



Psalm 132 - The Eternal Dwelling of God in Zion

A Song of Ascents.

Introduction

The theme of this royal psalm is God's covenant with the house of David to establish the dynasty for the good of the people and, eventually, of the world. Most of the psalm expresses confidence in these promises; the requests are for God to carry out his purpose. As a Song of Ascents, this psalm recalls how the dynasty of David is to ensure the stability of the realm, especially of Jerusalem. In the era in which the Psalter was edited, the inclusion of this psalm in the collection shows the editors' faith that in due course God will renew the Davidic line.

This psalm is another in the series of fifteen titled, A Song of Ascents. It has no author associated with it in the title. Some believe David was the author, and some believe it was written after the exile. James Montgomery Boice made the case for Solomon as the author: "Since verses 8-10 are quoted in 2 Chronicles 6:41-42 as part of Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, the psalm probably dates from Solomon's reign even though the title does not identify it as Solomon's psalm."

Psalms 24 and 68 also refer to the coming of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem.

Psalm 132 is quoted twice in the NT: Stephen quoted v.5 in Acts 7:46 and Peter quoted v.11 in Acts 2:30.

Psalm 132:1-5 - Remember David's Service to the Ark.

The psalm opens with a request that God will remember all that David did to prepare for the building of the temple, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob: <<*the king said to the prophet Nathan, 'See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.'* Nathan said to the king, 'Go, do

all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you'>> (2 Samuel 7:2-3); refer also to 1 Chronicles 22:2-19. Perhaps the other sufferings of David to retain his rule are included in the hardships. The prayer expresses the feeling that such sacrifice and hard work ought not go to waste.

1 O Lord, remember in David's favour
all the hardships he endured;
2 how he swore to the Lord
and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob,
3 'I will not enter my house
or get into my bed;
4 I will not give sleep to my eyes
or slumber to my eyelids,
5 until I find a place for the Lord,
a dwelling-place for the Mighty One of Jacob.'

Psalm 132:1-5

O Lord, remember in David's favour all the hardships he endured. The singer began remembering David, the great king of Israel, and all the afflictions he endured before he received the throne and afterward.

Apart from the Messiah, who is given the title Son of David, David the son of Jesse is acknowledged as Israel's greatest king. Yet he had to endure a remarkable number of afflictions. All the following was true of David:

- He was despised and criticised by his family.
- He was placed in many life-and-death struggles.
- He was accused of treason and treachery.
- He was attacked by the connected, powerful, and ruthless.
- He lived many years as a fugitive, a wanted man.
- He had family, home, friends, and career taken from him.
- He endured a significant season of backsliding.
- He was accepted as king only reluctantly.
- He faced many enemies in battle through many wars.
- He was openly criticised and despised by one of his wives.
- He suffered because of his own sin and scandal.
- He knew great conflict and problems among his children.
- He suffered a coup staged by his favourite son, followed by a civil war.
- He was openly despised and criticised by some of his subjects.

The psalmist asked God to look upon and remember both David himself and all his afflictions. He prayed, “Lord, consider the man and consider his troubles. Let none of them be forgotten or wasted.” In the context of Psalm 132, there may be a specific sort of affliction considered. Some think the afflictions David suffered in seeking to build a temple, then preparing for a temple he would not build and would never see or worship in were in mind.

The afflictions of David always suggest the afflictions of his Greater Son Jesus; also the individual Christian can take comfort that God does remember all the afflictions endured for his glory.

How he swore to the Lord. The poet asked God to remember a specific oath David made unto Yahweh. The oath itself is not recorded in 2 Samuel Chapter 7, but the heart behind it was there recorded. Alexander Maclaren commented, “Wearied with a stormy life, he might well have left it to others to care for the work which the prophet had told him that he was not to be permitted to begin. But not so does a true man reason. Rather, he will consecrate to God his leisure and his old age, and will rejoice to originate work which he cannot hope to see completed, and even to gather materials which happier natures and times may turn to account. He will put his own comfort second, God’s service first.”

