

David, Uzzah and the Ark of God

2 Samuel 6

In **2 Samuel 6** we see an instance of God not being pleased with a worship activity performed in His honor.

David had a great plan to bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem and create a great center of worship for the Lord. He invited everyone, he got himself a bunch of musicians - it was going to be a great celebration. His expectations were that this celebration would bring God's pleasure and God's blessings.

Instead, because of his actions the Lord's anger was aroused and He struck down a man named Uzzah because he touched the Ark of the Covenant.

First some background.

David had just conquered Jerusalem and was going to make it the capital city of Israel.

David loved God and wanted to honor Him as the true King of his nation and make Him the center of Israel's focus.

So he sought out the Ark of the Covenant to bring it into Jerusalem from the town of Kiriath Jearim where it had sat unused in the worship of Israel for about 70 to 80 years.

The ark of God was essentially a wooden box overlaid with pure gold. On the top on the lid were two Cherubim and between their outstretched wings was the mercy seat. It was constructed during the time of Moses, and within it were three things: the two tablets of the 10 Commandments, Aaron's priestly rod that had budded and produced almonds, and a jar containing the manna that God had provided for the His people in the wilderness. God and His Presence dwelt with Israel at the mercy seat of the ark.

Philistine War

So what was the ark doing in Kiriath Jearim? Well, when Eli was old and Samuel was still a youth, Israel had been guilty of disobeying God, and as a result they were losing badly in a war with the Philistines (**1 Samuel 4-6**). The Ark of the Covenant was at Shiloh and the Israelites thought that if the ark was with them on the battle front, God would be there too. But the Philistines slaughtered Israel's army. Hophni and Phinehas, sons of the high priest Eli, were killed, and the Philistines took the Ark back home with them to the city of Ashdod as a trophy of war. The news of the ark's capture was such a shock to Eli that he fell off his chair and died. Phinehas' wife died in childbirth as she heard the news, giving birth to Ichabod, whose name means "Where is the glory?" or "Glory is exiled."

Dagon

Now what do you do with a trophy? You display it in a prominent place, don't you? So the Philistines placed the Ark in the temple of their god – Dagon (half man/ half fish) as a way of declaring that their god was greater than the God of Israel.

Celebrating their victory, the Philistines offered sacrifices and incense to their god and then went home to bed. The next morning, Dagon lay face down on the temple floor. They shrugged it off, picked up the statue of Dagon and placed him back where he belonged. Again they offered their sacrifices and incense to Dagon and went home again. The next morning, Dagon was on the floor again – but he wasn't laying face down this time. He no longer even had a face. His head and his hands were broken off and were lying on the threshold beside him.

Ashdod

Then God plagued the people of Ashdod with tumors (likely Bubonic plague from rats). The citizens of Ashdod decided maybe it was time to share this trophy of war with the other great cities of the Philistines for awhile.

Return to Israel

So the ark was shuttled from city to city in Philistia, and everywhere it was taken those cities were plagued by the same pestilence. Finally, the Philistines decided it was time to return the ark to Israel, and they **placed it on a new oxcart** and placed a chest alongside it...with 5 golden tumors and 5 golden rats as a peace offering to the God of Israel (**1 Samuel 6:5-8**).

Beth-Shemesh

So the Philistine oxcart brought the ark back to the city of Beth-Shemesh in Israel. **1 Samuel 6:15** tells us that **“The Levites took down the ark of the LORD**, together with the chest containing the gold objects, and placed them on the large rock. On that day the people of Beth-Shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices to the LORD.” The citizens of Beth-Shemesh were delighted to have the ark in their city, but they decided to look inside the ark. That was a mistake. The hand of God struck down 70 men who died on the spot. This so upset the city of Beth-Shemesh that they had the ark moved to Kiriath Jearim and there it remained for the next 70 to 80 years or so... until David decided to bring it to Jerusalem.

This bring us to our story in 2 Samuel 6.

David is finally fulfilling his anointed kingship over all of Israel, and he wants to make sure that God is acknowledged and honored as the source of all blessings. So he goes to the house of Abinadab in Kiriath-Jearim to bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. Abinadab's two sons, Uzzah and Ahio, go along. Ahio was leading the oxen and it appears Uzzah was walking alongside the cart.

And all the while “David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals.” **2 Samuel 6:5**

THEN SOMETHING WENT HORRIBLY WRONG.

In verse 6 they came to Nacon's threshing floor. A threshing floor was always on the side of a hill so that the wind could separate the wheat from the chaff. So as they were going down the hill an ox stumbled and Uzzah reached out to steady the ark, and he immediately he was struck dead by God.

