

# 'Ascended far above all the heavens': Rhetorical functioning of Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8–10?

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The letter to the Ephesians employs various communicative strategies in responding to the rhetorical situation of its implied recipients. Focusing on the recipients' new identity and ethos ἐν Χριστῷ [in Christ], the text emphasises supernatural elements such as resurrection, ascension, heavenly places, revealed mystery, Spirit and power. At the same time, it adopts a rich mosaic of traditional materials, inter alia echoing the Hebrew Scriptures, Hellenistic traditions and early-Christian liturgical traditions. This article explores the dynamic yet complex intertextual fusion and reappropriation of (mainly Jewish) traditions in Ephesians as the author's experience and understanding of the ascended Christ. Special attention is given to the probable functioning of Psalm 68:18 (LXX 67:19) in Ephesians 4:1–16. In conclusion, the essay investigates the intended rhetorical effect of material from the Hebrew Scriptures in the letter – as construction of Christian identity in continuation with the story of Israel and from within the context of Empire.

## Structural coherence in Ephesians

Scholarship on the Ephesians letter over the past decades reveals a growing awareness of its high degree of intertextuality. This article focuses on probable references in Ephesians to the Hebrew Scriptures and on how they might have served as warrant for the authority of Christ and the unity of the church.

At the centre of the extended prayer in the first main section of Ephesians (1:3–3:21) is the pivotal faith confession of 1:22–23 – a summary and conclusion of what God has done ἐν Χριστῷ [in Christ] (cf. Roberts 1991:56–60).<sup>1</sup> The confession deals with two closely related matters. The first is the exalted position of Jesus as resurrected and sovereign lord and his significance as God's gift of salvation to the believers (καὶ αὐτὸν ἔδωκεν κεφαλὴν ὑπὲρ πάντα τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ [and has made him {literally 'gave him to be'} the head over all things for the church] – 1:22).<sup>2</sup> The second aspect defines the first in a profound way: In the context of Ephesians, Christ's power and honour is decisively yet paradoxically defined in terms of his sacrificial love, humility and care as servant (1:7; 2:13, 16; 4:32; 5:2, 25, 29). This position is characterised particularly by the memory of his death on a cross, his resurrection and his ascension.<sup>3</sup> This theme is confirmed in the author's

1. Generally, Ephesians is divided into four major sections: the opening (1:1–2), a first and second main section (1:3–3:21 and 4:1–6:20, respectively), and the ending (6:21–24; cf. Mouton 2003:63–66). The eulogy of 1:3–14 announces the thrust of the first main section as a celebration of God's gracious blessings towards all people ἐν Χριστῷ [in Christ]. It contains various elements such as utterances of praise, thanksgiving, intercessory prayers and confessions of faith. These elements express the doxological appeal to praise God, followed by the reasons why God has to be praised.

2. Greek references are to the 27th edition of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (1983) and the LXX Septuaginta (1935), and English references are to the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (1989).

3. Two factors accomplish a linking of the experience of Christ to the identity of the believers. Firstly, the images of κεφαλὴ [head] (1:10; 4:15–16; 5:23, 29–30), σῶμα [body] (4:12–16; 5:29–30) and πληρωμα [fullness] (3:19; 4:13; 5:18) in 1:22–23 stress the close and inseparable relationship between God's people and Christ. As head, Christ incorporated all who belong to him into his one body (his fullness) when he accomplished their salvation. What has happened to him has happened to them. When he was raised from the dead, they were raised with him. When he was seated at God's right hand, they were seated with him (2:4–6). The structure of 2:6 is syntactically parallel to that of 1:20, which is of major rhetorical significance (cf. the two aorist indicatives, συνέγειρεν [raised up with] and συνεκάθισεν [seated with], in 2:6 and the two aorist participles, ἐγειρας [raising] and καθίσας [seating], in 1:20). The second factor is the symbol of the cross. Within the Mediterranean sociological world of the 1st century, death on a cross was considered an extremely shameful event (cf. Meeks 1993:14–15, 61–65, 131–35). In Ephesians, this symbol is reinterpreted and becomes, through Christ's resurrection and ascension, an honourable deed for the benefit of those who adhere to him by faith. It is particularly in the radical and overwhelming experience of the resurrection power of Jesus as the crucified messiah that the origins of Christianity and the New Testament writings have to be sought (Johnson 1999:95–122; cf. Mouton 2006:57–60). Although the concept of resurrection after death was a popular theme in Greek and other mythological narratives (cf. Van Eck 2004:564–565), the resurrection of a crucified messiah – and especially the life-changing effects of Jesus' resurrection – seems to have been shockingly and surprisingly new to the Mediterranean symbolic world. Because the resurrection faith of the early Jesus followers was rooted in paradox, it created an urgent need for interpretation. Continuous experiences of God's life-giving Spirit in the present – in diverse and changing social contexts – would constantly challenge them to (re)interpret inherited traditions and to (re)imagine the future. The living, collective memory of Jesus' life, death and exaltation would thus be intertwined inextricably with the construction of their identity and ethos as a community. Any interpretation, including the interpretation of religious experience, obviously happens in the light of available symbols. This would also be the case with the author and early recipients of the Ephesians letter. They were forced to interpret new experiences and changing circumstances in the light of a pluralistic 1st-century Mediterranean symbolic world, constituted by diverse and complex combinations of inter alia Roman rule, Greco-Roman (specifically Hellenistic) culture and the religious symbols of Judaism (the Torah, prophets and 'writings'). In the process, they did not so much invent a new language but rather reinterpreted, rearranged and reappropriated available symbols and traditions, particularly from within the symbolic world of Torah (cf. Johnson 1999:5, 35–38). For those participants in the Judeo-Christian story – both in the Jewish scriptures and the New Testament (NT) – the cult, its festivals and specifically its liturgy provided the interpretive space, the frame of reference, the horizons for a reality within which they collectively expressed and cultivated their vision of and trust in a living God. Through rituals of public worship, they were constantly reminded of, and affirmed by, who God is and what God had done in the past.

reference to Psalm 68 in 4:8–10, emphasising Christ as conquering cosmic lord ascending to his heavenly throne from where he blesses his people.

