**Bringing of the ark to Jerusalem** 7/5/23 dkm

Read: 2Samuel 6, John 4:13-26

Text: 2Samuel 6

Psalms: 80b:1-11, 99, 67, 134a

The Bible is a unique book and it is interesting in many ways. One thing we note about the NT is the four accounts of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth: the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Back in the OT we find two accounts of the giving of the Law of Moses: the book of Deuteronomy is literally the second giving of the law. Today we are looking at the book of Samuel and the life of David. In the book of Chronicles we find a parallel record beginning with the death of King Saul: ‘Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the Lord’ (1Chron 10:13). Scholars look into who wrote these books, and when, but we simply note that the Bible contains more than one account of the same events which makes it harder for critics to discard the record. With David we have his own poetic record of various events in the book of Psalms. And remember that the Bible records history from God’s perspective, not man’s.

When Samuel anointed a young shepherd called David, the Spirit of the Lord came upon David. He had to wait and suffer persecution for probably seven or eight years before finally being crowned king of all Israel. He captured Jerusalem from the Jebusites and built his palace in this fortified city, with help from the king of Tyre; Hiram sent him beautiful red cedar timber from Lebanon to build a palace. David also wanted to build a house for the Lord in Jerusalem (7:2). But first he had to bring the ark of God up from Baal Judah or Kirjath Jearim.

The ark ended up in the house of Abinadab in Kirjath Jearim after the Philistines sent it back into Israelite territory; it was in this place for twenty years (1Sam 7:1, 2). You will recall how the Philistines put the ark on a new cart pulled by a pair of milking cows. You may also recall how the Lord struck the men of Beth Shemesh for looking into the ark of God. Saul showed no interest in the ark but David does now that he is king and settled in Jerusalem. However, David’s initial attempt to transport the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem did not go well. Our first subheading is, ‘David stumbles’ our second, ‘The oxen stumble’ and our third, ‘Saul’s daughter stumbles’.

**1. David stumbles**

David gathered all the ‘chosen men’ or elite troops to go down with him to Kirjath Jearim for the purpose of bringing the ark of God up to Jerusalem (6:1, 2). Other people may have also gone with him but it seems this was more of a military than a religious operation. David decided the ark should be brought to the city in which he now reigned as king. He had set up the tent of meeting or tabernacle in which he would house the ark, presumably according to plans given by Moses in the Book of the Law. Maybe Abinadab had set up a tent in his place at Kirjath Jearim but there is no indication of this - although he did consecrate Eleazar his son, ‘to keep the ark of the Lord’ (1Sam 7:1).

The ark of God represented the Lord’s presence among his people, the Lord whose name is ‘the Lord of hosts’ and was enthroned between the cherubim on the cover of the ark (Ex 25:22, Ps 80:1). The ark was the most holy object associated with worship in Israel. It represented to some extent the holiness or separateness of God.

What was it that David failed to do before going down to Kirjath Jearim to bring up the ark of God? Remember what he did before he went to war with the Philistines- he inquired of the Lord (5:19). What was it that David did before building a temple in Jerusalem- he spoke with Nathan the prophet (7:2). There is no mention of priest or prophet in David’s deciding to bring the ark of God up to Jerusalem. He did what was right in his own eyes and in the eyes of the people (1Chron 13:3).

Did David think this was an obvious thing to do? Maybe so! We do many things without consulting the Lord, and sometimes this is okay. We do not consult the Lord about coming to church, although some do, so it seems. We do not wake up Sunday morning and ask the Lord if we should go to church or not, because it is written in the Bible: ‘Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together’ (Heb 10:25). David should have prayed before deciding to bring the ark to Jerusalem, but more than this, he should have read what is written in God’s word! We do not need to pray about coming to worship but we do need to look into God’s word to learn how we are to worship our holy God. Too many Christians cannot be bothered reading the Bible, and some think they can worship as they choose. Jesus said, ‘God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth’ (John 4:24); we sometimes term this the ‘regulative principle’ regarding worship.

**2. Oxen stumble**

‘So they set the ark of God on a new cart’ (6:3). Where did they get the idea of using a cart to transport the ark of God? Was it from the Philistines (1Sam 6:7)? It certainly wasn’t from the Bible. But it was a *new* cart! Like the heathen, they knew not to bring an old, broken cart as an offering to the Lord. They, as in David, had the two sons of Abinadab, namely Uzzah and Ahio, drive the two oxen pulling this new cart. Were these two men consecrated- Abinadab had consecrated his son Eleazar (1Sam 7:1). Even if these two were consecrated priests, the Law of Moses stipulated the sons or descendants of Kohath the Levite. And it stipulated that these men carry the ark on special poles made for this purpose. And not even these Levites were to ‘touch any holy thing, lest they die’ (Num 4:15).

When God makes rules he intends for people to obey them. He intends this to be his rule until he make a new rule under a new covenant. This rule regarding the ark of God was still in place in David’s day, and he should have known this. When he tried a second time to bring the ark up to Jerusalem he knew this rule (6:13); ignorance of God’s holy law was no excuse for David, and nor is it for us today! Too many Christians have taken to writing their own rules about worship, and even about salvation and about getting to heaven.

