



PART 12 - David Brings the Ark to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:1-19)

July 5, 2023 - Chris Altrock

Reading: 2 Sam. 6:1-19 (NRSVue)

1 David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. 2 David and all the people with him set out and went from Baale-judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the Lord of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim. 3 They carried the ark of God on a new cart and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart 4 with the ark of God, and Ahio went in front of the ark. 5 David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the Lord with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.

6 When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen lurched. 7 The anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him there, and he died there beside the ark of God. 8 David was angry because the Lord had burst forth with an outburst upon Uzzah, so that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day. 9 David was afraid of the Lord that day; he said, "How can the ark of the Lord come into my care?" 10 So David was unwilling to take the ark of the Lord into his care in the city of David; instead, David took it to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. 11 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.

12 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, 13 and when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatted calf. 14 David danced before the Lord with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. 15 So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet.

16 As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal 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.

17 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 offerings of well-being before the Lord. 18 When David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts 19 and distributed food among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people went back to their homes.

Notices

1. What do you notice? What stands out to you? What questions do you have?

(Notice these points of tension)

2. The joy (dancing, songs) that accompany the ark V. Uzzah's death that accompanies the ark.
3. David angry (with the Lord? With Uzzah?)
4. The near failure of David to simply get the ark to Jerusalem.
5. Micah angry at David.

(Other noticing)

6. The food distribution that accompanies the welcoming of the ark.

Commentary/ Application¹

1. Aside on the Ark of the Covenant²

- a. In the traveling formation in the desert, the Ark was carried 2000 cubits ahead of the nation (Num. 2:9). According to one midrash, it would clear the path for the nation by burning snakes, scorpions, and thorns with two jets of flame that shot from its underside (T. VaYakhel, 7) ... When the Israelites went to war in the desert and during the conquering of Canaan, the Ark accompanied them; whether its presence was symbolic, to provide motivation for the Jews, or whether it actually aided them in fighting, is debated by commentators. (JVL)
- b. When the Jews crossed into the land of Canaan, the waters of the Jordan River miraculously split and the Ark led them through (Josh. 3). The most dramatic demonstration of its power comes when the Jews breached the walls of Jericho merely by circling them, blowing horns and carrying the Ark (Josh. 6). (JVL)
- c. After the conquest was completed, the Ark, and the entire Tabernacle, were set up in Shiloh (Josh. 18) . There they remained until the battles of the Jews with the Philistines. The Jews, after suffering a defeat at the Philistines' hands, took the Ark from Shiloh to Even-Ezer in hopes of winning the next battle. But the Jews were routed, and the Ark was captured by the Philistines. (I Sam. 4). (JVL)
- d. The Philistines took the Ark back to Ashdod, their capital city in the south of Canaan, where they placed it in the temple of their god Dagon. The next day,

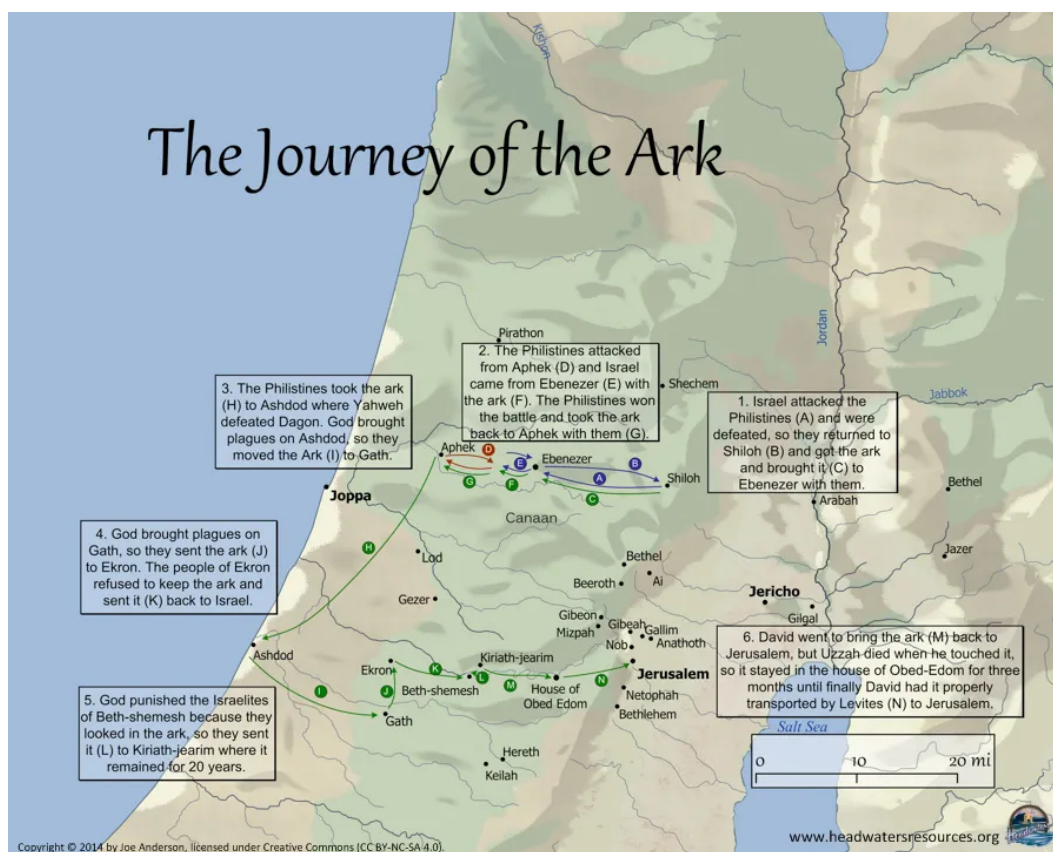
¹ Robert Alter *The David Story* (Norton & Co, 1999); Robert Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel* New American Commentary (B & H, 1996); Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Interpretation (John Knox, 1990).

