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# The Homecoming of the Ark

2 Samuel 6:1-23<sup>5</sup>

*Russ Kennedy*

We do not have anything like the Ark of Covenant in the New Covenant.

It was the place where God showed His Presence...

It was the visible sign of God's pleasure, provision and presence among God's people...

It was the altar of sacrifice on the annual Day of Atonement...

It was ever so much more than just a piece of furniture in the tabernacle or the tent.

The Ark of the Covenant had been removed from its proper place during Saul's reign. It had been used as a talisman and a weapon of war. It had been captured and when recaptured, was not taken to the Tabernacle but rather rested in the home of a Jewish family.

The King has begun to establish his kingdom. David's kingship, his throne, his family had all been acknowledged and consolidated. He decisively defeated Israel's mortal enemies, the Philistines.

But the presence of the king does not mean the Presence of the Lord. There can be no proper return to the Mosaic and Levitical worship without the Ark of the Covenant. For seventy-five years the ark has absent from the tabernacle which was standing in Shiloh. So David sets out to bring the Ark home...

## Its Auspicious Start (v. 1-4)

David wants to bring the ark home with all the grand pomp it is due.

<sup>1</sup> David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. <sup>2</sup> And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale-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. <sup>3</sup> 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 Uz-zah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart, <sup>4</sup> with the ark of God, and Ahio went before the ark.

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### ***A Glorious Desire (v. 1-2)***

David gathers thirty thousand men of Israel. It seems to be a convocation of military might. As they go down towards Baale-Judah where the ark resided, they are joined by all the people from that place who were with David. David wanted the presence of the Lord to be in Jerusalem. David's throne would be blessed by God's Presence there.

Our author reminds people of the centrality of the Ark. It was called by the Lord's name. It was representative of the Lord's presence. But it was of lesser place and position than the heavenly throne of God which was surrounded by the four cherubim.

There is also a political calculation. With the Ark in Jerusalem, it unifies the kingdom under David. But it also unifies the kingdom under God. All of the tribal differences and difficulties would be overcome as Israel began more and more to see itself as one people, with one ruler under the one Lord.

### ***A Surprising Disobedience (v. 3-4)***

But in transporting the ark, there is a surprising disobedience. David meant well. He got a brand new cart so it would be clean and could be dedicated to the task. He stationed someone to walk and lead the oxen pulling the cart. And apparently, others were walking along beside the cart as well. Though the text does not say, it is reasonable to assume that the thirty-thousand soldiers surrounded the cart to protect it and bring it to Jerusalem in a great display.

But this was not how God had instructed in the Law for the Ark of the Covenant to be moved. God had given specific directions through Moses how the tabernacle was to be erected, dismantled, and transported (Numbers 4), and the major pieces of furniture were to be carried on the shoulders of the Levites who descended from Kohath (Numbers 4:4-6, 15).

<sup>4</sup> This is the service of the sons of Kohath in the tent of meeting: the most holy things. <sup>5</sup> When the camp is to set out, Aaron and his sons shall go in and take down the veil of the screen and cover the ark of the testimony with it. <sup>6</sup> Then they shall put on it a covering of goatskin and spread on top of that a cloth all of blue, and shall put in its poles.

<sup>15</sup> And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, as the camp sets out, after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry these, but they must not touch the holy things, lest they die. These are the things of the tent of meeting that the sons of Kohath are to carry.

When they used a new cart drawn by oxen, they were following the example of the pagan Philistines (1 Samuel 6), not the directions given to Moses on Mount Sinai.

### ***Its Dreadful Interruption (v. 5-11)***

Disobedience leads to disaster...

<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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, for the oxen stumbled. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> And David was angry because the Lord had broken out against Uzzah. And that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day. <sup>9</sup> And David was afraid of the Lord that day, and he said, "How can the ark of the Lord come to me?" <sup>10</sup> So David was not willing to take the ark of the Lord into the city of David. But David took it aside to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. <sup>11</sup> 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.

### ***The Joy of the King (v. 5)***

David lead the celebration parade. There was music, and singing and dancing. There was loud praises and songs accompanied by the band. This was not a show. It was the heartfelt outward expression and the joy of God coming home.

### ***The Disobedience of Uzzah (v. 6-8)***

But the oxen stumble. The cart is a two-wheeled cart and thus is shaken. It appears as though the ark may have shifted and maybe was in danger of tipping over or falling out of the cart. He certainly had good intentions. Nevertheless he clearly disobeyed the Law. There is no evidence that he was a Levite and thus qualified to even carry the Ark. But even the authorized bearers of the ark were never to touch it. It was supposed to be carried by running the poles through the rings on either side. It was to have been draped by the veil, then a layer of goatskin to shield it from the weather and then a piece of bright blue cloth so that it could be clearly seen. But never was anyone to touch it.

God's anger burned at this act of disobedience. God struck down Uzzah so that he died on the spot. This seems grossly unfair to us. Uzzah was just trying to keep the Ark from falling. For his good deed, he dies. What kind of God is this? If our intentions are ok, isn't what we do ok? The answer to that is a resoundingly Biblical, "no". The Law required absolute, total, and unfailing obedience. The Law was clear. Even with good intentions, Uzzah disobeyed the Law and paid the price.

