

# Lost and Found

Psalm 132:1 *A Song of Ascents.*

" *A Song of Ascents.* Remember, O LORD, in David's favor, all the hardships he endured,

<sup>2</sup> how he swore to the LORD and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob,

<sup>3</sup> "I will not enter my house or get into my bed,

<sup>4</sup> I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids,

<sup>5</sup> until I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob."

<sup>6</sup> Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah; we found it in the fields of Jaar.

<sup>7</sup> "Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool!"

<sup>8</sup> Arise, O LORD, and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might.

<sup>9</sup> Let your priests be clothed with righteousness, and let your saints shout for joy.

Neh 13:30 Thus I cleansed them

from everything foreign, and I established the duties of the priests and Levites, each in his work;

<sup>31</sup> and I provided for the wood offering at appointed times, and for the firstfruits.

Remember me, O my God, for good."

<sup>10</sup> For the sake of your servant David, do not turn away the face of your anointed one.

<sup>11</sup> The LORD swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: "One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne.

<sup>12</sup> If your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies that I shall teach them, their sons also forever shall sit on your throne."

<sup>13</sup> For the LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place:

<sup>14</sup> "This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it.

<sup>15</sup> I will abundantly bless her provisions; I will satisfy her poor with bread.

<sup>16</sup> Her priests I will clothe with salvation, and her saints will shout for joy.

<sup>17</sup> There I will make a horn to sprout for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.

<sup>18</sup> His enemies I will clothe with shame, but on him his crown will shine.""

## **PSALM 132; NEHEMIAH 13:30-31**

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# **Little Boxes**

WHAT HAPPENED TO [THE ARK of the Covenant](#)? This question is one of the great mysteries of, not only the Bible, but the whole world. It has been the fascination of many adventure books and more than one movie, though Indiana Jones certainly captures our imagination the most vividly. An adventure writer and story teller puts its history like this:

In early Old Testament times the Ark of the Covenant was ... the sign and the seal of [God's] presence on earth, as the stronghold of His power, and as the instrument of His ineffable will. Built to contain the tablets of stone upon which the Ten Commandments had been written, it was a wooden chest measuring three feet nine inches long by two feet three inches high and wide. It was lined inside and out with pure gold and was surmounted by two winged figures of cherubim that faced each other across its heavy golden lid.

Biblical and other archaic sources speak of the Ark blazing with fire and light, inflicting cancerous tumours and severe burns, levelling mountains, stopping rivers, blasting whole armies and laying waste cities. The same sources also leave no doubt that it was, for a very long time, the cornerstone of the evolving Jewish faith: indeed when King Solomon built

the First Temple in Jerusalem his sole motive was to create ‘an house of rest for the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord’. At some unknown date between the tenth and the sixth century BC, however, this uniquely precious and [influential] object vanished from its place in the Holy of Holies of that Temple, vanished without song or lamentation in the Scriptures – almost as though it had never existed at all ... There is no report that the Ark was carried away or destroyed or hidden. There is not even any comment such as ‘And then the Ark disappeared and we do not know what happened to it’ or ‘And no one knows where it is to this day’. The most important object in the world, in the biblical view, simply ceases to be in the story.’<sup>1</sup>

Gone. Lost for at least 2,600 years now. But this was not the first time...

## Psalm 132: A Song of Ascents of the Ark

Psalm 132 takes us to the [seventh of the eighth day festival](#) of Tabernacles. I wanted to preach it with its companion 133, but that will have to wait until next time as there is too much good stuff in this one song. It is “A Song

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<sup>1</sup> [Graham Hancock](#), *The Sign and the Seal*, iBooks.

of Ascents,” with no author given. However, it does mention someone in the first verse: **David**. “Remember, O LORD, in David’s favor, all the hardships he endured” (Ps 132:1). This doesn’t mean David is its author. In fact, it almost certain means he isn’t. It could be someone who served David, or someone who came at literally any time after until Nehemiah.