Ahio went ahead of the cart, and Uzzah behind it, as it left the house of their father. David and everyone present sang and played music as the cart carrying the ark of God set off for Jerusalem. They played all kinds of instruments, including stringed instruments, tambourines and cymbals, and instruments made of wood (6:5, 1Chron 13:8). This account is without comment from the writer regarding musical instruments, but one scholar added his own comment about some churches not allowing musical instruments in worship. I found this strange, given that David was at this point not adhering to what was written regarding the transporting of the ark of God! Clearly, ‘enthusiasm and even sincerity are not enough when Yahweh’s explicit instructions are neglected’.

When the ox cart came to the threshing floor of Nachon, the oxen stumbled and Uzzah reached out to steady the ark of God (6:6). At this the Lord’s anger was aroused: ‘God struck him … and he died there by the ark of God’ (6:7). It was written, as we have seen, not to touch this holy thing lest you die (Numb 4:15). Yes, it was a case of shock-horror for David, and he got angry. We understand that his anger was against the Lord, not at himself or at Uzzah. David saw what happened at the ‘Lord’s outbreak against Uzzah’ and therefore named the place ‘Perez Uzzah’ (6:8). David, and no doubt everyone present, feared the Lord as never before. David feared the Lord in a new and vital way, so much so that he was afraid to take the ark of God any further. He took it aside to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite, a ‘man from Gath’, where it remained for three months (6:10, 11).

During these three months the Lord blessed Obed-Edom and all his household (6:11). The Lord is powerful to bless; was it with children, good health, or a good harvest- we are not told but I am sure it was not by winning the lottery! During these three months David examined his relationship with the Lord. He was thankful to the Lord for establishing him on the throne of Israel but had he begun to rule in his own strength, even by his own rules? The king of Israel was not like other kings; he ruled the nation as God’s representative. I think the king of Tonga is such a king. The king was God’s under-shepherd, answerable to God in all things. David heard that the Lord was blessing the house of Obed-Edom and not his royal house during these three months. So, having reformed his ways, David went to the house of Obed-Edom to bring the ark of God up to Jerusalem (6:12).

**3. Saul’s daughter stumbles**

This time David undertook the task of moving the ark of God in accordance with what is written in God’s word (1Chron 15:13). This time oxen and sheep were sacrificed after the Levites, who were carrying the ark with its poles, had gone just six steps (6:13, 1Chron 15:15). And this time the celebration was different- it was with gladness and joy, and was orderly (6:12); there are indications that their previous celebration was ‘more revelry, merrymaking, and even jesting’. Sure, David was whirling about and singing with the sound of trumpets, but this time he was wearing a lined ephod (6:14). David discarded his royal robes to put on the simple dress of a priest. Psalm 24, with its repeated references to ‘the King of Glory’, may well come from this time of celebration.

As this procession came to the gates of Jerusalem, Michal, still being referred to as Saul’s daughter, saw David twirling about in his linen ephod and ‘despised him in her heart’ (6:16). She did not like David ‘uncovering’ himself in this manner. She thought it undignified and vulgar. Clearly, she did not appreciate the celebration or worship in which David and the people were engaged.

David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings when the ark of God was brought into Jerusalem, and into the tent or tabernacle that he had erected. Such offerings were according to the Law of Moses. David went on to bless the people in the name of the Lord of hosts. Meat from the peace offerings, along with bread and a cake of raisins, was given to everyone in Israel (6:18, 19). All the people felt blessed and were blessed as their new king re-established true worship in the land of Israel. The Passover, and indeed the Lord’s Supper instituted by Jesus, was, and is, a time of food-fellowship in the Lord.

The Passover was family-based, and so it was that ‘David returned home to bless his household’ on this wonderful occasion (6:20). But Michal, the daughter of Saul, was not in the mood to be blessed. She greeted her husband with sarcasm, calling him a base fellow for ‘uncovering himself before the female servants (6:20). David had taken off his royal robes to humble himself before the Lord in a linen ephod; Michal confused humility with being undignified. Still today, men and women seek after dignity or respect before other people in the way they dress. Labels once worn on the inside of a garment or shoes are now attached to the outside!

David did not accept Michal’s sarcastic words. He was focussed on worshipping the Lord not on impressing people. His reference to the Lord choosing him above her father was not a good way to mend their marriage relationship (6:21). David was patient and understanding with Saul, and everyone else, but does not show a great deal of wisdom in dealing with his wife. The Lord must come first in all our relationships of course, as David makes clear to Michal, but he could have been gentler, don’t you think?

The Bible does not make any judgment upon this marital dispute, but the outcome is disastrous for Michal: ‘She had no children to the day of her death’ (6:23). There is no reference to her having children with Paltiel when he was her husband, and she had none with David, and no hope of having any after her sarcastic words to him. Was the Lord punishing Michal for her pride and disrespect for her husband? It appears so. It is also apparent that this is the end of Saul’s line; even his daughter failed to produce a grandson. It is also a reminder that the Lord humbles the proud, but exalts those who humble themselves before the Lord (Prov 3:34, James 4:6, 1Peter 5:5).