What happened? What did they do wrong? **2 Samuel 6:8** says that “David was angry because the LORD's wrath had broken out against Uzzah...” The Hebrew here describes David has “hot”, “furious”, “incensed.” David's immediate reaction is to be angry with the Lord. He doesn't humble himself before the Lord, and doesn't even seem to want to know why this terrible thing has happened. Then, either because of his anger, or regardless of his anger, David becomes afraid of the Lord. He decides not to move the ark any further. Instead he has it carried over to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite where it remains until he figures out what went wrong.

Well... what did go wrong?

2 Samuel 6:7 “The LORD's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God.”

His “irreverent act?” He had touched the ark... you weren’t supposed to do that. **Numbers 4:15** tells us that only the Kohathites – a family in the tribe of Levi – were allowed to carry Ark. And even they were told that “they must not touch the holy things or they will die.”

Along each side there were rings that were designed to hold poles that the Kohathites would use to carry it. **Numbers 4:6** tells us “Then they shall put on it a covering of badger skins, and spread over *that* a cloth entirely of blue; **and they shall insert its poles.**”

But instead the Israelites put the ark on a new oxcart and were wheeling it down the road.

Why did they do that? Why risk the wrath of God by directly disobeying a command from Scripture?

Two possibilities:

1. **David and Israelites did not know they had to use the poles because they failed to read the Law before they moved the Ark.**

1 Chronicles 15:13 - "For because you *did* not *do it* the first *time*, the LORD our God broke out against us, because we did not consult Him about the proper order."

2. **They were aware that the Lord had given specific instructions, but didn't follow them on this occasion.**

1 Chronicles 13:1-3 -- “David CONFERRED with each of his officers, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. He then said to the whole assembly of Israel, 'If it seems good to you and if it is the will of the LORD our God, let us send word far and wide to the rest of our brothers throughout the territories of Israel, and also to the PRIESTS and LEVITES who are with them in their towns and pasturelands, to come and join us. Let us bring the ark of our God back to us, for we did not inquire of it during the reign of Saul.'”

David had clearly given this a lot of thought. This was not some haphazard adventure he was embarking on. He consulted people. He asked everyone he knew. He even made sure that the priests and the Levites were on hand. 30,000 people are on hand for this event.

David had to have known the history of the Ark of the Covenant, every Jew did, especially Uzzah! Uzzah grew up around the ark --- it was in his house! He had to have known that to even get near it at all was a matter of life and death.

Hey, how did they get the ark onto the oxcart? Maybe they used the poles!

But the sad irony of this incident is that David and the people are all very excited about bringing the ark of God into their city. “We're going to go get God's Presence and bring Him here, and He will greatly bless us!”

So, why did David choose an oxcart?

1. **It was easier.** Kiriath Jearim was about 10 miles west of Jerusalem. Imagine having 4 men carry a heavy box with poles on their shoulders 10 miles. Wouldn’t it be so much easier to put it up on a cart and let oxen to the work?
2. **The Philistines had done it that way.** About 70 years earlier they had returned the ark to Israel. ... and God hadn’t struck them dead! If it worked for the Philistines... why wouldn’t it work for them? But it DIDN’T work. A man died. In spite of the fact that

Israel had turned this event into a giant worship service.
Offered sacrifices to God.
Sang songs of praise and honor to the LORD
Were rejoicing and praising God's name
In spite of all that... God was not pleased... and a man died.

And why wasn't God pleased? Two primary reasons...

1. They replaced obedience to God's way with a way that was easier for them.
2. They followed the ideas of men over the clear commands of God.

The results were devastating.

Lessons to learn:

1. We must approach the service of God with a high degree of reverence and godly fear.
Heb. 12:28-29
2. Just because we say we're sincere in our efforts to please God doesn't mean that He is pleased. We are to obey God, not expect Him to bless what we have already set our minds to do. *(David didn't stop to listen to God. Instead he led his people in the way that seemed good to him, and then expected God to be pleased to follow HIM.)*
 - a. Have you heard people say, "God is too good to condemn anyone. As long as my intentions are good, everything will work out. It doesn't matter how you worship God, so long as you are sincere."
 - b. **1 Sam 15:22** - obedience is more important to God than sacrifices.
Micah 6:6-8 - sacrifices cannot make up for being unjust, unmerciful, and prideful.
Hosea 6:6 - Mercy and knowledge is more important than offerings.
3. Ignorance of the law does not excuse us; we are still subject to God's will. **Rom 10:1-3**
4. Just because something seems to be good and right does not mean that it is God's WILL or the WAY He wants it done. **Proverbs 16:25**
 - a. *Man likes to think he is pure - Proverbs 16:2*
 - b. *Man can always justify his own decisions - Proverbs 21:2*
5. Our laziness and/or carelessness can cause our own destruction AND that of others.
Matt 15:13-14
6. We must strive with all our heart to serve God in the ways that He has taught us.