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 for the Lord, a dwelling-place for the Mighty One of Jacob. David was absolutely dedicated to building God a temple, an earthly dwelling place for his Spirit. David’s dedication to this was so complete that he vowed to refuse himself many comforts of life until the job was finished. After David built himself a fine palace, he felt guilty that a mere tent represented God’s dwelling place. David asked through Nathan the prophet for permission from the Lord to build the temple, and Nathan initially replied in the affirmative. Not much later, God told Nathan that David was not to build him a temple, that privilege would be given to his son.

God excused David from his obligation to build a temple. Yet God was so pleased with David’s heart that he promised to build David a house, a lasting dynasty over Israel. Adam Clarke commented, “And we find that he would have acted in all things according to his oath and vow, had God permitted him. But even after the Lord told him that Solomon, not he, should build the house he still continued to show his good will by collecting treasure and materials for the building, all the rest of his life.”

David’s passion speaks in at least two ways:

- Christians should have a passionate drive to enjoy God’s presence in their own life, that their heart would truly be his home.
- They should have a passionate drive for the blessing and benefit of the house of God, the community of his people.

Spurgeon observed, “I wish that this same zeal would take firm hold of all Christians. How many there are who dwell in their ceiled houses while the house of God lies waste! They can provide abundantly for themselves; but for God’s cause, for God’s gospel, for a place wherein the poor may meet for the preaching of the Word, they do not seem to care.”

The Mighty One of Jacob. The designation ‘Mighty One of Jacob’ derives from Genesis 49:24 and signifies the marvellous manner in which the Lord had protected, guided, and blessed Jacob. The epithet connotes the great strength of the Lord as the divine warrior.

Psalm 132:6-7 - We Are Going There to Worship.

The pilgrims come from various villages in Judah, specifically Ephrathah, the district whose best-known villages were Bethlehem and Jaar; or Kiriath-jearim, where the ark had once lodged, to worship at his footstool: <<*Then King David rose to his feet and said: ‘Hear me, my brothers and my people. I had planned to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, for the footstool of our God; and I made preparations for building’>> (1 Chronicles 28:2), and: <<Extol the Lord our God; worship at his footstool. Holy is he!>> (Psalm 99:5).*

- ⁶ We heard of it in Ephrathah;
we found it in the fields of Jaar.
- ⁷ ‘Let us go to his dwelling-place;
let us worship at his footstool.’

Psalm 132:6-7

We heard of it in Ephrathah. Most all commentators understand it here to mean the Ark of the Covenant and the tabernacle associated with it. This would be the remembrance of the season before David brought the ark into Jerusalem. The ark was lost, or at least forgotten, and under David’s direction it was found and re-established as the focal point of worship to God.

Ephrathah included Bethlehem in Judah: <<*Then all the people who were at the gate, along with the elders, said, ‘We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you produce children in Ephrathah and bestow a name in Bethlehem’>> (Ruth 4:11), and would become the birthplace for the Messiah: <<But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days>> (Micah 5:2).*

We found it in the fields of Jaar. Jaar literally means wood or thicket but here it is a shortened form of Keriath-jearim. The location of the ark seems to have been forgotten during the reign of Saul when it was at Keriath-jearim: <<***Then let us bring again the ark of our God to us; for we did not turn to it in the days of Saul***>> (1 Chronicles 13:3), and it was only found there later in David's day after a time of serious searching.

As one of the Songs of Ascents, this song was sung by pilgrim travellers to the temple in Jerusalem, mainly at festival times. They remembered and understood David's great heart for God's house and used it to inspire them as they said, "Let us go to his dwelling-place; let us worship at his footstool".

Psalm 132:8-10 - Continue Blessing the People and Its Leaders.

Adapting the words of Solomon's prayer, the worshippers pray that God will be present in his chosen resting place. Envisioning the scene in Jerusalem, the worshippers pray that Israel will be true to its calling, i.e. that the priests who lead worship and teach the Scriptures at the sanctuary would be clothed with righteousness, i.e. would be genuinely godly men: <<***True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in integrity and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts***>> (Malachi 2:6-7), that the saints or pious people would shout for joy, celebrating what God has done: <<***Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them'***>> (Psalm 126:2); and that God would not turn away the face of his anointed one: i.e. he would continue showing favour to David's heirs, so that Israel would remain a secure home for piety.

⁸ Rise up, O Lord, and go to your resting-place,
you and the ark of your might.

⁹ Let your priests be clothed with righteousness,
and let your faithful shout for joy.

