



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: Ephesians 4:3-4, 7-13

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“...Keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body & one Spirit...⁷ [But] grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. ⁸ For it says: ‘*When he ascended on high, he took the captives captive; he gave gifts to people.*’ [Psalm 68:18] ⁹ But what does ‘he ascended’ mean except that he also descended to the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ The one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, to fill all things. ¹¹ And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith & in the knowledge of

God’s Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness.” [Eph. 4:3-4, 7-13 CSB]

SUMMARY: Christ gives gifts to each believer & gifted people to his church. Paul portrays Christ’s cosmic tour of a 3-tier universe (standard in 1st century science) to obtain the church. In the OT, God led Israel from Egypt via Sinai to Mt. Zion. Now, in the NT, Christ conquers his foes at the cross. Then he descends to Hades the realm of the dead, asserting his authority, changing our destiny & trajectory. From the depths Christ ascends to the heights as Lord of the universe & gifts his people. No sphere in the cosmos is outside his control. No event—life or death, depression or disease—can separate us. No being—good or evil; human, angelic, demonic, or satanic—can defeat God’s mission to build his church. The church is not just another human institution; it’s the end-product of Christ’s cosmic tour; the church has cosmic significance!

1. **The Divine Warrior** (Ps. 68:18; Eph. 4:8)

- a. Psalm 68—the LORD, the Warrior God of Israel (Psalm 68:1, 7-10, 17-18)
- “God arises. His enemies scatter, and those who hate him flee...God, when you went out before your people, when you marched through the desert...⁸ the earth trembled...before God, the God of Sinai...⁹ You, God...revived your inheritance... Your people settled in it...¹⁷ God’s chariots are tens of thousands, thousands & thousands; the LORD is among them in the sanctuary [Temple] as he was at Sinai. ¹⁸ *You ascended to the heights, taking away captives; you received gifts from people, even from the rebellious, so that the LORD God might dwell there.*” (Psalm 68:1, 7-10, 17-18 CSB)
- b. Commentary on Psalm 68—God’s military campaign (tour) from Sinai to Zion
- a. Psalm 68’s “theme is...unflinching praise for the powerful Warrior God of Israel...God moves from...Sinai...via a great procession to the temple in Jerusalem.” [Beth Tanner, *Psalms*, p. 542]

2. Ephesians 4: The Divine Warrior’s triumph transposed to the Cosmic Scale

- “This is why it says: ‘When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people’.” (Eph. 4:8 NIV)
- “In Psalm 68 the warrior is God, who drives his armed chariot...from Sinai &...ascends the temple mount of Zion [Jerusalem]...*That picture is now tipped on end, transposed onto a vertical plane of earth and heaven, with Christ triumphantly ascending the heavenly temple mount.*” [Tremper Longman (ed.) *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, p. 238]
- “Paul’s interest in Psalm 68:18...lay not only in the ‘gifts’ that...were given to people, but also to the psalm’s expression of God’s *triumph* over his enemies [he “*took prisoners captive*” (Ps. 68:18; Eph. 4:8)]...In Eph, Paul is...interested in the theme that God, in Christ, has triumphed over the enemies of God’s people...Paul...chose...this quote...not only [for] the crucial term ‘*gift*,’ but also the theme of Christ’s *triumph*.” [F. Thielman in Beale, Carson (eds.) ...*NT use of OT*, p. 824]

