SONG, PRAYER, SCRIPTURE

ASPECTS OF THE RECEPTION OF THE BOOK OF PSALMS FROM THE HEBREW BIBLE TO THE 21ST CENTURY

EDITED BY
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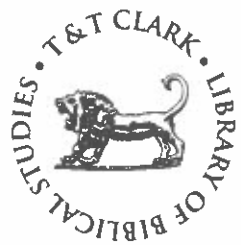

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1. Introduction

Overlooking the banks of the Potomac River in Washington D.C. stands the Lincoln memorial, a neo-classical temple in which the imposing statue of Abraham Lincoln is flanked by inscriptions of his most famous speeches. Etched onto the righthand wall is his inaugural address, given when he took the oath of the office of the presidency for the second time on March 4, 1865. As he contemplated the final days of the Civil War, Lincoln centered its cause squarely on the institution of slavery. He looked forward to a post-war reality in which the people would "bind up the nation's wounds," envisioning a period of reconstruction in which those who attempted to break the country would be treated with compassion. Although he was clear that the South was in the wrong, he emphasized that the warring sides shared a religion and a sacred text: "Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other."

Few would describe Psalm 132 as a favorite or even a particularly well-known text, and there is nothing explicit in Lincoln's speech that would call it to mind. "Lord, remember David and all his afflictions," as the first verse puts it, appears in no Presidential address before or after Lincoln's. Moreover, the subsequent verses of Psalm 132 have been quoted much less frequently than any others of the Psalms of Ascents (Pss 120–134).

Yet centuries before Lincoln's speech, Psalm 132 helped set the stage for the European engagement with the American continent that eventually gave rise to his presidency and the Civil War. As this chapter will lay out, Psalm 132 was a key text used to promote colonialism as well as the institution of slavery upon which the plantation economies in the southern US and parts of the Caribbean depended. At the same time, some discerned in the same text a future in which black bodies were not compelled to submit to bondage. This chapter will chart the rival interpretive trajectories of Psalm 132 fundamental in this period—trajectories so antithetical as to call Lincoln's assertion about a shared culture of Bible reading and prayer into question.

2. Psalm 132 and Colonialism

a. Psalm 132 at Elmina

More than 200 years before Lincoln's speech, another set of words were engraved upon a wall, not on the side of a grand memorial but above the exit door of a small chapel. The church was built just after 1637 and the inscription relates a portion of Psalm 132 in Dutch:

> ZION IS DES HEEREN RUSTE DIT IS
> SYN WOONPLAETSEIN EEUWIGHEY
>
> PSALM:132

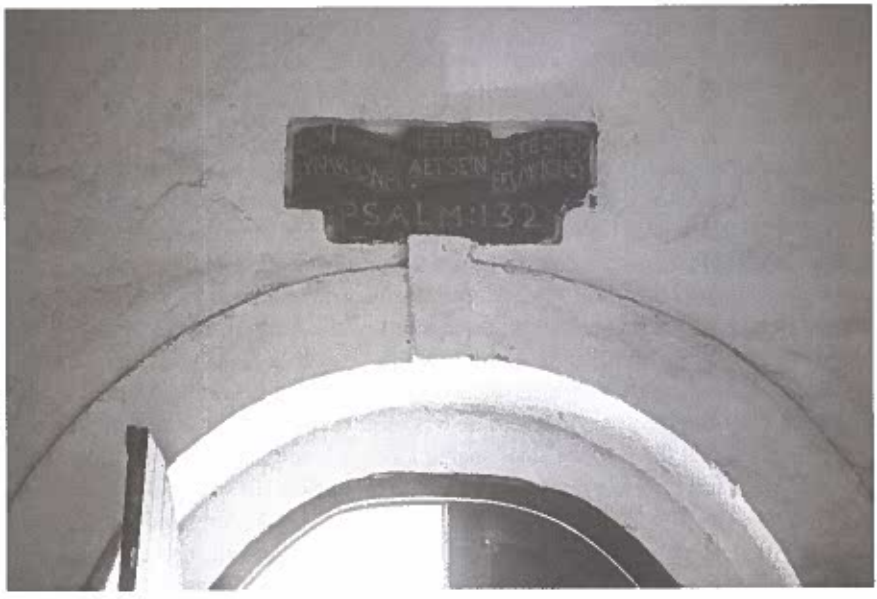

Image 1: *Psalm 132 in Old Dutch at Elmina Castle*
(supplied by Merten Snijders/The Image Bank via Getty Images, used with permission)

The text is a variation on Ps 132:13–14 from the official Dutch version of the Bible published a century earlier and translates into English as: "Zion is the Lord's throne. This is his resting place for all eternity."[1] The chapel where it appears was built when the Dutch took over Elmina, a Portuguese stronghold whose construction began 150

