

Ark of God's Strength: A Scriptural Foundation for the Blessed Virgin's Role in Spiritual Battle

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When Pope Pius V instituted the Feast of Mary, Help of Christians, it commemorated the miraculous victory of the Christians over Muslim forces at Lepanto through the praying of the Rosary.¹ Some three hundred years later, St. John Bosco composed a prayer to Mary, Help of Christians in which he applies to her the description “terrible as army in battle array” (Song 6:10) and begs her help against Satan, “the enemy.”² The tradition of seeing Mary as powerful in spiritual battle seems grounded in three authentically Christian sources: first, theological reflection on how helpful a sinless Mother could be in the struggle against sin;³ lived experience of Mary's intercession in spiritual battles; and third, miraculous military or cultural victories such as Lepanto or the conversion of the Albigensian heretics.⁴ However, it seems that *direct* Scriptural grounding of these devotions to Mary, Help of Christians, Vanquisher of the Devil, etc. is generally limited to the Protoevangelium.⁵ Granted, Mary's *fiat*, through which “by divinely given power she utterly destroyed the force and dominion of the evil one,”⁶ provides sufficient grounds to trust Mary with one's soul. Even more, the lived experience of the Christian people over two millennia gives arguably enough evidence for Pope Pius IX to encourage everyone to approach Mary “in all dangers, difficulties, needs, doubts, and fears.”⁷ However, it

¹ Anthony M. Buono, “Help of Christians.” *The Greatest Marian Titles: Their Meaning and Usage* (Staten Island: Society of St. Paul, 2008), 70-71.

² G.K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, ed. Stanley Porter, Vol. 166 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 1998) 73-74.

³ See Buono, “Help of Christians,” 67-68.

⁴ Buono, “Help of Christians,” 70.

⁵ See Buono, “Help of Christians,” 64-68.

⁶ Pius IX. *Ineffabilis Deus, Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church: Documents on the Blessed Virgin Mary*, ed. Marianne Lorraine Trouve, (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2001) 20.

⁷ Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 26.

may be that some Christians would go to the Blessed Virgin more frequently in their needs if the Scriptural basis for this practice were broadened.

The traditional title of Mary, Ark of the New Covenant is entirely biblical. Simply the fact that God overshadowed Mary at the Annunciation as He overshadowed the Ark would be sufficient cause for the title. However, this paper aims to explore the foundations for a biblical understanding of Mary's role in the spiritual battle of Christians and show its *raison d'être*. In the first section, a brief overview of both ancient and modern sources will demonstrate the historicity and biblical grounding of the title. The second section demonstrates the parallels between the fall of Jericho in Joshua and the fall of Babylon in Revelation. The third section connects the Ark, the Woman clothed with the Sun, and the Bride of Christ. In the final section, I argue that Mary, Ark of the New Covenant, acts to expand her privilege of indwelling to the whole People of God, which is the purpose of her role in spiritual battle and designation as New Ark. There are, of course, many ways to receive a scriptural text as multivalent and vexed as Revelation.⁸ This paper does not intend to pinpoint a "correct" reading of these texts but illuminate a thin layer of the truths contained therein.

Mary as the New Ark: a Survey

The association of Mary with the Ark goes back to Patristic times.⁹ The great Akathist hymn of the 6th century addresses the Theotókos, saying, "Rejoice, tabernacle of God the Logos/ Rejoice, holy one, holier than the holies./ Rejoice ark that was gilt by the Spirit.../Rejoice,

⁸ For an overview of possible reading frames, see Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale, 2014) 112-115.

⁹ For more Patristic quotes, see Brant Pitre, "The New Ark," *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary: Unveiling the Mother of the Messiah* (New York: Image, 2018) 64-65.

through whom enemies are defeated.”¹⁰ In these lines, the Theotókos is not simply named as Ark, but compared on several points. First, the hymn identifies her as the “tabernacle” or dwelling-place of God. The first purpose of the ark was to be the meeting-place between God and His people (Ex 25:22, *NRSV*).¹¹ Second, the holiness and purity of Mary is compared to the pure gold overlay that covered both the inside and the outside of the ark (Ex 25:11). This comparison indicates that she is “holier than the [Holy of] holies” and therefore surpasses the Ark because she bore God incarnate. The Incarnation presents a permanent and superior theophany to the one in the desert. Finally, she is the one “through whom enemies are defeated,” which calls to mind the whole history of the Ark in battle as Israel sought to conquer the Promised Land.

