

Others, however,¹ see Paul using the Greek *pas* as neuter and thus to indicate God’s rule over the entire universe as well as His sovereign power to bring all things to their divine purposes, and to sum up all things in Messiah (1:10). And, as Theilman notes, Paul’s use of the expression “all things” in Ephesians supports the interpretation that “over all and through all and in all” of our verse portrays the sovereignty of God over the entire universe.

He will sum up “all things” (τὰ πάντα, *ta panta*) in Messiah (1:10).

He works “all things” (τὰ πάντα) to accomplish His will (1:11).

He has subjected “all things” (πάντα) to Messiah (1:22).

He has created “all things” (τὰ πάντα; 3:9).

He is the Father who names “every” (πᾶσα, *pasa*) family, whether earthly or heavenly (3:15).²

God, Father, Son and Spirit, is “over all” since He is the creator of the entire universe (3:9), named all the tribes of the universe (3:15), and has subjected all things to Messiah Yeshua (1:22). He is “through all” and “in all” in that He is summing up all things in Messiah (1:10) and is working all things according to the council of His own will (1:11).

The summary then is this: since God is working all things according to His own sovereign will, summing all things up in the person of Messiah Yeshua, and working in the *ekklesia* by the power of His Ruach, surely those who are truly His should endeavor in every way to manifest the “unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace” (4:3).

7–8 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Messiah’s gift. Therefore it says, “WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.”

In the previous verses Paul has focused on a more inclusive picture of the *ekklesia*, emphasizing the unity of the body of Messiah through union with Yeshua in His redemptive work as applied by the work of the Ruach in accordance with God’s sovereign calling of the elect to eternal salvation. Now, in our present context, Paul makes sure that we understand how God’s divine calling to salvation applies to each individual in the *ekklesia*, a calling which includes all that is necessary for the child of God both to persevere in faith as well as to fulfill a vital

1 Including Theilman, *Ephesians*, p. 258.

2 Ibid., p. 259–60.

role within the body of Messiah.

The NASB as well as most other English translations begin v. 7 with the word “But,” marking a transition to the individual believer within the *ekklesia* from the previous context. And this is emphasized as well by the word “one” (ἓν, *heni*) – “to each one of us grace was given.” Each one who is truly born again through the work of the Spirit, having exercised saving faith in Yeshua, is individually endowed by God’s grace with both the ability and the desire to function for the good of the whole within the local community of faith of which they are a member.

..*grace was given according to the measure of Messiah’s gift.* This ability or gifting for each believer to fulfill his or her necessary role within the body of Messiah is a gift of God’s grace, as Paul makes clear. Through the indwelling Spirit of God, the child of God is enabled to fulfill an important and necessary function within the body of Messiah. This is not something earned or gained through one’s own design or strength, but is a gift of God’s grace. God enables each and every believer to function in the body of Messiah in accordance with His plan as they willingly submit to Him and follow His leading.

And the measure of God’s grace is “according to the measure of Messiah’s gift.” Paul used similar terminology earlier in our epistle when speaking of his own enablement by God’s grace to fulfill his role as an Apostle of Yeshua, and this is brought into our text by the fact that Paul states: “But to each one of us grace was given.” In the same way that God gifted Paul to accomplish his role as an Apostles of Yeshua, so He gifts each believer in the body of Messiah to accomplish God’s design for them within the *ekklesia*.

Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you.... (3:2)

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of His power. To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Messiah.... (3:7–8)

In our verse, Paul specifically notes that the gifting given to each member of the *ekklesia* is “according to the measure of Messiah’s gift,” that is, according to that which the Messiah Himself measures out to each of those He has redeemed. Since Yeshua is the head of the *ekklesia*, He has determined how each member of the *ekklesia* will be specifically gifted, i.e., given the gift of His grace, in order to function as He desires within His body, the *ekklesia*. Not everyone is given the same gifting or abili-

ties, but by the omnipotent and sovereign wisdom of our Savior, each member of the body is enabled by His grace to add a necessary and important function within the local assembly. Here Paul uses the term “grace” (χάρις, *charis*) as equivalent with the term he uses elsewhere, i.e., χαρίσματα (*charismata*) when teaching about the “gifts” given to each member of Messiah’s body, the *ekklesia*.

