition as Eccl. 3:21 and 12:7 suggest (cf. Ps. 139:7-8). Asaph’s hope for glory (cf. Ps. 73:24) may refer to his ultimate resurrection (cf. Job’s hope [Job 19:25-27]). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. A careful exegesis of Ezk. 32: 17-31 shows that there is a fine line in Scripture between the physical and spirit world. Physical graveyards apparently have counterparts in *she’ol* where the dead are conscious and organized in graves nationally. *She’ol* may refer either to physical graves or to underworld graves in the *“nether parts.”* Interpretation of the realm for *she’ol* is subject to the exegete’s perspective (cf. Ps. 9:17). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The Hebrew *`oliym min ha’aretz* (*“ascending out of the earth”*) employed the *`al* (to go up) root. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Christ’s illustration is not a parable because He did not call it so, He used proper names, He considered that Abraham and Moses were realities, and He built it upon the truth of Abraham’s bosom. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. The Lord Jesus promised the thief that he would accompany Christ in paradise, saying, *“To day shalt thou be with me in paradise”* (Lk. 23:43). Christ and the thief visited paradise that day, but Scripture dose not record its location at that time, whether in *she’ol* or heaven. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Cf. *“And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it”* (Gen. 28:12). Jacob’s dream is consistent with the NT revealed order of Christ’s unique priority of descent before ascent. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The CT omits the Greek adjective *proton* (*“first”*), causing confusion with regard to the obvious allusion to the incarnation. Interestingly, the “ancient” *Vulgate* reads *descendit primum*. Some of those who embrace the CT argue that the descent was post-ascension, referring to the Spirit’s descent at Pentecost. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. This comparative of the adjective *kato* is one of Paul’s eight *hapax legomena* adjectives in *Ephesians*. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. The Spirit of Christ (cf. I Pet. 1:11) preached through Noah (cf. II Pet. 2:5) the message of repentance to the disobedient antediluvian sinners (cf. Gen. 6:3) who are now imprisoned spirits and awaiting the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:13-15). Those who are now dead had previously heard and received the gospel, giving them spiritual life (I Pet. 4:6), Peter declared. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Some speculate that Christ suffered in the flames of hell as part of His redemptive program. However, John revealed that the Lord Jesus finished His work on the cross, quoting the Savior, saying, *“It is finished”* (Jn. 19:30). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. This Greek adjective occurs elsewhere only in Eph. 1:21 and Heb. 9:5. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Elsewhere the Apostle stressed the reality of Christ’s exaltation into heaven, saying, *“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession”* (Heb. 4:14; cf. 7:26). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Cf. other occurrences of the cognate of this verb in *Ephesians* (1:23; 3:19; and 5:18). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)