

# **The Life of David**

## **David and the Ark**

*2 Samuel 6:1-15*

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# David and the Ark

## Scripture

After ten weeks of not being able to meet together in person for worship because of the worldwide coronavirus pandemic, I am now able to resume my sermon series on “The Life of David.”

The fifth chapter of Second Samuel showed us David’s coronation as king over all Israel, his selection of Jerusalem as his capitol city, and his defeat of the pesky Philistines. Having established Jerusalem as his political capitol, David now also wanted to establish Jerusalem as his religious capitol. But, to do so, he needed to bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem.

The ark of the covenant was an ancient box  $3\frac{3}{4}$  by  $2\frac{1}{4}$  by  $2\frac{1}{4}$  feet made of acacia wood, plated with gold, and with a cherub at each end (Exodus 25:10-22). It was the only piece of furniture that was kept in the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle, and later in the temple. It was so holy that only the high priest saw the ark of the covenant, and then only once a year on the Day of Atonement. God had given specific instructions for transporting the ark. The significance of the ark of the covenant is that it was the visible symbol of God’s presence in the midst of his people.

The background for today’s sermon is that about seventy years earlier the Philistines captured the ark of the covenant at the Second Battle of Aphek (1 Samuel 4:11). However, they quickly discovered that it was a dangerous trophy (1 Samuel 5). So, the Philistines sent it back to Israel, to the city of Beth-shemesh. The men of Beth-shemesh treated the ark like a carnival curiosity and looked at the ark, completely ignoring God’s word about how it should be handled. God struck dead seventy of their men. Then the ark was sent to Kiriath-jearim, to the house of Abinadab (1 Samuel 6:19-71), where it remained until David decided to bring it back to Jerusalem.

Let's read about David and the ark in 2 Samuel 6:1-15:

<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 Uzzah 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.

<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.

<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. (2 Samuel 6:1-15)

## Introduction

In his book *Soul Searching*, Christian Smith summarized perceptions about God that are prevalent in the church and in contemporary culture. He said that most young evangelicals believe in what could best be described as “moral, therapeutic deism.” We could also call this viewpoint “the Santa Claus god.” Here is how Smith describes “moral, therapeutic deism”:

- *Moral* implies that God wants us to be nice. He rewards the good and withholds from the naughty.
- *Therapeutic* means that God just wants us to be happy.
- *Deism* means that God is distant and not involved in our daily lives. God may get involved occasionally, but on the whole, God functions like an idea not a personal being actively present in our world.<sup>1</sup>

Smith argues, rightly I would say, that this is the version that is prevalent not only in our culture but also in our churches. You see, so often our culture shapes our churches and our view of God.

But our view of God must never be shaped by culture. Our view of God must be shaped by God himself. And a right view of God can only come from the word of God.

One of God’s most important attributes is his *holiness*. In David’s bringing the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem, we see the holiness of God on shocking display. The holiness of God is something that must be properly revered and respected.

## Lesson

Second Samuel 6:1-15 teaches us about the holiness of God. We learn four lessons about the holiness of God:

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2010/october/4102510.html>.

1. God's Justice and Mercy Must Not Be Confused (6:1-8)
2. Fear Follows a Failure of Faith (6:9-10)
3. God's Presence Brings Blessing (6:11-12a)
4. Obedience to God's Word Brings Joy (6:12b-15)

## I. God's Justice and Mercy Must Not Be Confused (6:1-8)

The first lesson about God's holiness is that God's justice and mercy must not be confused.

King Saul had no interest in the ark of the covenant. It had remained in the house of Abinadab throughout Saul's entire forty-two-year reign and he did absolutely nothing to give the ark of the covenant its proper, central place in the worship of God's people. "To neglect the ark was to neglect God himself," one commentator said. "It was effectively to deny both the supremacy of truth and the covenant mercy of the Lord. While the ark was absent from the center of Israel's worship, the nation was in a covenant-breaking condition."<sup>2</sup>

David was unlike his predecessor, Saul. David wanted to bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem in order to restore the worship of their covenant God. So, he gathered representatives from all Israel, a great throng of **thirty thousand**, and they went to bring the ark from Kiriath-jearim, also known as **Baale-judah**, to Jerusalem. David wanted the very best for this very special occasion, **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** (6:3-4).