Since we have gifts (χαρίσματα, *charismata*) that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly.... (Rom 12:6)

Now there are varieties of gifts (χαρίσματα, *charismata*), but the same Spirit.... But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. (1Cor 12:4, 11)

The NASB translates our verse with the words “according to the measure of Messiah’s gift,” but this could be a bit misleading. For in English, the phrase “according to the measure” can be understood to mean “in proportion to the measure.” And in one sense, this is a proper understanding for our verse, for the grace that is given to each individual believer in terms of equipping or gifting them for their role in the body of Messiah is in proportion to the eternal and infinite value of the redemption won for us by Messiah. For only through the infinite value of Messiah’s redemptive work could a redeemed sinner be endowed with the ability to accomplish spiritual tasks within the body of Messiah that accomplish His eternal plan.

Yet we must also understand by the phrase “grace has been given in accordance as Yeshua measured it out,” that He gives to each one of His redeemed children both the gifting to serve one another within the body of Messiah as well as the necessary strength and wisdom to use their gift in a way that brings about His ultimate purpose and plan for His *ekklesia*.

No member of the body of Christ is endowed with such perfection as to be able, without the assistance of others, to supply his own necessities. A certain proportion is allotted to each; and it is only by communicating with each other, that all enjoy what is sufficient for maintaining their respective places in the body.¹

1 Calvin, *Ephesians*, p. 271.

Paul gives us similar teaching in Rom 12:3–5

For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Messiah, and individually members one of another. (Rom 12:3–5)

Therefore it says, “WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.” – Paul now supports his teaching about how each believer is gifted by alluding to Ps 68:18[19]. I use the sense of “alluding to Ps 68” because the opening words, “Therefore it says” (διὸ λέγει, *dio legei*), in the Pauline epistles found only here and in 5:14, could be used to introduce a quote from the Tanach or from some other source. Note that in 5:14 Paul may be alluding to a number of different texts (Is 26:19; 60:1; Jonah 1:6) but none of these exactly fit Paul’s apparent quote. In fact, by using the introductory words “Therefore it/he says,” he may be alerting his readers that he is using the words of a well known hymn, possibly an early baptismal hymn. As Thielman notes:

Since Paul introduces an otherwise unknown saying with διὸ λέγει in 5:14, it is reasonable to propose that here too he quotes not Scripture directly but a traditional paraphrase of Ps. 68:18.¹

This seems possible in our current text as well, because even though the NASB marks our verse as containing a quote (i.e, from Ps 68), as we will see, Paul has made several significant changes from what we read in all extant Hebrew manuscripts of Ps 68:18[19] as well as in the Lxx translation of that text. However, there is some evidence that an early tradition or interpretation of Ps 68:18[19] may have been extant in Paul’s day which frames his words in our text. The following table gives English translations of several of the extant witnesses to our verse.

1 Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 267.

MT	Lxx	Syriac	Targum	Paul
<p>You have ascended on high, You have led captive captives; You have received gifts among men, Even <i>among</i> the rebellious also, that Yah Elohim may dwell there.</p>	<p>You have gone up on high, You have led captivity captive, You have received gifts among man, for they were rebellious, that You, Lord God, might dwell among them.</p>	<p>You have ascended on high, You have carried away captives; You have blessed men with gifts; but rebellious men will not dwell before the presence of God.</p>	<p>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, and even the stubborn who are converted turn in repentance, [and] the glorious presence of the LORD God abides upon them.</p>	<p>Therefore it says, "when he ascended on high, he led captive a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."</p>

The obvious differences between Paul's words in our verse (Eph 4:8) and the text of Ps 68:18[19] are: (1) Paul uses third person singular "he" in place of the second person "you," (2) he leaves off any mention of the "rebellious ones" mentioned at the end of the verse, and (3) both the MT and the Lxx have God "receiving gifts among/from men" while Paul has God "giving gifts to man."