1. The *Statenvertaling* was the first translation of the entire Bible from the original ancient languages into Dutch, originally printed in 1637 with a second edition appearing in 1657. The relevant text from Ps 132 is as follows: [13] Want de HEERE heest: Zion verkoren, Hij heft het begeerd tot Zijn woon-plaetze [14] Dit is myne ruste tot in eeuwigheid…

years earlier in 1482. It stands on the coast of Ghana and was the first permanent European settlement in Africa to secure a place where European brandy, bowls, and guns could be exchanged for African pepper, ivory, and gold. As plantation agriculture expanded in the Americas, Elmina was captured by the Dutch and shifted in purpose from trading post to slave dungeon. According to a report from the Dutch West India Company in 1730, the "part of Africa which as of old is known as the 'Gold Coast'...has now virtually changed into a pure Slave Coast."[2] To support the new labor-intensive economy across the ocean, one room in the stronghold was reused to house kidnapped men before they were transferred to a ship bound for the Americas, and another was newly built as a women's dungeon over which a Protestant chapel was constructed.[3]

Like Elmina, the Psalms were key elements at the very beginning of Europe's exploration across the oceans in the fifteenth century. It was the dawn of a new age as Europe interacted with the "new world," but the explorers were nevertheless informed by old practices and sensibilities. During this period, the first pages of Psalters contained world maps with Jerusalem as the center point.[4] Columbus himself, who sailed with a Portuguese mission to Elmina between 1482 and 1484 to hone his seafaring skills,[5] annotated his copy of Ptolemy's *Geography* with Ps 93:4: *Mirabiles elationes maris; myrabilis in altis Dominum* ("Mightier than the sea's waves, mighty on high is the Lord").[6]

Yet this does not entirely clarify why Psalm 132 was displayed over the door of the Dutch chapel. How could David's ancient vow and God's generous response relate to the eighteenth-century slave trade? To put it another way, what does Elmina have to do with Zion? As this section will explore, aspects of this story can be traced back even earlier to the prayers of a Spanish Catholic Queen and the dying words of a French Huguenot explorer. Both found in the obscure text of Psalm 132 a guide and goad for the colonial conquest that would result in the forced enslavement and transport of millions of Africans to the Americas, and eventually the Civil War itself.

2. Cited by Parker 2021, 124.
3. For more on Elmina and the slave trade, see Adjaye 2017 and DeCorse 2001. For a discussion that contemplates the women in Elmina's dungeons as an ongoing metaphor for injustice in the Reformed Church today, especially as it relates to black women, see Kobo 2018, 1–9.
4. See the thirteenth-century Psalter MS London, BL Add 28681, f. 9 (Plate 2) 15, pointed out by Flint 1992, 7.
5. Hair 1990, 115, noted in DeCorse 2001, 10.
6. Flint 1992, 44. For more on Columbus' reliance on the Bible to shape his mission and geographical knowledge, see Phelan 1970; Watts 1985; Avalos 1996; Delaney 2006. See also Columbus 2010, which contains quotes from forty-three different books of the Bible and selections from over half the Psalms. Also note that Columbus' adopted autograph, "Chro-ferens," literally translates to "Christ-bearer" and points to his desire to carry Christianity over the seas just as his namesake St. Christopher carried Jesus over the water.

b. Psalm 132 in Queen Isabella's Prayer Book

The story of Psalm 132 in the early Americas begins with the Book of Hours of Queen Isabella of Castille, which, like the chapel in Elmira, interprets the psalm in light of God's supposed blessing on colonial conquest.[7] The royal prayerbook, dating from the late 1400s, highlights Psalm 132 as a significant text and leverages its narrative to motivate world conquest for the glory of God. It is this interpretive trajectory that set the stage for the seventeenth-century Elmina chapel.

Following a pattern found in a sizable minority of other Books of Hours from this period, Isabella's prayerbook includes a separate unit for the fifteen Psalms of Ascents (Pss 120–134). Typically, the visual program in this section associates these Psalms with private piety.[8] That is, it usually promotes an interior personal spirituality through close-up depictions of individuals in prayer—either the patron, King David, or the young Virgin Mary (in the latter case, Mary prayerfully climbs the fifteen stairs to the temple and thus physically models the spiritual path of the reader who approaches God through the fifteen psalms). Such images intended to foster the reader's life of private devotion by providing a visual model to imitate.