3. Ancient Cosmology—the Three-Tier Universe (Phil. 2:10)

- a. Three Cosmic Tiers—Heaven, Earth, & Under-the-Earth (Phil. 2:10-11; Rev. 5:13)
- a. “At the name of Jesus every knee will bow—[1.] *in heaven* and [2.] *on earth* and [3.] *under the earth*—¹¹ and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 2:10-11)
- b. “At an absolute minimum, Paul understood the cosmos to be at least a three-tier affair, involving ‘terrestrial’ [earthly], ‘celestial’ [heavenly], & [‘subterranean’] [under-worldly] realms each populated by creatures...with enough [capacity] to praise God (Phil. 2:10-11)...” [Michael Lakey, *Ritual World of Paul the Apostle*, 44-45]
- c. “Phil. 2:10-11...reveals the lordship of Jesus over the entire creation, and the *incidental ancient science* is the three-tier universe...God allowed Paul to use his ancient understanding of the [universe]...[In] Phil. 2:10, Paul accepted a three-tier universe. Does his belief confer reality on this understanding of the cosmos?...Do we [Christians] have to believe it also?” [Dennis Lamoureux, *4 Views on...Historical Adam*,]
- d. “The biblical writers were not *teaching* this ancient world picture (this way of seeing the world was simply the common understanding of ancient Near Eastern cultures); rather, they were using this world picture to communicate a distinctive vision of the *meaning* of this world.” [J. Richard Middleton, “*Ancient Universe & the Cosmic Temple*,” July 19, 2016]
- b. Reading Paul in a Three-tier Universe
- a. “We should read ‘the lower parts of the earth’ [Eph. 4:9] in concert with Phil. 2:10 [‘every knee will bow [to Jesus] (1.) in heaven, (2.) on earth & (3.) *under the earth*’ (2:10)] & assume the author of Ephesians held a three-tier cosmology...Paul...believed in Sheol [Hades] beneath the earth.” [Todd A. Scacewater, *Divine Builder in Psalm 68*, p. 141 & #104]

4. God’s Disruptive Invasion Defeats the Dark Cosmic Powers

- a. In Ephesians God’s “power invades the world in the resurrection of Jesus, confronting & vanquishing any & all that oppose God (Eph. 1:20)...Jesus’ exaltation places him above all rulers, authorities, power & lords, & each & every name...(Eph 1:21). The ascension of Jesus throws open wide heaven’s doors providing liberty for humans [whom] Evil has held hostage (Eph.4:7-11). Jesus’ ascension...turns the tables on humanity’s demonic oppressors, who find themselves...plundered (Eph. 4:8). These heavenly events link to earthly ones—even...affairs of the abyss. The death of Jesus equally opens the door to the underworld, through which he himself passes in his [descent into Hades]. The effects of descent & ascent ripple outwards... in a larger chain of cosmic events. In his despoiling [defeat] of Evil and his empowering of humanity, Jesus fills the universe.” [Carey C. Newman, “*Ephesians & Reading Paul*,” in J. Dunne (ed.) *One God, One People, One Future*, p. 497]