Psalm 132:8-9

Rise up, O Lord, and go to your resting-place. The pilgrims on their journey remembered the words of their forefathers in the wilderness, who called out when the ark travelled: <<***Arise, O Lord, let your enemies be scattered, and your foes flee before you***>> (Numbers 10:35b). Although the ark of God's strength had found its resting-place, this was still an appropriate saying for a pilgrim people.

Let your priests be clothed with righteousness. When they sang of the goodness and glory of God's temple, they also remembered the place of his priests. It was fitting for them to be known for righteousness in life, and this would make God's saints shout for joy. Maclaren observed, "The pure vestments of the priests were symbols of stainless character, befitting the ministers of a holy God. The psalmist prays that the symbol may truly represent the inner reality." When God's servants are not clothed with righteousness, it may cause some of God's people to lose some of their joy.

¹⁰ For your servant David's sake
do not turn away the face of your anointed one.

Psalm 132:10

For your servant David's sake. God promised that he would not forsake the sons of David: *<<I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever>>* (2 Samuel 7:14-16). When the psalmist prayed this, he prayed for the fulfilment of a promise God had already made. Spurgeon added, "For his sake all those who are anointed in him are accepted. God blessed Solomon and succeeding kings, for David's sake; and he will bless us for Jesus' sake."

Do not turn away the face of your anointed one. The singer asked that the favour of God would never be taken from his anointed. There is a sense in which every king of David's line was God's anointed, but this looks to the ultimate anointed one – the Messiah himself, Jesus Christ. This is ultimately a prayer for blessing on God's Messiah, the anointed Son of David. The word Messiah comes from transliterating the Hebrew word for anointed, and the word Christ comes from translating anointed into Greek.

Psalm 132:11-18 - The Lord's Promise to David and Zion.

The final section of the psalm is about half the total length; it reviews the sure oath that God swore to David. This promise is God's answer to the prayer of vv.8-10. God promised to preserve the dynasty and expects the individual heirs of David to be faithful to the covenant. The psalm does not mention that some of these may fail in their faithfulness and the people suffer for it; but with 2 Samuel 7:14-15 and 1 Kings 2:2-4 in the background, no one could miss that. With the Lord present in Zion, which he has chosen, the people will be happy and secure. Singing these words enables the worshippers to delight in their privileges, and not to take them lightly.

11 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.

12 If your sons keep my covenant
and my decrees that I shall teach them,
their sons also, for evermore,
shall sit on your throne.’

Psalm 132:11-12

The Lord swore to David a sure oath. Earlier in v.2 the singer remembered how David made a solemn oath to God. In return, God made a solemn oath to David, as recorded in 2 Samuel 7:4-16. God would never turn from such an oath.

One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne. The psalmist remembered the promises God made to David to 2 Samuel 7:12-16. These were the promises God confirmed with an oath.

If your sons keep my covenant and my decrees that I shall teach them, their sons also, for evermore, shall sit on your throne. As with many of the promises of God conditions must be met for them to come to pass. From the time of the Babylonian exile to the time of Christ there was no Davidic king because many of his descendants did not keep the Lord’s statutes. In fact many of them had the legacy of doing evil in God’s sight.

13 For the Lord has chosen Zion;
he has desired it for his habitation:

14 ‘This is my resting-place for ever;
here I will reside, for I have desired it.

15 I will abundantly bless its provisions;
I will satisfy its poor with bread.

Psalm 132:13-15

For the Lord has chosen Zion. The connection is made between the choice of David and his descendants and God’s choice of Jerusalem, i.e. Zion, as his sacred dwelling place, the place he desired for his presence to be known. The faith of the Bible is based in history – real people, events, and places. God could have chosen

any place on earth to be the stage on which his drama of redemption was displayed, and he deliberately chose Zion. His dwelling is in no way restricted to Jerusalem and the land of Israel, but it is significant that this was the place he desired.

This is my resting-place for ever. Once the Ark of the Covenant came into Jerusalem, there was to be no more travelling for the tabernacle. The ark - a symbol of the incarnate God - would rest there among his people forever. Spurgeon commented, "This is the joy of our souls, for surely we shall rest in God, and certainly our desire is to dwell in him. This also is the end of our fears for the church of God; for if the Lord dwell in her, she shall not be moved; if the Lord desire her, the devil cannot destroy her." Maclaren added, "The Divine promises teach the great truth that God over answers our desires, and puts to shame the poverty of our petitions by the wealth of his gifts. He is 'able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.'"