Some two hundred years before the Akathist hymn was written, St. Ephrem the Syrian had portrayed Mary as both New Ark and New Eve:

With the rib that was drawn out of Adam, the wicked one drew out the heart of Adam. There rose from the Rib a hidden power, which cut off Satan as Dagon.... There was then a mystery revealed, in that Dagon was brought low in his own place of refuge!¹²

This stunning passage compares Mary to the Ark, which had the power to shatter to pieces a statue of the Philistine god Dagon when the Ark was captured in battle and taken captive (1 Sam 5:1-5). Of course, God’s power drives the Ark’s destruction of Dagon, and it is primarily God’s “hidden power” at work in the destruction of Satan through the “Rib.” The “Rib” must be Mary, since Eve, the one “drawn out of Adam” failed to crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). The

¹⁰ “The Akathist Hymn and Small Compline,” trans. N. Michael Vaparis and Evie Zacharia des-Holmberg, *Liturgical Texts of the Orthodox Church*, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, <https://www.goarch.org/-/the-akathist-hymn-and-small-compline>, Stasis 4.

¹¹ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (New York: Oxford, 1991).

¹² Ephrem the Syrian, Hymn 3, *Hymns on the Nativity*, trans. J.B. Morris (Hymn nos. 1-13), *From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 13, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1898), revised and ed. Kevin Knight. www.newadvent.org.

Fathers in general saw both Mary and Christ's Humanity in the type of the ark,¹³ and this should not surprise us. For Israel, the Ark was so identified with God that at its capture the daughter-in-law of Eli exclaims, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured" (1 Sam. 4:22). Where the Ark went, so went God. Likewise, Mary gave Christ His human nature. By sharing her flesh with Christ and providing God a place to meet humanity, Mary and God became inseparable.

The Fathers were not alone in associating Mary with the Ark: St. Luke did so in the Gospel. According to John McHugh, the Greek word for "overshadow" (ἐπισκιάσει) which Gabriel uses at the Annunciation (Lk 1:35),¹⁴ and which is also used in the Greek translation of Exodus to describe God's presence in the Ark (See Ex. 40:34-38), is rare in the Septuagint and nearly always refers to the presence of God.¹⁵ He argues that Luke makes the analogy in order to emphasize that Christ is God even at His conception. Because McHugh cannot devise a doctrinal rationale for them, he dismisses the other Lucan parallels,¹⁶ such as when John the Baptist leaps (Lk 1:41) as David leapt before the Ark (2 Sam 6:16), but he does admit of the central one.¹⁷ As Brant Pitre points out, once the overshadowing is admitted as a reference to the Ark, the other parallels are consistent.¹⁸ Moreover, Scott Hahn argues that the simplest way to make sense of the parallels are to say they were Luke's intention. By demonstrating that at least one New Testament author believed Mary to be the New Ark, these parallels support a reading of

¹³ Richard Klaver, "Ark of the Covenant," *The Litany of Loreto* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1954) 137.

¹⁴ "The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you...'"

¹⁵ John McHugh, "Ark of the Covenant (Lk. 1:35)," *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975) 58.

¹⁶ McHugh, "Ark of the Covenant," 62-63.

¹⁷ For summaries of other parallels in the Gospel of Luke, see Pitre, "The New Ark," 54-59 and Scott Hahn, "Venerators of the Lost Ark," *Hail, Holy Queen: The Mother of God in the Word of God* (New York: Doubleday, 2001) 63-65.

¹⁸ Pitre, "The New Ark," 59.