5. Christ's Triumphant Tour of the Cosmos — *Descent to Hades; Ascent on High* (Eph. 4:8-11)

- a. Christ's descent is "the beginning...of his proclamation of victory over God's enemies...[He] is victorious over the powers & principalities...It is a declaration of victory that begins in the descent & moves upward through the universe...It is in *the descent*...that Christ *begins his victory tour*." [M. Emerson, 'He Descended to the Dead': *Evangelical Theology*, pp. 192-3]
- b. Christ's Cosmic Tour—Descending from the Cross to Hades; Ascending to God's Throne
 - a. **Where was Jesus on the Saturday, between 'Good Friday' (1st day) & 'Easter Sunday' (3rd day)?**
 - a. **Death** on the Cross (1st day: 'Good Friday') (Col. 2:15; Jn. 19:30)
 - God "disarmed the rulers and authorities [supernatural forces of evil...], He made a public example of them [exhibiting them as *captives in His triumphal procession*], having *triumphed over them through the cross*." (Col.2:15 Amp.) "The image is...of defeated foes led captive in the [procession] of a triumphant general." (James Dunn)
 - "Before Jesus died on the cross, he said '*It is finished*' (John 19:30). Jesus did not have to suffer in Hades to pay the penalty for our sins. He suffered for our sins on the cross. *Jesus did not go to Hades to suffer for our sins*." [Gary Gromacki, "Descent & Ascent of Christ in Eph. 4:8-10," *Journal of Ministry & Theology*, p. 37]
 - b. **Burial** (1st day: 'Good Friday' PM) "*Christ died for our sins...he was buried*" (1 Cor.15:3b-4a)
 - "Ancient writers did not see *Sheol/Hades* as the 'grave,' but as a distinct realm where the souls of the dead dwell." [Justin Bass, *Battle for the Keys*, p. 26]
 - c. **Descent** "to the earth's lower parts"—Hades, the underworld (incl. 2nd day: 'Holy Saturday') (Eph. 4:9)
 - "The common...Jewish view in NT times was that the dead descend to *Sheol* (Hades); [so] *Jesus' descent to Hades was simply the corollary of his death*." [Richard Bauckham, *Fate of the Dead*, 38]
 - When Jesus 'descended,' "where was Jesus? He was in a place called *Hades* (in Greek) or *Sheol* (in Hebrew), the waiting place of the dead. *Hades/Sheol* is the abode of the dead as they wait for the final judgment, while '*Hell*' is the place of everlasting punishment & eternal separation from God." [Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology*,]
 - "Hades is *not* purgatory, a rehab clinic where old sins are worked-off, *nor* is it a subterranean cavern...under the earth's mantle. Hades simply means the abode of the dead wherever that location [is]. [Dead] OT saints went to the blessed part...the wicked inhabit the punitive part of Hades." [Michael F Bird, *What Christians Ought to Believe*,
 - d. **Resurrected** (3rd day: 'Easter Sunday' AM) "*he was raised on the 3rd day*" (1 Cor. 15:4b)
 - e. **Ascent**—"He ascended on high; he led captivity captive [He led a train of vanquished foes]" (Eph. 4:8 Amp.)
 - "Quoting Ps. 68...Paul describes...the victorious king who leads his captives in triumphal procession to the temple mount...In Jesus' exaltation Paul [sees]...the triumph of God." [Ezra J-K. Cho, *Rhetorical Approach to 1 Thess.*,]
 - "The best...identity of these hostile warriors that Christ has defeated is the principalities, powers & authorities...In Eph. [they are] the enemies of Christ & [God's] people...They are the foes...subjugated...in Eph. 1:20-22. In Col 2:15 ...Christ stripped them of their power...& led them in a triumphal procession." [Clinton E. Arnold, *Eph.*, p. 251]
 - He "ascended far above all the heavens, to fill all things" (Eph. 4:10) "Here...'fill' means to exercise divine authority everywhere...so that the Messiah might be Lord over all." [Peter Williamson, *Ephesians*, p. 116]
 - "Christ died & returned to life for this: that he might be *Lord over both the dead & the living*." (Rom. 14:9)
 - f. **Gift-giving**: "Giving gifts to his people" (Eph. 4:8b NIV)—"he gave some apostles, some prophets..." (Eph. 4:11)
 - "'He *received* gifts...' (Ps. 68:18) [was] reworded...so Christ *gives*, not receives, gifts [&]...the gifts are given, not to people in general, but to *his* people, i.e., to the church." [R. J. Miller, *Helping Jesus Fulfill Prophecy*, 212-213]
 - "Paul emphasizes that Christ...sovereignly works to raise up and supply gifted leaders to the church. These aren't elected officials, nor are they offices achieved [via job promotion]. They are roles fulfilled by people whom Jesus himself sovereignly chooses & enables." [Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, 255-256]

6. Christ descended to *Sheol/Hades*

- a. *Sheol* (Hades)—does *not* equal the "grave" or "Hell"
 - Jacob: "I'll go down to *Sheol* to my son [Joseph], mourning." (Gen. 35:37 CSB) "...to the '*grave*' (KJV); to '*Hell*' (DRA)
 - In the Hebrew OT...*Sheol* is used 65 times, [rendered] Hades (Greek)...61x in the LXX [Gk. OT]. KJV (1611) English trans. *Sheol* as 'Hell' 31x, 'grave' 31x, & 'pit' 3x. This misuse...increased confusion. But, "Sheol is not the same as the grave, which is *kever* in Hebrew. The ancient Jews believed when a person died his/her body went to the grave, but their soul went to *Neither is Sheol the same a 'Hell.'* Like Hades it is not necessarily...a place of punishment. Rather, it is an abode for all the dead." [Jonathan Bernis, *Rabbi Looks at the Afterlife*, p.] Paul Enns [says, *Sheol/Hades*] "may refer to the place of the dead where both good & bad people go upon death (Gen. 37:35). Believers will be rescued from Sheol (Ps. 16:9-11). The wicked go to *Sheol* upon death (Job 21:13; [etc.])." [Paul P. Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, p. 374]
 - *Sheol* (Hades) is like an Abyss, a Pit (Ezek. 28:8; Ps. 30:3)
- b. 'Hell' (Heb. *Gehenna*) in the Bible