In contrast, the presentation of Psalm 132 in Queen Isabella's Book of Hours is distinctive in its modelling of a public and political piety, highlighting the significance of Jerusalem and its possession by God's chosen ruler. The section devoted to the Psalms of Ascents opens with a full-page depiction of King David along with his musicians.[9] Above Psalm 121 on the next page, David oversees the construction of a stone platform in the middle of a city.[10] The next image introduces Psalm 127 ("Unless the LORD builds the house…") with God sitting in the clouds surrounded by an assembly of saints as an angel unfurls a scroll that dangles between heaven and earth.[11] The final image in the section is placed alongside Psalm 132 and depicts the arrival of the Ark in Jerusalem along with musicians playing and a priest sacrificing a lamb.[12]

This visual program depicting David's installation of the Ark is unusual in several ways that highlight the political implications of Psalm 132. The choice of this story to illustrate the Psalms of Ascents is distinct compared to the choices made in the other Books of Hours described above. Clearly it is motivated by the text's recounting of David's oath to build a "dwelling place" for God in Zion. The curious thing is that this

7. Add MS 18851, currently in the British Library, London. See http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_18851. The following section relies heavily on research presented in Knowles 2021.
8. Knowles 2021.
9. Add MS 18851, f. 184v.
10. Add MS 18851, f. 185r. This scene is misidentified on the website of the British Library as Solomon overseeing the building of the Temple. The problem with this interpretation is that the architecture is a small and open-air space, the same size and style of the open-air platform that again appears with the ark a few pages later on f. 187r. In addition, the king wears the same gold-colored robe that David wears as he ascends the stairs in the miniature that begins the Psalms of Ascents (f. 184v.).
11. Add MS 18851, f. 186r.
12. Add MS 18851, f. 187r.

story about David and the city is routinely ignored in Books of Hours, since the typical visual programs stress interior piety, standing apart from concerns of the outside world. In addition, Psalm 132 only appears in Books of Hours when the Psalms of Ascents are included in a separate section. This is in sharp contrast with the prominent and predictable use of Psalms 120–131 in the offices of daily prayer and Psalm 130 as one of the seven penitential Psalms. Strikingly, Queen Isabella's Book of Hours not only includes Psalm 132, it also highlights the text by giving it its own miniature and by basing the artistic program of the entire section on its plot. As such, the volume draws attention to a somewhat obscure site of private devotion and moves it into the public and political realm.

Image 2: *Psalm 132 in Isabella's Book of Hours*
(Add MS 18851, f. 184v; used with permission of The British Library Board)

In addition, the illustrations of the Psalms of Ascents in Isabella's volume emphasize that David's work had the clear and direct support of God. As the section retells the story of David, the images and their strategic textual associations emphasize God's direction and blessing of the royal program. As the ancient king begins to build, the accompanying Psalm proclaims that he works in the strength of God alone: "My help is in the name of the LORD" (Ps 121:2). The "building of the house" under God's guidance that Psalm 127 describes is illustrated as David's efforts to build a venue for the ark in Jerusalem, blessed by God and according to a divine plan handed down directly from heaven. Finally, as Psalm 132 relates the story of David's oath and God's subsequent blessing of David and Jerusalem, the accompanying miniature depicts the moment when the Ark is installed in the city. The Psalms of Ascents are interpreted as a story of a king piously completing God's plan for Jerusalem under divine direction and with divine blessing.

The parallels with the life of the original owner are not difficult to see. The volume was likely presented to Queen Isabella around 1497 to commemorate the marriages of her two children into the family of the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian of Austria.[13] Five years earlier, Columbus set out with the financial support of the royal court to find a new route to the East, thus alighting upon the Americas and claiming them for Spain. The year 1492 was also when the entire Iberian Peninsula came under the control of Catholic rulers, and Muslims and Jews were soon expelled from Spain.[14] On the basis of such grand and global prospects, Isabella and her husband King Ferdinand contemplated a new crusade to retake the Holy Land. Ferdinand already held "King of Jerusalem" as one of his titles, and notables such as Abbot Joachim of Fiore prophesied that the Christian who would rebuild Mount Zion would come from Spain.[15] Columbus himself left money in his will for the purpose of "liberating" Jerusalem.[16]

In 1497, therefore, it seemed quite likely that Isabella would have a grandchild who would unite most of Europe and the New World in his reign, and lead in the reconquest of Jerusalem as well. While praying with her Book of Hours, the Spanish queen could meditate upon David as a royal role model who obeyed God by leveraging riches and might in order to bring the Ark into Jerusalem and provide for it a suitable edifice. By moving Psalm 132 from a personal and privatized experience to a model for political action, Isabella's prayer book demonstrates the text's new prominence and public significance. In Spain at the very end of the fifteenth century, Psalm 132 was employed to justify colonial conquest in the name of God.