Revelation 11-12 that connects the Woman clothed with the sun to the Ark¹⁹ – a text to which we will soon turn.

The Fall of Babylon in Revelation: Jericho Retold

Before attempting a closer read of Revelation 11-12 and 21, we must look at the four major parallels between the fall of Babylon in Revelation and the fall of Jericho in Joshua: the Ark, the trumpets, the victory shout, and the fall of the city. In order to proceed methodically and simply, we must neglect obvious and important allusions to other texts. Interestingly, the parallels between Joshua and Revelation have been neglected in notable commentaries. For example, Joshua is not among 24 books of Scripture listed as sources of allusions for Revelation in the Anchor Bible Commentary.²⁰ In one sense this neglect is reasonable, since texts such as Ezekiel and Exodus provide large quantities of the images and language used throughout the text. However, Scott Hahn²¹ and G.K. Beale²² both see the allusions to Joshua as keys for correctly interpreting the text of Revelation.

The first major parallel is the presence of the Ark. The Ark of the Covenant had not been seen since the time of Jeremiah the prophet (2 Macc. 2:4-8), so the mention of it in Revelation – “Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple...” (Rev. 11:19) – stands out. In fact, Hahn argues that the revelation of the lost Ark would have been of monumental importance to readers, who believed the Ark to be lost after Jeremiah hid it in the mountainside.²³ Thus, the presence of the Ark in the Revelation account

¹⁹ Hahn, “Venerators,” 63-65.

²⁰ Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, 123.

²¹ See Hahn, “Venerators,” 51-55.

²² See Beale, *John’s Use of the Old Testament*, 209-211.

²³ Hahn, “Venerators,” 51-55.

would call to mind the time in Israel's history when the Lord accompanied them in the desert and awoken both the memories and hopes of the Promised Land.

The trumpets present the second parallel. In the attack on Jericho, God instructs Joshua to have the people circle the city with the Ark "for six days, with seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark" (Josh 6:3-4). G.K. Beale points out that the six days leading up to the triumph over Jericho parallel the six trumpets of Revelation before the final one in Revelation 11:15. Also, the seven angels who blow the trumpets in Revelation are akin to the priests in Joshua.²⁴ According to Beale, the story of Jericho provides the "background uppermost in mind for the trumpets...where the trumpets announced the impending victory of a holy war."²⁵

The victory shout provides a third parallel. On the seventh day of the siege of Jericho, after seven laps around the city, "Joshua said to the people, 'Shout! For the Lord has given you the city'" (Josh 6:16). After the trumpets sound and the people shout, the city wall falls and the people are able to make full attack (Josh 6:20). The way the story is presented in Joshua, the shout has prophetic weight. By shouting, the people proclaim their faith that God has already delivered the city into their hands. In a similar way, the Revelation account includes a "shout" after the seventh trumpet blast. In the shout, "loud voices in heaven" proclaim: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord/ and of his Messiah/ and he will reign forever and ever" (Rev 11:15). They also give thanks to God for beginning his reign over the nations "and for destroying those who destroy the earth" (Rev 11: 17-18). A series of battles follow, but Babylon does not fall for five chapters more. However, it is clear from the text that this "shout" after the seventh trumpet and immediately before the appearance of the Ark signals the end of Babylon as much as the "shout" prophesies the end of Jericho.

²⁴ Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament*, 209-210.

²⁵ Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament*, 209.

Finally, it is worth noting that Revelation's Babylon falls under the ban just as Jericho did. Joshua instructed the people to "devote to destruction" all people (except for Rahab and her family) and beasts and to burn the city. He likewise cursed anyone who would try to rebuild the city (Josh 6:17-26). Similarly, in Revelation, Babylon is split into three parts through an earthquake after "flashes of lighting, rumblings, [and] peals of thunder" (Rev 16:18-19) that imply the presence of the Ark.²⁶ An angel curses the fallen city, also described as a whore, and announces that "she will be burned with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who judges her" (Rev 18:1-8). Both cities crumble after trumpets and a shout, both cities are placed under a curse, and both are burnt with fire. As noted in the beginning, this frame of seeing Jericho retold in Revelation is not the only way to read the text. However, the parallels are strong and justify further exploration along these lines. In order to understand the purpose of the battle, we must now attend to the identity of the feminine figures in Revelation 12 and 21.

