

SERMON FOR 3RD AUGUST - THE LIFE OF DAVID

2 SAMUEL 6:1-23 DAVID AND THE ARK

Introduction

As we continue through this sermon series on the life of King David, we are jumping forward in time having already learned that David was obedient to God, conquered the philistines and was pursued by Saul. After Saul's death, David became King over Judah, the southern kingdom, and was then accepted by the northern tribes, so became King over all Israel (chapter 5). David reigned in Hebron for 7 years before conquering the Jebusites and making their city of Jerusalem his new political base, where he has his palace.

Chapter 6 is therefore set later in David's reign, Jerusalem was neutral territory for a new capital, from which to build unity across all the tribes comprising the people of Israel, and David has decided to bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. This passage is a historical narrative of an event which happened around 1020 BC and has a lot of detail and also a range of emotions.

Professor of OT studies, Dale Ralph Davis, sees a structured pattern in this chapter.

Bringing up the ark (**v2-4**)

Joy (**v5**)

Tragedy (**uzzah v 6-7**)

David's reaction: anger and fear (**v8-9**)

In the house of Obed-edom - Blessing (**v10-11**)

Bringing up the ark (**v 12-13**)

Joy (**v14-15**)

Tragedy (**Michal v 16**)

David's reaction: worship and generosity (**v17-19**)

In the house of David - contempt (**v20-23**)

We will look at this passage using these themes of tragedy, joy and reaction. Before we do that, it is helpful to remind ourselves briefly about the ark of the covenant itself.

a) What was the Ark of the Covenant?

The Ark of the Covenant was a portable chest, made of wood and covered in gold inside and outside. It had four carved feet with rings attached through which carrying poles were placed. The lid of the ark was a solid gold slab on which were two gold cherubim (angels) with outstretched wings facing each other. They protected the mercy seat, God's throne and place of his invisible presence.

Inside the ark were the stone tablets recording the ten commandments, Aaron's rod and a gold jar containing manna. The ark was constructed in the desert during the time of Moses, from God's instruction and carried with the people during their wanderings by the Levites or the priests.

b) Why was the ark of the covenant Important?

- As the name suggests, it reminded the people of **God's covenant with them**, as it was carried from place to place. God had made covenants with several OT patriarchs, Noah, Abraham, and Moses, each a restatement of his promise to be their God and that they would be his people.
- It was **symbolic** of **God's rule** over his people (throne of the Lord).
- It was also a **symbol** of **God's presence** with the people, even when it was hidden away in the tabernacle's holy of holies, they knew it was among them.
- and **God's glory and power were symbolised**. People were not supposed to touch the ark, only the carrying rods.
- It reminded people of **God's forgiveness**, because the high priest met with God at the ark on the day of atonement, blood from the sacrifice was sprinkled onto the lid of the ark. So the lid is also sometimes called the 'atonement cover' because of this.
- The ark therefore had an **important place in worship for Jews**.
- The ark contained the ten commandments, so a symbol of **obedience to God**, of God's **revelation and his directing word** to his people.

However, like many OT aspects, the ark was a visual symbol which was a glimpse of god's future better plan for salvation.

c) Where had the ark of the Covenant been before this event?

Before Saul and David, during the time of the Judges, the Ark of the Covenant was in the temple at Shiloh, where Samuel grew up and ministered. But at the start of this chapter, the ark is in a private house at Baale-Judah (also known as Kiriath Jearim in some translations). In 1 Samuel 4, when Eli was priest:

- Eli's ungodly sons, Hophni and Phineas took the ark and used it like a good luck charm in battle - idolising the ark rather than seeking the will of God himself.
- Israelites were defeated and the Philistines captured the ark for 7 months
- The Philistines became afraid of it, so returned it to the Israelites and it was taken to Abinadab's house, whose family were priests (1 Sam 7:1-2).