13. Blackhouse 1993, 5.
14. Blackhouse 1993, 56.
15. Note a portion from one of Columbus' letters to the royal court: "Jerusalem and the Mount of Zion are now to be rebuilt by Christian hands, and God through the mouth of the prophet in the fourteenth Psalm said so. The Abbot Joachim said that this man was to come from Spain." See Flint 1992, 185. See also Arcelus-Ulibarrena 1992, 49–60.
16. Sweet 1986, 369–82.

c. Psalm 132 and the Final Words of Jean Ribault

With the advent of Protestantism, such use of this text soon moved outside of Catholic circles. As additional countries and religious traditions pursued their own interests in the Americas, the colonizers also sought God's blessing upon their endeavors through the language and imagery of Psalm 132. One such example involves the French expedition led by the Huguenot Jean Ribault. In 1562 he and his crew dismounted near what is now Jacksonville, Florida and, after saying what is thought to be the first Protestant prayer in the New World, erected a stone column and claimed the territory for France before returning home for supplies and settlers. Upon his arrival back in Florida in 1565, he soon encountered Spanish forces led by Pedro Menéndez and was killed along with 350 of his men.

There are three accounts of Ribault's death written by first-hand witnesses.[17] The fullest was written in Spanish by Gonzalo Solís de Merás and records that, upon the capture of himself and his company, Ribault recited a version of Psalm 132:

> Jean Ribault replied that he and all those who were there were of the new religion, and he began to recite the psalm "*Domine Memento Mei.*" When it was over, he said that dust they were and unto dust they must return, that another twenty or so years were of little account, and the Adelantado should do with them as he pleased.[18]

There is some dispute in the literature as to what text Ribault actually recited. Earlier editions clearly identified it as Psalm 132, slightly modified by either Ribault or Solís.[19] The editor of the most recent edition of the account, however, notes that such an attribution is "problematic" given that there is no Psalm with this exact title. The Latin incipit is *Memento Domine,* taken from the first line which reads in full *Memento Domine David et omnis mansuetudinis eius.* Given the variation, Arbesú-Fernández prefers to attribute the quote to Luke 23:42 where the thief on the cross says to Jesus *Domine, memento mei, cum veneris in regnum tuum* ("Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom").[20]

Yet this attribution to Luke 23 is also not entirely clear. Solís clearly states that Ribault recited a psalm ("*el salmo*"), and that it took some amount of time to deliver: "he began to recite... And when it was over... " ("*y empeçó a decir... Y, acabado, dijo que...*"). Both facts make the Luke attribution difficult to sustain. In addition, a mistake in the account is not inconceivable given the several different languages and

17. A brief account was written in Spanish by Father Francisco López de Mendoza Grajales. For discussion of the three extant Spanish copies and a history of their publication and translation, see Arana 1965, 12–13. A longer account in Spanish was written by Gonzalo Solís de Merás, the Ferrera manuscript of which has been recently published as Solís 2020. Both a French and an English account were written by Nicolas Le Challeux 1566 and 1579.
18. Solís 2020, 72–73.
19. Warner 1984, 81.
20. Solís 2020, 389.

versions of the Bible in play. Since Ribault was a Huguenot (indeed, according to Solís' account he had just declared to Menéndez that he and his company were of the "new religion"), it is probable that he would have quoted a biblical text in French rather than Latin. Adding to the complexity of the account is the likelihood that he sang the psalm in the metrical version popular in French Protestant circles: "Vueilles, Seigneur, etre recors, De David & de son tourment."[21]

If this is the case, then Solís heard a French paraphrase of Psalm 132 and, after first identifying the text, he then converted it into Latin for his Spanish Catholic readers. In such a context, it is conceivable that he slightly mishandled the quotation. This scenario takes better account of the evidence than attributing Ribault's quotation to the terse line found in Luke 23.

Solís' account of Ribault reciting "*el salmo*" received increasing visibility via its publication in succeeding centuries. Published in 1723, his was the first of the two Spanish versions from first-hand witnesses available in print.[22] (Father López's account was published first in French only in 1841, then in Spanish in 1865, and in English in 1875; Le Challeux's account was first published in an English translation in 1566, then later in the original French version in 1579.[23])

These popular nineteenth-century accounts of Protestants and Catholics fighting each other for hegemony in the Americas may seem distant from Queen Isabella's solitary prayers with her Book of Hours in the late 1400s. Yet together they form a trajectory of interpretation that illuminates Psalm 132's presence on the wall of Elmina's chapel. Created at the very beginning of Europe's conquest of the Americas, Isabella's Catholic prayerbook used imagery from Psalm 132 to draw attention to David's quest to create in Jerusalem a fit dwelling for the Ark. The prayerbook shifts Psalm 132 from a vehicle of private devotion to a model for public and political action. Following this same line of interpretation, the Huguenot Jean Ribault, shaped by singing metrical psalms, likely recited Psalm 132 before his death by Catholic hands in Florida in 1565. Like Queen Isabella, Ribault found the text an effective guide and goad for seeking God's favor through colonial conquest. Both Catholic queen and Protestant mariner took from the text a vision of God who was pleased by a national leader leveraging power and riches to support faithful worship in the chosen city.

