

“Upon the Lampstand”

“After lighting a lamp there is not one person who conceals it with something or who puts it underneath a bed. Instead, the person puts it upon the lampstand so those who come inside may see the light.”—Jesus, Gospel of Luke 8:16–17.



Greg Stafford, “What is the meaning of Psalm 68:18 and Paul’s use of it for Jesus in Ephesians 4:8?”
“Upon the Lampstand” (Elihu Books & Media: October 12, 2026)

Question: Does Psalm 68:18 apply to God or to a prehuman Jesus, and what is the meaning of this psalm when applied to Jesus in Ephesians 4:8?

Answer: The Hebrew and Greek texts of Psalm 68:18 have basically the same meaning. But the quotation of this text in Ephesians 4:8 is very different. Here is Ephesians 4:8 and two versions of Psalm 68:18 translated together with the key differences highlighted:

Psalm 68:18 (Hebrew)

עלית למרום | שבית שבי

לקחת מתנות באדם

ואף סוררים לשכון יה אלהים:

You went up to the high place.

You led captivity captive.

You received gifts from man,

Psalm 68:18 (Greek)

ἀναβὰς εἰς ὕψος

ἡχμαλώτευσας αἰχμαλωσίαν,

ἔλαβες δόματα ἐν ἀνθρώπῳ,

You have ascended into the height

You took captivity captive,

You received gifts among man

Ephesians 4:8

διὸ λέγει· Ἀναβὰς εἰς ὕψος

ἡχμαλώτευσεν αἰχμαλωσίαν,

ἔδωκεν δόματα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις.

For this reason, it says, “He ascended into the height,

He took captivity captive,

He gave gifts to the men.”

Notice first how both the Hebrew and Greek texts of Psalm 68:18 agree in the key parts highlighted in red, namely, “received... from/among men,” or in Hebrew, *laqata* (you received) ... *ba’adam* (from men), and in Greek, *elabes* (you received) ... *en anthropo* (among men). But in Ephesians 4:8 Paul *changes the quoted text* in the key highlighted parts to *edoken* (he gave) ... *tois anthropois* (to the men). He does this so the part of Psalm 68:18 that fits with Jesus ‘descending and ascending’ in relation to the Christians can be used in a completely different way from how the words were originally used of God in relation to his people. Again, in Psalm 68:18 “God Jah” receives (Hebrew, *laqata*; Greek, *elabes*) “gifts” from / among man (Hebrew, *ba’adam*; Greek, *en anthropo*). But in Ephesians 4:8 Jesus gives (*edoken*) “gifts” (*tois anthropois*) to men.

These two texts (Psalm 68:18 and Ephesians 4:8), and the different terms and different uses of the terms in them, clearly do not have the same subject. They also do not have the same context, and the meanings of the key terms used in them are not the same. In fact, the key terms which differ between the texts have the opposite meanings. In one text (Psalm 68:18), God is ‘receiving gifts from man.’ In the other (Ephesians 4:8), Jesus is ‘giving gifts to men.’ One is receiving, the other is giving. These two actions are not the same thing. They are opposites. Based on this fact alone, the two texts cannot possibly mean the same thing or be in reference to the same subject.

While the singular or generic use of “man” in the Hebrew and Greek of Psalm 68:18 is different from Paul’s plural “men,” this is not the most significant difference. It is the difference between “you received gifts from man” and “he gave gifts to the men” which proves the two contexts are different, they do not have the same subject, and the use of the psalm by Paul is for a far different reason than the purpose for which Psalm 68:18 was written. Since the terms used in Psalm 68:18 (*laqata* and *elabes*) mean “receive” and never mean “give,” and since the term used in Ephesians 4:8 (*edoken*) means “give” and never means “receive,” why does Paul quote part of Psalm 68:18 which applies to God, but change a key term to mean something completely different when he applies it to Jesus?

The reason has to do with why Paul is quoting the psalm in the first place. In Psalm 68:18 it refers to God’s descent as God (or through an angel) from heaven to the earth literally to ‘ride through the desert’ and ‘to lead the prisoners into prosperity’ (Psalm 68:4-6). God did this “when [he] went before the face of [his] people, when [he] marched through the desert, [when] the earth quaked and the heavens rained down before the face of God, the one of Sinai” (Psalm 68:7-8). Psalm 68:12-14 next explains this to mean God ‘scattered kings when it was snowing in Zalmon’ (Psalm 68:12-14), followed in verses 15-16 by calling “the mountain Bashan” both “a mountain of God” and “a mountain of many peaks,” from which God can be said to ‘descend.’