The second main section of the letter (4:1–6:20) consists primarily of paraenetic elements directed at the church. These are interwoven with theological and Christological motivations and intrinsically linked to and informed by the first main section. The admonitions in this section are motivated by the indicatives of God's redemptive work ἐν Χριστῷ [in Christ], which God had already given to the church. The essence of Ephesians 1–3 (a new humanity in relationship to Christ and fellow-believers) is thus explicated in terms of its practical implications (Eph 4–6): They should 'walk' in unity (4:1–16), holiness (4:17–32), love (5:1–6), light (5:7–14) and wisdom (5:15–6:9).<sup>4</sup>

The first pericope (4:1–6) links the two main sections of the letter by introducing the central theme of the second main section, namely a life worthy of the calling (identity, character) they had received from God: Παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς ἐγὼ ὁ δέσμιος ἐν κυρίῳ ἀξίως περιπατήσαι τῆς κλήσεως ἧς ἐκλήθητε [I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called] (4:1).<sup>5</sup> The very first practical admonitions lead to a rhetorical accumulation of the words 'one' (εἷς, μιᾶ, ἓν) in 4:4–6 whereby the unity of Christians is stressed as a dominant theme in Ephesians. The new life, characterised by a real sense of the triumphant lord's presence (3:14–19; 4:6, 10), is represented by the enlightening work of God's Spirit (1:17; 4:3–4, 30; 5:17–18; 6:17–18) and the unity of the body of Christ (4:1–16). In 4:7–16, Christ's ascension is explicitly associated with the purpose to fill all things with his presence (ἵνα πληρώσῃ τὰ πάντα [so that he might fill all things] – 4:10; cf. 1:22–23; 2:19, 22; Lincoln 1981:155–163). In order to guide the church towards the full experience of God's presence, God provided Christ as a gift to the church (1:22), grace to each believer according to the measure of Christ's gift (4:7), together with the gifts of gifted people – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (4:11–16).

## Traditional material in Ephesians

When one compares the Ephesians text to contemporary inter- and extra-biblical texts, its high degree of intertextuality becomes obvious. Together with numerous metaphors, the author integrated several traditional motifs (as extended metaphors) into the document to support his understanding of the Christian narrative (Mouton 2002:75–83). I shall

4.Cf. Meeks (1993:95, 150–173), Mouton (2002:190, n. 48), Thielman (2007:819).

5.They are called to be 'completely *humble and gentle*' (μετὰ πάσης ταπεινοφροσύνης καὶ πραΰτητος [with all humility and gentleness]). For the significance of these 'peculiarly un-Greek' imperatives, see Barth (1974b:457–462), Lincoln (1990:234–237) and Wessels (1990b:70–72). They should be *patient* 'bearing with one another in love, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace' (4:2–3 – μετὰ μακροθυμίας, ἀνεχόμενοι ἀλλήλων ἐν ἀγάπῃ, σπουδάζοντες τηρεῖν τὴν ἐνότητα τοῦ πνεύματος ἐν τῷ συνδέσμῳ τῆς εἰρήνης). They should be 'kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you' (4:32 – γίνεσθε [δὲ] εἰς ἀλλήλους χρηστοί, εὐσπλαγχνοί, χαρίζομενοι ἑαυτοῖς καθὼς καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἐν Χριστῷ ἔχαρισται ὑμῖν). They should live a life of love, 'just as Christ loves you and gave himself up for you' (5:2; 4:2). In sum, they were to 'put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness' (4:24 – καὶ ἐνδύσασθαι τὸν καινὸν ἄνθρωπον τὸν κατὰ θεὸν κτισθέντα ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ καὶ ὁσιότητι τῆς ἀληθείας).

briefly *identify* probable traditional material in Ephesians, then discuss the dynamic *reference* and *orientation* of some of these traditions and finally deal with probable persuasive strategies underlying their appropriation in the letter.

Metaphors and traditions as metaphorical expressions are important elements of rhetorical persuasion in communication as a whole. By identifying a document's metaphors and traditional material, I believe, one can to a large extent construct the implied author's view of the recipients' moral world as well as the alternative she or he wished to communicate. With regards to the New Testament, the Christ event was to intensify and reconfigure previous experiences and interpretations of the God of the Hebrew Scriptures. It would challenge the early (and later) Jesus followers radically to revise their everyday lives from within a faith relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ and the Spirit.<sup>6</sup>

Scholarship on Ephesians over the past decades – especially Barth (1974a, 1974b, 1984), Dahl (1965), Gombis (2004, 2005, 2010), Harris III (1996), Käsemann (1966), Lincoln (1982, 1990), Roberts (1963, 1991), Roetzel (1983), Sampley (1971, 1972), Schlier (1957) – has been dominated by a growing awareness that Ephesians probably has to be understood against the background of a mosaic of traditional materials.<sup>7</sup> Although quotations with introductory formulae are used only twice in Ephesians (4:8; 5:14), unmarked quotations, which probably stem from oral and written, hymnic and prose, liturgical and ethical and perhaps mystical and proverbial traditions, abound in the letter (Barth 1984:3; Hendrix 1988).<sup>8</sup>

Apart from a variety of traditions from the Hebrew Bible, it is possible that the Ephesians author employed motifs from the cultic language of Qumran, the Hellenistic moral world and early Christian material (Mouton 2002:96–107). Since the influence at the beginning of the 20th century of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, which became notorious for its employment of sometimes remote parallels as direct influence between the NT and different traditions, the contribution of scholars such as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

6.A remarkable ability of human imagination is to *re-describe* reality, to *rename* experiences, to *retell* stories from new angles. This refers to the human capacity to speak *metaphorically* – to see new possibilities and to make new connections between known images and experiences (Lategan 1994:21). According to Ricoeur (1975, 1976:89–95), the transformative (referential, authoritative, life-giving) power of a text lies in its ability to *suggest*, to *open up*, to *mediate*, to *make possible* (glimpses of) a 'proposed world' which readers might adopt or inhabit, an *alternative point of view with which they can identify*. In this way, a text may disclose new possibilities – new ways of looking at things, new ways of relating to people, new ways of thinking and behaving. Metaphorical language typically permeates the NT writings. Literary devices such as *genre* (narrative, parable, poetry, apocalyptic symbols), liturgy, tradition and even people all function rhetorically as instruments for *re-describing* reality from new perspectives. The early Christians had to *reimagine* and *rename* their understanding of God and their (ordinary) life experiences from the new perspective of the Christ event. NT metaphors and traditional material thus serve as 'windows' (albeit hazy) through which the processes of identification, estrangement and reorientation – typical of the image-making capacity of the human mind – can be viewed (cf. Mouton 2002:32–40).

7.For a list of passages in Ephesians that quote, allude to, or echo ideas that closely parallel the Old Testament (OT) and/or some non-canonical writings, see Evans (1992:207–208).

8.This viewpoint began to replace the well-known hypothesis of the American Baptist scholar Edgar J. Goodspeed which, to a large extent, dominated the interpretation of Ephesians since the early 1930s. Goodspeed maintained that the document was best understood as an introduction to, or a covering letter for, a newly formed collection of Paul's letters which had been provoked by a reading of Acts. As such, Ephesians was not considered as having much creativity and individuality of its own (Lincoln 1990:lxix; Sampley 1972:101).

