

## 2 Samuel 6: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     2 Samuel chapter 6 David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand, and David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baal-Judah to bring up from there the Ark of God, which is called by the name of the Lord of hosts, who sits enthroned on the cherubim.

And they carried the Ark of God on a new cart and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. And Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart with the Ark of God, and Ahio went before the Ark.

And David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the Lord with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the Ark of God and took hold of it.

The oxen stumbled, and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah. And God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the Ark of God. And David was angry because the Lord had broken out against Uzzah.

And that place is called Perez-Uzzah to this day. And David was afraid of the Lord that day. And he said, How can the Ark of the Lord come to me? So David was not willing to take the Ark of the Lord into the city of David.

[ 1 : 1 5 ]     But David took it aside to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. And the Ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite three months. And the Lord blessed Obed-Edom and all his household.

And it was told King David, The Lord has blessed the house of Obed-Edom and all that belongs to him because of the Ark of God. So David went and brought up the Ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the city of David with rejoicing.

And when those who bore the Ark of the Lord had gone six steps, he sacrificed an ox and a fattened animal. And David danced before the Lord with all his might. And David was wearing a linen ephod.

So David and all the house of Israel brought up the Ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the horn. As the Ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michael, the daughter of Saul, looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord.

And she despised him in her heart. And they brought in the Ark of the Lord and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it. And David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord.

[ 2 : 2 3 ]     And when David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts and distributed among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins to each one.

Then all the people departed, each to his house. And David returned to bless his household. But Michael, the daughter of Saul, came out to meet David and said, How the king of Israel honoured himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' female servants, as one of the vulgar fellows shamelessly uncovers himself.

And David said to Michael, It was before the Lord who chose me above your father and above all his house to appoint me as prince over Israel. The people of the Lord. And I will celebrate before the Lord.

I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in your eyes. But by the female servants of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honour.

And Michael, the daughter of Saul, had no child to the day of her death. 2 Samuel chapter 5 and 6 contain a couple of iterations of a victory house-building pattern.

[ 3 : 33 ] The basic pattern involves a victory over enemies, whose riches are then spoiled, leading to the establishment of a new dwelling place in which rest can be enjoyed.

The most prominent Old Testament example of this is probably found in the Exodus narrative itself, with the movement from the defeat of the Egyptians to the building of the tabernacle. The first cycle in these chapters is the victory over the Jebusites, and then the establishment of David's household in Jerusalem.

The second cycle is the victory over the Philistines at the end of chapter 5, and then the establishment of God's palace in this chapter, in chapter 6. David and his 30,000 chosen men go down to restore the ark after an almost 60-year exile.

The ark was captured at the Battle of Aphek in 1 Samuel chapter 4. 30,000 Israelites had perished at Aphek, and now 30,000 Israelites are travelling up with the ark as a great honour guard.

The army accompanying the ark is fitting for the one who is described as the Lord of hosts, or the Lord of armies, who sits enthroned on the cherubim. The ark and the mercy seat are the Lord's throne and his footstool.

[ 4 : 41 ] In 1 Samuel chapter 6, the ark was returned to Israel by the Philistines, but it had to be left in Kiriath-Jerim. It still hadn't truly been brought back from captivity. If we remember the aftermath of the return of the ark from Philistia, we should recall that the ark never was restored to the tabernacle or to proper service.

1 Samuel chapter 6, verses 19, to chapter 7, verse 2 read, And he struck some of the men of Beth Shemesh, because they looked upon the ark of the Lord. He struck 70 men of them, and the people mourned, because the Lord had struck the people with a great blow.

Then the men of Beth Shemesh said, Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God? And to whom shall he go up away from us? So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-Jerim, saying, The Philistines have returned the ark of the Lord.

Come down and take it up to you. And the men of Kiriath-Jerim came and took up the ark of the Lord, and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill. And they consecrated his son Eliezer to have charge of the ark of the Lord.

From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-Jerim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord. The people of Beth Shemesh were seemingly struck with a plague as a result of looking into the ark, suffering the same sort of judgment as the Philistines had.

[ 6 : 03 ] Fearful of God's judgment, wanting to be free of the ark, much as the Philistines were, they sent it up to Kiriath-Jerim. The people of Kiriath-Jerim leave it at the house of Abinadab, who consecrates his son to keep it.