When Dutch Calvinists later sought to expand their financial interests in the emerging international economy, they seized a fort from the Portuguese to facilitate their capture and sale of millions of Africans. Rejecting the extant Catholic worship space, they refurbished the fort with a new building to house a chapel and a slave dungeon. Yet even as they established their new Protestant form of worship, they aligned with the Catholic colonialists in using Psalm 132 to claim parity between their own actions and God's purposes on earth.

21. Marot 1986.
22. Solís' work was edited by Andres Gonzalez Barcia and first published in *Ensayo cronológico para la historia general de la Florida* in 1723, with the account of Ribault's recitation of Ps 132 on p. 281. For a history of subsequent publications of Solís' work, see Arana 1965, 13–14 and Solís 2020, 15–28.
23. For more on the publication of Lopez's work, see Arana 1965, 13–14 and Solís 2020, 12. For the accounts of Le Challeux, see Le Challeux 1579 and Le Challeux 1566.

There is a sobering footnote to this sobering trajectory. Almost 100 years after the Dutch chapel was built, an orphaned boy from Elmina was enslaved and brought to the Dutch Republic. Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein studied theology at Leiden University before he became the first person of African descent to be ordained a minister in an established Protestant church. His dissertation, published in 1742, defended slavery on Christian grounds. Two years later, the Dutch Reformed Church sent Capitein back to his homeland, where he served as a chaplain to Elmina Castle for two years before he died in 1746.[24]

The prayers of a Catholic queen in Spain, the dying testimony of a French Huguenot in Florida, and the slave dungeon of Elmina in between—all were shaped by a new political reading of Psalm 132. As Isabella, Ribault, and Capitein rose from their prayers, their understanding of Psalm 132 reinforced their sense that they had God's blessing to conquer the new world. Centuries later, the effects of this European-based trajectory of exploration and enslavement resonated in the political imagination and religious practice of antebellum Americans. As this country grew, the words of Psalm 132 continued to shape the perspectives of its citizens. However, in distinction to the reception of the text by Isabella and Ribault and Capitein, Psalm 132 also functioned more flexibly to fund rival moral visions. Even as it continued to sustain exploitation and enslavement, the text was also a resource for liberation.

3. Psalm 132 and Freedom

a. Reading the Bible and Psalm 132 in the Americas

As Europeans came to settle in the Americas, they brought their Scriptures with them—the Douay-Reims and King James Bibles, the Marot and de Beze metrical Psalters, as well as Sternhold and Hopkins. In English settlements established in Virginia in the seventeenth century, copies of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer had the Sternhold and Hopkins Psalter bound into them. Colonists in New England also set up printing presses to create the texts domestically. In 1640, *The Bay Psalm Book*, comprised of metrical Psalms, became the first book published in the New World.

Interactions with indigenous peoples prompted new translations of the Bible, and by 1865 one could obtain whole or portions of the Bible in almost a dozen different languages.[25] Early examples include translations into Aymaran in sixteenth-century Peru and Nahuatl in seventeenth-century Mexico.[26] The first complete Bible published in the Western hemisphere was a translation into the indigenous language of Wôpanâak in 1663.[27] The main translator, John Eliot, was assisted by Job

24. Capitein, *Staatkundig-Godgeleerd Onderzoekschrift over de Slaverny, als niet strydig tegen de Christlyke Vryheid (Is Slavery Compatible with Christian Freedom or Not?)*. For a translation of Capitein's work, see Parker 2001. For more on Capitein, see Kpobi 1993, Levecq 2013, 145–66, Ekem 2014, 395–411, and Bosman 2021.
25. Gutjahr 1999, 200; Fisher 2017, 39–59.
26. Fisher 2017, 35–47; Lara 2004, 164; Lara 2003, 293–309; Ricard 1974, 176–93.
27. Eliot 1663. There were over 1000 copies printed for the first edition translation, and 2000 for the second in 1685, a version which also included a metrical psalter.