(1976; cf. Smith 1989:207–208) is to be welcomed. She finds it methodologically inadequate and misleading to define the relationship between, for instance, the Qumran and New Testament writings *only* by means of parallels and similarities pertaining to the history of religions: ‘What is necessary is to search for the concrete situation and theological motives that in each community led to the transference of cultic language’ (Schüssler Fiorenza 1976:161).

In the end, it would be of vital importance to find a responsible way by which ongoing processes of identification, estrangement and reorientation underlying the document can be appreciated and by which the (re)appropriation of traditions as a persuading strategy in the fortification of the implied recipients’ identity awareness and ethos can be viewed.

## Echoes from the Hebrew Scriptures

The functioning of the Hebrew Scriptures in the New Testament remains a challenging area in the field of hermeneutics, inter alia due to the complex (mainly typological and allegorical) methods of exegesis used by the New Testament and other 1st-century authors.<sup>9</sup>

When the Ephesians text is compared to its intertextual canonical context, remarkable echoes with traditional Jewish material occur. A first example is the unique doxological formula Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ] at the beginning of the letter (1:3). In the Hebrew Bible, this expression consistently refers to ‘the God of Israel’ (Gn 24:27; 1 Ki 8:15, 56; Ps 111:1–10; 145:1–21). In Ephesians, it is profoundly reinterpreted as referring to ‘the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (cf. Roberts 1983:96–98). Probable references to *enthronement psalms* further occur in 1:20–22 (Ps 110:1 in Eph 1:20 and Ps 8:6 in Eph 1:22a), strengthening the notion of Christ’s ultimate authority and power as cosmic lord (Lincoln 1982:40–42, 1990:61–65; Roberts 1991:53–55). It is also generally accepted that the classic structure of the Jewish *berakah* prayers (the great benediction as a form of traditional Jewish worship) can almost inevitably be discerned as the basic form represented in chapters 1–3 (Barth 1984:6–8; Johnson 1999:58–62, 414–416; Roberts 1991:15, 31–34).<sup>10</sup>

Apart from individual instances of Hebrew Bible motifs,<sup>11</sup> the overall study of the particular functioning of Old-Testament

9. The Hebrew Scriptures, or *Tanakh* (the Christian Old Testament), did not take final canonical form until near the beginning of the second century after Christ ... The Greek Scriptures (the Christian New Testament) were a selection of early church writings which received canonical sanction in the fourth century after Christ. Until that time, varied collections of these writings, together with Hebrew Scriptures, were used as Christian Scriptures’ (Birch & Rasmussen 1989:31; cf. Du Toit 1989:171–272; Johnson 1999:595–603).

10. The Jewish *berakah* is a popular prayer form in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Gn 24:27; Ps 103–106; 111; 117–118; 135–136; 138; 144; 145; 149; 150; Roberts 1991:32–33). Fundamentally, the *berakah* was an act of remembrance where God was to be praised for the way he had worked in the past (cf. Schnackenburg 1991:45–47). It is adopted in Ephesians and reinterpreted in terms of a Christological content. The act of remembering was at the same time an act of ‘dismembering’ or disorientation because of the way in which previous traditions such as election, covenant, law and temple with its dividing wall had to be reinterpreted in the light of the Christ event (1:4; 2:11–18; 4:7–10).

11. For detailed discussions on the possible influence of other OT motifs – particularly that of kingship, peace, the Spirit of God and major elements from Jewish domestic codes – see Barth (1984:3–8), Lincoln (1982:25–43, 1990:224–269) and Sampley (1972:101–109).

material and later Jewish traditions in this letter – in contrast to Christian traditions, particularly from the Pauline writings – has however for long remained a relatively neglected aspect.<sup>12</sup> Amongst possible reasons why the Hebrew Bible has not attracted much scholarly attention with regard to the religious background of Ephesians is the relatively small number of direct Old-Testament citations in the document as well as the focus that has often been directed towards either an early form of *Gnosticism* (Dahl 1965; Käsemann 1966; Schlier 1957:19, n.1) or cultic language from *Qumran* (Sampley 1972:101–102). The widespread assumption that the author’s audience was predominantly Greek or Hellenistic has also frequently contributed to the notion that Jewish traditions are of no consequence in the interpretation of the document (Sampley 1972:102).

These notions were fundamentally challenged by scholars such as Lincoln (1982, 1990) and Barth (1984), who, amongst others, have dealt in comprehensive ways with questions pertaining to the functioning of the Hebrew Scriptures in Ephesians.<sup>13</sup> Allusions to Jewish motifs in the letter may serve as significant structural markers pointing towards its dynamic thrust and persuasive strategies as well as its rhetorical situation.

I shall briefly analyse the adoption of material from Psalm 68 in Ephesians 4:8–10, illustrating some of the difficulties involved in a traditio-historical reading of the letter as well as the rich yet complex communication processes underlying it.

## Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:7–16?

Of all possible usages of the Hebrew Scriptures in Ephesians, 4:8 is the only citation which is accompanied by an introductory formula (διὸ λέγει [therefore he says]), designating the authority of the quoted words (Lincoln 1982:18, 1990:242). As such, it has to a large extent been the focus of attention as far as the role of OT traditions in Ephesians is concerned. At the same time, it has proven to be one of the most difficult interpretive problems in the

12. Amongst the few scholars who have devoted focus or extended discussion to this topic are Barth (1974a:27–31, 1984), Dahl (1965), Harris (1996), Gombis (2004, 2005), Käsemann (1966), Lindemann (1975), Lincoln (1982, 1990), Sampley (1971, 1972) and Schlier (1957). The findings of these scholars on the functioning of OT sources in Ephesians sometimes vary considerably. Sampley, for instance, makes fairly extensive claims about the OT’s role in Ephesians whilst Lindemann considers its significance to be fairly minimal.