Mary: Ark, Woman, and Bride

Linking Mary to the Ark; the persecuted Woman of Revelation 12; and the Bride of Christ in chapter 21 is not a new idea. In fact, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* presents these overlapping images succinctly:

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"²⁷

In this passage, Mary forms the link between God and his people, both the historical Israel and the Church as her fulfillment. Her primary purpose is to be a place for God's glory to meet the created order. Mary first fulfilled this role through the Incarnation. However, by allowing God to

²⁶ Similar phenomena accompany the first introduction of the Ark in Rev 11:19.

²⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 2003), 2676, quoting Rev 21:3.

overshadow her, she also became the first member of the Church of which the Holy Spirit is the soul. Thus Isaac of Stella can say that Mary and the Church are both “Mothers of Christ, but neither of the two gives birth to the whole Christ without the other.” Therefore, anything said “in a universal sense about the virgin mother church is said in an individual sense about the Virgin Mary.”²⁸ Taking up this theme, *Lumen Gentium* calls the Blessed Virgin the “pre-eminent and singular member of the Church” as well “as its type and excellent exemplar.”²⁹ With this foundation, we can elaborate on the Catechism’s succinct commentary on how Mary is the Ark, Woman, and Bride in Revelation, and then go on to see in the last section of this paper that her role in the spiritual battle of Christians functions to bring them to participate in the Church as City-Bride.

Not all biblical scholars are convinced that the Woman in Revelation 12, “clothed with sun,” “crying out in birthpangs,” giving “birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all nations,” hiding “in the wilderness” (Rev 12:1-6) and mother of “those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus” (Rev 12:17) can be identified with Mary of Nazareth. For example, John McHugh³⁰ and Craig Koester³¹ argue convincingly that the Woman’s characteristics far outstrip the characteristics of one historical woman, and that her birthpangs and other children clearly point to seeing the woman as a collective. Koester makes the illuminating point that the Woman experiences events, such as time in the wilderness, that evoke the whole history of the people of Israel. Of course, it is common to depict a people or city as a

²⁸ Isaac of Stella, “*Sermo 51 in Assumptione*,” in *Mary in the Middle Ages: The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Thought of Medieval Latin Theologians*, trans. Thomas Buffer (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000) 175.

²⁹ The Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, (21 November 1964), §53.

³⁰ John McHugh, “The Woman Clothed with the Sun (II): Archetype of the Church,” *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 409-432.

³¹ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001) 123-125.

woman,³² and Babylon is portrayed as a woman just two chapters later. This way of thinking stems from a Semitic understanding that the same symbol can represent both an individual and a collective, a view that Bernard Le Frois supports by citing varied biblical examples such as Nebuchadnezzar's dream statue (Dan 2:32-33), the "Son of Man" (Dan 7), the seven heads of the beasts (Rev 17:9), the male child of the Woman (Rev 17:11), and Jacob/Israel (Gen 32:28).³³ He argues that in each of these instances, the individual is at times spoken of in a collective manner or clearly stands in the place of a larger group. Thus, the Woman can mean both Mary and the Church. A robust ecclesiology sees that Mary does not need to be in competition with the Church, but that she is, to borrow *Lumen Gentium*'s phrasing, an "exemplar" member.

One unfortunate side effect of this argument about the identity of the Woman has been to obscure the link between the Woman and the Ark of the Covenant, which is mentioned immediately before it. However, both Hahn and Pitre have defended this identification in recent years.

Pitre's view is shaped by his more general lens in which Jesus is the new Moses and the Christian people are experiencing a new Exodus.³⁴ As such, we need a new Ark. He argues that the key to identifying the Ark is to "see it overshadowed by the cloud of 'the glory of the Lord.'" ³⁵ As evidence for identifying Mary as the Ark, he explains that the chapter breaks are artificially created by scribes, and thus the sentence, "Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of the covenant was seen..." (Rev 11:19) functions as the immediate prelude to the "great portent" of the "woman clothed with the sun" (Rev 12:1). He also links the presence of the

³² Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, 542.