Nesutan, John Sassamon, and Cockenoe in translation and typesetting, and Wowaus in printing, meaning that this publication was also the first translation of the whole Bible for and with indigenous peoples.[28] Other translations followed, including *The Massachuset Psalter* and Gospel of John in Algonquian (1709), the Gospel of St Mark in Mohawk (1787), the Gospel of John in Mohawk (1787), the Epistles of John in Deleware/Lenape (1818), and the Gospel of Luke in Seneca (1829). In Ojibwe, a translation of the Gospels of Matthew and John appeared between 1829 and 1831, followed by the entire New Testament in 1833, the Psalms in 1856, and the Pentateuch in 1861. A translation of the book of Genesis in Dakota/Lakota was published in 1842, followed by the New Testament in 1865 and the Hebrew Bible in 1879.[29]

Americans also produced new translations into English. *The Bay Psalm Book* of 1640 was produced by Puritans who eschewed what they considered ideological accretions in vernacular translations produced in Europe. The first Catholic Bible printed in America, *The Holy Bible Translated from the Latin Vulgate*, was produced in Philadelphia by Carey, Stewart, and Co., in 1790.[30] Nearly twenty years later, a former Secretary to the Congress of the United States, Charles Thompson, translated and published a version of the Bible based entirely on Greek texts (before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint manuscripts were centuries older than any of the Hebrew versions).[31] For Jewish communities, a new translation of the Hebrew Torah was produced by Rabbi Isaac Leeser in 1845, with an English translation of the entire Tanakh following in 1853.[32]

As it was for Christian communities in Europe, the Bible was a vehicle of literacy and became a way to read both in English and in indigenous languages. Ten years after Elliot's translation was published, 30 percent of the Christian indigenous population in Plymouth Colony could read Wôpanâak, whereas non-Christian literacy in this area was non-existent.[33] *The Massachuset Psalter* was published with a column of Algonquian appearing alongside a column of English so that readers could learn both languages.

The enthusiastic efforts in translation were matched by those in distribution. Local Bible societies sprang up across the Atlantic seaboard, and those in New England consolidated into the American Bible Society in 1816.[34] The group wanted every American home to own a Bible, and produced hundreds of thousands of copies in their New York plant to sell cheaply or give away for free.[35]

28. Fisher 2017, 38–39.
29. Mayhew 1709; Harris 1829; Horden 1880; Riggs 1886.
30. Fogarty 1988, 117–43.
31. Thomson 1808.
32. Leeser 1845–46; Leeser 1853; Byrd 2021, 14; Sussman 1995.
33. Fisher 2017, 40, citing Lepore 1998, 36–37. Handwritten marginalia in some of the extant texts indicate use, although some were exported to Europe as curiosities (Fisher 2017, 40–45).
34. Fea 2016, 10–11. The Canadian Bible Society likewise emerged from local groups and officially formed in 1904.
35. Fea 2016, 30–39.

In domestically printed or imported versions, in Catholic or Protestant communities, in European or indigenous languages, the Bible was ubiquitous in post-contact America. It has been called the continent's "most comprehensively present 'thing,'" through at least the American War of Independence.[36] According to another historian, the Bible was "the most imported, most printed, most distributed, and most read written text in North America up through the nineteenth century."[37]

In this context of ubiquity, the public quotation of Psalm 132 was most frequently heard in one context: the dedication of a church. At the reopening of a Congregational church in Connecticut in 1864, the Reverend Tompkins McLaughlin used Psalm 132 as the first of four texts for his sermon.[38] In his exegesis of the text he postulated that it was sung at the dedication of both Jerusalem temples, and invited his congregation to join in the prayer for God's presence in the sanctuary: "We see here to-day no golden chest—no cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy-seat; but we *feel that the Lord is in his holy temple*."[39] At the dedication of a Calvinist meeting house in 1823, Psalm 132 was read and understood to illustrate God's "special respect to the place which is set apart and faithfully used for his social worship."[40] The text was also read during the first services held at a Presbyterian church in 1859.[41] These readings of Psalm 132 interpreted David's installation of the Ark in Jerusalem in light of their own establishment of new worshipping congregations in America.

b. Envisioning Liberation with Psalm 132

In the public quotation of particular verses at church dedications or in the private reading of the whole Bible in a large variety of languages, the text was widely available throughout the Americas. Yet this availability was not evenly distributed, and entire communities were denied access to the Bible, especially in its written form. The considerable translation and distribution project was largely directed to indigenous populations or European settlers and their descendants. Those who came in chains to the Americas via ports such as Elmina were banned from reading. Fearing that literacy would make the enslaved unfit for their service, southern US states passed literacy laws between 1740 and 1834 that prohibited teaching enslaved persons to read, with punishments that included fines, imprisonment, and flogging.[42] Frederick Douglass, born into slavery, recounted that when the husband of the woman teaching him to read found out, he forbade her to continue, saying that if he learned to read "there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave."[43] When it was detected that enslaved persons could read, they were routinely punished by

36. Noll 2016, 1.
37. Gutjahr 1999, 1.
38. McLaughlin 1864.
39. McLaughlin 1864, 22, emphasis in the original.
40. Austin 1823.
41. Sproull 1860, 122.
42. Span 2005, 27–28.
43. Douglass 2009, 44.