13. Lincoln focuses on what he sees as the most significant ‘actual’ quotations from the OT in Ephesians, namely the use of Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:7–13; Is 57:19 in Ephesians 2:17; Genesis 2:14 in Ephesians 5:31, 32; Exodus 20:12 in Ephesians 6:2, 3; Psalm 110:1 and 8:6 in Ephesians 1:20, 22; Zachariah 8:16 in Ephesians 4:25; Psalm 4:4 in Ephesians 4:26; Proverbs 23:31 in Ephesians 5:18 and Isaiah 11:4, 5; 52:7; 59:17 in Ephesians 6:14–17. In the first four instances, OT passages are not only cited but also discussed and unfolded by hermeneutic comments (Barth 1984:3–4). Earlier, Lincoln (1973, 1981:135–168) did useful research on the Hebrew Bible and Jewish concept of ‘the heavens’, which often recurs in Ephesians. In several publications, Roberts has explored the OT background of ‘temple’ and ‘building’ imagery in Ephesians (cf. Roberts 1963:18–19, 22–30, 1991:76–83). To this can probably be added the artistic combination of elements from Ezekiel 16:1–8 and the Song of Songs in Ephesians 5:25–27 as well as allusions to OT imagery like the ‘cornerstone’ in 2:20 (cf. Is 28:16), sacrificial imagery in 5:2 (cf. Ps 40:6; Gn 8:21; Ex 29:18, 25, 41) and the general theological influence of essential OT themes such as *election*, *salvation* and *the people of God*. When shorter allusions are included, Barth (1984:4) indicates that ‘about 17 references to the Pentateuch (especially to Exodus and Deuteronomy), 30 to prophetic books (almost half of these to Deutero-Isaiah), 11 to the Psalms and 10 to the (partly apocryphal) Wisdom books can be counted’. To these, he adds references to ‘the Christ’ (the Messiah), his sacrificial death, the temple, circumcision and the use of terms such as peace, grace, fear and secret (or mystery), which, according to him, all presuppose a pre-given significance.

letter (Gombis 2005). I briefly deal with various attempts to interpret the context of the Psalm 68 quotation in Ephesians 4 as well as its probable rhetorical function in the letter.

After the Ephesians author has stressed the maintaining of the unity of the Spirit in the pivotal first sentence of the second main section (4:1–6), he introduces the diversity of gifts to individuals (or gifted individuals) by Christ in 4:7 and 11. Directly following onto verse 7, as an opening witness to the utterances in 4:7–16, he quotes and interprets a piece of traditional material from Psalm 68:18 (MT 68:19; LXX 67:19) in rhetorical support of his paraenesis:

διὸ λέγει, Ἀναβάς εἰς ὕψος ἠχμαλώτευσεν αἰχμαλωσίαν, ἔδωκεν δόματα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις. (τὸ δὲ Ἀνάβη τί ἐστὶν εἰ μὴ ὅτι καὶ κατέβη εἰς τὰ κατώτερα [μέρη] τῆς γῆς; ὁ καταβάς αὐτός ἐστιν καὶ ὁ ἀναβάς ὑπεράνω πάντων τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἵνα πληρώσῃ τὰ πάντα) – 4:8–10.  
[Therefore it is said, 'When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people. (When it says, 'He ascended', what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.)']

Various attempts have been made, albeit with differing emphases, to find a plausible explanation for the author's reference to Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8 and its explanation in verses 9–10 (cf. Barth 1974b, 1984; Floor & Viljoen 2003; Gombis 2005; Harris III 1996; Lincoln 1982, 1990; Smith 1975; Thielman 2007). A major challenge is posed by the dramatic way in which the Ephesians author modified the Masoretic text (MT) of Psalm 68:19/LXX 67:19 in Ephesians 4:8. Firstly, he seems to have changed the MT/LXX reading ἀνάβης [you ascended] to the participle Ἀναβάς [having ascended]. Secondly, he changed the MT/LXX reading from ἠχμαλώτευσας [you captured] to ἠχμαλώτευσεν [he captured].<sup>14</sup> Thirdly, and most significantly, he changed the MT/LXX reading ἔλαβες δόματα ἐν ἀνθρώπῳ [you received gifts amongst/from humanity] to ἔδωκεν δόματα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις [he gave gifts to human beings].<sup>15</sup> These changes have been regarded by some scholars as so radical that they almost reverse the meaning of the original text (cf. Gombis 2005:367, with reference to C.L. Mitton; Thielman 2007:822).

To understand the *midrash* following the citation from Psalm 68 in Ephesians 4:8–10, the interpretation of the 'descent' mentioned in these verses is of vital importance. Textual criticism has shown that a variant reading exists in several manuscripts regarding the temporal relationship between the ascent and descent. This variant suggests that the sequence of the ascent and descent in the original could be taken either way (cf. Harris III 1996:32–45; Nestle-Aland [1979] 1983:509).

14. For variant readings in Codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus regarding these two points, see Thielman (2007:822).

15. The third change would have been particularly pertinent in the honour-shame value system of the 1st-century Mediterranean world where *gift-giving* as social interaction 'outside one's family or outside one's circle of friends (was) perceived as a challenge to honor, a mutual attempt to acquire honor from one's social equal' (Malina & Neyrey 1991:29, also see 25–65). Descriptions of gift-giving between God and humanity (as social unequals) occur right through Ephesians. God's gracious and abundant blessings or gifts in and through Christ, the Spirit and gifted leaders serve to give *ascribed honour* to the community of believers. In response, they are invited to praise God (cf. Eph 1:3–14) through an ethos worthy of God's calling (Eph 4–6).

Lincoln (1982:21–25, 1990:244–248) discusses three major possibilities for the descent of Christ, namely a descent into Hades with a possible reference to his death, the descent to earth of the pre-existent Christ in his incarnation and a subsequent descent of the exalted Christ in the Spirit at Pentecost.<sup>16</sup>

I group various (recent) interpretive positions regarding the Ephesians author's use of Psalm 68 into two broad categories: (1) scholars viewing Psalm 68 as commemorating the giving of the law at Sinai, also during Jewish Pentecost celebrations, and the notion of 'descent' in Ephesians 4:9–10 as referring to Christ's descent in the Spirit at Pentecost, thereby contrasting it with and reconfiguring the descent of Moses from Mount Sinai; and (2) scholars reading the quotation of Psalm 68 in Ephesians 4 against the background of the (typically ancient Near-East) ideology of divine warfare. These positions inter alia depend on interpreters' syntactic and semantic choices regarding Ephesians 4:8–10, an understanding of the structure, context and rhetorical function of Psalm 68 as well as the contemporary Jewish exegetical technique of *midrash-pesher* according to which an OT text is interpreted (*pesher*) and supplied with commentary (*midrash*) in the citation itself (cf. Roberts 1991:117–119; Wessels 1990b:73).

For the purpose of my analysis, Lincoln serves as (nuanced) representative of the first interpretive position. This position is essentially supported by Lincoln's student, Harris III, who did a fine and detailed doctoral study on the descent of Christ according to Ephesians 4:7–11 and the traditional Hebrew imagery associated with it (Harris III 1996:64–197). Lincoln (1982:18, 1990:224–234) considers the key concept in the argument of Ephesians 4:7–13 to be that of *giving*, which, according to him, probably sparked off the citation from Psalm 68:18 in verse 8 and which enabled the *midrash* of 4:9–10 to follow naturally. Lincoln argues that the 'original force of Psalm 68:18 was in praise of Yahweh's deliverance of his people' with Yahweh pictured as triumphantly ascending Mount Zion (Lincoln 1982:19; cf. Ps 68:8, 16, 17; Schmidt 1983:207–220). References to gifts being presented to and by Yahweh recur in the psalm (68:18, 29, 31, 35).<sup>17</sup> According to

16. For a comprehensive attempt to trace the history of interpretation of Ephesians 4:7–11, see Harris (1996:1–45). Harris (1996:46–63) continues by providing necessary lexical and syntactical background related to the locus of Christ's descent in the passage.

