

Ephesians 4:7-10  
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### Eph 4:7-10 ~ Taking Captivity Captive

I want to continue with our ongoing study of the book of Ephesians this morning. We've been off track for a few weeks, but we're going to pick up where we left off in Ephesians chapter four.

If you'll think back a few weeks, we spent several weeks talking about all of the "ones" mentioned in Ephesians chapter four. There is one Spirit to which we have been joined. He is the life of the body of Christ. Therefore there is only one body, because the same Spirit is the life of many members. And as we grow in a Spirit-given knowledge of this Life, we come to one mind, or one faith. This one faith is the one mind of the Lord seen with one Light that we all come to share because it is the truth of what God has done.

And that view, that one faith, produces in us one expectation. We spent a few weeks talking about the one expectation of God verses the many and different expectations of man. And then we finished that section by spending a week discussing the one baptism whereby we were put down into the death of Christ, and raised with Him to walk in the newness of His life.

Paul is now going to build on all of this and begin discussing the growth and ministry that grow out from this one Son. He's going to talk about how the life of Christ works in us towards His own body for the building up of the body and the equipping of the saints.

But before he does this, he brings in an Old Testament Scripture and shows all of this to be the fulfillment and realization of all that was promised in the Old Covenant. He quotes Psalm 68 saying "when He ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men". It's this verse – the quotation from Psalm 68 – that I want to focus in on today. I'll read the next four verses of Ephesians here for context, but I want to share this morning about "leading captivity captive".

**Eph 4:7** *But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore He says: "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVITY CAPTIVE, AND GAVE GIFTS TO MEN." 9 (Now this, "HE ASCENDED"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)*

Now this Psalm is written at the time and with reference to David, having fully destroyed the enemies of the Land and taken Jerusalem and called it His city. At this time, he brings the Ark of the Covenant up to Jerusalem. He ascends to the city and

causes the ark of God to reside in its permanent resting place. No longer carried around from place to place. No longer wondering in the wilderness with the children of Israel, but permanently set in Jerusalem, and soon to be placed in the temple that will be built by Solomon.

Paul sees the fulfillment of this type and shadow in the ascension of Christ into the eternal and "permanent" house of God, together with those who are his "captives". I'll say some things about the captives in a moment. But I want you to see how Paul is comprehending this Psalm. Whenever you see one of the apostle's taking an Old Covenant Scripture and describing how Christ is the fullness and realization of what it describes, it's a really good time to pay close attention because you can see how the Spirit of God brings him from shadow to substance.

There were three things placed inside the ark of the covenant. There were the tablets of stone upon which God had written the ten commandments. There was a golden pot of manna which fell from heaven to feed the children of Israel. And there was the dead staff of Aaron, which supernaturally grew leaves and sprouted almonds. All of this testifies of Christ. He is the true ark of the covenant. He is the true glory of God that dwells in the midst of his people. He is our covenant, the one in whom and by whom we have relationship with God. It is in Him that God's word is realized – the tablets of stone. He declares Himself to be the true bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world – the pot of manna. And He is the resurrection and the life out from among the dead – the dead staff that grew branches and bore fruit. He is the mercy seat of God. He stands between the Cherubim that behold his glory. We could go on and on with all of the types and shadows of Christ represented in the ark.

But what Paul brings into view here is not just that Christ is that ark, but that AFTER David had destroyed the enemies of God through judgment, he brought that ark to its permanent resting place in the city of Zion. The Jerusalem of the earth has forever been a clear and obvious picture of what Paul calls the "Jerusalem above". God's city. So, having accomplished judgment, the ark is seated permanently in the city of God. So to Christ, having accomplished the eternal judgment of God in the cross, ascends again to the heavens.

In another Psalm, David describes Christ returning to glory having accomplished the purposes of God. He says

***Psa 24:7*** Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. **8** Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, The LORD mighty in battle. **9** Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. **10** Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah

He has returned to glory, but He has not returned alone. He prays in John 17

***Joh 17:24*** "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

As Hebrews says, He has brought many sons to glory. The living Word of God has not returned to the Father void, but has accomplished His will and prospered in the thing for which He was sent. (Isa 55) He has brought his body with Him. And so

we are said to be “made alive together, raised together, seated together with Christ in the heavens”. We talked about all of this when we were in chapter 2.

