

Today’s Scripture is an incredible passage with an amazing story, so let me get right to it. First, I want to recap the story and then take a look at the three people mentioned in this passage and draw a few lessons from each one. The story begins this way: Step 1) *“David again brought together all the able young men of Israel—thirty thousand.”* Step 2) *“...to bring up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom.”*

Many years before this, the Ark of the Covenant had been captured by the Philistines. The Ark was essentially a box which contained items like the Ten Commandments, Moses’ staff and some manna from the wilderness. It contained items from their history in the wilderness. The box went with them wherever they traveled. The Ark symbolized the presence of God. No matter where they wandered, God was with them. And God would provide for them again in the future. It was highly valuable and symbolic.

For about twenty years under King Saul, the nation had been without the Ark as part of their national worship. The Ark resided at the house of Abinadab for safe-keeping. Now David is the king. He successfully conducted various military campaigns so that many of Israel’s enemies had been defeated.

David decided to move the capital city from Shiloh to Jerusalem. He wanted to bring the Ark of the Covenant to his new capital city, which was to be both the political center and the religious center of the nation. It had been a very long time since the Israelites had a specific location that would serve as their center for worship. It was something of a shrewd political move on David’s part. By bringing this religious symbol to his political capital, he identifies himself with God and the kingship of God. Shrewd politicians in this country have also used the trappings of religion to gather support for his or her political platform. Just because someone throws around the name of God and talks about religious issues, however, does not mean they are legitimately a person of God. But I think David does this out of sincere motives.

First and Second Samuel portray David as a man after God’s own heart. David consistently shows that he legitimately worshiped God and could not imagine being king without having God’s blessing.

Verse 3 says, *“They set the ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. (Must have been Pittsburgh-like geography). Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were guiding the new cart”*

This verse does not seem to be significant unless we look at the other verses in the Bible that talk about the Ark of the Covenant. On the Ark were rings which had poles through them. Men were to carry the Ark by using those poles. That was the prescribed method for carrying the Ark. But when Abinadab and his two sons were given the privilege of moving the Ark to Jerusalem, they hit upon a new technology. The Philistines had invented the ox cart. So they put the Ark on the cart so that the people would not be so burdened. This sounds reasonable, but it was not what God had instructed.

Verse 5 says, David and all the house of Israel were *“celebrating with all their might before the LORD, with castanets, harps, lyres, timbrels, sistrums and cymbals.”* There was plenty of music, singing and even dancing. And no one danced more vigorously than David. Next comes a few verses that were left out of the reading today, but I want to tell you what they say. Verses 6-11 tell of the death of Uzzah, one of the sons of Abinadab. As the procession begins, the oxen stumble and the ark teeters. Uzzah naturally reaches out his hand to steady the ark. Verse 7 says, *“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.” Isn’t this a shocking turn of events? We’ll come back to it in a minute.

We can imagine the effect this death had on the parade. I once read about a baseball game where the umpire died. They called off the game and sent everybody home. That’s what happened with David’s parade. When Uzzah died, they stopped the procession and waited for *three months*. David was disturbed and angry with God over Uzzah’s death. After three months, the procession resumed from the house of Obed-Edom. We can presume that this time David’s men use the poles to carry the Ark.

The Ark is brought into Jerusalem successfully. In verse 16, we see a second character: *“As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart.”* That verse holds a lot of meaning. David was celebrating by dancing and is basically in his “tidy whiteys” by this point. Michal sees her husband, David, and is upset that he is behaving this way. Michal is the daughter of Saul. David and Michal later have an argument about his dancing in public.

In the final paragraph, the Ark is brought in, there are offerings, and David gives to everyone a gift; a loaf of bread and a cake of dates and raisins. Then all the people went back to their homes. That’s the story.

Now, what do each of these three main characters show us? **First, there is David.** His story holds center place in this story. The big question is, “Why did David dance?” He danced before the Ark, reckless and joyful. And the Bible indicates he was nearly naked when he did so. Why? I think it is because David was the kind of person who responded with his heart. He was not the kind to be calculating and overly concerned with political correctness or even proper protocol for a king. He trusted his reactions. He went with his instincts.