having a finger cut off.[44] For slaveowners wanting to teach their household the virtues of humility and obedience, guidebooks were published with titles that emphasized the spoken form of instruction such as Hoff's *Manual of Religious Instruction, Specially Intended for the Oral Teaching of Colored Person*.[45] Educational opportunities were also curtailed in Northern states, where segregated schooling was the norm.[46]

Against the odds, some Americans of African descent achieved literacy and often used their skills to fight for abolition. One example is Maria W. Stewart, a black woman who was born free in Hartford, Connecticut in 1803, orphaned at five, and later came to work first as an indentured servant, then as a teacher and writer.[47] She married a relatively wealthy black man, but was widowed after only two years, whereupon lawyers illegally took up his estate and she was left in poverty. In the early 1830s, she gave a series of public speeches promoting abolition. Her first one, in 1832 at Boston's Franklin Hall, marked the first time that an American woman of any race spoke in a public setting to what was called a "promiscuous audience"—a crowd of mixed genders and races.

In her trailblazing inauguration into the public political arena, Stewart also spearheaded a new public construal of Psalm 132. She published the text of the speeches along with spiritual meditations in 1835, and her work is suffused with biblical quotations and allusions as she marshals the text to condemn slavery and racism.[48] Her reliance on the Bible was partially due to her exposure to the text during her youth, when it was, as she describes it, "the book that I mostly studied."[49] Near the end of the volume, she quotes Psalm 132 in a prayer as she envisions a post-slavery world:

> Lord, I come, pleading alone the merits of my Redeemer; not only for myself do I plead, but for the whole race of mankind—especially for the benighted sons and daughters of Africa. Do thou loose their bonds, and let the oppressed go free. Bless thy churches throughout the whole world. *Clothe thy ministers with salvation, and cause thy saints to shout for joy.* Grant that the time may soon come that all may know thee, from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof.[50]

Given the centuries-long use of Psalm 132 to promote colonization and enslavement, Stewart's use of the text here is remarkable. As she broke barriers for women in the public and political sphere, she also reframed traditional ideological supports for slavery.

44. Span 2005, 32–33.
45. Hoff 1856. See also the emphasis placed on oral instruction in the form of sermons and lectures in Jones 1842.
46. Span 2005, 28–29.
47. Cooper 2011; Richardson 1987.
48. Stewart 1835.
49. Stewart 1835, 24.
50. Stewart 1835, 37, emphasis added.

c. Psalm 132 and the Bible in the Confederacy and Beyond

In the decades that followed, the work of abolitionists such as Stewart gained in strength even as support for slavery galvanized in the Southern states. When war broke out in 1861, Psalm 132 again entered into the public discourse to support the institution of slavery. One example is in a sermon given in Virginia in the early months of the war, when the Reverend Robert Sledd quoted a variation of Ps 132:13–14 to motivate southern troops into battle.[51] Preaching on 1 Chr 19:13, Sledd encouraged the troops to "fight for the cities of our God," described in the idealistic terms of the antebellum imagination that actively effaced the reality of slavery to instead focus on images of stately homes and refined pursuits:

> And the cities of our God! Their pleasant places, their peaceful homes and stately palaces, their vine-clad bowers and dancing fountains, where innocence sports and happiness lives—*Jerusalem which he hath chosen, and Mt. Zion where his glory dwelleth*—all are threatened with desecration and ruin!... You go to aid in the glorious enterprise of rearing in our sunny South a temple to constitutional liberty and Bible Christianity. You go to fight for your people and for the cities of your God.[52]

For Sledd, whose "sunny South" was being threatened by "idolatrous Ammonites" from the north, Psalm 132 provided key imagery to bolster the enthusiasm of the troops. Like the Elmina chapel, Sledd's sermon aligned God's choice of Jerusalem with the institution of slavery.

Such rival interpretations of Psalm 132 offer a microcosm of the rival stances that Americans understood the Bible to take with regards to slavery. For some, the curse of Ham in Gen 9:18–27 supported racial division and white supremacy, lending divine authorization to the enslavement of those of African descent. Others held up the affirmation in Acts 17:26 that God created all humanity out of "one blood" and thus intended equality with regards to racial status and heritage.[53]

These rival readings led to the emerging politicization of the Bible itself as a material object. As the war progressed, Americans continued to read their Bibles even while partisan perspective came to bear on established distribution patterns. The American Bible Society handed out more than three million copies of the Bible during the Civil War, but their efforts in the South were stymied early in the conflict. Because they were printed in New York, the texts soon came to be known as "Yankee Bibles" and were routinely rejected by southern troops. Confederate soldiers would routinely destroy boxes of Bibles from the American Bible Society because they were sent from the north. The Confederacy inaugurated its own Bible Society in 1862 in order to print and distribute Bibles in the southern states.[54]

51. Sledd 1861.
52. Sledd 1861, 20–21, emphasis added.
53. Powery 2016, 83–111. Powery 2017, 304–18; Johnson 2004; Haynes 2002.
54. Fea 2016, 78–81; Harvey 2017, 359.