This is what Paul sees going on in Psalm 68. In the type and shadow there is the ark of God ascending to the city of God followed by a train of captives. But in the fulfillment there is Christ, the true ark of the covenant, ascending to the true city of God together with His captives. And what I want to focus on today is this word “captive”. It doesn’t say that he ascended on high and led the redeemed. It specifically says he led captivity captive. This word “captive”, like so many other words in the New Testament, has a long and rich history behind it.

Do you remember when we started this study on Ephesians, we spent a little bit of time talking about how so many words of the New Testament are deliberately chosen because of what was promised and foreshadowed in the Old Covenant. For instance, the word “blessings” that Paul mentions in Ephesians chapter one. Ephesians 1:3 says that God “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ”. That’s a great verse, but what is a blessing? That word is used in direct relation to and fulfillment of the “blessings” that God promised Abraham in the book of Genesis. More than that, it is the spiritual fulfillment and reality of the blessings Moses describes in Deuteronomy for those who will possess the land and walk in covenant with God.

If you do not know the word “blessing” in view of the incredible history of that word as its used in the Old Covenant, then there is no way to really understand what Paul is doing in Ephesians 1:3. In this verse Paul is gathering up the blessings promised under the Old Covenant and saying that they are not natural, but rather spiritual. They are not on the earth, but rather in the heavens. They are not under Moses, but rather IN Christ. There is so much going on here that we will miss if our natural mind defines the word “blessing” apart from the testimony. We’re so quick to define “blessing” according to what we want in the flesh rather than what God promised in the Spirit.

Well, its that way with every spiritual term. Jesus says “I am the door”. You don’t get to define “door”. “Door” comes to you already defined through the story of the Exodus, the door at the tent of meeting, and the door of the tabernacle. Its not yours to define, its yours to realize as the Spirit teaches you Christ.

And it’s the same way with the word “captivity”. Whether we’ve realized it or not, there is an enormous chunk of the Old Testament that is taken up with the “captivity” of Israel. The word itself appears around 250 times. But the reality of this captivity is one of the, if not THE, central issue of not only 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings and 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles, but all of the major prophets, and most of the minor ones as well. That’s hundreds of pages in your Bible. That’s a really big deal. And the big deal, of course, is not the natural event of the Assyrian or Babylonian captivity of Israel, but the spiritual reality to which it points. **God had a lot to say about Himself, His judgment, and His salvation, through the story of Israel’s captivity.**

You might have guessed already that it speaks of some reality of God’s eternal purpose through Christ crucified. It speaks of the death of Christ and the glory that came forth in the resurrection. That’s always a good guess if you’re not sure what’s being pointed to. Peter gives you a massive hint about this when he said

**1Pe 1:10** Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you, **:11** searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the **sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow**.

If you're ever wondering what a prophet is talking about, its generally a safe bet that it ultimately speaks in some way of the "sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow".

Anyway, I remember very clearly one night laying in my bed reading Isaiah and Jeremiah. I have spent quite a bit of time reading these two prophetic books over the years. Especially Isaiah. I would guess that I spent a few hundred hours, about a decade ago, studying the book of Isaiah...with my carnal mind. And that is obviously not a boast. That is actually an amazing statement about the thickness of the veil that lies over the heart. Time is not enough to penetrate it. And somehow in all of those hours I managed to see absolutely nothing of the primary thing the Spirit of God was using Isaiah to describe. I learned words, and attached my own concepts, events, and blindness to them.

But one night, maybe a year or so ago, I was laying in bed and I was re-visiting Isaiah and Jeremiah after quite a long time. And as I read the constant references to the judgment of Israel through captivity and their eventual return to the Land, it began to speak loudly to me of the cross. The judgment, captivity, and restoration of Israel clearly and intentionally paralleled the death, burial, and resurrection of the true Israel of God. I mean it was like the Lord turned on a light that changed the color of the entire book.

And so I thought I'd share something of that right now because of its relevance to this verse. I suppose I could have just said that the "captives" there being led into the heavens, ascending with the king of glory, are the ones who have been joined to Him in resurrection. I could have just left it at that. But since there is SO much of your Bible that describes this reality through the captivity of Israel, I figured it might be helpful for me to share more. And if you can see this, it will make reading the prophets an absolutely joy. Its no longer strange language just describing historical events. These men writing 3000 years ago, spoke of something that is a current reality and experience of our souls.