It doesn’t really read like many of the other songs of ascent, and it is much longer than most of them. Rather than repetition of lines, **chiasm** seems to be its organizing pattern:

- 1a) Ps 132:1, Prayer to remember David for his afflictions
- 1b) Ps 132:2-10, David’s vow to the LORD:
  - 1c) Ps 132:11, I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body;
  - 1d) Ps 132:12a, **If your sons will keep My covenant and My testimony which I shall teach them;**
  - 2c) Ps 132:12b, Their sons also shall sit upon your throne forevermore;”
- 2b) Ps 132:13-17, The LORD’s vow to David:
- 2a) Ps 132:18, The Lord will remember David by clothing his enemies with shame

If so, its center becomes the focal point, and as we will see, it indeed is the point of the whole story the song tells.

The song wants us to remember something that happened long ago. It tells us of when David “**swore to the LORD and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob, ‘I will not**

enter my house or get into my bed, I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place of the LORD, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob” (Ps 132:2-5). David makes a vow to the LORD. It involves three things.

- I will not enter his own house or get into his own bed. (3)
- I will not go to sleep. (4)
- I will find a place for the LORD (*Yahweh*), a dwelling for the Mighty One (*Abir*). (5)

*Abir* is an unusual name for God. While “**Mighty One**” appears several times in the OT up to this point, only once does it translate this word. This is when Jacob is speaking to his son Joseph on his deathbed and says his “**bow remained unmoved; his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (from there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel).**” Being paired with the **Shepherd** and **Stone** imagery is interesting for a couple of reasons. First, Shepherds must be mighty to protect their flock, and stones are mighty pillars of refuge. But second, these are **clear images of Christ** (i.e. The Good Shepherd and the Stone of Stumbling). Even more, the Rabbis said here that this was

the Logos and/or Shekinah, two more clear references to Christ.

These reflections on David seem to take us back to the most famous chapter in the books of Samuel: **2 Samuel 7:1ff**. Here we read, “Now when the king lived in his house and the LORD had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, the king said to Nathan the prophet, ‘See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent’” (**2Sa 7:1-2**). From there, the story goes on to do a **reversal**. God comes to the prophet to tell him that he has never needed or asked for a house to reside in. But here’s what He’ll do. The LORD says that instead, *He* will build a house *for David!* “I will make you a house” (**11**). He then adds, “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your seed after you, who shall come from your body, and I will established his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son” (**12-14a**). This is God’s vow to David.

Let’s return to the song. **Verse 5** is actually a **strange puzzle** to commentators. The translation sounds straight

forward. David is looking to build a temple, a permanent dwelling. That's what our minds naturally think. But the grammar leads us to the conclusion that this is not what is going on. David is trying to “find” (*matsa*) a place. But look at what vs. 6 says. It is a response to vs. 5 from the people or the men. “Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah; we found (*matsa*) it in the field of Jaar.”

Found what? The temple? Of course not. They found something else. What did they find?

Vv. 7-8 answer. “Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool!” What is “the footstool” of God? David himself explains when it says in Chronicles that he “rose to his feet and said: ‘Hear me, my brothers and my people. I had it in my heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD and for the footstool of our God, and I made preparations for building’” (1Ch 28:2). The ark is the footstool. In other words, what he was looking for and what he found was in fact *the ark*. Thus vs. 8, “Arise, O LORD, and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might.”

To put it another way, the ark was lost, and now it is found. Someone writes of this, “In order to be searched for



and found, something has to have been previously lost. The lost ark, having been found again, is represented here as now returning home to Israel.”<sup>2</sup> Makes sense. But those who know their Bibles may know that, technically speaking, the ark was never “lost” in the sense that we normally think of it. Certainly not in the sense that we described at the beginning. Nevertheless, there is a story that this relates to, and curiously, it is found in the chapter prior to 1 Samuel 7.

This chapter is all about bringing the ark up to Jerusalem (2Sa 6:12), from the famous story where, on the way, Uzzah touches it and dies and makes David angry, to later when David dances before the LORD and makes Michal jealous. But it is the way it begins that is important for now. “David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale-Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts who sits enthroned on the cherubim” (2Sa 6:1-2).