² <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-ark-of-the-convenant> ;

however, they found the idol fallen on its face. After replacing the statue, they found it the next day decapitated, with only its trunk remaining, and soon afterward, the entire city of Ashdod was struck with a plague. The Philistines moved the Ark to the city of Gath, and from there to Ekron, but whatever city the Ark was in, the inhabitants were struck with plague. After seven months, the Philistines decided to send the Ark back to the Israelites, and accompanied it with expensive gifts. The Ark was taken back to Beit Shemesh, and, according to midrash, the oxen pulling the Ark burst into song as soon as it was once again in Israel's possession (A.Z. 22b). (JVL)

- e. From Beit Shemesh, the Ark was transported to Kiryat Yearim, where it remained for twenty years. From there, King David transported it to Jerusalem. En route, however, the oxen pulling it stumbled, and when Uzzah reached out to steady the Ark, he died immediately. As a result of this tragedy, David decided to leave the Ark at the home of Obed-edom the Gittite. Three months later, he moved it to Jerusalem, the seat of his kingdom, where it remained until the construction of the First Temple by David's son Solomon (I Sam. 5-6). When the Ark was finally placed in the Temple, the midrash reports that the golden tree decorations that adorned the walls blossomed with fruit that grew continuously until the Temple's

destruction
(Yoma 39b).
(JVL)



- f. The Ark remained in the Temple until its destruction at the hand of the Babylonian empire, led by Nebuchadnezzar. What happened to it afterward is unknown, and has been debated and pondered for centuries. It is unlikely that the Babylonians took it, as they did the other vessels of the Temple, because the detailed lists of what they took make no mention of the Ark. According to some sources, Josiah, one of the final kings to reign in the First Temple period, learned of the impending invasion of the Babylonians and hid the Ark. Where he hid it is also questionable – according to one midrash, he dug a hole under the wood storehouse on the Temple Mount and buried it there (Yoma 53b). Another account says that Solomon foresaw the eventual destruction of the Temple, and set aside a cave near the Dead Sea, in which Josiah eventually hid the Ark (Maimonides, Laws of the Temple, 4:1). (JVL)
 - b. One of the most fascinating possibilities is advanced by Ethiopian Christians who claim that they have the Ark today. In Axum, Ethiopia, it is widely believed that the Ark is currently being held in the Church of Saint Mary of Zion, guarded by a monk known as the "Keeper of the Ark," who claims to have it in his possession. According to the Axum Christian community, they acquired the Ark during the reign of Solomon, when his son Menelik, whose mother was the Queen of Sheba, stole the Ark after a visit to Jerusalem. The claim has thus been impossible to verify, for no one but the monk is allowed into the tent. (JVL)
 - c. A more plausible claim is that of archaeologist Leen Ritmeyer, who has conducted research on the Temple Mount and inside the Dome of the Rock. He claims to have found the spot on the Mount where the Holy of Holies was located during the First Temple period. In the precise center of that spot is a section of bedrock cut out in dimensions that may match those of the Ark as reported in Exodus. Based on his findings, Ritmeyer has postulated that the Ark may be buried deep inside the Temple Mount. (JVL)
2. Verses 1-5
- a. “After twenty years of dormancy, the ark is now recalled as a vehicle for royal legitimation ... David’s new regime in Jerusalem is a radical departure from that old order and as such is in urgent need of legitimation ... He appeals to the central symbol of the old order to legitimize a new order that decisively departs from all that was traditional. While this move may have been an act of good faith, it is also a nervy act of calculation.” (Brueggemann, 247-248).
 - b. In what ways might David’s use of the ark have been political or military rather than merely spiritual or religious?**
 - c. Can you think of any ways today that religious items/ places are used for not-so-spiritual purposes?**

