

King David Almost Brings the Ark to Jerusalem.

2 Samuel 6:1-11

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Last week's we concluded the book of 1st Samuel with the death of King Saul and with David living in exile in Philistine territory. This week as we begin the stories of King David, we are entering the most important period of Israel's history.

Moses brought the tribes of Israel to the Promised and Joshua settled them there, but it was King David who finally united these various tribes under his benevolent reign, bringing 80 years of prosperity, peace, and prestige to the nation of Israel.

- It was David who finally defeated the Philistines so that they were never again a serious threat to Israel.
- It was David who made Jerusalem both the political and spiritual capital of Israel.
- And it was David who brought about a spiritual revival, concluding nearly 400 years of Israel's religious wandering.

Thus David is the Hebrew equivalent of George Washington and Paul Bunyan combined; both the father of his country and a national hero of legendary proportions. Which is why many years later as Jesus was rising to popularity, He was often celebrated as "the Son of David," signaling that the people expected Jesus to restore for them those golden years of David's reign.

So to better understand the continuing claim that David has held on the Hebrew imagination, we need to begin with the first ten years of his rise to power as recorded in 2nd Samuel, chapters 1-5. Then we will conclude with one illustrative story of how, in his first failure to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, David learned an important lesson in the right versus the wrong ways to honor God.

The book of 2nd Samuel opens with David hearing news of Saul's death. Following God's guidance, he then returns to Israel settling in the southern region, in the town of Hebron, in Judah, where the leaders immediately anoint him as their king (2nd Sam. 2:4).

But, the household of Saul being unwilling to relinquish their former power, Abner, the commander of Saul's army, then declares Ishbaal, another of Saul's sons, as king of Israel, setting up his capital in a northern town. For the next two years, as David's support steadily grows, Ishbaal's weakens. During this time, the armies of these two divided houses had several confrontations, often with cousins and former friends in arms now fighting against each other. In one of those conflicts Abner, not wanting to, but in defense of his own life kills the brother of his former friend Joab who is the commander of David's army.

After two years, Abner has a falling out with king Ishbaal and switches sides. Coming to David in Hebron, Abner made peace and vowed to bring all Israel together under David's rule. Joab was not present for those talks. So when he learned that Abner had

come and was sent away in peace, unknown to David, Joab secretly called for Abner to return to Hebron where he murdered him in revenge for the death of his brother.

Hearing of Abner's death, Ishbaal's courage fails him sending Israel into political chaos. Two of Ishbaal's own soldiers then assassinate him while he is taking an afternoon nap and bring his head to David.

The important thing to notice in all of these sad events, is that with each of Saul's, and Abner's, and then Ishbaal's death, rather than gloating, David publicly honored them for who they had been, publicly mourned their passing, and punished their murderers. All of which increased his popularity with the people; David was a king who delivered justice and showed compassion. Thus, all the leaders of Israel now rallied around David anointing him king over the land.

David was thirty years old when he was first anointed as king and he ruled Israel for forty years. For the first seven years and six months, David ruled from Hebron. Then after making Jerusalem his capital, he ruled for another 33 years.

The first recorded action of King David was to acquire Jerusalem – in the center of Israel – as his new capital. Sitting high on a mountain top with a walled stronghold, surrounding valleys, and a fresh water spring nearby, Jerusalem was a natural fortress. The Jebusites – a Canaanite tribe who currently inhabited the city – felt so secure, they bragged that “*even the blind and the lame*” could successfully defend Jerusalem against David's assaults. But they had not counted on David knowing of the secret tunnel they had dug to bring the spring's water into the city. David and his men simply snuck up the tunnel and the rest is history.

Now when the Philistines heard that David had been crowned king, unifying the land, and had made Jerusalem his new capital, they sent several expeditionary forces into Israel in an attempt to kill him and keep Hebrew people under their control. But as before, each time they attacked David's army, they were soundly defeated and driven from the land. David then went on to conquer the Moabites, the Syrians, and all of Israel's other enemies, now forcing them to pay him tribute. In all this time as the book of Chronicles records, *David became greater and greater, for the Lord of hosts was with him* (1 Chron. 11:9).

The important thing to notice about these years, is that each time David had an important decision to make, he first inquired of the Lord as to what he should do and then faithfully followed God guidance. But in this next story, that is the one thing he apparently forgot to do.

Having brought peace to Israel and having defeated all their enemies; having established his capital in Jerusalem and having even built himself a nice house there,

David felt there was still an important task yet to accomplish: he knew that most of the people were still far away from the Lord.

During the 400 years of the Judges, Israel had wandered away from their close relationship with God. Being "a man after God's own heart," David wanted to make that situation right. He wanted to bring his people back to the Lord. To do this, David knew that he would personally have to lead the nation back to God. So he decided to retrieve the Ark of the Covenant from its 70 year exile in the house of Abinidab and place it in his new capital city as the centerpiece of Israelite worship and everyday life.

