

**Shayla:** Do Ephesians 4:8 and Psalm 68:18 contradict each other? Did the Apostle Paul make a mistake or did he intentionally misquote?

**Midrash:**

- **Psalms 68:18 HCSB** You ascended to the heights, taking away captives; You received gifts from people, even from the rebellious, so that the LORD God might live *there*.
- **Ephesians 4:8 HCSB** For it says: **When He ascended on high, He took prisoners into captivity; He gave gifts to people.**

Paul's quote differs slightly from both the Hebrew text and the LXX. Some commentaries suggest that Paul deliberately modified the text in order to solidify support. Though that is a common enough technique in Talmudic literature, to say that the Apostle (and by implication the Holy Spirit) used deliberate obfuscation is repugnant.

Some suggest that Paul is not quoting from Scripture but from a first century Christian hymn. I have a couple of problems with that explanation. First, we do not have such a hymn and so we are appealing to an unknown in order to explain a known – hardly a convincing argument. Second, even if there were such a hymn, the hymn itself would be misquoting the Psalm which leaves once again with the same problem, only one step removed.

A third common explanation is that Paul is citing a variant of Psalm 68 which has not survived to our day. However, that would imply that the rendition we have is fundamentally flawed and leaves us open to doubts concerning the inerrancy of the original texts, which is a fundamental tenet of Adonaic Christianity.

The key word here is the Hebrew "*laqach*" (Strong's #3947). Its primary denotation is "to take", but it also carries the idea of "fetch" as in retrieve and give to another. *laqech*' is used in other passages to indicate the concept of fetch as in Genesis 20:2 "he fetched Sarah"; Genesis 27:13 "go fetch me"; as well as Genesis 42:16; Numbers 23:11; Judges 11:5; 2 Samuel 4:6. More on point, *laqech*' is also used in the sense of "bring" as in Genesis 15:10; 18:5, 7, 8; Exodus 25:2; 35:5; Job 38:20.

In ancient times, when a king conquered his enemies and gathered the spoils, he would immediately distribute the booty among his followers.

- **Genesis 14:14-16, 21-24 HCSB** When Abram heard that his relative had been taken prisoner, he assembled his 318 trained men, born in his household, and they went in pursuit as far as Dan. (15) And he and his servants deployed against them by night, attacked them, and pursued them as far as Hobah to the north of Damascus. (16) He brought back all the goods and also his relative Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the *other* people. (21) Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people, but take the possessions for yourself." (22) But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand in an oath to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, (23) that I will not take a thread or sandal strap or anything that belongs to you, so you can never say, 'I made Abram rich.' (24) I will take nothing except what the servants have eaten. But as for the share of the men who came with me--Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre--they can take their share."
- **Numbers 31:26-28 HCSB** "You, Eleazar the priest, and the family leaders of the community are to take a count of what was captured, human and animal. (27) Then divide the captives between the troops who went out to war and the entire community. (28) Set aside a tribute for the LORD from what belongs to the fighting men who went out to war: one out of every 500 humans, cattle, donkeys, sheep, and goats.
- **1 Samuel 30:23-25 HCSB** But David said, "My brothers, you must not do this with what the LORD has given us. He protected us and handed over to us the raiders who came against us. (24) Who can agree to your proposal? The share of the one who

goes into battle is to be the same as the share of the one who remains with the supplies. They will share equally." (25) And it has been so from that day forward. David established *this policy* as a law and an ordinance for Israel *and it continues* to this very day.

The passage in Psalm clearly describes the coming Messiah as a conquering King gathering the spoils of His victory. The prophet Isaiah also predicted as much:

- **Isaiah 53:12 HCSB** Therefore I will give Him the many as a portion, and He will receive the mighty as spoil, because He submitted Himself to death, and was counted among the rebels; yet He bore the sin of many and interceded for the rebels.

The Lord Jesus described Himself in the same manner:

- **Matthew 12:28-29 HCSB** If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you. (29) How can someone enter a strong man's house and steal his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house.
- **Mark 3:27 HCSB** "On the other hand, no one can enter a strong man's house and rob his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he will rob his house.
- **Luke 11:20-22 HCSB** If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you. (21) When a strong man, fully armed, guards his estate, his possessions are secure. (22) But when one stronger than he attacks and overpowers him, he takes from him all his weapons he trusted in, and divides up his plunder.

And the Apostle Paul had the same mindset in another passage besides Ephesians:

- **Colossians 2:15 HCSB** He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly; He triumphed over them by Him.

It is my opinion that as:

1. laqech' does not mean simply receive or take but to "fetch", connoting both to take and bring,
2. the context of the Psalm is of a king despoiling his enemy
3. the context of the Ephesian passage is of a king distributing gifts

Paul simply emphasized the second part of the meaning of laqech'. It was not an error. It was not a deliberate misquote. It was a brilliant midrashic technique that gives a much more in-depth understanding of the process of Jesus' victory.