The fact that the ark disappeared from Jerusalem around the time that the Babylonians sacked the city does not mean that God's presence has left that great city. He has promised that it will dwell there forever and his promises are sure. In fact, it seems that the ark is in the presence of God: <<*Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail*>> (Revelation 11:19), and it is known that Jerusalem will be the final home for God's people: <<*And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal*>> (Revelation 21:10-11).

I will abundantly bless its provisions. God promised to have a special material blessing on Jerusalem and Israel, especially as part of the blessings on obedience connected to the Mosaic Covenant: <<*If you heed these ordinances, by diligently observing them, the Lord your God will maintain with you the covenant loyalty that he swore to your ancestors; he will love you, bless you, and multiply you; he will bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the issue of your flock, in the land that he swore to your ancestors to give you*>> (Deuteronomy 7:12-13), and: <<*The Lord will command the blessing upon you in your barns, and in all that you undertake; he will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. The Lord will establish you as his holy people, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in his ways. All the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of you. The Lord will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your womb, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your ground in the land that the Lord swore to your ancestors to give you. The Lord will open for you his rich storehouse,*

the heavens, to give the rain of your land in its season and to bless all your undertakings. You will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow>> (Deuteronomy 28:8-12).

I will satisfy its poor with bread. God does not promise material wealth to those who choose him but he will provide their basic needs. However, it should also be noted that some go even without the basics, not because of God but because of what humankind has done with the world.

- 16 Its priests I will clothe with salvation,
and its faithful will shout for joy.
- 17 There I will cause a horn to sprout up for David;
I have prepared a lamp for my anointed one.
- 18 His enemies I will clothe with disgrace,
but on him, his crown will gleam.'

Psalm 132:16-18

Verses 16-17 closely echo the prayer of vv.9-10.

Its priests I will clothe with salvation. Earlier in v.9 the singer prayed that the priests would be clothed with righteousness. Now he declared a promise from God that he would also clothe the priests with salvation: <<*Now rise up, O Lord God, and go to your resting-place, you and the ark of your might. Let your priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, and let your faithful rejoice in your goodness*>> (2 Chronicles 6:41). When those who serve as God's representatives are saved, the people of God shall shout for joy: <<*He will yet fill your mouth with laughter, and your lips with shouts of joy*>> (Job 8:21).

There I will cause a horn to sprout up for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed one. Jerusalem would also be the place where the strength promised to David and his descendants would grow. In so doing, God prepared a light or a lamp for his Messiah, the ultimate anointed One: <<*The Lord will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king, and exalt the power of his anointed*>> (1 Samuel 2:10b), <<*On that day I will cause a horn to sprout up for the house of Israel, and I will open your lips among them. Then they shall know that I am the Lord*>> (Ezekiel 29:21), and: <<*He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David*>> (Luke 1:69 NIV). Derek Kidner noted, "The three terms, horn, lamp and crown, scarcely need comment, with their evident implications of strength, clarity and royal dignity. But note that the word used for crown (the same as for the high priest's mitre) draws attention to the fact that it symbolised the king's hallowing. Not power alone, but holiness is this king's – our King's – glory."

His enemies I will clothe with disgrace. Any and all who opposed God's Messiah will end in shame: <<*Those who hate you will be clothed with shame, and the tent of the wicked will be no more*>> (Job 8:22), but the anointed one's crown shall flourish. His reign will prosper and last forever. Spurgeon observed, "Their shame they will be unable to hide, it shall cover them: God will array them in it for ever, and it shall be their convict dress to all eternity."

But on him, his crown will gleam. Sung in exilic times, when the Psalter was compiled, this is a declaration of faith that God would again fulfil his promises and raise up a new David, with a crown even more glorious than the one David took from king of the Ammonites: <<*He took the crown of Milcom from his head; the weight of it was a talent of gold, and in it was a precious stone; and it was placed on David's head. He also brought forth the spoil of the city, a very great amount*>> (2 Samuel 12:30).