The Ark of the Covenant, built at the command of the Lord, was a chest of wood overlaid in pure gold (Ex. 25:10-22.). It was topped by a golden lid called the Mercy Seat and flanked on either side by two golden cherubim covering it with their wings. Inside the Ark was a pot of manna; Aaron's rod that budded and the two stone tablets of the Law that God gave Moses at Mount Sinai. But what made the Ark so important was that it was here, above the Ark, where God promised to meet with His people. It was here where the blood of the atonement was placed on the Day of Atonement. It was here that the glory of God rested as He led the children of Israel through the wilderness.

As the symbol of God's presence among His people, the Ark was central to their worship and their relationship with God. In the early days of Israel's occupation it was even carried into battle in front of the soldiers. But through the years of the Judges as the tribes of Israel spread across the land, the Ark had not been kept in the central position that it deserved and, as a result, neither had God.

Then in the days of the High Priest Eli some 100 years before David's reign, without first seeking God's guidance, Israel's leaders had again attempted to carry the Ark into battle only to be utterly defeated and have it captured by the Philistines. Hearing of the death of his sons and the capture of the Ark, Eli dies and his daughter-in-law goes into premature labor. With her dying breath she named the child **Ichabod**, meaning "**the Glory has departed.**" The loss of the Ark was a tragedy beyond all proportion for the people of Israel. While the glory of God had long ago departed, still the symbol of God's glory was now also gone.

But, during the seven months that the Ark was in the possession of the Philistines, God harassed whatever city that tried holding it; causing their idols to fall and shatter and inflicting upon them diseases and infestations. (1 Sam. 5-6.).

Believing in territorial gods, the Philistine solution was to send Israel's angry God back home by returning the Ark to Israel's possession. But they also devised a clever test to determine if it was really Israel's God who was now plaguing them. They placed the Ark along with guilt offerings to the God of Israel on a new ox cart. Then, having removed their calves from them, they harnessed two young milk cows to the cart and

followed it as the untended cows, still calling for their calves, nevertheless carried the Ark all the way back to Israel, to the Levite town of Beth-Shemesh.

The people of Beth-Shemesh were so overjoyed at the return of the Ark, that they immediately cut up the cart for firewood and sacrificed the cows as a thank offering to God. But after that they treated it more like a local attraction, with some of their men even trying to lift its lid to look inside; as a result many of the residents died. Now themselves fearing the Ark, the people of Beth-Shemesh wanted to get rid of it, sending the Ark up into the mountains to the house of Abinidab where it then stayed for the next 70 years.

The Bible doesn't explain why the Ark was not immediately returned back to the Tabernacle in Shiloh, there to be properly tended by the priests; probably because after the Ark's capture and Eli's death, the Tabernacle had also been deserted. It seems that all Israel had forgotten the significance of the Ark as a symbol of God's presence in their midst.

Neither did King Saul have any interest in the Ark, letting it remain at Abinidab's house throughout his 42 year reign while doing nothing to restore the Ark of the Covenant to its proper, central place, in the worship of God's people. As one commentary noted, "*To neglect the Ark was to neglect God himself. While the Ark was absent from the center of Israel's worship, the nation was in a covenant-breaking condition.*"

So, after 100 years of neglect, David personally decided to show Israel, by example, how to rightly worship God. Gathering 30,000 of Israel's leaders, David led the procession to Abinidab's house to retrieve the Ark. But apparently this time David had forgotten to first consult God before fetching the Ark to its new home.

It was to be a nine mile victory parade from Abinidab's house bringing the Ark to its new home in Jerusalem. As the Philistines had done earlier, the Israelites loaded the Ark on a brand new Ox Cart for the journey. Two of Abinidab's sons were to lead the cart, Ahio from the front with Uzzah following behind, while "*David and all the house of Israel danced before the Lord with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets, cymbals and trumpets* (1 Chron. 13:9).

The people were worshipping with genuine enthusiasm — celebrating before the LORD! There was laughter, music, singing, and dancing. The procession was filled with joy, with David leading the festivities, while over thirty thousand of Israel's leaders accompanied the Ark to its new home. But then, the cart hit a bump in the road. With that momentary slip of the oxen's feet, Uzzah reached up his hand to steady the Ark so it wouldn't fall and the moment he touched the Ark it was he who fell to the ground ... dead. Everything changed in that moment. The victory parade came to a dramatic halt as everyone stared in shock at the body on the ground. God had struck Uzzah dead.

Scripture records that *David was angry because the Lord had burst forth with an outburst upon Uzzah; ...*

And David was afraid of the Lord that day; saying, 'How can the ark of the Lord come into my care?' 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 [where] the Ark of the Lord remained ... for three months; and the Lord blessed Obed-edom and all his household.' (6:6-11)

What had gone wrong? David's heart was in the right place, his intentions were God honoring, but apparently he forgot to first consult God on the process. He also had either forgotten or ignored the clear commands from God as to how the Ark was to be transported. God had allowed the Philistines to return the Ark on an ox cart because they could not have known the proper ritual, and besides God was the one leading the milk cows home. But David should have known better.