- “Hell, as a place of eternal suffering & punishment, does not exist in the Hebrew Bible [the OT]...It is only in the Synoptic
- Gospels...for the 1st time in [the] Bibl[e]...we see...what's normally understood as Hell (Gk.: *Gehenna*) [Mk. 9:43, 45, 47]” [Mark T. Finney, “...*the Afterlife: Development of Hell...*,” in J. Exum, (ed.) *Biblical Reception* (2013) pp. 150, 160]

c. Christ's Descent to Hades in Ephesians 4:8-9

- “What does ‘he ascended’ mean except that *he also descended into the lower [regions] of the earth?*” (Eph. 4:9 NABRE)

a. Christ's descent to Hades between his death & resurrection

- a. “So prevalent was the idea of an ‘underworld’ in...Greco-Roman culture...it can be reasonably assumed that the average person would've understood...‘*he descended to the lower regions of the earth*’ as indicating...a descent (of some sort) to the underworld, the realm of the dead.” [William Bales, “*Descent of Christ in Eph. 4:9*,” CBQ, Vol. 72, #1 p. 90]
- b. “The most significant interpretational difficulty in [Eph. 4:9] is in deciding what ‘*the lower parts of the earth*’ refers to. The view of the early church fathers and the consensus view through the centuries has been that it refers to a descent of Christ to the underworld (or, Hades). Although a difficult issue, this view appears to have the greatest amount of evidence to support it.” [Clinton E. Arnold, *Exegetical Commentary On The NT: Ephesians*, p.]
- c. Eph 4:8-9 has two “phrase[s], ‘he led captive a host of captives,’ and...‘He also descended into the lower parts of the earth’... The idea [derived] from these 2 phrases is that Christ spent...the interval between his death...& his resurrection...in the underworld [Hades].” [Scott K. Leafe, “*Two-Compartment View of Hades from Eph. 4:8-9*,” pp. 10-11]
- d. “The meaning of the...[phrase] in Eph. 4:9 ‘into the lower parts of the earth’ is much controverted...The words [‘the lower parts’], when conjoined with [‘the earth’], seem at first glance to be an *obvious reference to the netherworld*.” [George Landes, “*Sign of Jonah*,” in C. Meyers (ed.) *Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth*, p. 679]
- e. “Pictur[ing]...Hades as a stronghold in which the dead are held captive by the angelic rulers...*Christ's descent could be seen as a conquest of Hades*...He released the captives from their chains and led them out of their prison (Ps. 68:18)... [see] Jesus' parable of binding the strong man & plundering his goods (Mk. 3:27).” [R. Bauckham, *Fate of Dead*, 42]

b. Not Incarnation—Christ's descent from Heaven to Earth (e.g. Phil 2:6-7); Eph. 4:9's ‘descent’ is not that!

- a. “Some...think the prior ‘descent’ was to the earth itself...a reference to the incarnation. But *this must be judged unlikely* o [The Greek phrase:] *katotera (mere) tes ges* [‘lower parts of the earth’] would most naturally be understood as a synonym for Hades, the place of the dead (cf. Ps. 63:9,...Ezek. 32:18)
- b. Genitive following *mere* (parts [‘of’]) most naturally denotes the whole to which the parts belong—parts *of* the earth, rather than parts *which are* the earth...[In that case ‘descended to the earth’ is sufficient]
- c. Eph 4:10 is...[the opposite of] Eph. 4:9 ‘far above all the heavens,’ corresponding to ‘the lower/lowest parts of the earth’...This is confirmed by the...purpose ‘in order that he might fill all things’...These denote the outer limits of his journey & in between lies the ‘all’ which he fills. But, if one limit is the supreme height of heaven, at [God's] right hand...(Eph. 1:20), the other is not the earth, but the *lowest depth of the earth...the underworld, the place of the dead*...As the confession of Christ's resurrection [implies]...his (prior) death, so the assertion of his ascension (...from Ps. 68:18) [implies] his (*prior*) *descent into the place of the dead*.” [J. Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, pp. 186-187]

7. Christ's Descent to Hades: Corroborating Scriptures (Mt. 12:39-40; Rom. 10:6-7; Acts 2:27-28, 31; Luke 23:43)

a. The Sign of Jonah (Mt. 12:39-40)

