

Promises Kept
Psalm 132
August 13, 2023

One of my friends with small kids told me recently, “We no longer call it vacation; we call it ‘family time.’” By that he means that the math of travel plus small children does not always equal rest.

On an unrelated note, Julie and I just returned a week or so ago from our annual trip with her family. We’ve done this same trip—same people (6 adults and 6 children), same place, relatively same itinerary—a number of times. Thankfully, all the adults on this trip are highly committed to it going smoothly. So, each year we edit our packing lists based on things we did or didn’t use the year before, our grocery lists based on what we actually ate, and our daily schedule to minimize chaos and enable all the other things that lead to enjoying parenting on someone else’s turf. And, after *many* years of doing this same trip, I think we’re actually getting better at traveling together. If you were to ask me after church, “How do you live with 12 people—four of them four and under—in a small space for a week,” I could give you a few tips. They’ve been learned by experience; and I’ve found them to work.¹

We’ve talked about how these Psalms of Ascent ended up functioning in Israel’s life, as something of a soundtrack for the people of God’s annual journeys to Jerusalem. I’m guessing you’ve noticed some recurrent themes—leitmotifs, if you will—as we’ve walked through these Psalms. This week I read someone call those repeated themes for these pilgrims, “travel tips.”²

If Psalm 120 was a song far away, and each Psalm has been sung as we march toward a particular destination, here’s the latest counsel for travelling well, and wisely, based on Psalm 132: remember, recite, and rejoice in the promises of God fulfilled. Maybe that sounds like something you’ve heard a few times before. If that’s the case, and *because* of that it’s therefore uninteresting, be reminded: *novel* advice is not always the best advice. If no one else has ever said it, it might be better to steer clear. However, if we’ve been told this before, if the Psalms *themselves* have said this time and again, could it be because it’s been vital for pilgrims for centuries?

Consider, how did the Psalms of Ascent begin, the one we called “A Song Far Away”? **Deliver me, O Lord, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue** (Ps. 120:2). Lies, half-truths, papered-over deceptions, create and foster both pain and disappointment. The Psalmist, like us, longs for something *true*, something that can be believed and depended upon. And in Psalm 132, God’s people sing about those things. So, while this is a complicated Psalm with a good bit of complicated historical detail, the essence of it is quite simple: God makes promises. And then, He keeps them.

1. Promises Prayed: The Lord Dwelling Among His People (vv. 1–10)

The Psalmist begins by praying that the Lord remember David. That means, most likely, the one writing this Psalm is *not* David. This particular songwriter is writing later, reflecting on Israel’s past. Verse 1: **Remember, O Lord, in David’s favor, all the hardships he endured.** The context will explain which hardships the song refers to. Verse 2: **how he 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 for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.”**

¹ *Some of the time.*

² J. Stephen Yuille, *Longing for Home.*

It will be important for the latter half of the Psalm that we note *here* the vow David made. He vowed—made an oath—to not rest until he accomplished what he set out to do. Keep in mind that as King, David could afford to live at ease. Whatever he desired done, he could have had others do. Yet this Psalm gives insight we might not have otherwise. He denied himself the privileges of position, refusing creature comforts for this purpose: that he might find a dwelling place for the Lord.

So, the Psalmist asks the Lord to remember David’s hardships. Verses 2–5 point us in the direction of what that hardship was, this vow. However, the Psalmist then gets even *more* specific. He’s pointing to a particular hardship related to a particular vow concerning a particular thing. That thing is the “it” of verse 6: **Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah; we found it in the fields of Jaar.** The vow David made about finding a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob is the vow to find the Ark of the Covenant.

If what you know about this Ark is more informed by Spielberg than it is Samuel, let’s review. First, the Ark was a wooden chest overlaid with gold. You might picture the gold cherubim facing one another on top of it. *Within* the Ark were the tablets of the Law, among various other items.³ But *most* importantly for the context of Psalm 132 is what the Ark of the Covenant symbolized or represented for the people of God.⁴ The Ark was understood to be the throne or the footstool to the throne of God Himself. Atop the Ark were the cherubim, but above them God was enthroned (2 Kings 19:15; Psalm 80). And if the Ark represented His throne, then the presence of the Ark also symbolized *His* presence—the nearness of their King.⁵ If all *that* is true concerning the importance of the Ark, then maybe we can understand why David sought it as he did.