It was an incredibly festive occasion as **David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the Lord, with songs**

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<sup>2</sup> Gordon J. Keddie, *Triumph of the King: The Message of 2 Samuel*, Welwyn Commentary Series (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1990), 43.

**and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals** (6:5). It was a wonderful procession, as they were with the ark of the covenant—the symbol of the very presence of God—all on their way to Jerusalem.

But 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** (6:6). That seemed to be the right thing to do, didn't it? Who would want the ark to end up in the dirt?

So, we are quite unprepared for the next verse, which says, **“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”** (6:7). What? God killed Uzzah? Just because he stopped the ark from falling on to the ground? That seems terribly unfair of God. Well, when we look carefully at the text, we notice that God killed Uzzah **“because of his error.”**

What was the **“error”**? Actually, there were a number of errors. According to Numbers 4:5–15, the ark could be handled only by Kohathites, who were descended from Levi, as they were given the responsibility for taking care of the ark. So, first, we have no confirmation that Uzzah was a Kohathite. Second, the ark had to be covered with goatskin, since even to look upon the ark carried the punishment of death. Third, the ark was to be carried by Kohathites using wooden poles provided with the ark, and not carried on a cart. And fourth, Numbers 4:15 warns that those carrying the ark **“must not touch the holy things, lest they die.”** Uzzah believed he was doing the right thing by touching the ark so that it did not fall. But, he disobeyed God's command, and paid the penalty.

David's reaction to all of this is as we might react. We read in verse 8, **“And David was angry because the Lord had broken out against Uzzah. And that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day.”** God usually does not respond to human sin by instantaneous death. This caught David by surprise, and he was angry by God's action against Uzzah. Yet, because God does not

always apply the death penalty immediately when we break his law does not mean that God was wrong in doing what he did to Uzzah.

Some of you may recall a well-known illustration that R. C. Sproul gave about this from his days as a college professor. He assigned the first paper, and on the due date about a quarter of the students did not turn it in. They offered him various excuses—the pressure of midterms, trouble adjusting to college, problems at home, and so on—and when Sproul agreed to show mercy, they praised him as a great teacher. The same thing happened when the second paper was due, except that Sproul warned that this would be the last time that late papers were accepted. The third time, he made good on his threat, and when a quarter of the class showed up without the assignment accomplished, he gave all those students an F. What was amazing, he recalls, is their reaction: “That’s not fair!” But of course, it was fair. It would have been just for Sproul to have given an F when the first paper was turned in late. He had shown mercy, and the students began taking it for granted and presuming on his kindness. Sproul elaborates: “It is the confusion between justice and mercy that makes us shrink in horror when we read the [story] of... Uzzah. When God’s justice falls, we are offended because we think God owes us perpetual mercy.”<sup>3</sup>

God is patient with us. We must take seriously the warning God gives us in the story of Uzzah.

Let us never confuse God’s justice and mercy.

## II. Fear Follows a Failure of Faith (6:9-10)

The second lesson about God’s holiness is that fear follows a failure of faith.

We read in verses 9-10, **“And David was afraid of the Lord that day, and he said, ‘How can the ark of the Lord come to**

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<sup>3</sup> Richard D. Phillips, *2 Samuel*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Iain M. Duguid, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), 104–105.

me?’ 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.” David’s fear of God was not a proper, reverent fear. He decided to abandon his project of bringing the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. Instead, he parked the ark at the **house of Obed-edom** and he returned to Jerusalem.

Fear followed a failure of faith. David’s faith failed because he did not obey the revealed will of God. David decided to put the ark on a new cart because things were modern now. Carrying the ark by hand was done in previous centuries. But now they had modern carts and they could make the journey so much easier.

But, dear friends, we have no mandate at all to do things contrary to God’s revealed will, as it is revealed in his word. One of the issues that came up frequently during the past few months of not meeting together corporately was the desire to have the Lord’s Supper virtually. I can’t tell you how many pastors wanted to celebrate the Lord’s Supper virtually. However, the word of God is clear that Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper with all participants and the elements *physically present in the same place* (Matthew 26:26-35; Mark 14:22-31; Luke 22:14-23). Paul stated five times, “*When you come together*” (1 Corinthians 11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34), the implication being that the Lord’s Supper was to be celebrated together and in-person. The abuse of the Lord’s Supper at the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:17-34) could only have taken place with *the participants and elements in the same place*. In the end, I don’t know that any pastors did celebrate the Lord’s Supper virtually. Hopefully, they did not do so. Whenever we do not walk in obedience to God’s word, we have a failure of faith, and that leads to fear.