Verse 16 further states “God will dwell there [in the mountain Bashan] forever.” Psalm 68:17 next describes “the chariots of God” being “many myriads, thousands upon thousands,” with God “among them as at Sinai.” The “many myriads” described with God “as at Sinai” appear to be the angels (compare Deuteronomy 33:2; Hebrews 12:22; Jude 14; Revelation 5:11), consistent with how the New Testament identifies “angels” (*angelon*) doing what God is said to be doing in these accounts. This is because the Bible attributes causation to God regardless of whether he uses others to represent him, since ‘no man can see God’s face and live.’—Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19; Exodus 33:20-22.

Why, though, does Paul apply a revised quotation from Psalm 68:18 to Jesus in Ephesians 4:8 with a new understanding appropriate to Jesus' 'descent' and 'ascent,' neither of which have anything to do with the 'descent' and 'ascent' of God in Psalm 68? In Jesus' case, his 'descent' in Ephesians 4:8-9 either involves him coming to the earth as a man born through Mary, or to his 'descent' to "preach to the spirits in prison" (1 Peter 3:18-20) after he was raised to life as a "spirit" by the Father (1 Corinthians 15:45; Galatians 1:1), thereby becoming "firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5). His 'ascent' is after his "resurrection" when he "went his way to heaven" at "God's right hand," at which time "angels, and authorities and powers were subjected to him" (1 Peter 3:21-22). But none of this relates to God's 'descent' and 'ascent' in Psalm 68!

In Ephesians 4:1 Paul begins by referring to himself as "a prisoner in the Lord" (*desmios en kyrio*), followed by an affirmation of "one God and Father of all" (4:6). Then in verse 7 Paul writes about "mercy" according to "the gift [*doreas*] of Christ." It is this "gift" which Paul ties to Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8 by first opening with, "For this reason" (*dio*). What reason? According to Ephesians 4:7, "the mercy according to the measure of the gift of the Christ." How does Paul then tie this in with Psalm 68:18? Not by using the language of the psalm he is quoting (Hebrew or Greek), and which speaks about God 'receiving gifts from man.' Instead, as we have already discussed in part, he changes the language and the meaning of the psalm to fit with Christ '*giving gifts to men.*' As Paul noted at the start of the chapter (4:1), he is a member of the "captivity" group which Christ "led captive," as well as one of the "men" to whom Christ 'gave gifts,' specifically, "mercy" in verse 7. In Ephesians 4:11 these "gifts" are expanded to include other things which Christ "gave" (*edoken* [same in 4:8]), namely, "some apostles, but some prophets, and some proclaimers, but some shepherds and teachers."

None of this has anything to do with what is described or with what happened in Psalm 68, which is why Paul changes the wording of the quoted text from verse 18. He skillfully make use of descriptions about God 'descending and ascending' from heaven or from "the mountain Bashan" to his people literally (or representatively, through angels) to 'ride through the desert' as he 'leads the prisoners into prosperity' (Psalm 68:4-6). There is nothing said here about anything described by Paul with respect to himself and other Christians as 'prisoners' to whom Christ "gave gifts" in the form of "mercy," as well as various Christian callings "for the preparation of the holy ones, for the work of ministry, [and] for the building up of the body of Christ."—Ephesians 4:12.

All of this takes place in Ephesians 4:1-12, not because Jesus is the "God Jah" of Psalm 68:18. It is because that God "raised [Christ] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 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," which happened after God "put all things in subjection under his feet, and made him head over all things to the congregation, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:20-23). The highlighted part of these verses ("made him head over all things") says God "gave" (*edoken* [same in Ephesians 4:8, 12]) "him [to be] head over all things." Everything Christ has is contingent on God Father, even all his and all our "fulness" (Colossians 1:19; 2:9-10), just like Jesus taught (John 5:26; 6:57; 10:29; 17:7). This is why Christians who conquer are also seated at God's right hand with him on his Father's throne (Revelation 3:21), which Paul also teaches explicitly in Ephesians 2:4-6:

But God being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, though being dead in trespasses he made us alive with the Christ, ... and he raised us up together and seated us together in the heavenly realms in / with Christ Jesus.