The city of Kiriath-Jerim was one of the cities of the Gibeonites, which means that its population was primarily Gentile, while under the rule of Israel. The ark's resting in a Gibeonite city, and not being restored to the tabernacle, is a sort of wilderness period, after a lease, but prior to settlement and restoration.

It would be over a century before the pieces of the torn house of the Lord were truly brought back together in the temple. The Mosaic system of worship collapsed at the Battle of Aphek.

During the period following the capture and the return of the ark from Philistia, there seemed to be a sort of legitimate reversion to earlier forms of worship, with localized altars and sacrifices, rather than the one central sanctuary that Deuteronomy had required.

David leading the ark to Jerusalem with his men is a sort of a triumphal procession, and an entry into the city. When the ark is brought to Jerusalem, as Peter Lighthouse has observed, there is an exact reversal of the pattern of events that occurred when it was first taken.

[ 7 : 16 ] In restoring the ark and bringing it to Jerusalem, there is a sort of resurrection of worship too. The ark was taken, and the house of Eli was removed, in 1 Samuel chapter 4 verses 1 to 22.

Then the ark was exiled in Philistia, in chapter 5 verse 1 to 6 verse 9. Then the ark was returned on a cart, and there was a sin concerning it, in 1 Samuel chapter 6 verses 10 to 21.

Then the ark was with Abinadab, in 1 Samuel chapter 7 verses 1 to 2. As David brings the ark into Jerusalem, the sequence of events is an exact reversal of the events that led to the ark's removal from the Mosaic tabernacle.

First, the ark is returned on a cart, and there is a sin concerning the ark once more, in chapter 6 verses 1 to 9 of 2 Samuel. Then the ark is housed with a Philistine, in 2 Samuel chapter 6 verses 10 to 11.

And then finally the ark is restored, and the house of Saul is cut off, at the end of the chapter. David and his men sinned concerning the ark. The ark was not to be transported by a cart, but on the shoulders of the Kohathite Levites.

[ 8 : 29 ] There are detailed instructions for how the ark was supposed to be prepared for transport, and how it was supposed to be moved from place to place, along with the other holy items. We should know all of this from Numbers chapter 7 verses 4 to 9.

Then the Lord said to Moses, Accept these from them, that they may be used in the service of the tent of meeting, and give them to the Levites, to each man according to his service. So Moses took the wagons and the oxen, and gave them to the Levites.

Two wagons and four oxen he gave to the sons of Gershon, according to their service, and four wagons and eight oxen he gave to the sons of Merari, according to their service, under the direction of Ithamar, the son of Aaron the priest.

But to the sons of Kohath he gave none, because they were charged with the service of the holy things that had to be carried on the shoulder. By carrying the ark on a cart, they were in violation of the law then, and put themselves in jeopardy of just such an infringement as Uzzah committed.

They are following the example of the Philistines, not the instructions given in the law. Uzzah's sin is the breaking of the boundary of the holy things. Intentional or not, the infringement is an extremely serious thing.

[ 9 : 39 ] The person who touched Mount Sinai, for instance, would be put to death. Uzzah wasn't judged for his personal wickedness. The problem was with taking the presence of God as a light thing to be handled carelessly.

Because the priests and the Levites failed to guard the ark properly, the cherubim struck down Uzzah for his violation. The place is named after the event, Perez Uzzah, the breaking out against Uzzah.

This might remind us of the naming of the site of the victory over the Philistines in the preceding chapter, Baal-perazim, lord of the breaking through. There might also be some significance to the relation of the name to that of David's ancestor Perez.

Words related to Perez occur on several key occasions in the story of David and his ancestors. As a result of the judgment upon Uzzah, the attempt to bring the ark into Jerusalem is abandoned for a time.

The ark is left with a Philistine, a Gittite, before it will finally be returned. As a Gittite, Obed-Edom came from Gath, where 600 men had joined David.

[ 10 : 44 ] We read of these persons in 2 Samuel chapter 15 verse 18. The Lord showed great favour to the house of Obed-Edom for the time that the ark was housed there. God's presence is a fearful thing, but also a source of great blessing for those who approach it appropriately.