For a quick history, years prior the Ark had been taken by the Philistines (1 Samuel 5). I can’t read all of 1 Samuel to you, but after the episode with Dagon and various illnesses afflicted the Philistines, they sent that Ark *right* back to the Israelites. Yet, the language of verse 6—**we heard of it in Ephrathah**—makes it sound as if the Ark had been somewhat forgotten.⁶ We see evidence of neglect in 1 Chronicles 13 when David says that the Ark was *not* sought in the days of Saul (1 Chron. 13:3). So, from 1 Samuel 7 to 2 Samuel 6—some would say 20 years—it seems as if the Ark had *not* been in the center of Israel’s life. In fact, Motyer describes verse 6 as if the search for it were akin to a treasure hunt.⁷ Verse 6: **Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah; we found it in the fields of Jaar.**⁸

The Psalmist began this Psalm asking the Lord to remember David’s vow to find it. Now that we’ve recalled what the Ark represented, and some of David’s hardship in finding it, it might be worth asking again what *precisely* it was that David pursued. It wasn’t *merely* an Ark. It was what the Ark represented, as verse 5 made clear: **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.** He sought that which was lost, but I don’t mean *merely* the Ark. He sought that which was lost in the Garden: God’s presence in the middle of His people.

Where He is, God’s people long to be. Verse 7: **“Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool!”** And where *they* go, they desire the Lord to be. Verse 8: **Arise, O Lord, and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might.** This is not unlike what Moses would say whenever the Ark would set out, as recorded in Numbers 10: **Arise, O Lord, and let**

³ See Leland Ryken, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 43.

⁴ Alec Motyer, *Psalms by the Day*, 386.

⁵ Ryken, 43.

⁶ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, 485.

⁷ Motyer, 386.

⁸ Walford, Jacobson, Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, NICOT, 936; Kidner, 486, thinks *both* Ephrathah and Jaar refer to Kiriath-Jearim (Jaar is the singular of Jearim).

your enemies be scattered (Numb. 10:35). But *here* in verse 8 it's as if this is the *final* time the Ark would move: **Arise, O Lord, and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might.**

The arrival of the Ark in Jerusalem in 2 Samuel 7 was a monumental event in Israel's history. They wrote songs about it! It's not a stretch to say that for them the period of desert wanderings had come to an end.⁹ Derek Kidner called the Ark's arrival the climax of a journey of centuries, begun at far-off Sinai.¹⁰ It ushered in a new era in God's rule over Israel. God's throne had come to God's city. And in 2 Samuel we see their response: **David and all the house of Israel were bringing up the ark of the Lord with shouting and the sound of the trumpet** (2 Sam. 6:15). They rejoiced. Verse 9 of our Psalm describes the same kind of response, but in something of a prayer: **Let your priests be clothed with righteousness, and let your saints shout for joy.**

We've been all over the Old Testament—in 1 and 2 Samuel, Numbers, and in 1 Chronicles—but we should also note something important from 2 Chronicles 6. This is years after the Ark's return, when David's son Solomon dedicated the long-awaited temple. 2 Chronicles 6:41 is the end of that beautiful prayer of dedication: **Now therefore arise, O Lord God, to Your resting place, you and the ark of your might; let your priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation and let your godly ones rejoice in what is good.** Sound familiar? Now listen to the final line of that prayer: **O Lord God, do not turn away the face or your anointed; remember Your lovingkindness to Your servant David.**

And now hear verse 10 of Psalm 132: **For the sake of your servant David, do not turn away the face of your anointed one.** Did Solomon write Psalm 132? Maybe.¹¹ But it almost certainly was a king that followed David. This king first asked God to remember David in verse 1. But, then in verse 10, he asks God, for the sake of David, to show *him* mercy.

You might say he was praying on the basis of prior promises. Otherwise, he has no hope. He's asking for access *based on* what God had assured prior. He longed to be in God's presence with God's people. So, he prayed promises. Maybe in your confusion about what He is doing, it'd be helpful to pray based on what He's done. Note secondly,

2. Promises Made: Through a King, the Lord Dwelling Among His People (vv. 11–12)

Why did the story of the Ark make its way into this Psalm? There are a few reasons, but it's worth noting that the return of the Ark was *also* the historical context for one of the most important chapters in all the Old Testament—2 Samuel 7—which includes one of most important promises in all of Israel's history. Once the Ark—the throne of God—had come to its rightful place, Psalm 132:11 recalls the promise made: **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. If your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies that I shall teach them, their sons also forever shall sit on your throne.”**

Verses 1–5 of Psalm 132 talked about what David vowed. Now, in the second half, we see what God vowed. In that context—2 Samuel 7—David wanted to build God a house. He, of course, had misunderstood God's purposes. He grossly *underestimated* them. God has something better in mind. David wants to grab a hammer; God lays a foundation for redemptive history. He

⁹ Willem VanGemeren, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 927.

¹⁰ Kidner, 484.