17. For an overview of the outline and historical setting of Psalm 68 as well as its history of Jewish interpretation, see Thielman (2007:820–821). Despite the diverse range of times, places and topics covered in the psalm, it 'displays a coherent historical movement from God's past faithfulness to Israel to a future in which all the nations of the earth would worship him. At the center of the psalm, between the account of past victory and future hope, lies an affirmation of God's faithfulness in the present (68:19–20)'. In 68:17–18 the psalm reaches the climax of its historical review when it speaks of God as moving from Sinai into the sanctuary on Mount Zion' (Thielman 2007:820). To this, Thielman (2007:821) adds: 'With remarkable consistency, Jewish interpreters of Ps. 68:18 explained it as a reference to Moses' ascent to heaven to receive the Torah from God'. Another attempt at looking at the historical context of Psalm 68 in its canonical environment was undertaken by Smith (1975). He suggests its focal point to be the *song of praise* which was used after the Levites placed the ark in the inner sanctuary of Solomon's temple (2 Chr 5–6). Smith sees the captives whom God captured as the often rebellious *Israelites* (cf. Ps 68:5–6, 18b). More specifically, says Smith, these refer to the Levites who were taken 'as captives' from amongst the sons of Israel and separated from them (Nm 8:6, 14, 16, 18; 3:45; cf. Is 66:20–21). The purpose was 'that they might be able to perform the service of the Lord' (8:11) and 'to make atonement on behalf of the sons of Israel' (8:19) so that the Lord might dwell amongst them (cf. 2 Chr 7:19–20). Smith finds further support for this notion in Numbers 8:19a where the Levites are referred to as *gifts given* to Aaron (cf. 18:6). For Smith (1975:187), both captives and gifts in Psalm 68:18 thus refer to the Levites (cf. Kirby 1968:146). In his view, the author of Ephesians applied the thoughts of Numbers 8 and 18 through the words of Psalm 68:18 analogously, explaining the gifts given to the church by

Lincoln, it was probably these parallel notions of 'Yahweh's triumphant ascent' and the 'gifts' associated with it that interested the Ephesians author. Although the author does not explicitly develop the concept of 'leading captive a host of prisoners', it certainly fits his earlier depiction of Christ's exaltation over the powers in 1:21–22.

Lincoln (1982:19, 1990:243–244) describes the functioning of Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:7–16 as *contrasting* its use in rabbinical tradition where it could refer to an ascension to heaven by Moses: 'Ps. 68:18 was linked with Moses going up Sinai and interpreted as an ascent to heaven to receive not only the Torah but also other heavenly secrets' (cf. Schmidt 1983:38–52). The 'Moses mysticism' with which this interpretation is to be associated occurred quite frequently in (later) rabbinic writings (cf. Dahl & Juel 2000:1117; Harris III 1996:64–142; Thielman 2007:821–823). The Ephesians letter pictures Christ in a 'new Moses typology' as a link with the heavenly world which exceeds all previous parallels. Lincoln (1982; cf. 1981, 1990:61–65) comments:

Christ has ascended far above all heavens in order to fill all things (cf. v. 10). His gift is not the Torah but his grace (v. 7) nor are his various special gifts heavenly secrets for the enlightenment of a few but people whose ministries will build up the whole body (vv. 11 ff). (p. 20)

According to this view, the function of the reinterpreted citation is to underline the reality that it is the exalted Christ who is the *giver* of gifts and blessings to *all* members of his body (cf. Lincoln 1982:18).<sup>18</sup>

Apart from the connection between Psalm 68:18 and Ephesians, various scholars have gone further by indicating how Psalm 68 has often been associated with Jewish *Pentecost* celebrations during its history of interpretation (cf. Harris III 1996:143–170; Gombis 2005:368; Smith 1975:184; Yates 1977:518). Besides celebrating the harvest, Pentecost increasingly came to be regarded as 'the feast which commemorated the lawgiving at Sinai' (Lincoln 1982:20; cf. Harris III 1996:144–152, with reference to Caird). Lincoln (1990; cf. Yates 1977:519) finds substantial reason to believe that this association existed from the middle of the 2nd century BCE:

The *Book of Jubilees*, which is usually dated between 135 and 105 B.C.E., makes Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks the most important of the annual festivals in the Jewish liturgical year, associating it with the institution of the various covenants in Israel's history but above all with the covenant at Sinai. (p. 244)

(Footnote 17 continues ...)

using the example of the Levites who were given to Israel. However, to conclude that the gifts of Psalm 68:18 refer to the Levites seems to be risky. Whilst the idea of the Levites as 'gifts' to God is indeed present in Numbers 8, none of the Hebrew texts of that chapter indicates that the Levites were 'taken captive'. With reference to Albright and others, Smith (1975:184–187) connects the text of Psalm 68 with the time of David and the dedication of the temple during the time of Solomon. In that case, it is problematic to accept literary dependence on Numbers 8 or 18 since Numbers is nowadays considered mainly to be the result of the Priestly redaction, which would make it almost impossible to date these texts to the Solomonic period (cf. Deist 1990:201).

18. This tradition often appeals to the *Targum* Psalms (Aramaic paraphrase) where the concept of *receiving* has been changed to that of *giving* in a similar way as in Ephesians 4:8 (Gombis 2005:368; Harris 1996:96–104; Lincoln 1990:242–243; Smith 1975:182–183; Thielman 2007:821–823). Thielman (2007:823) remarks that this is the 'only unambiguous evidence of a Jewish exegetical tradition that actually replaces the verb "received" with the verb "gave"'. The Targumim on Psalms in their present form, however, come from the fourth and fifth centuries after Christ'. That they existed in the first century and influenced the author of Ephesians seems unlikely to him (cf. Smith 1975:189).

Together with other factors, the two central themes of the Christological interpretation of the citation in Ephesians 4 – the exaltation of Christ and his distribution of gifts – suggest *Pentecost* as a probable background to the psalm's use there.

