CHAPTER FOUR
PSALM 68.18 AND EPHESIANS 4.8-10

"This is why it says: When he ascended on high, he led captives in his
train and gave gifts to me. What does 'he ascended' mean except that
he also descended to the lower earthly regions? He who descended is
the one who ascended higher than all the heavens in order to fill
everything."

It is well known that Eph 4.8-10 appears to misquote from Ps 68 to
the extent of totally reversing the thrust of the original verse.
Whereas the Psalm asserts that "God received (גּ֥֫֫֫֫֫רֶץ) gifts from
among mankind", Ephesians draws out the implication that God gave
(דּ֥֫֫֫֫֫שָּׁם) gifts. As Stoeckhardt remarks sarcastically, "one may turn,
stretch or גּ֥֫֫֫֫֫רֶץ as one will, one will never force it to mean "giving".1
Despite this warning, the list of attempted harmonisations is long.2
Having said that, Schmid is content to point to the frequent NT
practice of quoting from memory,3 while Stoeckhardt himself
suggests that the writer of Ephesians has no intention of interpreting
the quoted Psalm.4 Lenski suspects a case of "plainly messianic"
exegesis5 and Pokorny detects an element of allegory.6 Eadie follows
Meyer in his proleptic interpretation of גּ֥֫֫֫֫֫רֶץ.7 There may be a measure
of truth in some of these proposals, but they can hardly claim to have
solved the basic problem.

A more constructive approach focuses on the evidence of a
Targumic tradition which parallels to some extent the Ephesian
version of Ps 68.18.8 I shall compare various text forms in order to
establish possible lines of dependence. It will become evident that
this Targumic rendering does not suffice to explain the phenomenon

1 Stoeckhardt, Ephesians, 191.
2 Stoeckhardt provides a list for a number of rather extreme examples.
3 Schmid, Epheser, 318.
4 Stoeckhardt, Ephesians, 191.
5 Lenski, Ephesians, 518.
6 Pokorny, "Epheserbrief", 185.
7 Eadie, Ephesians, 282. Similarly Merklein, Amt, 66.
8 The most recent major study of this aspect has been conducted by Harris,
"Descent" (diss.).
of Eph 4.8. Further comparative material will be drawn mainly from rabbinitic texts and the Qumran documents. This will give grounds for the assumption that the author of Ephesians can be credited with a greater degree of originality in his use of this Psalm than has been suggested by those commentators who regard Ephesians at this point as simply reflecting midrash or some type of exegetical tradition.¹⁹

The other proposed solutions have attempted to reconcile Ephesians with the underlying thrust of Ps 68.¹⁰ This approach is favoured by those exegetes who are unwilling to concede that the author of Ephesians may simply have misquoted. In order to evaluate such hypotheses it is necessary to assess the function of v18 within Ps 68 itself. A fresh assessment of the relationship between Ps 68 and Eph 4 and a study of the midrash that follows the quotation is also needed. The present chapter unfolds as follows.

Text Forms Related to Psalm 68 and Ephesians 4.8
Parallels from Qumran and the Rabbinic Literature
Qumran Parallels
Rabbinic Parallels
The Evidence of Psalm 68
The Historical Occasion of Psalm 68
The Structural Role of v18
Psalm 68.18 and Eph 4.8-10
Explanations Offered in the Past
The Formula, Wording and Provenance of the Quotation
Torah and Christ - the Theological Background of Eph 4.8
The Midrash which Follows the Quotation
The Ascent-Descent Theme in Relation to Psalm 68.18 (v9)
The Fulfillment Theme in Relation to the Altered Quotation (v10)
Conclusion: Eph 4.7-11 in Context

¹⁹ Gnilka, Epheser, 208f; Mussner, Epheser, 122; Schnackenburg, Epheser, 179f; Lincoln, "Use", 19 and Ellis, Use, 144. Mostly these commentators do not envisage a direct appropriation of Jewish exegetical tradition; rather, it is assumed that Ephesians took over an early Christian strand which itself reflects a Jewish exegetical influence. Lindars, Apologetic, 44 and 53-5 claims that such a tradition may also have surfaced in Acts 2.33 and possibly 5.32 (for a discussion see Harris, "Descent", 219ff). But despite the list of scholars attempting to prove such a link, this is at best uncertain if not highly unlikely (cf Overfield, Ascension, 97f and Bock, Proclamation, 181-3) - the verbal links are far too slight. Given that Acts 2.33 is perfectly understandable on the basis of the quotation from Ps 110.1, Lindars' speculative reconstruction (cf Dupont, "Ascension", 219-28) is somewhat unnecessary.

¹⁰ Thus Penner, "Enthronement", 90ff.