### ***The Struggle of the King (v. 9)***

David is both angry that this happened and he is fearful. The moment of joy and celebration has been spoiled by Uzzah, but ultimately by God. How are they going to get the Ark home to Jerusalem? Even David's glorious desire and hopeful intentions have been crashingly halted. I would imagine at this point no one is willing to continue. Poor Uzzah is dead. They named the place that this happened after him.

### ***The Halt of the Journey (v. 10-11)***

So the journey is halted. They took the Ark down from the cart and stored it in the house of Obed-edom. Now this tells me that the poles were there in the Ark. They had loaded it in the cart and now unloaded without anyone being struck.

For three months, the Ark sat in Obed-edom's home. The whole procession and homecoming of the Ark is delayed for a rather long time. Now for a moment, imagine Obed's home. There sits the Ark of the Covenant in, maybe his living room. It is probably draped as it should have been. And suddenly, his home and family begin to experience new and great blessings.

### **Its Joyous Culmination (v. 12-15)**

The journey will be resumed and brought to a joyous culmination.

<sup>12</sup> And it was told King David, "The Lord has blessed the household 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. <sup>13</sup> And when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six steps, he sacrificed an ox and a fattened animal. <sup>14</sup> And David danced before the Lord with all his might. And David was wearing a linen ephod. <sup>15</sup> So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the horn.

### ***With the Proper Carriage (v. 12-13)***

First notice that now the Ark is properly carried. It is no longer on a cart. It is being borne along in the way commanded by God. Once again there is great joy and celebration.

### ***With the Bloody Sacrifices (v. 13)***

After the first six steps that the Levites took, on the seventh, David sacrificed an ox and a prized animal that was prepared for the sacrifice. Six steps, sacrifice. Six steps a knife flashes and throat is slit. Six steps, and blood flows. Six steps and an ox is sacrificed. Six steps and a fattened calf, goat, sheep or pigeon poured out its life. David sees that God accepts the sacrifice and does not break out in anger.

### ***With the Joyous Dancing (v. 14-15)***

And oh the joy! David is dressed in a linen ephod over his inner tunic. This is a priestly garment. The Ark is on the move. The Lord has accepted David's sacrifice. And he is overcome with joy. He dances with all his might before the Lord. This mighty man of valor; this great leader of men; this great king of Israel, dances with all his might. Imagine the scene: a huge procession with blaring music and drums with Ark of the Covenant in the middle and David leading the way leaping and dancing and shouting with joy. All the way from Obed's home to the city of Jerusalem.

### **Its Varied Responses (v. 16-19)**

Watch the responses to this amazing scene as it comes into city...

<sup>16</sup> As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal 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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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 <sup>19</sup> 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.

### ***A Despising Heart (v. 16)***

Michal, the daughter of Saul and the wife of David despises David. She sees him dancing before the Lord. Instead of rejoicing with him in the return of the Ark, she watches this public display of emotion with disdain.

### ***A Gracious Heart (v. 17-19)***

David responds with delight. He has a heart full of God's grace.

That delight and grace causes David to be grateful. Out of his own riches, he offers up great sacrifices of gratitude and thanksgiving. He offers burnt offerings which were to be offered in view of one's sin. And then he offered the peace offerings which expressed gratitude for having been forgiven and having peace with God.

That delight and grace also causes David to be giving. He blesses the people invoking the great name of the Lord. And he gives a package of gifts to everyone who was there. Each person received a loaf of bread, a portion of meat and a raisin cake.

Two hearts... two very different responses to the situation. One focuses on the public display of joy. The other focuses on the glorious grace of God and gives thanks, blessings and gifts.

### ***Its Sad Marital Strife (v. 20-23)***

At the end of this amazing day, David goes home. And all is not well.

<sup>20</sup> And David returned to bless his household. But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, "How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' female servants, as one of the vulgar fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!" <sup>21</sup> And David said to Michal, "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. <sup>22</sup> 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 honor." <sup>23</sup> And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.

### ***A Wife's Confrontation (v. 20)***

Michal goes out to meet David. "How you have covered yourself with honor today", she snidely says. "You have embarrassed yourself before the nation and humiliated me before all the women in exposing yourself in your dancing. You are no better than

the vulgar men who uncover their nakedness to urinate in the street.” She accuses him of allowing himself to be exposed while he was dancing. Nothing in the text prior to this indicates that her accusation is true. I believe it was false. She is humiliated and embarrassed and now falsely accuses him of a public display of nudity.

### ***The King's Explanation (v. 21-22)***

David rebukes her. He was not dancing for her sake. He has been selected by God to be king. He has brought the Ark home. He was filled with joy. How dare she despise him for his joy in God’s great work. And she hasn’t seen anything yet.

### ***The Wife's Barrenness (v. 23)***

Michal is judged. She is barren the rest of their marriage. There will be son who will be union of Saul and David’s households. There will be no future heir who can claim to be both. Her barrenness is a public rebuke and judgment from God. We know whose heart, whose actions, whose words were displeasing to the Lord.

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## **Reflect and Respond**

May God help us to do His work, His way. Yes, in the New Covenant, we have great freedom to serve the Lord with wisdom. But let us be very careful that we are pleasing Him in all ways.

God intentions never excuse disobedience. Good intentions never replace active obedience.

Jesus is the final King-Priest. What joy there will be when His people come home. What joy there will be when He comes to dwell with His people. May our hearts be filled with delight as we look, long and lean towards that dancing day.