¹¹ J. Stephen Yuille thinks so.

wouldn't be outdone. With a play on words, God shows David that instead of David building God *anything*, God will build David's house *forever*.¹²

The Psalmist asked in verse 1 and verse 10 for God to remember David. In essence God's promise assures them, "I have."

The Israelites recite this central promise as they journeyed to Jerusalem. They recall the context, the return of the throne. And they recall the promise, the one who'd sit upon it. However, I trust you noted the complicating condition mentioned in verse 12: **If your sons keep my covenant**

...

On this side of history, we can and should ask: Did the sons of David keep it?

The first section of this text included prayers that God might remember David and His promises toward him. In the second section of this Psalm, the Psalmist recalls the promise made David. Promises have been prayed, and promises made. Note third,

3. **Promises Kept:** Through a King, the Lord Dwelling Among His People for Their Good (vv. 13–18)

In this last section God answers many of the requests made earlier in the Psalm. And, in each case, the answer is larger than the prayer. He has always been able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think (Eph. 3:20). For example, though we noted David's intentions to get the Ark to Jerusalem, David's pursuit did not surprise Yahweh. He'd already chosen Jerusalem. Note verse 13: **For the Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place.** David pursued what God already purposed.

I wonder what you're pursuing and the hardship you're facing. Have you considered how far ahead of you God is? You think 10 years out, and all that comes to mind are questions/burdens. He's gone before you. It's not a mystery to Him. He's governed all of human history perfectly forever. You think He can't handle Tuesday?

Nothing thwarts what He aims at. In fact, Messianic hints come in relationship to this in verse 14: **"This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it."**

As I thought about David's vow, and the Lord's **sure oath**, Hebrews 6:16–19 came to mind: **for men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.**

Will broken promises from others in your past—or in your present—affect how you view His truth tomorrow? Do you think that the One who's never lied is going to begin with you? We should pray *both*, "Deliver me from lying lips," *and* "Help me trust your unfailing Word."

More promises are kept in verse 15. Wherever He rests, He **will abundantly bless her provisions; I will satisfy her poor with bread.** The Lord dwells among His people *for their good*. More promises are kept in verse 16. Back in verse 9 the Psalmist prayed: **Let your priests be clothed with righteousness, and let your saints shout for joy.** Verse 16 answers: **Her priests I will clothe with salvation, and her saints will shout for joy.** More promises kept, for the good of God's people.

We'll note one more. Verse 10 asked: **For the sake of your servant David, do not turn away the face of your anointed one.** Verse 17 and 18 answer: **There I will make a horn to**

¹² Richard Belcher, *The Messiah and the Psalms*, 151, "Just as David was concerned with the throne of the Lord, the Ark, so the Lord was concerned with the throne of David."

sprout for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed. His enemies I will clothe with shame, but on him his crown will shine. Verse 10's prayer answered.

In fact, once again, more is given than was asked. The horn speaks to strength. The lamp speaks to clarity. And the crown speaks to dignity.¹³ Kidner points out that the word for "crown" is the same word used to describe what the high priest wore upon his head. In that parallel, we should note that it's not power *alone* this King will have or wield, it's *holy* power that is our King's glory.¹⁴

Which might remind you of the condition: if David's sons kept God's covenant and testimonies, then their sons would reign forever and ever. Have any of David's sons kept the covenant without fail?

Yes. One has. When God made the condition, He had Someone in mind.

So, what of God's promise that He will not turn back from?

Like every other promise, He kept it.

This holy King took upon Himself all of our sin. And right now, at this moment, the resurrected Son of David rules and reigns. And He sent His Spirit to dwell among His people for their good, now and forever in a Jerusalem to come. Every promise of Psalm 132 finds its "Yes" in Him and Him alone. In fact, John the Baptist's father Zechariah considered Psalm 132:17 to be something of a reference to the Messiah.¹⁵ Hear what he prayed when his tongue was loosed, **Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant** (Luke 1:68–69).¹⁶

Conclusion

So, what's the application of this travel tip: to remember, recite, and rejoice in the promises of God fulfilled in King Jesus? Missionary to India Lesslie Newbigin answers well. He was frequently asked a question concerning his ministry in the non-Western world: "Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future of the gospel in India?" His standard reply went along these lines, "I believe in the resurrection of Jesus and therefore the question doesn't arise." By that he meant, "The gospel is news of a fact" and regarding a fact . . . you have to ask a different question: "Do you believe it or do you not?"¹⁷

¹³ Kidner, 488.

¹⁴ Kidner, 488.

¹⁵ VanGemeren, 930.

¹⁶ See also Beale and Carson, *A Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 263.

¹⁷ Quoted here: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/participants-in-what-we-proclaim-recovering-pauls-narrative-of-pastoral-min/>