

Who Are the “Host of Captives?”

Therefore it says, “When He ascended on high, He led captive a **host of captives**, And He gave gifts to men.” (Ephesians 4:8 NASB)

Are these “host of captives,” the old testament saints being taken from Hades to heaven as many believe? Another popular view is that the captives are Satan, sin, and death which Jesus showed his victory over them by raising from the dead and ascending into heaven.

The most common English translation is “He led captivity captive.” The Greek word translated “captivity” can also be translated “a captive multitude.” Either translation is valid. [see [Ephesians 4:8 from all English translations](#)] Ephesians 4:8 is actually a quotation of [Psalms 68:18](#), composed by King David to celebrate the conquest over the kings around them and the ascent of the ark of the Covenant being taken up Mount Zion. In ancient times it was common for the victorious leader to return home with a public procession of not only his troops but captured military and civil leaders and the spoils of war; some of which might be thrown to the gathered crowd (just the spoils of course but, I did have another picture flash in my mind). This allusion to a triumphant procession fits well with [Colossians 2:15](#) which says that Jesus made a public display of the powers behind this worldly system stripping them of their authority. If this is literally describing a triumphant parade into heaven with those that were in Hades why compare them to captives being led as prisoners or being led into captivity instead of as freed captives? I think it makes much more sense to look at this as a figurative illustration of Jesus victory over the things which hold every human captive (sin, death, Satan and the powers of this worldly system) when he died on the cross, resurrected and ascended into heaven. It makes even more sense when you consider verses like [Hebrews 11:39,40](#) that say the Old Testament believers will not receive their reward until we do (or until we are made perfect). This sounds a lot like the timing of [1 Thessalonians 4:17](#) which describes the dead and living being caught up together (simultaneously) at the Lord's coming to meet the Lord and be with him forever. Nowhere does the Bible

emphasize any group being rewarded before the other. In fact it emphasizes just the opposite.

If these Old Testament saints' souls were taken to heaven when Jesus ascended to heaven, how come sometime afterwards Peter said that David (one of the Old Testament saints mentioned in Hebrews 11) was dead and buried and did not ascend into heaven? [[see Acts 2:29](#) and [Acts 2:34](#)] The Bible often mentions the wonderful future in store for those who have died when Jesus returns and they are resurrected. Why doesn't it ever mention that their souls are already enjoying the benefits of heaven and are already in the presence of the Lord? Could it be that's not what happens? Before you decide I recommend reading the next chapter which addresses the possibility of the old testament saints being bodily taken to heaven.