- Jesus: “No sign will be given...except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For as *Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish* 3 days & 3 nights, so the *Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth* 3 days & 3 nights.” (Mt. 12:39-40)
- There's a “natural association...Jesus' hearers (& Matthew's readers) would make between the centre of the earth & *Hades* as the realm of the dead. [There's also a] parallel between the experience of Jonah and what's being described. The term *kardia* [‘heart’] occurs in the [Gk. OT] of Jonah 2:3-4 [in] reference...to Hades, & in Jonah 2:6-7. Jonah's descent to Hades is described as [‘*descent into the earth*’]...The word *Hades* is replaced by...its location, ‘the heart of the earth’ [in Mt 12:40] ...parallel to ‘the belly of the [fish].’ Mt. 12.40...*clearly expresses a doctrine of Christ's descent after death into the place of the dead*...It tells us no more [about what Jesus did there...But,]...Jesus clearly speaks of an extended sojourn in Hades... after his death.” [John Yates, “*He Descended into Hell: Pt. II*,” Churchman, #102.4 (1988) pp. 303, 310]

b. Paul: Don't say “who will ascend...?” or “Who will descend...?” (Rom. 10:6-7)

- “Don't say...‘*Who will go up to heaven?*’ that's, to bring Christ down ⁷ or, ‘*Who will go down into the abyss?*’ that's, to bring Christ up from the dead...⁹ confess...‘Jesus is Lord,’ & believe...God raised him from the dead, you'll be saved.” (Rm. 10:6-9)
- Paul's assertions in Rom. 10:6-7 “imply...Christ has dwelt in heaven & need not be brought down & that *he alone has come up from the abyss, from the realm of the dead*.” [Edith M Humphrey, in S Soderlund

(ed) *Romans & People of God*, p 133]

- “In Ps. 71:20 ‘abyss’ is used of the depths of the earth...the realm of the dead. It’s...in this sense...Paul uses it [in Rom. 10] ...‘Abyss’ bears the usual meaning for *Hades/Sheol* we cannot take Paul to mean anything more than Christ died & went to the place of the dead before his resurrection...In the ancient world to be dead meant to be in the place of the dead [Hades].” [John Yates, “*He Descended into Hell: Part II*,” *Churchman*, #102.4 (1988) pp. 306, 311]

c. Peter: Christ not abandoned in Hades (Acts 2:27-28, 31)

- “The most explicit textual support for the descent doctrine is Acts 2:27–31. Here Peter twice affirms that Christ was not abandoned to Hades.” [Z. Seals, J. Bush, “*Redeemed from Death*,” *MJTM*, Vol. 20 (2018–19) p. 164]
- At Pentecost Peter quotes David: “... *You won’t abandon me in [Sheol] Hades* or allow your holy one to see decay. ²⁸ You reveal the paths of life to me; you’ll fill me with gladness in your presence’ (Ps. 16:10-11)...[Peter asserts David] “spoke about Messiah’s resurrection: *He was not abandoned in Hades, & his flesh didn’t experience decay*.” (Acts 2:27-28, 31)
- “Peter is...quoting...Ps. 16:10 (...[at] Pentecost) with reference to the experience of Jesus between his death & resurrection ...The natural way of understanding this verse is that while Christ’s soul...*went down to Hades*, God did not leave him there, but raised him from the dead. If [this] exegesis be accepted we have a clear reference to ‘the descent into hell’ [Hades].” [John Yates, “*He Descended into Hell: Part II*,” *Churchman*, #102.4 (1988) p. 305]

d. Jesus told the thief “*Today* you’ll be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43)