It is interesting to note that the Syriac Peshitta has God giving gifts rather than receiving them. The Targum has Moses as the subject, who ascends into the firmament, teaching Torah and thus giving gifts to men. Likewise, the Midrash on Psalms also has the gift being the Torah and given to men.

"the words *thou hast received gifts for men* refer to the Torah which was bestowed upon Israel as a gift, at no coast."¹

1 See William G. Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms*, 2 vols. (Yale Univ Press, 1959), 1.545.

While this may seem to be a solution to our question of how Paul is using the text from Ps 68, the major difficulty is that both the Syriac Peshitta as well as the Targumim are later than the 1st Century. It could even be possible that both were influenced by Paul's words in our text.

There does remain the possibility, however, that the Targumim evidence an early tradition of a midrash on Ps 68:18 which found in its words a picture of Moses ascending Mt. Sinai, receiving the Torah, and then giving it to Israel, all of which could well have been used early on in connection with Shavuot celebrations and thus had become a common teaching or even part of an early Shavuot liturgy. If so, Paul's similar wording in our text would have resonated with the early followers of Yeshua, and especially as Paul is teaching on the gifts given through the work of the Ruach HaKodesh. For surely the events which took place on Shavuot, as recorded in Acts 2, were well retained in the memory of the followers of Yeshua, as might have been the use of Ps 68 in connection with Shavuot celebrations. While this is, of course, speculation, it does have a connection with the later Targumim and Midrashim which may well have retained an earlier tradition in terms of the use of Ps 68 in connection with the giving of the Torah (thus Shavuot) and for the followers of Yeshua, the outpouring of the Ruach at Shavuot as recorded by Luke in Acts 2.

It seems obvious, then, that Paul must have been using a familiar refrain when he refers to Ps 68:18 to establish that fact that God enables each believer in the body of Messiah to serve one another through the gifts He gives them. And likewise, God gifts individuals to be leaders, teachers, and spokesman to the body of Messiah in order that the *ekkle-sia* would be a living and dynamic witness of the redemption won for God's people through the work of our reigning and victorious Savior, Yeshua our Messiah.

9–10 Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.

Taking the wording of Ps 68:18[19] as having been associated with the giving of the Torah and thus with Shavuot and the outpouring of the Ruach as promised by Yeshua, Paul understands the subject of the Psalmist's words to be Yeshua Who descended, ascended, and gave gifts to men. It was just prior to that eventful Shavuot when Yeshua had

promised that He would send the Spirit and thus the disciples were to wait in Jerusalem anticipating the fulfillment of His words.

Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” (Acts 1:4–5)

Thus, even as Yeshua’s resurrection gave irrefutable proof that He had conquered death and sin for all those for whom He died, so His ascension to the Father was necessary in order that through His intercession He would bring to completion in the lives of all believers that which He had purchased with His own death, i.e., eternal life with Him in the world to come. It seems clear, then, that Paul sees in the words “He ascended” a reference to Yeshua’s victorious ascension to the Father to intercede for His people.

What is more, Paul’s logic in our verse is that since Yeshua ascended, this requires that previously He had descended, meaning that from Paul’s theological perspective, He was with the Father prior to His coming to earth, and thus once again Paul’s words substantiate the biblical truth that Yeshua is eternal, dwelling with the Father and the Spirit from all eternity.¹

We see a similar theological argument used by Yeshua Himself as recorded in John’s Gospel.

No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. (Jn 3:13)

For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. (Jn 6:38)

What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? (Jn 6:62)

...into the lower parts of the earth? – Many have used our verse, and

1 Note that in some of the manuscripts, the word “first” (πρῶτον, *prōton*) is added so the text reads “Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended **first** into the lower parts of the earth?” (cf. KJV). While this reading is found only in \aleph^2 , B, C3, Ψ , most Byzantine manuscripts, it may well indicate an early interpretation of Paul’s words in our verse.

particularly this phrase, to bolster their belief that the Scriptures teach a descent of Yeshua into hell during the days His body was in the tomb in order to announce the victory He had won and to give a “second chance” to those who mocked Noah and the truth he proclaimed and therefore perished in the flood. Though based primarily on 1Pet 3:18–20, our verse is likewise interpreted as supporting the belief that Yeshua descended to Hades during the time between His death and resurrection.