³³ Bernard J. Le Frois, "Individual Versus Collective in Semitic Thought." *The Woman Clothed with the Sun (AP. 12): Individual or Collective? (An Exegetical Study)* (Rome: Orbis Catholicus, 1954), 237-262.

³⁴ Pitre, "The New Ark," 42-43.

³⁵ Pitre, "The New Ark," 53.

Ark in the temple with the Woman using a passage from Isaiah: “Listen an uproar from the city!/
A voice from the temple!/
The voice of the lord, dealing retribution to his enemies!/
Before she was in labor she gave birth;/ before her pain came upon her she delivered a son” (66:6-7). He also states that he agrees with Koester that the repetition of the word “appeared” in reference to the Ark and the Woman links the two.³⁶ To expand Pitre’s point, the Lord asks at the beginning of the passage, “...what is the house that you would build one for me, and what is my resting place?” (Is 66:1), which calls to mind the Ark, David’s intention to build a temple, and, most importantly, the promise of the Messianic Kingdom (2 Sam 7:1-17). Further on the text states, “...as soon as Zion was in labor she delivered her children” (Is 66:8). While the woman in Isaiah 66:7 gives birth *before* her pains, in contrast to how the Woman in Revelation experiences birthpangs, the vacillation between the individual and collective sense of the Woman might explain the lack of parallelism on that point.

Hahn’s argument relies more on contextualizing Revelation by appealing to the Lucan parallels between Mary and the Ark.³⁷ He also points out the similarities between the contents of the Ark and Christ: “What made the ark holy was that it contained the covenant.”³⁸ The first Ark had the commandments, the manna, and Aaron’s rod; the New Ark contained the Word made flesh, the Bread of Life, and the Eternal Priest.³⁹ While all of the aforementioned arguments are helpful in identifying the Ark as the Woman, the simplest argument is perhaps the best. Hahn points out that a Jewish-Christian audience, prepared by the Joshua allusions, would have been eager to see the Ark of the Covenant. It would not make sense, therefore, for John to introduce

³⁶ Pitre, “The New Ark,” 61-62.

³⁷ Hahn, “Venerators,” 63-65.

³⁸ Hahn, “Venerators,” 60.

³⁹ See Heb 9:4 and Hahn, “Venerators,” 61.

the Ark and then move on immediately to another image.⁴⁰ To extend this line of argument, it would not be in keeping with the rich imagery of Revelation to introduce what Eli called the “glory of God” (1 Sam 4:22) and then move on without describing it. Should the locusts executing God’s judgement be described in more detail than the Ark (Rev 9:3-11)? Also, the Ark is connected to God’s throne, which John describes as emitting lightning and thunder as early as the fourth chapter (Rev. 4:5). Would something so connected to God and His holiness be so easily passed over? Moreover, if the earthly sanctuary is merely a sketch of the heavenly one (Heb. 8:5), and if the amplified imagery that suffuses the whole book applies to all its parts, the Ark cannot *simply* be an Ark. Why would God need an Ark in Heaven, anyway? While none of these questions or arguments are strict proofs that the Woman is Mary and Mary is the Ark, the collective weight of them and the tradition of the Church are strongly in favor of this interpretation.

Granted that the Ark is actually a Woman, still another step remains. Before the seventh trumpet sounds and the Ark is revealed, an angel tells the Evangelist, “There will be no more delay, but in the days when the seventh angel is to blow his trumpet, the mystery of God will be fulfilled, as he announced to his servants the prophets” (Rev 10:7). However, the seventh trumpet sounds in 11:15, some ten chapters before the end of the book. Koester rightly points out that the full completion of the mystery of God does not happen until Babylon falls and the New Jerusalem appears.⁴¹ He also notes that the first time John is asked to measure the temple, he is instructed, “...do not measure the court outside the temple” (Rev. 11:2), thus giving partial measurements. Later, the measurements of the New Jerusalem show completeness.⁴² Thus we

⁴⁰ Hahn, “Venerators,” 51-55.