Nothing out of the ordinary may strike you about this. But what if I told you that the ark has basically not been seen

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<sup>2</sup> Roger David Aus, “The Compassionate Father of Two Difficult Sons (Luke 15:11-31) and Judaic Interpretation of the Ark and 2 Samuel 6,” *Earliest Christianity within the Boundaries of Judaism: Essays in Honor of Bruce Chilton*, e. Alan J. Avery-Peck, Craig A. Evans, Jacob Neusner (Boston: Brill, 2016), 244.

in the text since **1 Samuel 7**?<sup>3</sup> That's almost an entire book, 26+ chapters, and given that this is such an important, powerful object, that's mighty strange.

In **1 Samuel 7** we read, “And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took up the ark of the LORD and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill. And they consecrated his son Eleazar to have charge of the ark of the LORD. From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD” (**1Sa 7:1-2**). This comes right on the heels of a chapter describing some of the more radical and powerful things that happened to the Philistines because they stole the ark (like horrible **tumors** and plagues of **rats** and striking **70 dead** just for looking at it). Then, suddenly, they just leave the thing alone and basically forget about it *for 20 years!* Clearly, everyone was afraid of this thing. Chronicles says, “**We did not seek it in the days of Saul**” (**1Ch 13:3**).

It isn't necessarily that it was lost, *per se*. But **it was neglected**. For the sake of drama, the Psalmist says that it was lost. Or as we will see at the end, maybe it is more than

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<sup>3</sup> There is one oblique reference in 1Sa 14:18, where Saul wants it brought to him. Other than that, silence.

drama. For all intents and purposes, it was. In fact, some have taken the cue from 2Sa 6 where it says they had “gone six steps, he sacrificed an ox and a fattened animal” (2Sa 6:13) to suggest that Israel had a yearly festival that Nehemiah was renewing to celebrate that event with a “psalm of ascent.” That’s very clever, but there is literally no evidence anywhere that this happened. But it didn’t need to. Reality is even better.

Note where it says the ark was left: Kiriath-jearim. Note where it says David went to get the ark: Baale-Judah. Thing is, this is the same place (see 1Ch 13:6). What does calling it Baale-Judah do to your view of Kiriath-jearim? It tells you that the place was full of Baal idols and worshipers! This is *not* where God’s ark belongs!

Now we must return to the Psalm. “Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah; we found it in the fields of Jaar” (Ps 132:6). Again, nothing striking. But knowing geography makes it clear. Ephrathah is Bethlehem. It is where Benjamin was born, and more importantly, where Jesus was born. David sent the men out in search of the ark. They travelled no further than Bethlehem, which is 6 miles south of Jerusalem. (Keep note of that location). There they hear

whispers of the long-lost ark. It says they found it in the fields of Jaar.

“Jaar” means “forest.” It may be a reference to the forested hill surrounding place. But what place? [Kiriath-jearim](#) (“City of Woods”). In other words, the Psalm is remembering 2Sam 6! Three interesting facts about this place. **First**, it has now become a tell—a human-made hill created by millennia of occupation. It was the last major Biblical site in ancient Judah left unexcavated (they apparently dug there only in the fall of 2017). **Second**, it is not south of Jerusalem like Bethlehem is; it is **9 miles northwest**. In other words, David’s men went the wrong way. It *was* lost! Amazing, when you consider how close this is to the capital city. **Third**, today there is a church located on the summit, at the highest point of the village. It has a shrine on it. It is a huge statute of Mary holding a small Jesus while standing on *the ark*! Hence, it is called *Our Lady of the Ark of the Covenant Church* (built only in 1924, but upon the ruins of a 4<sup>th</sup> century church). Why Mary on the ark? Let’s turn to Nehemiah.





## Nehemiah Intermission

The corresponding section in Nehemiah to Psalm 132 is quite short. It is also the very end of the book. It is **Nehemiah 13:30-31**. “Thus I cleansed them from everything foreign, and I established the duties of the priests and Levites, each in his work; and I provided for the wood offering at appointed times, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.” Recapping the

cleansing of the temple, the [cleansing](#) of the sabbath, and the [cleansing](#) of the marriages, Nehemiah's work is finished. The wall is built. Temple worship is reestablished. All is clean. There is nothing else to do. (Of course, we still have two Psalms to go, and we will see next time why those go back earlier in the book). But how might this song fit with this short testimony?