Many of you know some of the history involved here, but I'll just review for a minute. David defeated all of the enemies in the land, and prepared the way for His Son to build that temple of the Lord. There is so much that could be said just about that statement, but we'll move along. Solomon, for about 40 years, reigned in wisdom and peace and truth without any adversity, with the kingdom and priesthood in full glory. His son Rehoboam, however, made some serious leadership mistakes and ended up causing the kingdom to split. Ten tribes went one way under the leadership of a man named Jeroboam, and they were known collectively as Israel. Two tribes (Benjamin and Judah) went another way under the leadership of Rehoboam and were known as Judah.

These two kingdoms shared the land for several hundred years, one in the north, the other in the south. They had a few good kings over the years, but most of the time they were wicked and idolatrous and did whatever was right in their own eyes. Overall, Judah clung a little closer to the covenant than Israel. But they both had

some serious rebellion issues. Because of this, God began to speak to them about a judgment. Much like with the flood of Noah, but this time giving us an even greater picture of the cross, God began to talk about the necessity for a colossal judgment.

And so He began sending them guys like Isaiah and Jeremiah that proclaimed to them a coming judgment. And the judgment was going to be total destruction to most, but captivity and restoration to a few. The northern ten tribes were conquered and taken captive by the Assyrians, never to return again. A century later, Judah also was conquered and massacred by the Babylonians and many were taken captive. This is the captivity. And many of these captives, at the appointed time, were gathered, brought back, and restored. And this few is called the remnant.

But before the judgment that came at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar and the captivity to follow, the prophets came and announced the coming death and destruction. The people were told, in a manner of speaking, that they must fall on the rock and be broken or the rock would fall on them and ground them to powder. Actually, that is what Jesus said when He was fulfilling all of this. But the Israelites were basically told the same thing. Accept this judgment, go with it, bow to it, or you will be destroyed. **Receive this judgment as from my hand, as from my servant, and I will raise you up out of it.** Otherwise, you have no hope. This was the message the prophets brought. Can you see the judgment of the cross in that?

Be judged in the body of Christ or be judged on your own, either way you are coming to judgment. Be judged in the blood of the Lamb painted over your door, or be judged as those in the land of Egypt, either way death is coming. Be crucified with Christ, lose your life, and find His...or live in the imagination so of the natural mind until all is destroyed. This was the proclamation of the prophets prior to the captivity. And it was rejected and by the people then just as it is rejected by people today. It was twisted and changed and replaced for a message of safety and security, rather than judgment, by the Israelites. False prophets ran through the land proclaiming safety and peace and comfort from God. They preached reconciliation without judgment. They preached freedom without death. They proclaimed how happy God was with his people, and that he accepted them as they were and with what they were doing.

I cannot help but see a parallel in this with how we preach the cross today. We preach a gospel of life without mentioning the reality of our death. We preach reconciliation to God without comprehending the judgment of the adamic man. We talk about how much God loves us and is pleased with us and is pursuing us without proclaiming the fact that all of that is through our death with Christ, the loss of ourselves, and the filling of the soul with His Son. We preach a syrupy sweet, romanticized, gospel that has no blood, no judgment, no captivity. And so we try to live for Him and live with Him even though we have refused the fellowship of His sufferings, and being conformed to His death. We preach good news, but don't mention the way that God provided. "Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in yourself". **The prophets of old were stoned for describing the judgment that led to life. Christ was crucified for offering a death as the doorway to life. The apostles were persecuted and killed for proclaiming a Messiah that brought the entire first man to death in order to resurrect, in Himself, the kingdom of God.**

*Jer 43:10 and say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Behold, I will send and bring Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant,*

*Jer 27:8 And it shall be, that the nation and kingdom which will not serve Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and which will not put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation I will punish,' says the LORD, 'with the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand."*

*Jer 27:12 I also spoke to Zedekiah king of Judah according to all these words, saying, "Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live!*

But for the few that would submit their neck to this judgment, they would come out of this death onto resurrection ground. The great return to the land is a picture, in every conceivable way, of a people "made alive with Him, raised with Him, and seated with Him in heavenly places". This isn't just getting their stuff back. This isn't just going back to where they came from. The words that are used to describe this "restoration" to Israel, restoration to covenant, restoration to purpose...the words do not allow you to see the fulfillment in any natural event itself. This is Christ, the captain of salvation, taken the captive ones captive in Himself, and bringing them back to His Father. This is Christ, "taking captivity captive" and ascending on high – back to where HE came from. Back to what He saw from the beginning. Can you hear what I'm saying?