In the book of Numbers, God had given specific instructions on the manner in which the Ark was to be transported. Before the Ark could even be moved out of its inner sanctuary it had to be covered, because only the High Priest was ever allowed to see it. Then, only the sons of Kohath, a family in the tribe of Levites, were allowed to carry the Ark (NUMBERS 7:9). But before doing so, the carriers had to sanctify themselves – make themselves ritually clean. Then, they were to use two long poles to lift the Ark up to their shoulders for transport. In all this process they were forbidden from actually touching it, lest they die (NUMBERS 4:15). Having lived with the Ark all their lives, you would think that Ahio and Uzzah knew of these requirements; their failure to follow them had now cost Uzzah's life.

Seeing the result of their simply neglecting the proper rituals for the Ark's transport and now being afraid of it, David deposited the Ark in the nearby residence of Obed-Edom the Gitite until he could figure out what had gone wrong.

Interestingly, Obed was specifically identified as a "Gitite," meaning that he had come from the town of Gath – Goliath's former home. In other words, **Obed was Philistine!** Probably having joined David's army during his days of exile, Obed had then followed him back to Israel. That God was now blessing Obed's hosting of the Ark, seemingly meant that he either knew better how to care the Ark, or that God had again taken into consideration Obed's respect for the sacred relic in spite of his lack of knowledge concerning its proper handling.

Either way, for the three months that the Ark resided in his home, God so obviously blessed Obed-Edom's household that David heard of it, and now – having done his homework – he was ready for another attempt at bringing the Ark to its new home in Jerusalem. This time he did it the right way.... But that is the story for next week.

Today we don't have an Ark like Israel did; but we still have God's presence now living within us. And just as they needed God's presence to be blessed, we still need the blessing presence of God in our lives; blessing which comes through obedience. So now, let's conclude this week's story by learning how we might benefit from knowing and honoring God's rules concerning those things which represent His holiness.

The first lesson this story should teach us is that before we decide to do something for God, we had better ask His guidance first. Jesus told those seeking food, shelter, and security to seek first God's kingdom and He would give us all these things as well (Matt. 6:33). His brother James also warned us to never make any plans without first consulting God.

*you ought to say,
'If the Lord wishes,
we will live and do this or that.'*
James 4:15

*Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money.' Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that.' As it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. **Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.*** James 4:13-17

Failing to seek God's will is just as dangerous as ignoring what He has already told you to do. The best thing a child of God can do is to learn and align themselves with the Word of God and then walk in humble obedience. Since we have been told to pray without ceasing, God's children should always pray before they make a move (1 Thess. 5:16-18, Micah 6:8).

Secondly, if we want to do God's work, we had better do it God's way

God's blessings come only through obedience and those who defy His Word and His will are going to pay a terribly high price. In the days of Moses, the hiddenness and untouchability of the Ark not only symbolized the complete holiness of God, it also demonstrated His unapproachable separation from sinful people. Other than Moses, only the High Priest could even see the Ark, only once a year, and only after offering sacrifices both for his and the people's sin.

because God is holy
we who would approach Him
should also be holy in all that we do

1 Peter 1:15-16.

These days through the intervention and atoning death of Jesus Christ, God no longer needs to remain separate and unapproachable, but seeing all who come to Him covered by His son Jesus, God now welcomes us as children and encourages us to boldly approach His throne (Hebrews 4:14-16, Romans 8:14-17). That does not mean we can now take God's holiness for granted. **We have been warned: because God is holy we who would approach Him should also and always strive to be holy in all that we do** (1 Peter 1:15-16). Just because our Heavenly Judge is now also our loving Father, does not mean we can give Him any less respect.

The Apostle Paul had to warn the new Christians in Corinth, that because their irreverence while participating in the Lord's Supper, some of their members had brought judgment upon themselves: both illness and death. *For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves.* 1 Corinthians 11:20-31

We are privileged to live in fellowship with a loving, but nevertheless Holy God. While we need not be afraid of him, a little healthy fear and respect would be our wise response. In C.S.Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia, the Beaver family tell Edmund and Lucy that they are going to meet Aslan the Lion, the king of Narnia.

"Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he-quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion"... "Safe?" said Mr Beaver ... "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

— C.S. Lewis, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

The Apostle Paul has advised all of us who claim to follow Jesus,

For we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others

2 Corinthians 5:10-11

The Bible records that David became angry with the Lord and for a while instead of repenting and doing things the Lord's way, David chose instead to forget the whole business. He dismissed the people and left the Ark where it was. David stopped praising and he started pouting.

We should not be surprised that God refuses to bless us when we leave the reservation.

- When we seek to do God's business our way, He will not bless it.
- When we employ worldly methods in an attempt to do God's work, He will not bless it.
- When we fail to seek His will, He will not bless us.

- When we operate in the power and energy of the flesh, He will not bless us.
- When we refuse to obey His precepts and principles, He will not bless us.

If you want to be disappointed in your walk with Jesus as an individual or as a church, just do everything your way, and watch God refuse to honor it. Watch Him send judgment instead.

If you want God's blessing, then do God's business God's way; He will honor it and bring glory to Himself through it.

Thankfully after three months of hearing God blessing others and not himself, David came around, found out how to honorably carry the Ark, and was finally able to victoriously dance it into Jerusalem, where the priests could properly tend it and all the people could be blessed. Everyone was happy Well almost everyone. But that's next week's story.

Let' pray.