Imagine him as a boy who grew up tending sheep in the fields. We know that he killed lions and bears on many occasions to protect the sheep. When a lion comes to attack the sheep, he didn’t think rationally about his plan of attack. He just responded! If he saw a bear, he immediately went into attack. When Goliath threatened Israel, David immediately responded with his slingshot. If he had stopped to think, he might have been too afraid. But he trusted his instincts and his reflexes.

He trusts his instincts to wildly and uninhibitedly worship God. I think David is the kind of person who knows God protected him from the lion and the bear. He has often needed God’s help, and God has always been there for him. God brought him his success. David is genuine in his faith in God because God was always been faithful to him. He didn’t bring the Ark into Jerusalem Presbyterian-style but more Pentecostal-style. He came with genuine celebration and joy. He didn’t hold back his emotions.

The second important character in this text is Uzzah, the man who was struck dead because he touched the Ark of the Covenant. The crucial question here is why did God strike him dead? Isn’t God someone who is consistently revealed as the giver of life, patiently calling us to repentance, constantly seeking the lost, forever showing his steadfast love for us? It makes us uncomfortable when we come across an event in which God kills. What has Uzzah done to deserve this? The Bible doesn’t really say. I think we have to speculate a little to come to an acceptable understanding.

The narrative itself does not tell us much about him. But we do know the Ark has been in the house of his father for years. So we assume that Uzzah and his brother had been taking care of the Ark. Christian tradition says that Uzzah was the man in charge of the Ark. We can imagine that he was fussy about everything related to the Ark. Perhaps he had a sense of ownership of the Ark. He had to protect the Ark, and in a sense protect God. Maybe he also thought he could manage God. The Bible says that no one is to touch the Ark. Perhaps Uzzah made the mistake of thinking he was in charge of God.

Some of us try to put God in a box; we try to contain God; we try to manage God. We don't want God to disrupt or disturb our lives so we put God where we want God to be. But God is not so easily controlled. There is great danger in handling holy things of God.

The third prominent character in the story is introduced near the end. It is David's wife Michal, who was also Saul's daughter. This poor woman has been given in marriage three times for political reasons. The first time Saul gave her to David. The Bible does say that Michal loved David at that point. Saul offered his daughter to marry David if he would kill 100 Philistines, but David killed 200. So Saul reluctantly gave Michal to David.

Later King Saul becomes a little unbalanced and tries to kill David. David runs. So Saul gave Michal to a man named Paltiel to be his wife. I suspect that Michal may have fallen in love with Paltiel. But it is very clear that he fell in love with her. When David regains power, he insists that Michal be given back to him as his wife. As she is brought back, 2 Samuel 3 tells that Paltiel follows her weeping all the way, until Abner tells him to go home.

By the time of our story today, Michal looks out to see David dancing, and the Bible says, "*She despised him.*" There is no love in this marriage now. Perhaps Michal had a sense of properness because she was raised in the house of King Saul. She was royalty and knew the things that kings and king's daughters were supposed to do and not do. They were supposed to be dignified. When David was shouting and dancing, half naked, she simply cannot approve. David and Michal have a confrontation at the end of this chapter. The last verse of the chapter sadly says that Michal will remain childless until her death.

What lessons we can learn from her? When the Ark parade is coming, what is she doing in the window? Why is she a spectator and not a participant? She has chosen for whatever reason not to be a part of the Ark parade. She looks on as a bystander. She sees people with too much enthusiasm for God.

Which character can we most identify with? Perhaps **Michal**, carrying old bitterness and not able to bring ourselves to participate in the celebration of God. Are we spectators, bystanders, looking on critically at those who worship God in ways we do not approve? If we are, our lives will be barren if we do not participate in the parade of God.

Are we like **Uzzah**, thinking God is in our box? Do we think we can control God? Are we the kind of people who try to put a hand on God? If so, the Bible's message for us is, "Beware of taking God for granted."

Or are we like **David**, a person who was a genuine person who trusted God and his instincts? He was not one to manipulate God or control God. He was not a spectator. He was a part of the celebration,

worshiping God with all his heart and might. He let his emotions go. God loved David because he was a man after God's own heart.

I pray that we will all choose to be like David. Amen.