

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).

11–12 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Messiah;

Having conquered death and having raised triumphantly as the sovereign Lord Who “fills all in all” (1:23; 4:10), our ascended Lord and Savior secures the completion of His sovereign design to build the *ekklesia* to be the very trophy of His greatness, the witness to the entire universe that His promise to build His *ekklesia* will succeed, even against evil forces of hell (Matt 16:18). He does so by “giving gifts to men” (v. 8, quoting Ps 68). Paul uses this phrase to mean that the risen and ascended Messiah gave gifts to His *ekklesia* in order that those who make up the *ekklesia* will be equipped to serve their Lord by serving

each other so that the *ekklesia*, the body of Messiah, would be a primary witness in the world of the victory Yeshua obtained conquering sin and death.

Thus v. 11 begins with the words “And He gave...” (Καὶ αὐτὸς ἔδωκεν) emphasizing that the “gifts” He has given to His *ekklesia* come from Him as a matter of His grace. This is made emphatic in the Greek with the addition of the pronoun αὐτὸς (*autos*, “he”) yielding “And He Himself gave....”¹ The gifts He gives to the *ekklesia* are the fruit of His redemptive work. These gifts are not specifically “spiritual gifts” (πνευματικός, *pneumatikos*) but rather “persons” who are given the necessary “spiritual gifts” to carry out the duties to which they have been assigned by the head of the body, Yeshua Messiah.

...some as apostles – It should first be noted that the word “some” used by the NASB and other English translations in introducing each of those listed is actually a representation of the definite article. More literally we could translate “And He gave, on the one hand, the apostles and the prophets, and the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers.” But the word “some” is the proper way to understand the definite article, for it functions to give specificity to the noun it governs, indicating a specific duty within the body of Messiah. This is simply to say that not all within the body of Messiah function in these capacities, and thus the use of the word “some” is a valid expression of the Greek.

The way in which these “gifts” are listed in the Greek has given rise to various interpretations. The list begins with the particle μέν (*men*, “on the one hand”) introducing “apostles” and is followed by the particle δὲ (*de*, “and,” etc.) introducing each of the following gifts, “prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.” While in our text Paul does not designate these “gifts” given to the *ekklesia* by Yeshua as holding a specific “office” in the local assembly, in 1Cor 12:28 he teaches that similar designations (“apostles, prophets, teachers”) are “appointed” by God in the *ekklesia*, and in 1Tim 3:1, he uses the feminine form of “overseer” (ἐπισκοπή, *episkopē*) which describes the “office” or “position” of an “overseer” (ἐπίσκοπος, *episkopos*).²

The fact that in the list of our verse, the word “apostles” is introduced with the Greek *men* while the other designations are introduced by the Greek *de*, has been understood by some to mark “apostles” as distinct in kind from the others listed, and thus interpreting “apostles”

1 See Merkle, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Ephesians* (B&H Pub., 2016), p. 127; Hoener, *Ephesians*, p. 541.

2 See BDAG, “ἐπισκοπή,” p. 379.

in this list as referring specifically to the Twelve plus Paul who was an “apostle borne out of due time” (1Cor 15:8). Since being an eyewitness of Yeshua, both in His death and in His resurrection, was that which authenticated the Twelve as commissioned directly by Yeshua, Paul refers to his apostleship as having legitimacy since Yeshua appeared to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3ff) and commissioned him directly (Acts 9:15) as well.

Others, however, consider “apostles” in this listing to refer to those sent out by the local *ekklesia* to carry the gospel to other people-groups, those who in modern times are referred to as “missionaries.” While this second interpretation may have some validity, it seems most warranted, in light of the fact that Paul has already stated that the *ekklesia* is built upon “the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (2:20), that in listing the “apostles” first in this list, he is referring to the Twelve and to himself.

...and some as *prophets* – The prophets are included in the “foundation” of the *ekklesia* which Yeshua promised to build through the ingathering of the elect from the nations, and since “apostles” are named first followed by “prophets,” it seems clear that in this case, Paul is not referring to the writing prophets sent to ancient Israel but to those within the body of Messiah who were prompted by the Ruach to speak a particular message which the local assembly needed to hear, whether a warning, an exhortation, or words of edification as well as communicating the gospel to unbelievers in the gathered assembly.