For Messiah also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. (1Pet 3:18–20)

The notion that Yeshua descended during the three days His body was in the tomb to the place where the spirits of the departed unbelievers reside was taught very early in the emerging Christian Church. It is contained in one version of the Apostles’ Creed. Yet such a teaching finds no basis in the Scriptures. The 1Pet 3:19–20 passage is better understood to mean that it was the Spirit of Messiah who, through “preachers” such as Noah, and through pre-incarnate appearances of the Messiah (e.g., the Angel of the Lord), warned the people of Noah’s day regarding their sin and their need for repentance.

The impetus for the doctrine that Yeshua went to Hades during the time of His burial was the desire to give the people of the flood a “second chance.” Some within the early Christian Church had a difficulty with the wrath of God as displayed in the flood, especially since the doctrines of the early Church taught that salvation by Yeshua’s death was something that the “Old Testament” people anticipated but regarding which they had less than a complete understanding. It seemed unwarranted for God to destroy the people of the earth in the flood if, in fact, they had deficient knowledge of the salvation that was yet to be accomplished by the death and resurrection of the Messiah. The early Church Fathers therefore formulated a teaching that through the descent of the Messiah to Hades during the three days of His burial, a “second chance” was given to all who perished in the flood.

But the Scriptures give no indication of “second chances” regarding salvation. Hebrews 9:27 says: “... it is appointed for men to die once and

after this comes judgment.” Moreover, an essential cornerstone of Paul’s understanding of the Gospel is the statement Moses makes regarding Abraham in Gen 15:6, “Then he [Abraham] believed in Adonai; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.” For Paul, the same saving faith granted to Abraham was that in which he likewise participated and which he proclaimed to his generation. Thus, the whole idea of Yeshua descending to Hades to give those who perished in the flood a “second chance” is contrary, not only to the general tenor of the Scriptures but to the specific revelation of the Gospel throughout the Scriptures. Now is the day of salvation. Those who die in unbelief will perish.

How then is the phrase in our verse, that Yeshua descended “into the lower parts of the earth,” to be properly understood? Clearly the context makes it clear that Paul is contrasting the heavenly realm into which Yeshua ascended with the earthly realm into which He descended. When compared with the realm of heaven where Yeshua resided before His incarnation, the earthly realm in its fallen condition is contrasted by using the word “lower” (τὰ κατώτερα, *ta katōtera*).¹ Here the Greek word is plural and neuter, and could be understood as “lower things” with the following word τῆς γῆς (*tēs gēs*) “of the earth” simply indicating the regions of the earth as describing the earth in contrast to the heavenly realm. Note the ESV translation.

In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? (Eph 4:9, ESV)

Calvin takes this view as well in expounding the phrase “into the lower parts of the earth.”

These words mean nothing more than the condition of the present life. To torture them so as to make them mean purgatory or hell, is exceedingly foolish. The argument taken from the comparative degree, “the lower parts,” is quite untenable. A comparison is drawn, not between one part of the earth and another, but between the whole earth and heaven; as if he had said, that from that lofty habitation Christ descended into our deep gulf.²

1 Note the textual variants on the word μέρη (*merē*), “parts” in the Greek text.

2 Calvin, *Ephesians*, p. 275.

He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, – When Paul writes that Yeshua, descending to our world in His incarnation, ascended far above all the heavens, he means that He ascended beyond our created universe to the eternal abode of the Almighty before the universe was created. This coincides with Yeshua's prayer in the garden when He prayed:

Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. (John 17:5)

...so that He might fill all things. – This reminds us of what Paul wrote in 1:20–23 having spoken of God's "surpassing greatness" and "the working of the strength of His might,"

which He brought about in Messiah, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (Eph 1:21–23)

It is from His throne in the heavenlies that Yeshua, our exalted and reigning King exercises His sovereign authority to bring about the full application and eternal results of His redemptive work, for He "always lives to make intercession for us." (Heb 7:25).