- “The natural meaning of ‘today’ [is] ‘Friday’...‘Today’ ought to be taken literally...Jesus’ reply assures [this thief] immediate entry into paradise...dwelling place of the faithful dead...that very day.” [J W Cooper, *Body, Soul, & Life Everlasting*, 128]
- “In the light of Luke 23:43...Jesus was in that part of Hades known as ‘paradise’. That is, he went to that blessed abode which at that time contained (only) the OT righteous.” [J. Yates, “*He Descended... Pt II*,” *Churchman*, #102.4 (1988) p 311]
- Jesus told the thief: “*Today* you will be *with me in paradise*.” (Luke 23:43) Some (e.g. the ESV) claim that ‘paradise’ is ‘heaven.’ But, “According to Luke, Jesus was not in heaven...for the three days prior to the resurrection, rather he was in Hades (Acts 2:27, 31).” [Tony Wright, “*Death, the Dead & the Underworld in Biblical Theology—Part 2*,” *Churchman*, 122/3, p. 109] Note: Acts 2 & Luke 23 (both authored by Luke) are reconciled if “paradise” is part of “Hades.”
- Next: “Jesus called out...‘Father, *into your hands I entrust my spirit*.’ Then, he breathed his last. (Lk. 23:46) Some argue ...Christ’s spirit did not descend to Hades, but ascended to God the Father on Good Friday. But the...author, Luke places Christ’s soul in Hades (Acts 2:27, 31). [Plus,] the risen Jesus tells Mary, ‘I’ve not yet ascended to the Father.’ (Jn. 20:17)...[Better Jesus’ saying implies] the Father’s care is still exercised in Hades (Ps. 16:10).” [J. Bass, *Battle for the Keys*, p.]
- Others argue Jesus’ ‘3 parts’ dispersed: “Altho’...Jesus was put to death in the flesh, & *his spirit* returned to God the Father (...Lk. 23:46), & *his body* was placed in a tomb, & *his soul* descended into Hades.” [PM Ames, *Jesus Christ Revealed*, p 45]

e. Peter: Christ proclaimed to the imprisoned Spirits (1 Peter 3:18-20)

- “Christ...suffered for sins once for all...[to] bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, in which *he also went & made proclamation to the spirits in prison* ²⁰ who in the past were disobedient...” (1 Pet 3:18-20)
- “According to 1 Pet. 3:18-22 *Jesus did go somewhere after his burial & before his resurrection appearances...Something of significance did happen between the burial & resurrection appearances of Jesus, which the Church eventually... preserve[d] in the phrase ‘he descended into hell’.*” [David P. Scaer, “*He Did Descend to Hell:...*” *JETS*, 35/1 p. 95]
- “Jesus [proclaimed]...his victory to the wicked in Hades. Such is implied by...1 Pet. 3:19-20; 4:6...[We could] understand [these verses] as describing how Jesus went to the place of the dead and declared his victory over the disobedient angels imprisoned therein...” [Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology*,]

8. The Significance of Christ’s Descent to Hades

a. Christ experienced the full reality of Death

- William Barkley makes the following points(a) If Christ descended into Hades, then his death was no sham [it's a real death]. It is not... 'a swoon' on the Cross, or anything like that. He really experienced death, and rose again. At its simplest, the doctrine of the descent into Hades lays down the complete identity of Christ with our human condition, even to the experience of death. (b) If Christ descended into Hades, it means that his triumph is universal. This... is a truth... ingrained into the NT. It is Paul's dream that at [Jesus'] name... every knee should bow... in heaven & things in earth & things under the earth (Phil 2:10). In... Revelation... praise comes from every creature... [1.] in heaven... [2.] on... earth & [3.] under the earth (Rev. 5:13). 'He who ascended... is he who first descended into the lower parts of the earth' (Eph. 4:9-10). *The total submission of the universe to Christ is woven into the thought of the NT...* [William Barkley, *Daily Study Bible*, pp.]
- b. Christ is Victor over Dark Cosmic Powers, Hades & Death; He's Lord over the entire Universe
- "The important point... is not obscure... Christ's descent into [Hades] & his ascension tell us that *Christ's victory over the powers of evil* is no insignificant incident; rather it *reverberates to the most distant corners of the universe*... In heaven above, earth below, but also in the netherworld... Christ's victory is heard and celebrated... To keep this cosmic scope in [view]... Eph. 4:8-10 leads the way. *Jesus did not just ascend to heaven. He also descended to [Hades], i.e., to the realm of death...*" [G. Van der Kooi & C. Van den Brink, *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 457]
 - "Jesus achieved a victory over death & Hades... Jesus said the 'gates of Hades' will not overcome his church (Mt. 16:18)... John of Patmos [saw] a vision of the exalted Christ [saying] 'Don't be afraid. I'm the First & the Last, ¹⁸ & the Living One. I was dead, but look—I'm alive forever & ever, & I hold the keys of death & Hades.' (Rev. 1:17-18)... Because Jesus descended & rose, he owns the keys of death & Hades... Death... & Hades... has been subjugated to the will of the Risen One. *There's no place—whether in death, depression, or disease—where God in Christ cannot reach us.*" [M. Bird, *Evangelical Theol.*,]
- c. Christ's Cosmic Tour is for the Benefit of the Church; the Church has Cosmic Significance
- "In Eph. 4:7-16... Paul portrays Christ as giving various Spirit-empowered believers as 'gifts' *for the purpose of building up the church... as the temple of God*. [In] the rest of Eph... *the temple [is] a prominent theme*... The body language is obvious [in Eph. 4:12-16]. But... the use of the building metaphor is evidence Paul is still using the temple imagery in Eph. 4:12-16." [Todd A. Scacewater, *Divine Builder in Psalm. 68, 24-25*]
 - "Christ gives gifts in order to *build up his church as the... temple of God*, or as Eph. 2:21-22 refers to the church, a 'holy temple' and 'dwelling place' for God... Eph. 4:8 speaks of giving *gifts for the building up of the temple* [the Church]." [Todd A Scacewater, *Divine Builder in Psalm 68*, p. 130]
 - "The overarching temple theme may help interpret [Eph. 4]... Eph. 4:10 presents us with 'the one who ascended far above all the heavens in order that he should *fill everything*.' Eph. 4:11 then describes the ascended Christ giving gifts (or gifted people) to his church in order to build it up... *The filling of the temple is in view*... The result of this 'filling of all things' in Eph. 4:10 is... the building up of this corporate entity [the Church-Temple]... The reference to filling here is to the presence of God in *filling his* [end-time] *temple* [the Church]." [A. Mark Stirling, *TRANSFORMATION & GROWTH*, 141]