Here we need to return to [the lost ark](#). [Whatever happened to it?](#) Well, there are different legends. One has the ark having been stolen very early on, even in the days of Solomon, and taken down to the [queen of Sheba](#) by her (and his) son to Ethiopia.<sup>4</sup> The legends persist that a single man is chosen at an early age to guard the ark with his life. He does this from the day he is chosen until the day that he dies, and this has been going on now for nearly 3,000 years. He is the only man allowed to see it. So the story goes.

The apocryphal book of [Maccabees](#) tells a [different story](#). I don't tell you this because I think it is Scripture, but because it relates to the psalm and to Nehemiah in a remarkable way. It is certainly plausible that the story it recalls is history. It tells us a strange tale involving Jeremiah,

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<sup>4</sup> See Hancock.

one of the prophets who lived when Babylon sacked Jerusalem.

It was also in the writing that the prophet, having received an oracle, ordered that the tent and the ark should follow with him, and that he went out to the mountain where Moses had gone up and had seen the inheritance of God. And Jeremiah came and found a cave, and he brought there the tent and the ark and the altar of incense, and he sealed up the entrance. Some of those who followed him came up to mark the way, but could not find it. When Jeremiah learned of it, he rebuked them and declared: “The place shall be unknown until God gathers his people together again and shows his mercy. And then the Lord will disclose these things, and the glory of the Lord and the cloud will appear, as they were shown in the case of Moses, and as Solomon asked that the place should be specially consecrated” (2Mac 2:4-8).

Goulder gives us the setting in Nehemiah’s day:

The community of the Return was beset by the problem of the lost furnishings of the old Temple. Fortunately (in the Chronicler's view) Nebuchadnezzar had kept all the vessels from the Jerusalem temple, and Cyrus brought them forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer ... (Ezra 1:7-11).



Huge amounts of gold, silver and precious vessels are loaded on Ezra by Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:15-19) ... But the ark was gone. It was the centrepiece of David's and Solomon's Temple (1Ch 13-16; 2Ch 6:41; 8:11), and it was no more.

But in the imagination of Israel it was not no more. [He tells us the story of 2 Maccabees and concludes]. So Jeremiah hid both the ark and its tabernacle. Now the same opening chapters of 2 Maccabees tell how Nehemiah found the fire which had been hidden in a well in the time of the Exile, and how it engulfed the sacrifices: "Nehemiah offered sacrifices, after that he had built both the temple and the altar ... Nehemiah, having received a charge from the king of Persia, sent in quest of the fire the descendants of the priests that hid it ... Nehemiah commanded to pour on great stones the water that was left ... Nehemiah and they that were with him purified the sacrifice" (2Mac 1:18-36).<sup>5</sup> Nehemiah is

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<sup>5</sup> Since on the twenty-fifth day of Chislev we shall celebrate the purification of the temple, we thought it necessary to notify you, in order that you also may celebrate the feast of booths and the feast of the fire given when Nehemiah, who built the temple and the altar, offered sacrifices.

<sup>19</sup> For when our fathers were being led captive to Persia, the pious priests of that time took some of the fire of the altar and secretly hid it in the hollow of a dry cistern, where they took such precautions that the place was unknown to any one.

<sup>20</sup> But after many years had passed, when it pleased God, Nehemiah, having been commissioned by the king of Persia, sent the descendants of the priests who had hidden the fire to get it. And when they reported to us that they had not found fire but thick liquid, he ordered them to dip it out and bring it.

<sup>21</sup> And when the materials for the sacrifices were presented, Nehemiah ordered the priests to sprinkle the liquid on the wood and what was laid upon it.

<sup>22</sup> When this was done and some time had passed and the sun, which had been clouded over, shone out, a great fire blazed up, so that all marveled.

<sup>23</sup> And while the sacrifice was being consumed, the priests offered prayer -- the priests and every one. Jonathan led, and the rest responded, as did Nehemiah.



remembered as having looked for some of the holy things which had, in legend, been hidden before the fall of the Temple; the historian cannot say that he found the ark, and he does not want to say that he failed to find the ark, but he did seek and find the holy fire.