In the early communities of The Way, before the Apostolic Scriptures were written, gathered, and recognized as the authoritative word of God, the prophets may well have functioned to offer Spirit-led interpretations and applications of the Tanach, the Bible that was then extant to the people of God. We see this in Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians:

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the *ekklesiai* of the saints. (1Cor 14:29–33)

In our times, the question of whether the gift of prophecy is still extant in the *ekklesia* has fomented much debate. The rise of the “charismatic movement” in the 60’s was, in some measure, fueled by the

apparent return of the gift of “prophecy.” Surely God, by His Spirit, is able to give a specific communication to a person who then is moved to make it known to the gathered assembly. And I have heard first hand witnesses who were refugees in the former Soviet Union of how prophets in their secret gatherings would warn them, apparently by revelation from God, that their location had become known to the authorities and they needed to meet elsewhere. And these warnings were proven to be true.

But whether the gift of prophecy continued to function in the later centuries as it did in Paul’s day is questionable. It is possible that Paul speaks of a transition in 1Cor 13:8–10.

Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. (1Cor 13:8–10)

It is interesting that Paul singles out “prophecy, tongues, and knowledge” for all three of these were especially important in the early communities of The Way. Prophecy was necessary since the ingathering of the Gentile believers into the communities of The Way presented specific issues that had to be dealt with. Surely by the time Paul was teaching, the Apostolic message was being spread from city to city, and the words of the Apostles were being communicated to give direction to the local assemblies. But during this time, there was the need for direct revelation from the Lord to be communicated to the fledgling communities, and this was apparently done through those gifts as prophets.

Likewise, the ability to speak in a foreign language otherwise unknown was necessary so that those coming into the assembly who spoke different languages could be given the gospel.

So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers but to those who believe. (1Cor 14:22)

Paul’s point is that when an unbeliever whose native language is something not commonly known in the region, and someone speaks to him in his own native language, he will recognize that their ability to speak his language must have been given to them by God, and this would be a sign to them that the God of the believers in Yeshua was, in fact, the true God. In the coming decades, however, when the gospel

had been taken to many of the nations surrounding Israel, and may from the nations had come to faith in the Messiah, the gift of tongues was not as needful.

And this may well be what Paul means when he speaks of “the perfect coming” (ἔλθῃ τὸ τέλειον) in 1Cor 13:10, where the Greek noun τέλειος (*teleios*) is used to describe that which has come to completion, i.e., the inspired words of the Apostles that are gathered together as the completion of the biblical canon.

In the same way, when the Apostolic Scriptures were completed and gathered together, these inspired Scriptures became the authoritative standard by which each of the local assembly of believers would function. The need for prophecy to settle these foundational issues was no longer necessary. For the words of the Apostles, based upon the very life and actions of Yeshua Himself, gave the instructions.

This does not mean that God would no longer give a revelation to someone within the assembly when an emergency and dire contingency arose. But what it may mean is that reliance on the actual voice of the apostles and prophets would become reliance upon the written word of God which the Apostles had given and thus the inspired words of the Apostolic Scriptures would stand as the “manual” by which the *ekklesia* would properly function.

...some as evangelists – The word “evangelist” (εὐαγγελιστής, *euangelistēs*) is found only two other places in the Apostolic Scriptures:

On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him. (Acts 21:8)

But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2Tim 4:5)

While neither of these offer any clear explanation of the word itself, it is obvious that it is closely related to εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*) meaning “good news” and to the verb εὐαγγελίζω (*euangelizō*) meaning “to bring good news.” And in the Apostolic Scriptures this group of words became the technical term for the “gospel,” i.e., the good new about Yeshua and the work He accomplished as the promised Messiah and Redeemer.

But even before the “Good News” came to mean the Gospel centered in Yeshua our Messiah, this same cluster of words was commonly used to describe “good news” in general. This could be anything from “good news” from the battle field that the enemy had been defeated

to “good news” of an emperor’s accession to throne.¹ Thus, an “evangelist” was one who carried the “good news” to others, whether from the battle field or the capital city. Given this background, it seems most likely that the “evangelist” was one who was gifted to go out from the local assembly to surrounding villages or cities to proclaim the gospel.

Paul, then, probably thinks of “evangelists” as similar to apostles but without their authority because of their lack of direct connection to the historical Jesus. The evangelists proclaim the message to which the apostles have been eye- and ear-witnesses.²

... and some as pastors and teachers – There have been long standing debates over whether this phrase designates two distinct functions, i.e., pastors and teachers, or whether the two terms apply to one function, i.e., “pastors who are also teachers.”