⁴¹ Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, 480-81.

⁴² Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, 496.

can say that in at least one layer of the text the entire section from the Ark/Woman to the Bride of the Lamb is one literary unit with one theological meaning. The two feminine images are bookends for the revelation of the “mystery of God” announced by the seventh trumpet, which suggests a relationship between the two.

While Koester compares the Woman and the Bride and finds that both “[bear] the traits of the people of God from many periods,”⁴³ he stops short of equating them. However, textual similarities leave little doubt that the images are meant to indicate the same person/persons. First, the Woman and the Bride are both female collectives. While the Woman can be identified with Mary, she can and should also be reasonably identified with the Church in a different textual layer. The New Jerusalem, or “bride, the wife of the Lamb” (Rev 21:9), also clearly represents the Church, of which Mary is the exemplar member, as the fulfillment of Israel, since the promise of God to permanently dwell with his people (Rev 21:3) fulfills the promises of the whole history of salvation. Of course, on that point the New Jerusalem also parallels the Ark, which functioned as the place where God dwells, the meeting place between God and man. The Greek word for tent (σκηνή) is used in both contexts (Ex 40:34-38; Rev 21:3). Another interesting parallel regards the celestial bodies. The Woman is described as “clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” (Rev 12:1). Koester points out that “In Jewish tradition, God was robed with light, had the earth under his feet, and was surrounded by stars.”⁴⁴ In other words, this mysterious Woman is mantled in divine accoutrements. In an amplified way, the Bride is a light for the nations: “And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb” (Rev 21:23-24). For the Woman, the luminaries show her association with God in the midst of

⁴³ Koester, *Revelation and the End*, 195.

⁴⁴ Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, 543.

her travail and struggle. But the Bride is beyond all “mourning and crying and pain” (Rev 21:4), and the lights that merely clothed the Woman give way to a clear vision of God at the Bride’s very center.

How could the Woman be equivalent to the New Jerusalem if one is mother of the Messiah and the other is the Bride? The historical Mary of Nazareth helps reconcile these images. In her person she shows how the Church can relate both as mother and as bride to God. Just as Mary was a physical mother to Jesus and a spiritual mother to souls, so the Church brings Christ to birth in his people. Likewise, as Mary gave bridal consent and became the dwelling place of God, so the New Jerusalem is portrayed as a bride ready to live with her husband.

The *Catechism* rightly calls Mary “the daughter of Zion in person, the Ark of the covenant, the place where the glory of the Lord dwells.”⁴⁵ However, these titles also apply to the People of God. Before Christ, the “daughter of Zion” struggled to follow her God in the midst of the nations and lost the privilege of His presence. At the Incarnation, humanity itself in the person of the Virgin became the Ark of God. In the time of the Church on earth, the Church itself, and all of its members individually, are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). In the end, when the heavens and earth pass away and all things are made new (Rev 21:1, 5), God’s intention to make a holy people where he can dwell will come to full maturity. In all these stages of the Church, Mary has gone ahead and prepared a way for her spiritual children.

Mary’s Role in Spiritual Battle

Now that we have seen the *telos*, we can return to the question of the Ark in battle. Certainly, the Woman and Bride could have been connected without reference to the Ark, but instead the Ark is the opening scene for this textual unit. The “bookends” of the Woman and Bride enclose a

⁴⁵ CCC, 2676.

great battle in which the dragon and its beast-associates make war on the Woman and her children. The Ark's presence clearly indicates God's judgement and impending victory, but the battle must still be fought. If Mary is both the Ark and the Bride, then she is present on both sides of the struggle. She is there in the beginning, giving birth to the child destined to rule, and she is there in the end, the first member of the Bride-Church that will shine in the world to come.