He then concludes with something very important:

We cannot tell how early these traditions are; but we can say that something like them seems to be implied by Psalm 132. Its summoning of the ark to its final home is prefaced by an ... elaboration of the old story, in which the ark is

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<sup>24</sup> The prayer was to this effect: "O Lord, Lord God, Creator of all things, who art awe-inspiring and strong and just and merciful, who alone art King and art kind,

<sup>25</sup> who alone art bountiful, who alone art just and almighty and eternal, who dost rescue Israel from every evil, who didst choose the fathers and consecrate them,

<sup>26</sup> accept this sacrifice on behalf of all thy people Israel and preserve thy portion and make it holy.

<sup>27</sup> Gather together our scattered people, set free those who are slaves among the Gentiles, look upon those who are rejected and despised, and let the Gentiles know that thou art our God.

<sup>28</sup> Afflict those who oppress and are insolent with pride.

<sup>29</sup> Plant thy people in thy holy place, as Moses said."

<sup>30</sup> Then the priests sang the hymns.

<sup>31</sup> And when the materials of the sacrifice were consumed, Nehemiah ordered that the liquid that was left should be poured upon large stones.

<sup>32</sup> When this was done, a flame blazed up; but when the light from the altar shone back, it went out.

<sup>33</sup> When this matter became known, and it was reported to the king of the Persians that, in the place where the exiled priests had hidden the fire, the liquid had appeared with which Nehemiah and his associates had burned the materials of the sacrifice,

<sup>34</sup> **the king investigated the matter, and enclosed the place and made it sacred.**

<sup>35</sup> And with those persons whom the king favored he exchanged many excellent gifts.

<sup>36</sup> Nehemiah and his associates called this "nephtar," which means purification, but by most people it is called naphtha." (2Mac 1:18-36 RSV)

lost; and this is the predicament described in the Maccabean legend. David finds the ark, which is the situation which Nehemiah's community wishes to be theirs. The fact that it is associated with Nehemiah in 2 Maccabees 1 can hardly be an accident.

With this as background, it is now quite easy to think of this 445 B.C. festival, where Nehemiah and Ezra are leading the people through the stories and Psalms of assent, and how and why they are able to make this old psalm about David their own. **God has been faithful** in the past. And **he will be faithful** in the future. He has been faithful in the present, worship is restored, everything is cleansed, the people are happy. Perhaps he might even see fit to give us the ark again.

I think this is a very plausible idea, and it may very well have happened. The thing is, it forgets one minor detail. Remember how Jeremiah is the one who was said to have hidden the ark? It is this same Jeremiah who says in his book, “**And when you have multiplied and been fruitful in the land, in those days, declares the LORD, they shall no more say, ‘The ark of the covenant of the LORD.’ It shall not come to mind or be remembered or missed; it shall not**

be made again. At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart” (Jer 3:16-17).

I was reminded of this passage as I was searching for others who take the view that Psalm is in fact recalling a lost ark that was found. I read it in a book called *Fulfilled: Uncovering the biblical Foundations of Catholicism*. This section of that book is quite interesting, for its purpose in quoting Jeremiah is stated this way. “They would remember the Ark no more, because it would be fulfilled in an untouchable, virgin Mother of God.”<sup>6</sup>

It then quotes the Catechism of the Catholic Church: “Mary, in whom the Lord himself has just made his dwelling, is the daughter of Zion in person, the ark of the covenant, the place where the glory of the Lord dwells. She is ‘the dwelling of God... with men’” (CCC 2676). Your head may be spinning wondering where I’m going with this. Never fear, but learn something first.

This view of Mary as a kind of antitype of the ark has many, many Church Fathers behind it. It isn’t just the

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<sup>6</sup> Sonja Corbitt, *Fulfilled: Uncovering the Biblical Foundations of Catholicism* (West Chester: PA, Ascension, 2018), 230.

modern Roman Catechism making stuff up on the fly (actually, they rarely do that). It is, in my view, a perversion of the tradition<sup>7</sup> that elevates her beyond appropriate biblical praise. Yes, she deserves praise. “**Blessed** (*eulogeo*, from which we get eulogy, meaning praise) **are you among women**” (**Luke 1:42**). But this doctrine of Rome is more like virtual Mary-idolatry and goddess worship than biblical praise.