The first clue we receive is the fact that in this final phrase we have a break in the manner in which the previous designations are listed. “Apostles,” “prophets,” and “evangelists” each have the definite article preceding (τοὺς μὲν ἀποστόλους, τοὺς δὲ προφήτας, τοὺς δὲ εὐαγγελιστάς) but when we come to the couplet “pastors and teachers,” there is only one definite article on “pastors” but no definite article on “teachers” (τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους). While this cannot absolutely solve the question, it does immediately add weight to the interpretation that the phrase is using two nouns to describe one designated function within the *ekklesia*.

Further, when Paul meets with the “overseers” (ἐπίσκοπος, *episkopos*) in Ephesus, before leaving he admonishes them in this way:

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the *ekklesia* of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28)

While he calls them “overseers” here rather than “pastors” or “teachers,” it is clear that the “overseer” is likewise to engage in the duties of a “shepherd.” And when we consider the necessary qualifications for an overseer, given by Paul in 1Tim 3:1–7, we see that one of the qualifications is that the overseer must be “able to teach.”

1 Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 274 where he gives other examples as well.

2 Ibid.

Note also 1Pet 5:1–2 where Peter is exhorting the elders in the *ekklesia*:

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Messiah, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; (1Pet 5:1–2)

So together with these Pauline texts as well as this one from Peter, we see that the “overseer” or “elder is both a “shepherd” and a “teacher.” Given this additional insight gleaned from the words of Paul and Peter, when added to the fact that the two terms in our Ephesians verse are governed by only one definite article, it seems most likely that Paul considered “pastors and teachers” to be two aspects or duties to be carried out by one person gifted for such service within the *ekklesia*.

Another point of interest is that this is the only time in the Apostolic Scriptures where the noun “shepherd” (ποιμήν, *poimēn*) is used to designate a specific function or role within the *ekklesia*. The verb “to shepherd” when used to describe shepherding people, is found only three times, the two passages quoted above (Acts 20:28; 1Pet 5:2) and initially in the Apostolic Scriptures of Yeshua.

AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.” (Math 2:6, quoted from Micah 5:2)

Clearly the use of “pastor” (meaning “one who shepherds”) and the admonitions of Paul and Peter to elders and overseers to “shepherd the *ekklesia* or flock of God,” are based upon the example of the chief Shepherd, Yeshua. Indeed, the primary goal of the “pastor” must be to lead the people under his care to the chief Shepherd Who alone is able to meet all of their needs.

... for the equipping of the saints for the work of service – The “gifts” that Yeshua has given to His body, the *ekklesia*, by enabling people through the Ruach HaKodesh to function in specific ways of service, are not for those individuals themselves but are given entirely for “equipping the believers (*saints*)” to engage themselves in the “work of service.” All too often in the modern Church, we see those who have positions of authority using that authority for their own aggrandizement rather

than fulfilling the role of a servant whose primary purpose is to meet the needs of others within the body.

When we realize that Yeshua's purpose in "giving these gifts" to the *ekklesia* is so that those who make up the local community will grow in their walk with Him to become fully mature in their faith, we see how vitally important such service is. And what this verse teaches us is often missed, and that is this: it is not only the roles mentioned in the previous verse that do the serving. Rather, they are to "equip" all the believers within the body of Messiah to engage in the "work of service," i.e., in the work of serving others.

Remember that the list of roles began with "apostles and prophets," which should most likely picture the Twelve apostles plus Paul, by whom the inspired Apostolic Scriptures were given to the *ekklesia*, along with those prophets in the early communities of The Way who were much needed until such times as the written Scriptures were completed and available.

This brings us back to the final, combined designation "pastors and teachers." In combining these two designations, we recognize that a significant part of the shepherding which is to be done by "elders" or "overseers," is that of feeding the *ekklesia* from the word of God. Surely one of the primary aspects of shepherding sheep in the farming world is to make sure they are led to pastures which offer sufficient and good food. Before the word of God can be applied to the individual believer, equipping him or her to serve others as God intends, the Scriptures must be taught, understood, and then applied.

The word translated "equipping" (NASB) is (*kartartismos*) which is used only here in the Apostolic Scriptures, carries the sense of "giving a person the proper equipment to accomplish the stated task." Obviously "training" comes into the picture as well, since having equipment that one does not know how to use properly is not valuable. Thus having both the right way of thinking, as based upon the Scriptures, and then also the proper application of that truth to life situations, is the goal of the equipping that must take place.

Finally, the text is clear that "the work of service" means that everyone in the body of Messiah is to see himself or herself as serving others for the primary purpose of establishing unity and success in making known the glories of Yeshua and the good news of the redemption He has procured for all who come to Him in saving faith.