### **III. God’s Presence Brings Blessing (6:11-12a)**

The third lesson about God’s holiness is that God’s presence brings blessing.



Verses 11-12a say, **“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 household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God.’”** Obed-edom was a Gittite, that is, he was a Philistine. We don’t know if he knew what he was keeping in his house. Nevertheless, the Lord blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belonged to him.

I don’t know if Obed-edom was a believer or not. But the presence of the ark, representing the symbolic presence of God, proved to be a blessing to him and to his entire family. Moreover, the blessing was so noticeable that it was reported to David.

In a sermon titled, “Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness,” John Koessler says that “spiritual hunger is a precondition to God’s blessing.” He goes on to tell a story about when he was growing up, his mom would occasionally take him with her when she visited friends. Sitting on the couch next to her with his hands folded in his lap, listening to conversation that was meaningless to him as a small boy, was an excruciatingly dull experience for a small boy. At some point in the visit the host would eventually break the monotony and ask John if he wanted something to drink. He longed for that moment the way a prisoner longs to hear the sound of the key in the prison cell door. Unfortunately, his mother had a basic rule of etiquette whenever they went visiting. “If the host offers you anything to eat or drink,” she told him, “you say, ‘No, thank you.’ If the host offers again, you accept.” What kind of rule is that? Maybe she didn’t want him to appear greedy. Perhaps it had something to do with growing up during the Great Depression. Of course, the problem with this little game was that nobody seemed to have informed the host or hostess of the rules. They would say, “Would you like a cookie?” or, “Would like a glass of lemonade?” John would say, “No, thank

you.” They would take him at his word and put the cookies away.<sup>4</sup>

The problem with this tactic is that it was not true. John really wanted the cookie or drink but was taught to first say “No.”

We say “No” to the presence of God in our lives because we do not accept the offer of the means of grace. God’s blessing comes to us when we read and hear his word preached, when we pray, and when we participate in his sacraments.

#### IV. Obedience to God’s Word Brings Joy (6:12b-15)

And finally, the fourth lesson about God’s holiness is that obedience to God’s word brings joy.

David realized all that he had been missing for the past three months. **“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”** (6:12b-15).

This time David made sure that the ark of the covenant was carried properly. After just six steps, he halted the proceedings to offer a sacrifice to God. Most likely his sacrifice was a confession of his sin as well as a thanksgiving for God’s continued mercies.

What I don’t to miss is that there was great **rejoicing** when David and all those with him brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. This time David was following the precepts of God. He was obeying the revealed will of God. He was doing what God said about how the ark of the covenant was to be transported.

When we obey God’s word, we are filled with joy.

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<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2009/may/5051109.html>.

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the incident of David and the ark in 2 Samuel 6:1-15, let us pay attention to the duty God requires of us.

The first three Questions and Answers in *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* are:

*Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?*

*A.* Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

*Q. 2. What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?*

*A.* The word of God, which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.

*Q. 3. What do the scriptures principally teach?*

*A.* The scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.<sup>5</sup>

Admittedly, David did not have *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*. But he did have the scriptures. And the scriptures are clear about the “duty God requires of man.”

This passage is a very dramatic story about the holiness of God and how he requires us to obey his word. We must pay attention to the duty that God requires of us.

And yet, God has provided even for our failures. He sent his Son Jesus to pay the penalty on our behalf for our sin. Let us thank God for Jesus. Let us trust in Jesus. Let us repent of our sin. And let us show our gratitude to God for our salvation by doing the duty that he requires of us. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: Edinburgh Edition* (Philadelphia: William S. Young, 1851), 387–388.

# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church  
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can  
be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons).
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp).
3. [www.sermonaudio.com/source\\_detail.asp?sourceid=Fred-dyFritz](http://www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=Fred-dyFritz).

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