Without question, the Bible links Mary and the ark in close proximity, and perhaps even typologically. “**Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail. And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on**

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<sup>7</sup> **Going Deeper.** Tradition, unlike Scripture, is never a static thing, and therefore by its very nature it morphs, and so we see varying degrees of what this means in the Fathers. For a list of quotes see, “Church Fathers on Mary as Ark of the New Covenant,” *CatholicFidelity.com*, <https://www.catholicfidelity.com/apologetics-topics/mary/church-fathers-on-mary-as-ark-of-the-new-covenant/>. The list of Fathers includes: **Hippolytus** (c. 170-c. 236), **Gregory Thaumaturgus** (c. 213-c. 270), **Dionysius** (died 264), **Athanasius** (c. 296-373), **Hesychius** (lived c. 300), **Ephrem** (c. 306-373) **Cyril** (315-387?), **Ambrose** (c. 339-397), **Jerome** (c. 345-420), **Theodotus of Ancyra** (died c. 445), **Proclus**, died 446 or 447, **Chrysippus** (of Cappadocia? 5<sup>th</sup> cent.), **Hesychius** (of Jerusalem? 5<sup>th</sup> cent.), **Theodotus of Ancyra** (probably fl. 430), **Zeno** (c. 450-491), **Venantius Fortunatus** (c. 530-c. 610), **Breviarium in Psalterium**, **Methodius** (815-885), and several hymns.

her head a crown of twelve stars” (Rev 11:19-12:1).<sup>8</sup> What would the image of Mary as an ark convey? It conveys what the ark itself conveys. Inside her belly she carried the Great Law of God, the *Logos* Incarnate. This is a blessing unsurpassed by any mortal in human history, all of God’s grace and not her own.

But returning to the catechism, who does the *Scripture* says is the dwelling of God with men? **Christ, not Mary.** Mary was only the *vehicle* through which this happened. “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God’” (Rev 21:3). Rome, as it does too many times, has usurped the creation with the Creator; it has taken a good type and watered it to the point of rust and ruin. Returning to that church, it is not Mary who stands with Jesus on top of the ark in the Bible. It is Christ alone who sits between the cherubim, ruler of Israel; exalted of God as the Right Hand, ruler of all. But now we

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<sup>8</sup> A good scholarly treatment of this from an Evangelical turned Roman apologist is Scott Hahn, *Hail, Holy Queen: The Mother of God in the Word of God*, 1st ed. (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Image Books; Doubleday, 2001), Third Chapter. It has some fascinating insights that could help us Protestants and Reformed people go back to our Reformed roots where Mary was held in much greater esteem than by most of us today.

must return to the Psalm. For, you see, this is exactly what the second half celebrates.

## *Psalm 132: Act II*

Recall how the song begins with a prayer to Yahweh, the “**Mighty One**” of Jacob, and how closely this term is linked to The Good Shepherd and the Stumbling Stone who is Christ. What will Christ do for David? Well, David vows a vow to the LORD, and since he promised he wouldn’t even go to sleep until it was completed, in the very next verse, he finds the ark and rushes to the footstool to worship. He then commands the LORD, “**Arise, O LORD, and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might.**” Two more things take place in the song from David’s point of view. “**Let your priests be clothed with righteousness, and let your saints shout for joy**” (Ps 132:9). This is exactly what Nehemiah has just finished doing, and what the book ends with in this last testimony. History is repeating itself, in a good way. It then ends in a prayer: “**For the sake of your servant David, do not turn away the face of your anointed one**” (10). This language is very



similar to the many ending prayers of Nehemiah, thus linking them together in yet another way.

But the real issue here is how the Psalm reacts to these things. It reacts, just like God does in 2 Samuel 7. “**The LORD swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: ‘One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne’**” (11). In Samuel, you get the impression that the “son” is Solomon. But this Psalm, especially with its placement here, moves us beyond Solomon. How do we know? Obviously, because Solomon is the one who started the people on the road to exile, ruling the nations.

But the song itself says this. “**If your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies that I shall teach them, their sons also forever shall sit on your throne**” (12). Solomon obviously did not keep this Davidic covenant of the kings that was rooted in obeying all God had commanded him. He violated basically every law God had given: too many horses, too much gold, too many women, he did not regard the law of Moses in high esteem, etc. (Dt 17:15-20). Now, the people are returned from exile, and the best leader they’ve got is a governor, Nehemiah, who is himself a vassal servant of King Artaxerxes. With his lineage, he’s

not even worthy of being considered a Steward of Gondor, if you get my meaning. Their own kingly line is doing nothing. Where are the promises to David?