QUESTIONS: Read Ephesians 4:3-4, 7-13

1. In the middle of this section Paul inserts a quote from Psalm 68:18 [as Eph. 4:8], with Paul's elaboration (Eph. 4:9-10).
 - a. What ideas does that quote (& elaboration) introduce which would be absent if Eph. 4:8-10 were omitted?
 - b. What do those ideas add to the following verses (Eph. 4:11-13)?
 - c. How should these statements affect our view of the Church?
 - d. Discuss the statement: 'Christ's cosmic tour is for the benefit of the Church; the Church has cosmic significance'
 - e. If 'the Church has cosmic significance,' how should this affect our priorities, key decisions, & church participation?
2. Paul expounds the Ps. 68:18 quote in terms of Christ "descending to the lower parts of the earth" (Eph. 4:9) and "ascending far above all the heavens" (Eph. 4:10). What comes to your mind when you read

these two statements? How do you think they might be understood by first-time readers/hearers—(i.) in Paul's day & (ii.) today?

3. Paul's writing (here & Phil. 2:10) seems to assume a 'three-tier universe,' consisting of a (flat?) earth, with 'heaven(s)' up above the earth, & *Sheol/Hades* down below the earth. Modern science contradicts this 'primitive' view. No one has found Hades (realm of the dead) down below, within the earth's mantle; that's the 'stuff of horror movies.' Does this mean we ought to reject the whole scenario of Eph. 4:8-10 & its implications as outdated superstitions? Discuss.
4. The "Descent of Christ to Hades" is defined as meaning "*Christ spent...the interval between his death... and his resurrection...in the underworld [Hades]*"—Scott Leafe. Is this the first time you've heard this proposition? If you heard it previously, while you were growing up, or in another church, how did you understand this statement? In your prior experience/church was this taught, affirmed or rejected? What was accomplished by Christ's descent?
5. In 1 Cor. 15 Paul gives a statement of basic Christian beliefs—"Christ [1.] *died* for our sins...[2.] he was *buried*, that [3.] he was *raised* on the 3rd day..." (1 Cor. 15:3b-4). Now Eph. 4 seems to imply a more complex statement—That Christ [1.] Died, [2.] was buried, [3.] descended to Hades, [4.] resurrected on 3rd day [5.] ascended on high, [6.] gave gifts... What does this more elaborate statement add (besides complexity)? Discuss
6. Apostles' Creed dating back to ~400 AD (if not before) says: "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son Our Lord, Who ...suffered under Pontius Pilate, was *crucified, died, & was buried. He descended into Hell; the 3rd day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into Heaven, & sits at the right hand of God, the Father almighty...*" How do you feel about the statement, '*He descended into Hell*'? Should it be rejected, adjusted or retained? Why or why not?