It had been 20 years since the ark was last mentioned in 1 Samuel 7. Saul had ignored the ark of the covenant, which caused offence to the people and priests, showing that God was not a priority for Saul.

- David is now giving the ark the reverence that it had previously commanded.
- David wanted God amongst the people and at the heart of life;
- Tim Kellar suggests that one of David's motives for bringing the ark is to show who the real King is - not David, but God, which sets Israel apart from other nations.
- All of Israel had agreed to bring the ark, so a sense of unity and national importance.
- Bringing the ark would also have confirmed and raised the status of Jerusalem, as the new capital.

The ark was the throne of God and Jerusalem is being seen by David as the spiritual and religious capital, as well as the political base, bringing the three important roles of prophet, priest and the king into one location.

1. The tragedy of the ark

The tragic element of this account stands out (v 6-7) when Uzzah dies because he touched the ark. It seems unfair as he was only trying to stop the ark toppling from the cart and his act was one of concern. However, some background information helps:

- The military commanders and people were consulted about bringing the ark, but neither account suggests that David enquired of God, the priests or scripture. He assumed this would be God's will but didn't follow the required instructions.
- The philistines had put the Ark should on a cart to return it but the Israelites should have known better because ...
- They had been given precise instructions about moving the ark, to be carried by levites or priests.
- The Israelites had previously been warned not to touch the ark (Numbers 4:4-6) so Uzzah's death was consistent with what God had said would occur. God is holy and we should be **respectful** of that.
- Uzzah tried to protect the ark, but it was disrespectful because God is our protector.
- Uzzah had disobeyed God and sin was punishable by death, so Tim Kellar highlights this occurrence as **a visual aid** to show that God regards sin as serious. It separates people from God because sinful people cannot dwell with a holy God.
- God was showing that **sacrifice is necessary for sin**, so essentially the gospel message.

We don't feel comfortable with Biblical incidents of violence and death, yet they show the reality of a powerful, awesome and holy God . We acknowledge this when we pray 'hallowed be your name' in the Lord's prayer. We don't like hearing about the wrath of God, yet God's anger is an expression of his desire to set things right, so sometimes he is angry.

2. The Joy of Bringing up the Ark to Jerusalem

In **1 Chronicles 13:5-16:43** we also have an account of this episode, which provides additional detail. Here in the UK we have a king are good at such pomp, so we can get some idea of the celebratory nature of this event. A big deal with a massive procession of 30,00 people with celebration, music and singing of Psalms. Psalms 24 and 68 are thought to have been written for this occasion of moving the Ark to Jerusalem. Psalm 132, one of the songs of ascent, also specifically mentions the ark.

After 3 months, once David heard that Obed-Edom had been blessed, he decided to revisit the plan to bring the ark to Jerusalem. The Chronicles account mentions that this time, David consulted the priests and Levites, saying:

“Because you did not carry it the first time, the Lord our God broke out against us because we did not seek him according to the rule.”

So second time around everything is done according to God's instruction with Levites carrying the ark on their shoulders. Psalms were sung as the ark was brought to Jerusalem and sacrifices made because God had helped them. David is wearing the linen ephod and garments of a priest, which he was entitled to do as King, emphasising the importance of the ark in worship.

3. Reactions and responses to the Ark

The characters in this passage have different responses to the bringing up of the Ark.

David worshipped God with music and danced with joy. He wasn't a perfect king and got many things wrong, but his joy was from the heart. David was a servant of the Lord, even though he was king. Nevertheless, enthusiasm for God is not enough - there is a responsibility to obey him, the account of Uzzah reinforces this.

David had wanted to do his best for God, and reacted with anger to the tragic death of Uzzah and blamed God for what had happened. Was his anger because of the dramatic interruptions to the celebrations he had planned? David did not show anger at Uzzah's disobedience in touching the ark. He probably approved the transport arrangements, so may have felt responsible for Uzzah's death.