Well, **vs. 12** just so happens to be the heart of Psalm 132's chiasm (again):

1a) Ps 132:1, Prayer to remember David for his afflictions

1b) Ps 132:2-10, David's vow to the LORD:

1c) Ps 132:11, I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body;

1d) **Ps 132:12a, If your sons will keep My covenant and My testimony which I shall teach them;**

2c) Ps 132:12b, Their sons also shall sit upon your throne forevermore;"

2b) Ps 132:13-17, The LORD's vow to David:

2a) Ps 132:18, The Lord will remember David by clothing his enemies with shame

In this way, it shows forth the Savior **in a second great way**. For not only is this a song where Christ the Mighty One must remember David. It is a song where Christ the Meek one must come as a man to do all that is required of the Davidic kings. The song says, **"One of the sons of your body..."** Not Solomon. Someone else. It is he who will keep the covenant (he knew no sin). It is he who will teach the testimonies (Sermon on the Mt).

The song begins to repeat ideas once it moves out of the center. **"One of the sons of your body I will set on your**



throne” becomes “... also forever shall [they] sit on your throne” (12b). Christ is the one whose throne is “forever and ever.” In this way, Psalm 132 is bringing clarity to a song we saw a while ago: Psalm 89, the great Messianic song fulfilling the covenant of David. “I will establish your seed forever, and build your throne for all generations” (Ps 89:4). “I will establish his seed forever and his throne as the days of the heavens” (29). “His seed shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me” (36). Who is this “seed?” “The Seed is Christ” (Gal 3:16).

David’s great vow and fulfillment now becomes *God’s* great vow and fulfillment. Yahweh has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place (13). David wanted a temple. Solomon built one. It was destroyed. Ezra has built another, and Nehemiah has protected it with walls and cleansed it. But there is another Jerusalem and another Temple that must come if this is all to be forever.

Now, instead of David saying, “I will,” God does. And in typical God style, he outdoes David’s “I’s.” He doubles them:

- I will abundantly bless her provisions (15a)
- I will satisfy her poor with bread (15b)
- I will clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints will shout for joy (16)
- I will make a horn to sprout for David (17a)
- I have prepared a lamp for my Messiah (“anointed”) (17b)
- I will clothe with shame, but on him his crown will shine (17)

This last one is the parallel to the opening of the song. It asked the LORD to **remember** David and all his afflictions. Now, he is **remembering** him. He is clothing his enemies in shame and causing his crown to flourish.

Obviously, this didn’t happen in even Nehemiah’s day. So the people praised God *in anticipation*. Perhaps they were merely anticipating the finding of the ark as the final proof that God had restored their fortunes. But whatever they had in mind, Jeremiah’s words must not be forgotten. There is a reason why the people would no longer long for the ark of the covenant. They would have something greater.

He who sat upon its throne in the invisible parallel world of spirit as he guided and protected Israel would come into the physical realm to “**tabernacle**” among us. As

he put his enemies to shame, they sought to destroy him. In putting him to death, they caused his crown to shine brightly for eternity, for they did not know they were crucifying God in the flesh and that he had the power over life and death.

Revelation tells us that there is now an ark, and it isn't Mary. It is *the heavenly ark-type* (pardon the pun). “Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail” (19). And this is in heaven! *The power of the ark was never in a box.* It was on top of the box. It was in the One who sits enthroned above the cherubim. The One who takes his seat on the Mercy Seat. The One who has made atonement by his blood to take away our sins in the heavenly temple by his own entrance into it at his death. If anyone stands upon the ark, it is Christ alone—the exalted God of gods, Lord of lords, and King of kings. And no one will take away his worship.