This restoration is God's proclamation of resurrection. You just can't read the prophets and think this is speaking of any natural event. Yes, Israel was restored. Yes, they went back to their natural land. Yes, they rebuilt the temple. Yes, as always, there is the natural people and events that proclaim the spiritual reality. That is what a type and shadow is.

But in these prophecies we read of the redeemed of the Lord walking out of captivity on the "highway of holiness". We read of a people returning to "Zion" (which is the spiritual counterpart of Jerusalem) with everlasting joy. They are called the "ransomed of the Lord". We read of the two tribes of Judah brought together with the 10 tribes of Israel into an eternal kingdom, where David is their shepherd. But in the natural, the 10 tribes of Israel were never restored and David is long dead. This speaks of Jew and Gentile becoming one new man as described in Ephesians 2 and coming to the true Shepherd of their souls. We read of a people cleansed of sin, cleansed of idols, walking in God's truth, judgments, way. We read of God dwelling in the midst of His people forever.

Let me just read a few excerpts and listen to how the prophets describe the restoration of the captives. I'll read one section from Isaiah, one from Jeremiah, and one from Ezekiel, just to give you some samples. But we could literally stop here and read for hours about the captivity and restoration.

Speaking of God making a highway out of captivity, Isaiah writes:

***Isa 35:8*** *A highway shall be there, and a road, And it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, But it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, Shall not go astray. 9 No lion shall be*

*there, Nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it; It shall not be found there. But the redeemed shall walk there, **10** And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, And come to Zion with singing, With everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

Ezekiel writes:

**Eze 37:21** *"Then say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; **22** and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again. **23** They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. Then they shall be My people, and I will be their God. **24** "David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them... and My servant David shall be their prince forever. **26** Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. **27** My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. **28** The nations also will know that I, the LORD, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore." ' "*

And Jeremiah says:

**Jer 30:3** *For behold, the days are coming,' says the LORD, 'that I will bring back from captivity My people Israel and Judah,' says the LORD. 'And I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.' " **8** 'For it shall come to pass in that day,' Says the LORD of hosts, 'That I will break his yoke from your neck, And will burst your bonds; Foreigners shall no more enslave them. **9** But they shall serve the LORD their God, And David their king, Whom I will raise up for them. **10** 'Therefore do not fear, O My servant Jacob,' says the LORD, 'Nor be dismayed, O Israel; For behold, I will save you from afar, And your seed from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return, have rest and be quiet, And no one shall make him afraid. **12** "For thus says the LORD: 'Your affliction is incurable, Your wound is severe. **13** There is no one to plead your cause, ....I have wounded you with the wound of an enemy, With the chastisement of a cruel one, For the multitude of your iniquities, Because your sins have increased. I have done these things to you.*

**Jer 33:7** *And I will cause the captives of Judah and the captives of Israel to return, and will rebuild those places as at the first. **8** I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned and by which they have transgressed against Me. **9** Then it shall be to Me a name of joy, a praise, and an honor before all nations of the earth, who shall hear all the good that I do to them; they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and all the prosperity that I provide for it.' **14** 'Behold, the days are coming,' says the LORD, 'that I will perform that good thing which I have promised to the house of Israel and to*

*the house of Judah: **15** 'In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David A Branch of righteousness; He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. **16** In those days Judah will be saved, And Jerusalem will dwell safely. And this is the name by which she will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.'*

I realize that was a lot to read, but it is so important to realize the big picture behind God's historical dealings with Israel, and it is also so incredibly pertinent to this Scripture in Ephesians 4. Paul isn't pulling this "captivity" language out of his hat. This isn't an analogy that he's coming up with off the cuff. This is the language of hundreds of Scriptures along with hundreds of years of God's dealing with his people in covenant. When Paul speaks of Christ taking a people captive unto Himself and ascending with them, he is proclaiming in the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus the fulfillment and realization of the judgment, captivity, and restoration of Israel. Death, burial, and resurrection.

This is a restoration where now Christ is all and in all. As Paul says in the very next verse, He ascended that He might "fill all things". But we'll continue with this next week.