For Lincoln (1982:24–5, 1990:247), this interpretation best fits the context as well as the probable background and associations of the psalm citation. For him, it maintains the central function of Christ's ascent and the giving of gifts (gifted leaders) in the passage. It seems natural that the Ephesians author, having dealt with the Spirit's unifying work in the body (4:3–4), should include the vital connecting link between Christ's gift via his ascent and the coming of the Spirit (cf. Lincoln 1982:23; Harris III 1996:143–197; Yates 1977:519; 1 Cor 12:4–13). Psalm 68 would thus no longer be viewed as a Jewish Pentecostal psalm concerning Moses but as 'a Christian Pentecostal psalm, celebrating the ascension of Christ and his subsequent descent at Pentecost to bestow spiritual gifts upon the church' (G.B. Caird, quoted by Lincoln 1982:23; cf. 1990:246–248). This implies an inseparable relationship between Christ and the Spirit, which is also reflected in Ephesians 1:13–14, 17; 3:16–17; 4:30 and 5:18.

To summarise this position, it may be said that, by means of a *pesher* quotation from Psalm 68:18 and a rabbinical type of *midrash* on the psalm citation, the Hebrew Bible has been *reinterpreted Christologically* and *Pneumatologically* in Ephesians 4:8–10 as the author found scriptural support for his statement about Christ's various gifts of grace to his people.

A second interpretive position opts for a different sequence of the ascent and descent in Ephesians 4:9–10 through understanding 'descent' as referring to the death of Christ *not* to the descent of Moses at Sinai or the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost (cf. Lincoln 1990:244–245). For the purpose of my analysis, Gombis serves as representative of this position. Gombis (2005) critiques the previous position by offering an alternative proposal for understanding the functioning of Psalm 68 in Ephesians 4. Although his thesis is not entirely novel, it provides yet another creative framework from which to appreciate the syntactic and semantic coherence of the letter.

Firstly, Gombis (2005:368–372) finds unconvincing various attempts to connect Psalm 68 and the Pentecost and Psalm 68 and the giving of the Spirit in Acts. With reference to several scholars, Harris III (1996) in particular, he argues why the ascent-descent imagery in Ephesians 4 cannot be viewed as contrasting Moses, who ascended Sinai and descended with the Torah, with Christ. Secondly, Gombis (2005:370) cautions against an identification of Christ and the Spirit: Even though their functions are related, they are not identical: 'Notions of identification and union in Ephesians apply to the relationship between Christ and the church'. Gombis (2005) substantiates his argument as follows:

That Christ himself remains in view throughout the entire discussion ... is indicated by ... the personal pronoun *αὐτός* [*himself*], which serves to emphasize that it is precisely the one

who descended who also ascended, that is, Christ, not the Spirit ... The focus here is on the ascended Christ and his giving gifts to the church ... The current status of Christ, according to Ephesians, also militates against this reading. Far from portraying Christ as having descended as the Spirit, the author depicts Christ as presently occupying the position of supreme Lord over the cosmos, the exalted place from which he gives χάρις [blessing] to his people. It goes against the flow of the context ... to have Christ descending back to earth, even as the Spirit, after he has ascended to his exalted position as cosmic Lord. (pp. 371–372)

Thirdly, Gombis (2005) states that:

... given the cosmic situation of the church throughout Ephesians ... it is extremely odd that the writer would designate the descent of Christ in the person of the Spirit to the church as descending εἰς τὰ κατώτερα [μέρη] τῆς γῆς [to the lower parts, that is, the earth]. (p. 372)

Gombis (2005:372–380) subsequently offers an alternative explanation for the functioning of Psalm 68 in Ephesians 4. Similar to Lincoln and others, he regards the discussion in Ephesians 4:7–10 as revolving around Christ giving gifts to the church (cf. recurring elements such as ἐδόθη [was given] and τῆς δωρεᾶς [of the gift] in v. 7, ἔδωκεν δόματα [he gave gifts] in v. 8 and ἔδωκεν [he gave] in v. 11). According to him, the author's passion is to explain *how* Christ has given ἡ χάρις [a gift or blessing] to the church. Rather than merely citing one verse from Psalm 68, Gombis argues that the Ephesians author had the narrative movement of the entire psalm in mind and particularly the imagery of divine warfare represented in it. By developing Christ's triumph over the hostile cosmic powers as a coherent framework for the interpretation of Ephesians 4:7–11, Gombis opposes the view of the author's use of ἔδωκεν [he gave] being a 'reversal' of meaning.

For Gombis (2005:373–379), the imagery of *divine warfare* in Psalm 68 provides the key to understanding the Ephesians author's aim in appropriating it in 4:7–11.<sup>19</sup> What the author aimed to capture is the imagery of the conquering Yahweh ascending to his heavenly throne from which he blesses his people. In Ephesians 4:8, the author 'depicts Christ as the triumphant Divine Warrior who, after he has ascended his throne, blesses his people with gifts' (Gombis 2005:373). Accordingly (Gombis 2005; cf. 2004; 2010:139–153), the author of Ephesians employs the ideology of divine warfare to defend the claim that Christ has been exalted as the victorious cosmic lord over the powers and authorities ruling the present evil age:

This ideological tool was used widely in the ancient Near East, as well as in the OT, in order to assert the supremacy of a nation's deity. The ideology of divine warfare followed a typical pattern: Respective deities engage in conflict, with the eventual victor being proclaimed supreme among the gods and then given the right to build a house/temple at which the people gather to celebrate the deity's ascendancy. This basic pattern can be seen throughout Ephesians, especially in Ephesians 2, which serves to vindicate the claim that Christ is exalted to cosmic supremacy

19. Also, Barth (1984:5) remarked that the psalm 'may have played a role in a Holy war and/or in an Enthronement Festival. Or it may have expressed the expectation of a glorious king' (cf. Old 1985).

over the powers and authorities by listing his triumphs over them (2:1–16), giving Christ the right to erect his temple as a monument to his supremacy (2:20–22). (p. 374)

In continuation with this view, Gombis interprets the reference to τὰ κατώτερα [μέρη] τῆς γῆς [the lower parts of the earth] in the elaboration of 4:9–11 as referring to the death of Christ. With reference to Mußner and others, he opts for this position 'in light of similar phraseology with reference to Hades, the abode of the dead' (Gombis 2005:376; Harris III 1996:1–14; cf. Lincoln 1990:244–245). Following his descent to the grave, Christ ascended to his throne ὑπεράνω πάντων τῶν οὐρανῶν [far above all the heavens] (4:10) as the victorious one. This interpretation finds confirmation in the death and resurrection motif in Ephesians 1:20–22, which also occurs elsewhere in the New Testament (cf. Phlp 2:6–11; Rv 5:9–13). The goal of Christ's exalted status (Eph 4:10) is his sovereign reign over the whole cosmos: ἵνα πληρώσῃ τὰ πάντα [in order that he might fill all things] (cf. 1:10). In this way, the Ephesians author elaborates on the nature and purpose of Christ's ascension. It is a victorious ascension, the triumphant procession of the conquering Warrior to his throne, giving Christ the authority to bless his people with gifts (Gombis 2005:379) and to dwell amongst them as his new household or temple (2:19–22; 3:17; 4:6).<sup>20</sup>

To summarise this position, it may be said that the Ephesians author had the entire Psalm 68 and its imagery of divine warfare in mind when he interpreted it Christologically in 4:7–11. Writing from within the Ephesians landscape of cosmic war and conflict, the author described the triumphant cosmic Christ ascending to his heavenly throne from where he blesses his people.