All false forms of worship must continue to be cleansed from our idolatrous hearts. This includes the worship of his human mother, or the worship of whatever it is that you

have as sin in your life that usurps his rightful place in your heart. In an article I cited earlier about the finding the ark,<sup>9</sup> the author makes a fascinating argument that **the Parable of the Lost Son** (aka the Prodigal Son) is actually inspired by David's returning of the ark of Jerusalem. And in it, you, dear Christian, may have great hope that what was lost has been found in Christ. Not the ark. But you!<sup>10</sup>

**Luke 15:24** says, “This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” It repeats it in **vs. 32**. This is exactly like we saw in **Psalm 132:6**.

When the father's son returned, he did not say, “You may only come back if you do x, y, and z.” He was no legalist. Instead, as the son simply confessed his sin against God and his father he tells the men to bring out the robe, the best one and put it on him (**Luke 15:22**). This language comes from **2Sa 6:14** when David “was girded with a linen ephod.” David is putting of “a very special/distinguished robe, the same idea in the parable.”

In **Luke 15:23**, the father tells his slaves, “get the fatted calf and kill it,” and then when they do it, they say “we

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<sup>9</sup> **Aus**, 241-54.

<sup>10</sup> He gives several parallels: 1. The lost is found. 2. The Best Robe. 3. Slaughtering the Fatted Calf. 4. Dancing. 5. Music. 6. Celebration/Making Merry and Rejoicing. 7. Severe Reproaches. See all these below.

have killed the fatted calf.” This is told three different ways, thus showing its importance. This is what we find in **2Sa 6:16**, in the place that suggests to some that this became a ritual celebration. “When those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, David sacrificed an ox and a fatling.”

In **Luke 15:25**, the older brother returns from the field to find music and “dancing.” **2Sa 6:5** has David and all his house “dancing before the Lord with all their might” (see also **vs. 14, 16, 21**). When he returned, the older brother also heard “music” (**Luke 15:25**). 2Sam connects the dancing to “songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals” (**2Sa 6:5**).

Finally, the father told his whole household to eat and celebrate (**Luke 15:23-24**). This is because he was lost and is now found, he was dead and is now alive again. This is what really made the older brother angry. He never had a party thrown for him. The word for “danced” can also mean “to make merry.” And thus **Josephus** tells about how David “feasted and made merry” with all the people (see **2Sa 6:12**).

Finally, because the older brother had such a terrible attitude and did not see things the way the father did, he reproached his father. This is exactly what David's wife **Michal** does when she looked out her window and saw David dancing before the ark of the Lord. “**She despised him in her heart**” (2Sa 6:16) and went out and told him to his face, “**How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself before the eyes of his servants' maids, as any vulgar fellow might shamelessly uncover himself!**” (20).

While there is much more between these stories, we must conclude. The point of the Prodigal's Son is **the great forgiveness** of the merciful father who asks nothing from his son except humility. Meanwhile, the older brother, who one who has it all together, is really the goat of the story. He is unclean on the inside. If the father can forgive so much, why can't he? Therefore, we return to our psalm with these things in mind.

**It is not just Mary who is a type of the ark. We all are in this respect. We each hold the law of God inside of us. And, if we are believers, we have Christ himself in us. Why do we not long for the ark today? Because the Law-Giver**

has come and obeyed in our place and he now sits enthroned the cherubim in heaven. And he is not only written the law on tablets of stone and put them into an ark, he has written them onto new hearts of flesh in his people. They now have the Spirit to guide them and to teach them right and wrong in a way that they can obey.

We do not celebrate shadows by coming to worship today. We do not await some physical box to be restored. We celebrate the love of God in Christ, and we come together that we might better be prepared to serve him. You, his temple, have been cleansed. You, the new covenant arks and the place where the world watches to see if he has really performed a change in you. Through you, his church, he performs great power in a world darkened by sin. So celebrate with singing and laughter the joyous salvation that you have. For if Christ has found you, you are no longer lost. Use this gospel knowledge as the power of God in Christ to leave this place to be the living tablets that go forth to show the world what righteousness is, by the power of his Spirit. Forgive one another, just as God in Christ forgave you. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted. Be merciful to those who need mercy. Be loving to your

enemies. Show forth the power of the new covenant, Christ in you the hope of glory. For God has chosen Zion for his habitation. And you, church, are that habitation. Then you will truly worship with the people of old as we sing songs like this. This is the lesson of Nehemiah, of Jeremiah, of David, of the Prodigal's Son, and of **Psalm 132**.