This proves God is not ‘seating’ Jesus higher than those whom God makes alive at the “first resurrection, over whom the second death has no authority,” since like Jesus they “rule as kings” with him even while they are also his and God’s “priests” (Revelation 20:6). It is the same for Jesus who, though he is king on God’s throne, is still God’s “high priest” (Hebrews 3:1), meaning he is also one of God’s priests, even if he is the highest one. The same is true with him as the “archangel” (1 Thessalonians 4:16), and with him as God’s “firstborn” (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:6; compare Deuteronomy 21:17). It is, in fact, *God* who subjected all angels, authorities, and powers to Jesus after he raised him from the dead.—1 Peter 3:22.

Those subjected to him do not appear to include those “seated ... in the heavenly realms in/with Christ Jesus,” as they literally sit with Jesus according to Ephesians 2:4-6, on “thrones” and “ruling as kings” (Colossians 3:1; Revelation 3:21; 20:4, 6). If what is subjected to Jesus does include Christians who are seated together with him in heaven on God’s throne, that is because we are still slaves “of God and of Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1). Our position with him does not change that he is still our “head,” just as God remains Jesus’ “head” no matter how high God ‘seats’ him.—1 Corinthians 11:3.

Therefore, if Jesus is on God’s throne in the highest position of the “heavenly realms” and still has God as his “head,” the same can be and is true of those who sit with Jesus on his Father’s throne in the highest position, all without being the highest Being (Exodus 3:14; Revelation 1:4). That is the “one God” of Ephesians 4:6, the Father (compare 1 Corinthians 8:6). That is why Paul went out of his way to explain this to everyone in 1 Corinthians 15:27, making it clear that no matter how high Jesus has been “seated” or appointed by God, it has nothing to do with God himself, who is never subjected to anyone. That is also why only *after* Jesus returns the kingdom to his God and he is “subjected to the one who subjected all things to him,” that “God may be all things in everyone,” which was not the case while Jesus and the Christians were ruling.—1 Corinthians 15:28.

This all further proves the subject of Psalm 68:18 is not the same subject as Ephesians 4:8, which is why the words are different, even opposite in meaning, and why even the words quoted by Paul which are the same (including, ‘descending and ascending’ and ‘taking captivity captive’) have completely different meanings in each context. In Ephesians 4:8 Paul is doing what he often does, namely, apply texts from the Old Testament to Jesus from different people including God in Hebrews 1:10-12, which applies Psalm 102:25-27 differently from the Hebrew text to Jesus *after* his resurrection to show further how he “became better than the angels” (Hebrews 1:3-4). This also proves Jesus is mutable since these texts are applied to him *after* his resurrection, not before he lived as a man, making it impossible for him to be the God of Psalm 102, who never had to ‘become better than angels’ in this way or in any other way.—Hebrews 1:4.

Paul also applies Old Testament texts from non-resurrection contexts about David and Solomon in Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14 to Jesus in the post-resurrection context of Hebrews 1:5. He does it also with Solomon as the enthroned king from Psalm 45:6-7 by

applying what is said about him to Jesus in Hebrews 1:8-9. Paul even does this with “man” or “mankind” from Psalm 8:5 by quoting what is said about our creation to Jesus becoming a man in Hebrews 2:7, 9. Paul does all this without identifying Jesus as any of these people, or as God. As we have seen in Ephesians 4:8, and similar to Hebrews 1:10-12, Paul may change the wording of Old Testament texts before applying the revised wording to Jesus, which he does also in Hebrews 10:5.¹ He does this also in Ephesians 4:8 as the earlier comparison of this text with the Hebrew and Greek texts of Psalm 68:18 demonstrated.

Paul does something similar in his revised quotation of Isaiah 45:23 to Jesus in Philippians 2:10-11, revising Isaiah 45:23 so it can only apply to someone who is *not* the God of Isaiah, but whom the God of Isaiah exalts by giving him a new name. This is not the same as “exalting” God by lifting him up in praise. In Philippians 2:10-11 Paul says God gives Jesus a “name” in which others will “bow,” not to Jesus’ glory, but “to the glory of God the Father,” the God of Isaiah 45. In Isaiah 43:7 this God, Jah, says he will call creatures by his name for the same reason Paul says God exalted Jesus, namely, for God’s “glory.” This is precisely what we have in Philippians 2:10-11, God giving his name to his Firstborn ‘for the Father’s glory.’

¹ For a complete discussion of this text, see my recently updated Q&A, “‘Ears’ or ‘Body’ in Psalm 40:6/39:7 and Hebrews 10:5?” “*Upon the Lampstand*” (Elihu Books & Media: June 17, 2012; rev. August 17, 2026), here: [https://elihubooks.com/"upon-the-lampstand"-q%26as](https://elihubooks.com/).