To conclude, it is clear that the Christological interpretation of Psalm 68 in Ephesians 4 leaves room for multiple hermeneutic choices, each with its own presuppositions, strengths and weaknesses. In my view, the two interpretive positions mentioned above are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Both provide an intelligible framework from where to interpret the descent-ascent imagery in Ephesians 4:8–10. Both would fit the overall context of the letter. Both could have served rhetorically to strengthen the author's appeal to unity in 4:1–6.<sup>21</sup>

20. Notions of God being 'above all and through all and in all' (Eph 4:6) and of Christ filling 'all things' with his presence (4:10) thus surround and permeate Ephesians 4:7–11 (cf. Thielman 2007:824–825). As in the pivotal confession in 1:22–23 where Christ's exalted position as resurrected and sovereign lord is defined by his significance as God's gift of salvation to the believers, it happens again in the second main section of the letter. Christ's power and honour as sovereign *lord* (4:8–10) is decisively yet paradoxically defined in terms of his sacrificial love, humility and care as a *servant* (4:32; 5:2, 25, 29; 6:9). For a discussion of the description of Christ in 6:9 as 'having no partiality' (ὁ κύριός ἐστιν ἐν οὐρανοῖς, καὶ προσωποληψία οὐκ ἐστὶν παρ' αὐτοῦ [the Lord is in the heavens, and with him there is no partiality]), see Mouton (2003:69–70). In Ephesians 6:9, as well as parallel expressions in Deuteronomy 10:17, 16:19 and Leviticus 19:15, this phrase occurs in a context that emphasises God's sovereignty and almighty power. In dramatic contrast to the often abusive power of contemporary authorities, the essence of God's power is defined in terms of loving care and concern for people, particularly by God's restoring what was lost to them, namely, their dignity and humanity (see Hendrix [1988] and Mouton [2002:133–137] for a discussion of the *genre* of Ephesians as a reinterpreted honorific decree typical of the benefactor-beneficiary phenomenon in antiquity).

21. On the one hand, the immediate and broader context of Ephesians 4:7–16 focuses on the ascended Christ's presence (through the Spirit) as a basic characteristic of the new life pictured in chapters 4–6. Christ's ascension is explicitly associated with the purpose to fill *all things* – specifically *his body* – with his presence. Their identification with him was probably meant to bring about a radical shift in their

As later readers we have to respect the Ephesians author's use of the psalm in his own creative way, with his own rhetorical strategy in mind – without necessarily thinking of the concrete reference of the psalm or a clear historical analogy. His reinterpretation of Psalm 68:18 serves as an important strategy to emphasise Christ's exalted position together with the gracious gifts to members of his body associated with that position. I would therefore like to argue that it is particularly *in tandem* that these interpretations could have served a dual purpose – as construction of early Christian identity in continuation with the story of Israel *and* from within the context of Empire.

## Rhetorical situation of Ephesians?

An important function of a traditio-historical interpretation of a text is to determine the crucial *perspective* from which an author selects and edits transmitted oral and/or written material and from which she or he interprets, redescribes and reshapes her or his environment. It is vital to the reinterpretation of the text by later readers (cf. Schüssler Fiorenza 1988:13–17, 1999:26–30).<sup>22</sup>

It has become clear that the Ephesians perspective is in the first place *Christologically* oriented and aimed at the reorientation of the readers' awareness and ethos of their identity. An important rhetorical question arising from this brief investigation is what the letter (and particularly the quotation in 4:8–10) was supposed to *do* to its audience. This leads to the persuading function of the letter and the exploration of its *rhetorical* situation. Yet, is there enough substantial evidence in the text to illuminate the situation, and are there needs which called for such a message? Are we able to identify 'the issue that mattered' for the author (Mack 1990:20)?

The picture which the text presents of its audience is that of a group of people known as τὰ ἔθνη ἐν σαρκί [nations in the flesh] or *Gentiles by birth* (2:11–22). They were called 'uncircumcised' by those who called themselves 'the circumcision' (2:11), which indicates that the Jews treated them with some degree of contempt (cf. Roberts 1991:66; Wessels 1990a:52–55). The Gentiles' former religious and sociological position is described as that of ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι [strangers and aliens] who used to be 'far away' – people separated from Christ, 'excluded from citizenship in Israel

(Footnote 21 continues ...)

self-understanding and behaviour – a new understanding of who they were and of how they were to live. On the other hand, Christ's resurrection and ascension is, according to the letter's internal logic, the ultimate way in which God conquered anti-God powers and principalities – be it imperial or cosmic forces or conflict and animosity amongst Jewish and Gentile Christians. As such it affirmed the believers' identity and equipped them for their calling, for growing to 'the measure of the full stature of Christ' (4:3–4, 12–13, 15–16). In order to prepare and guide the church towards the full experience of Christ's presence, God provided each believer with a gift of grace (4:7), together with the gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (4:11).

22. The rhetorical situation of a text only comes into existence when the exigency of the situation enters into relationship with the interest of the rhetor. This means that the rhetorical situation of a document cannot be equated with its historical situation. The rhetorical situation is concerned with what the author (or rhetor) deems defect, and it only comes into existence as a creation of that person. As such, the purpose or meaning of a letter is concerned with the *perspective* or *interest* of its author. This recognition consequently requires that research on the purpose of a letter should be relocated in its *rhetorical* rather than in its *historical* situation (cf. Lincoln 1990:lxiv; Mouton 2002:114–121).

and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world' (2:12, 13, 17, 19; cf. Lincoln 1990:120–165; Roberts 1991:67–76).<sup>23</sup>

These and other linguistic and literary aspects of the Ephesians text give the impression that the implied recipients primarily consisted of Gentile Christian believers. Although the Christian communities of 1st-century Asia Minor consisted of Jewish and Gentile Christians, Ephesians seems mainly to address the Gentiles. Whilst Gentile citizens would presumably enjoy a sociologically superior position in the Roman Empire (of which there is no indication in the text), the author's perspective on the Jewish Christians' ideological perception of the Gentile Christians is that they belonged to an inferior class of people. In contrast, the thrust of Ephesians reveals an emphasis on their new status ἐν Χριστῷ. The dramatic consequences of this position are described as follows: Those who were far away have been brought near (2:11–18); those who formerly had been power- and statusless (ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι [strangers and aliens]) have been made συμπολίται τῶν ἁγίων καὶ οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ [citizens with the saints and members of the household of God] (2:19–22). In short: By destroying the barrier of hostility (2:14–16), Christ gave birth to a *new humanity* (ἵνα τοὺς δύο κτίσῃ ἐν αὐτῷ εἰς ἓνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον [that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two]).