Mary's role in spiritual battle is to help bring the rest of her children to the state of indwelling, especially the final and permanent indwelling of Heaven. Not only does the structure of Revelation suggest this, but also prophecy about the Ark itself. A passage at the beginning of the book of the prophet Jeremiah (see Jer 3:1-18) speaks of the infidelity of Judah and Israel, calls for conversion, and prophesies a future day:

And when you have multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, says the Lord, they shall no longer say, "The ark of the covenant of the Lord." It shall not come to mind, or be remembered, or missed; nor shall another one be made. At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord, and the nations shall gather to it, and they shall no longer stubbornly follow their own evil will (Jer. 3:16-17).

In other words, Jeremiah sees a day when the Ark will no longer be necessary, because God will dwell within the holy people instead of in the Holy of Holies. In Revelation, the Ark gives way to the Incarnation, and the Incarnation gives way to an entire People/City where the Lord dwells. Mary is intimately connected, therefore, with the fulfillment of this prophecy. In addition, this passage charges Judah with "play[ing] the whore" like Israel, which suggests a connection with the Whore of Babylon in Revelation. Juxtaposing the two texts suggests that infidelity through idolatry and wickedness holds Judah back from the day of indwelling. If only there were a way to overcome this tendency to infidelity! If only there were a way to truly return, so that God could fulfill his promise to "bring [them] to Zion" (Jer. 3:14)!

After Christ, the Blessed Virgin is the best candidate for the one who can help the People of God overcome their idolatry, symbolized in Revelation by worshipping and accepting the

mark of the dragon and beast (Rev. 13:4-16). Not only does she maintain a constant presence in the text of Revelation as the Ark of God's strength, but she also adds an element of approachability to God's majesty. The original Ark had an unapproachable holiness, such that Uzzah was struck dead for reaching out his hand to touch it (2 Sam 6:6-9). In the context of the Incarnation, however, the New Ark has a modified role. The author of Hebrews is right to say that when we approach God:

You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made hearers best that not another word be spoken to them. (For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear.") But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God... (Heb 12:18-22).

Instead of servile fear, now Christians can embrace the true motivation for endurance in trials, including persecutions. Jesus has opened up access to Heaven, and God is no longer perceived as a nebulous Presence on the mountain or a cloud over the Ark, but clearly a Father who, though "judge of all" (Heb 12:23) wishes to bring his children to the heavenly city (see Heb 11:32-12:29). If God has made his inner life accessible in this way, by analogy the Virgin Mary as New Ark is "touchable" in a way that the former Ark was not. Like Christ's humanity and sacrifice, this New Ark is at the service of God's people, delivering them from the worship of idols and servile fear, and pointing them toward the life of Heaven.

Conclusion

According to the Scriptural testimony and the logic of Christian believers throughout the centuries, Mary the Mother of Jesus is clearly identified as the New Ark of the New Covenant.

This belief is displayed in the teaching and prayers of the Church's liturgy.⁴⁶ However, this title has not always been connected to Mary's association with help in internal and external battle, which has instead been tied, with some frequency, to military victories. This paper aimed to provide a Scriptural reflection on the text of Revelation 11-21 that could biblically justify calling on Mary for help in spiritual battle and situate that help in the larger context of salvation history.

Throughout this exploration, it became clear that the indwelling of God is the primary characteristic of the Ark, which Mary as New Ark serves to extend to the entire Church, the Bride of the Lamb. Like the Ark at the battle of Jericho, Mary's indwelt presence gives a seat for God's power to destroy the idolatrous Whore of Babylon, which symbolizes not only Rome but also the worldly powers and temptations Christians face throughout the ages. Not having any strength of her own, Mary, the Ark/Woman/Bride, provides a conduit for God's strength to deliver his people from danger, and it is in this context that the Christian people can call on Mary for help in every difficulty.

⁴⁶ For example: "Eternal Word, you chose Mary as the uncorrupted ark of your dwelling place,/ free us from the corruption of sin." Morning Prayer, Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. 3 (Korea: Catholic Book Publishing Corp, 1976), p. 1935.

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