As David sees God's blessing of the Gentile Obed-Edom, he rightly desires that the ark would be brought up to the city of David so that it might bring blessing upon the wider kingdom.

After three months, David goes and brings the ark from the house of Obed-Edom in another great triumphal procession, marked by great rejoicing and an immense number of sacrifices. David dances before the ark with all of his might.

This isn't the only occasion that we see some sort of dancing and festal celebration in scripture. It isn't a regular form of worship at the tabernacle or temple where dancing isn't mentioned, but it is an entirely appropriate, extraordinary celebration of a different kind.

Another example is found in the response of the Israelites to the victory of the Lord over the Egyptians at the Red Sea. Dancing in such a celebratory procession is definitely the appropriate thing to do.

[ 11 : 50 ] Horns are also blown, as they were in the procession around Jericho on the day of trumpets and at the feast of Jubilee and at other such occasions. David establishes a tent for the ark of the covenant.

This is not the tabernacle, which is still several miles away at Gibeon, served by Zadok and the priests. Sacrificial worship continues at the tabernacle, but the ark is, as we see from 1 Chronicles chapter 16, surrounded by the joy of the songs of Asaph and the other appointed Levite musicians and singers.

The two tents are surrounded by different forms of worship. Michael, however, despises David when she sees him dancing. Michael's objection to David was that his dancing and his dress were shameful or dishonourable.

We should not, contrary to many, presume that David was in a state of undress. The same event is described in 1 Chronicles chapter 15, verse 27. David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, as also were all the Levites who were carrying the ark, and the singers, and Kenaniah the leader of the music of the singers, and David wore a linen ephod.

David becoming undressed is not the reason why Michael despises him. David is dressed like the priests in the procession. Samuel was described as being dressed in a linen ephod in 1 Samuel chapter 2, verse 18.

[ 13 : 10 ] Rather than thinking of undergarments, we should probably think more of simple dress. Her accusation is that David's behaviour was unbefitting of a king. He was dressed more as a serving priest than as the royal sovereign.

His dancing was unbecoming of the dignity and nobility of the monarch, who should comport himself as the detached and elevated ruler, not as someone throwing himself into the celebrations.

In behaving in such a way, Michael considered that David behaved himself more like a common fellow showing off to low-born serving women. His uncovering before their eyes was not a matter of exposing physical nakedness, the Levites were dressed in the same way, but rather of stripping himself of royal glory and dignity and acting like a common fellow.

David rebukes her. David's behaviour was not shameful because it is entirely appropriate for the king to behave as a servant before his lord. A king who exalts his own honour before the lord is a king who has lost sight of reality.

Michael's priorities were those of a haughty princess. Just as her father had spared Agag, presumably reasoning that kings were too important to be put to death, that they were above the rules that applied to general folk, Michael believes that the king should not visibly humble himself before the lord, lest this compromise his majesty and nobility in the sight of the common folk and expose him to dishonour.

[ 14 : 32 ] However, as David argues, the serving women that Michael so obviously despises would have more wisdom than she. While she despises him for his association with the commoners, David's humbling of himself before the lord and the fact that his heart is not raised up above the common folk rightly wins him honour in their sight.

We might recall the instructions of Deuteronomy chapter 17 verses 19 to 20 here. The king is instructed to produce a book of the law for himself. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the lord his god by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children in Israel.

The king's humility before an obedient service of the lord, and his heart not being lifted up above his brothers the people, were to be rewarded with the establishment and endurance of his kingdom.

While David's kingdom would be established as an everlasting kingdom, a kingdom consummated by the Messiah, whose great work was symbolised by his laying aside his outer garments and washing his disciples' feet like a servant, the house of Saul, which Michael represents, would be cut off.

Her barrenness is a judgement upon a woman whose heart was lifted up above her sister's, upon a woman who was not humble before the lord. It is not incidental that she is described as the daughter of Saul here, as in this, she takes after her father's own behaviour in his later life.

[ 16 : 14 ] A question to consider. In Acts chapter 15 verse 16, the apostle Paul talks about rebuilding the tent of David that had fallen, almost certainly referring to the tent shrine that David set up for the Ark of the Covenant in Jerusalem in this chapter.

Considering this chapter, and 1 Chronicles chapter 15 and 16, why might David's tent have assumed such significance in later prophecy?