Both North and South America were mired in an economy partially developed on plantation agriculture for which the labor of enslaved people was deemed essential. Thus, both continents lived in the shadow of the interpretation of Psalm 132 in Europe and Africa. Some understood that reading the Bible in this particular geography demanded new approaches. *The Bay Psalm Book* and many indigenous translations demonstrate this reality by making Scripture accessible to diverse populations, even as Maria Stewart's work reveals a new understanding of women's political speech and social imagination. The Bible was a vehicle for literacy and the social amplification of women's political voice, and Psalm 132 promoted a moral imagination of freedom. Yet the perspective of domination which a certain reception of Psalm 132 reflected and augmented endured, and people like the Reverend Sledd could continue to engage Psalm 132 to motivate geographical attainment and human enslavement. In this context, Psalm 132's hopeful vision of God choosing and protecting a city in which its citizens flourished largely continued to motivate slavery, even as some recognized the text's promise of equality and liberation.

4. Conclusion

On its face, Lincoln's assertion in 1865 that Americans on both sides of the conflict "read the same Bible" was obviously true. In both the North and the South, citizens opened up the book and read the same accounts of God's work in the world. While the strife was coming to a close, the nation was facing a future that would necessitate cooperation and forgiveness, and so the newly reelected President was engaging savvy political strategy to emphasize the core values and practices shared by the people.

Yet Lincoln's assertion was an optimistic simplification aimed more to influence the attitudes of a populace than to reflect lived reality.[55] Considered solely as a material object, the Bible during this period took on varied physicalities and appeared in many languages. At the dawn of the early modern period, a Spanish queen read the Psalms in Latin from her richly decorated prayer book. Soon after, the continents of North and South America were "discovered" by Europeans, and French Huguenots such as Ribault as well as Puritans in New England learned to sing their Psalms from hymnals written in the vernacular. Translations into indigenous languages soon followed.

These different physicalities of the Bible mirror the radically different hermeneutical stances its adherents adopted with regards to slavery. Arguments for and against the enslavement of Africans were made on the basis of the text. In order to deny access to the message of liberation and equality that the Bible contained, literacy laws prevented the enslaved from reading. In this context, the Bible was ideologically mapped on to rival moral and political visions, so much so that versions published in Northern states became unacceptable to readers in South.

55. In citing Lincoln and in framing my conclusions as I do, I am following the approach of Powery 2016, 32–33.

Looking at specific receptions of Psalm 132 during this period illustrates this ideological mapping. In addition to its standard use at the dedication of a new church, the text had a long history of supporting colonization and slavery. As far back as 1487, Queen Isabella saw in the text a goad and a guide to conquer other lands for the glory of God. Even though he held a different religious perspective, Ribault also summarized his work to claim America with the words of Psalm 132 in 1595. When a portion of the text was later placed on the chapel wall at Elmina in 1630, it summarized and supported work at the slave castle, influencing even former-enslaved people like Capitein to defend the institution of slavery in 1742. Finally, at the beginning of the war whose origin was intricately tied to slavery, the text was used once again to motivate troops to defend the southern cause in 1861.

In this context, the reception of Psalm 132 by Maria Stewart is a startling departure from tradition. As she stepped forward to express herself publicly in the political arena, her defiance of norms for women mirrored her defiance of the standard reception of Psalm 132. In her publication of 1835, Psalm 132 promotes a unique moral vision in which those of African descent are freed from their chains. The rival receptions of the entire Bible, and of individual texts such as Psalm 132 that promoted both the antebellum imagination and the abolition, call Lincoln's assertion of unity into question.

Once again, this narrative includes a sobering footnote. When Maria Stewart was widowed in 1829, her lawyers cheated her out of her proper inheritance and she was left penniless. In 1878 Congress granted pensions to the widows of the War of 1812, and she was able to avail herself of this benefit and use some of her funds to re-publish her collection of writings in 1879.[56] This re-publication, almost 50 years after the first edition and almost 15 years after the Civil War, is a stark reminder that the end of the war was not the end of racism in the US. Even though slavery was outlawed as an institution, moral and political visions grounded in racism and funded by texts like Psalm 132 persisted. By using her meager pension to republish a pre-Civil War abolitionist text, Stewart eschewed complacency in her post-war reality. In the face of an interpretative history that used the Bible to promote colonialism and slavery, rival voices like Stewart's remained essential.

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56. Stewart 1879.

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