Such a rhetorical situation may help to explain the large number of reinterpreted Jewish motifs and traditions that occur in the letter whilst the majority of its audience probably consisted of non-Jewish Christians. Could it be that these religious symbols still functioned verbally or non-verbally as a 'dividing wall of hostility' (2:14)? And could this be the reason why the author so emphatically reinterpreted Jewish traditions in terms of Christ's authority (2:14–16) and the unity of the church (4:1–16)? A probable *rhetorical* situation reflecting the Jews' continuous maintenance of religious superiority and exclusivity, and the Gentiles' resultant disposition of rejection and inferiority seems to compel the Ephesians author to reaffirm their roles.

23. These elements point to a possible *historical* situation for Ephesians in the prejudice and underlying tension between the Jewish and Gentile Christian communities in western Asia Minor during the 1st century CE. This tension does not necessarily seem to pertain to a specific historical conflict between these groups. It probably refers to the author's perspective of a *general situation* in which the Jews consistently refused to grant status to the new movement of Jesus followers within its fold. Whether Ephesians dates from an early period such as 58 to 61 CE (Barth 1974a:10–12; Roberts 1991:13) or a deutero-Pauline period (Lincoln 1990:xxv–lxiii; Sampley 1972:102; Schnackenburg 1991:24–29), the basic 'exigence' (Bitzer 1968:6) in terms of the struggle for identity amongst Jewish and Gentile Christians remained acute and was intensified after the Roman-Jewish War (66–70 CE) when the tension between Jews and Christians gradually led to a break between the synagogue and the Christian communities around 85 CE. This probably meant that the tension between Jewish and Gentile communities in Asia Minor still influenced their relationship after they had become members of the one body of Christ (cf. Meeks 1983:32–139, 164–170; Roberts 1986:76–77, 1993:97). A later 1st-century context for Ephesians would leave room for the probability that their experience of the War of 66–70 CE could have affected their imagination and vocabulary with respect to divine warfare and triumph (cf. Eph 1:20–22; 4:8–10; 6:10–18). Such complexities could have been caused by the fact that conversion to the Christian faith implied a complete reorientation of the value systems and lifestyle of *both Jews and Gentiles*: 'For Jews this transition was difficult enough, but it did not entail the abandonment of their own tradition – it was rather understood as its continuation and completion. For Gentiles, the break was much more incisive. They found themselves at a double disadvantage – new to the Christian faith, but also unfamiliar with its Jewish roots' (Lategan 1993:400, with reference to the argumentative situation of Galatians).

## Conclusion

Motifs from the Hebrew Bible seem to have played an important part in the understanding of the author of Ephesians concerning the Christian gospel. Generally, one may say that the remembrance of Jewish traditions in some or other way served to strengthen the Christian community's identity (cf. Meeks 1993:189–210). By referring to the roots of their faith, the author situates the story of the recipients within the larger narrative of Israel's history. To use Hays's (1989:26) terminology: The 'echoes of Scripture' in Ephesians are typical of the dynamic hermeneutical process represented by the document. As such it marks a dialectic 'intertextual fusion that generates new meaning'.

Although motifs from the Hebrew Bible play more of a supportive than a formative role in the document, they seem to have been creatively selected and reinterpreted to serve the author's particular Christological, ecclesiological and ethical purposes (Lincoln 1982:49–50). Lincoln (1982) further states:

In all cases ... exegetical techniques are subservient to a christological perspective whereby the OT texts are read in the light of the new situation which the writer believes God has brought about in Christ. (p. 45)

The purpose of Ephesians is summarised by Lincoln (1982:49–50) as a reminder to Gentile Christians of their privileges and responsibilities as equal members of the body of Christ.<sup>24</sup> This reshaped memory happens within the cosmic horizon of God's new creation to which Christ gave birth. It is this distinctive setting which ultimately seems to determine the cohesive and unifying function of probable Hebrew Bible and other traditions in Ephesians.

Whatever the historical situation of Ephesians' first readers, it is important to bear in mind that Christian believers of the 1st centuries CE worshipped God in manifold ways. The production of Christian literature was always, according to Barth (1984):

... related to the cultic and ethical service of God ... In oral and written form, narrative, legal, and moral traditions were kept alive, continued and adapted to meet contemporary needs ... The hermeneutics of Ephesians ... was traditional and suggests a Jewish-born author who knew of learned intra-mural Jewish discussions and cared for them. Only the results of the expositions proposed in Ephesians are different ... Sometimes the exegesis offered in Ephesians seems far removed from the intention of the author or final editor of the OT text in question. Still it is not certain whether modern scholarship is better equipped than ancient Jewish interpreters and the author of Ephesians to penetrate into the psyche of the OT writers and to reconstruct their real intention. (pp. 4–5)

24. However, the occurrence of OT references might also have been meant to strengthen the Jewish Christians' identity as being a continuation with their past. In *Echoes of Scripture in the letters of Paul*, Hays (1989:ix) argues, with reference to the letter to the Romans, that Paul never allowed the new world of Christian interpretation completely to supersede the symbolic world of earlier Jewish texts because he remained 'passionately driven, to the end of his life, by the desire to demonstrate that God had not abandoned Israel'. However the setting of Ephesians may differ from that of Romans, this seems to be a possibility to be kept in mind. Paul's readings of the OT are generally carried out in the context of pastoral situations, and they are done in the service of forming communities of faithful disciples (Fowl & Jones 1991:24, n. 14, with reference to Hays).

To this, Barth (1984:5) adds that Ephesians was part of, or the result of, an ongoing dialogue with contemporary Jewish exegesis rather than a matter of private interpretation.

A hasty and unnuanced solution concerning the relationship between Hebrew and early Christian writings would be untenable. Except for the development of different motifs within the Hebrew Bible, late Jewish writings and the New Testament itself, the unique situation within the Asia-Minor congregations – to which Ephesians was probably addressed – might have called for such a radical reinterpretation of traditional material that a 'logical' explanation of the Ephesians author's exegetical and hermeneutic methods (without proper background information) would be forced and almost impossible. To interpret an ancient text which, in turn, interprets still more ancient texts is indeed a daunting task. Whilst respecting the internal constraints of the Ephesians text as well as the implied situation within which it was meant to function, later readers should remain patient and open to be surprised by the dynamics *and* mysteries it represents.

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