- d. “Thirty thousand” is also the number of Israelites slain when the Ark was captured by the Philistines (1 Sam. 4). (Alter)
- e. “The ark was the object most closely associated with Israel’s God, a truth expressed by the writer’s notation that the ‘Name--the name of Yahweh of Armies, He who is seated on the cherubim--is called upon it.’ The ark contained the written agreement between Israel and the Lord (cf. Exod 25:16; 40:20; Deut 10:5; 1 Kgs 8:9), was a place of divine revelation (Exod 25:22; Num 7:89), and was in fact the Lord’s throne (cf. 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Kgs 19:15; Pss 80:1; 99:1; Isa 37:16). An object of such overwhelming significance would certainly make a valuable prize for the Philistines and was worthy of the massive protective force called upon by David.” (Bergen, 329).
- f. “New cart” = one unpolluted by any previous use. (Alter)
- g. “New cart” = “As respectful and well intended as David’s effort was, however, it violated Torah guidelines regarding the transport of the ark (cf. Num 4:15; 7:9). In fact, David's actions in this matter were more like those of the spiritually ignorant Philistines (cf. 1 Sam 6:7; 10). [*15 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 Kohathites shall come to carry these, but they must not touch the holy things, or they will die. These are the things of the tent of meeting that the Kohathites are to carry ... 9 But to the Kohathites he gave none, because they were charged with the care of the holy things that had to be carried on the shoulders.*] (Bergen)
- h. Why did David decide to transport the ark in an unauthorized way?**

3. Verses 6-11

- a. The word used for God’s wrath/ anger is the same word used for David’s wrath/ anger. (Alter)
- b. “The stated reason for David’s emotional storm was ‘because the LORD had broken out against Uzzah’ (v. 8)-- a clause that could either mean that David was made at God for killing Uzzah (unlikely, since God was merely enforcing the Torah) or that he was upset that Uzzah had acted in such a way as to cause God to bring fatal judgment to bear (more likely).” (Bergen, 330).
- c. Who do you think David was angry at--God or Uzzah (or himself)? Why?**
- d. Perez-uzzah = “bursting out against Uzzah.” (Alter)
- e. “David becomes freshly afraid of Yahweh (v. 9). When people are no longer awed, respectful, or fearful of God’s holiness, the community is put at risk.” (Brueggemann, 249).
- f. What place does fear have in our relationship with God?**
- g. “Obed-edom the Gittite” = a foreigner, perhaps from Philistine Gath and someone who had attached himself to David during his sojourn there. (Alter)

- h. “The plan worked well; during the ‘three months’ it was there, blessings--not curses--attended Obed-Edom and everything around him (v. 12; cf 1 Chr 26:5).” (Bergen, 331).
4. Verses 12-15
- a. This time the Levites carry the ark by hand rather than by cart. (v. 13).
 - b. “This ritual pause after six steps suggests a symbolic significance, perhaps a sort of Sabbath rest, suggesting a consecration of the entire journey.” (Bergen, 331).
 - c. What might it look like to consecrate a journey today?**
 - d. For this ten-mile journey, David prepared both the capital and himself. First, he erected a special tent in Jerusalem to house the ark (v. 17). Second, he wore special ritual garments, a ‘linen ephod’ (v. 14), worn normally by priests and Levites (Ex. 28:6; 1 Sam. 2:18; 22:18)--meaning David was acting, in certain respects, as a priest. (Bergen, 331-332).
5. Verse 16
- a. Notice that she is called “daughter of Saul” not “wife of David” (Alter)
 - b. At the beginning of their relationship Michal helped David escape through a window. Now she looks at him through a window, from a distance, seething. (Alter)
 - c. “It is unclear why Michal was absent from the event, since other women were permitted to be present (cf. v. 19), but the tone of the passage suggests that it was due to her jaded attitude toward the Lord and his anointed; previously she had been connected with the use of a teraphim, an object considered an abomination to the Lord (1 Sam. 15:23; 19:13).” (Bergen, 332).
 - d. “At face value, the day of transporting the ark is wondrous. Indeed it is a perfect day for all parties--Yahweh, Israel, David, the priests--for all parties except Michal, Saul’s daughter, David’s wife. The demanding, relentless voice of the old house of Saul sounds in the midst of the celebration. It is a voice of despising.” (Brueggemann, 251).
 - e. Why do you think Michal was angry?**
 - f. When have you encountered anger/ criticism while doing something good and right?**
6. Verses 17-19
- a. “The extravagance is one of liturgy. There are endless burnt offerings and peace offerings (vv. 17-18). The community is without restraint in its gratitude for the self-giving and the presence of God. There is social extravagance closely tied to these offerings, which are communal meals. Everyone celebrates, each with ‘a

cake of bread, a portion of meal, and a cake of raisin” (v. 19). Everyone has cause to rejoice because life has started again.” (Brueggemann, 250).

- b. The story of David bringing the ark to Jerusalem is a very positive and bright story that is darkened twice--once by the death of Uzzah who touched the ark, and once by the criticism of Michal when David dances. The first represents times when we try to do the right thing (e.g., bring the ark to Jerusalem) but do it in the wrong way (e.g., David had the ark transported by cart, rather than by poles--and this is what led to Uzzah having to reach out to steady the ark when the cart nearly tipped). The second represents times when we do the right thing (e.g., bring the ark to Jerusalem) in the right way (after Uzzah’s death, David has the ark removed from the cart and carried by hand, as the Torah demanded), yet still people criticize.

7. Look back over the text. In what ways does the theme “people are complicated” stand out to you?