David was also afraid of God's power, but this is an appropriate response because in **proverbs 1** we read that:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

What about Obed-Edom? He must have had mixed feelings when King David told him that he had to look after the Ark after Uzzah's death! Perhaps he had no choice, nevertheless, he **was** obedient in doing this and God blessed him. This reminds us that God is loving and wants to bless his people and David's words in psalm 103 reinforce this in the words about God:

'The Lord is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love'.

Michal is described in this account as Saul's daughter, rather than David's wife. She therefore represents the old regime of Saul. She shows contempt because she is concerned with the outward appearances, decorum, and image, which contrasts with David, who was unconcerned that his dancing might look undignified.

Michal was **bitter**, perhaps with good reason. Saul initially gave her to David in marriage, but when he became jealous of David, Saul gave Michal to another man. David claimed her back when he became king. However, in the meantime he had married Abigail and another woman called Ahinoam, despite God's law that kings should not have many wives (Deuteronomy 17). So Michal had been badly treated by the men in her life. We read that she has no children, but we can't assume this was God's punishment. Michal's lack of children may reflect the fact that her relationship with David had completely broken down. The outcome is that Saul had no royal descendants with a claim to the throne.

4. What can we learn from this passage about our response to God?

David wanted the ark to be at the heart of life in Jerusalem, not on the periphery in a distant place, as it been. As Christians, God should also be at the centre of our daily lives, not something just for Sundays.

Like David, we might want to give our best to God, but who decides what that is? There is a difference between assuming and ascertaining God's will. We need to be prayerful and read God's word to seek him in bible study and prayer and draw close to God.

We can also be genuine in our heartfelt expressions of thanksgiving for the blessings we receive and moved to joy by God, if our faith is sincere. However, Enthusiasm for God is not enough, we need obedience too.

The joy of bringing the ark to Jerusalem was tragically interrupted, by Uzzah's death. Perhaps a reminder to us that things don't always go to our plans. Do we blame God when that happens? In difficult times, we can be assured of God's steadfast love for us and should draw closer to him, not drift away.

David was a great but flawed king who pointed to a greater and perfect descendant in King Jesus. Similarly, our response to God is not represented by the ark of the covenant because it was a temporary symbol. Around 625 BC, Jeremiah 3: 16 predicted the disappearance of the ark and states:

'In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land,' declares the Lord, 'people will no longer say, "The ark of the covenant of the Lord." It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made.'

This prophecy was fulfilled 39 years later when the Babylonians, under Nebuchadnezzar, attacked Jerusalem in 586 BC and led the people into exile. The ark of the Covenant was probably taken from the temple as plunder and it was not mentioned again in OT scriptures.

So the Ark of the Covenant became obsolete because... it pointed to Jesus! All the aspects of God's character represented by the ark are seen in Christ Jesus, so he represents a better ark.

- Jesus inaugurated the **new covenant** at the last supper ahead of his death, and resurrection, which had been prophesied by Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Joel. This means we have his law written in our hearts and his spirit within us.
- Jesus as fully man and fully God lived among us, described as **Immanuel - God with us**
- He became the once-and-for-all-time **atoning sacrifice for the sins of God's people**
- The curtain of the temple tore when Jesus died, so **removing the hidden and limited aspect** of only a high priest making intercession for sin, so
- **we can all come to him for forgiveness** and enter into his presence.
- By his **resurrection**, Jesus **showed his power over sin and death**.
- **Jesus** ascended in glory to sit at the right hand of God

So the ark of the covenant is only mentioned twice in the New Testament:

Hebrews 9:4 looks back, describing what the ark looked like, in the context of Christ as the new and perfect great High priest emphasising the differences between the old covenant and the new covenant, inaugurated by Jesus at the last supper.

Revelation 11:19 looks forward and describes the vision of a heavenly temple opened up in which the ark of the covenant can be seen - a symbolic picture of the fulfilment and consummation of all that the OT temple represented. In Revelation we get a glimpse of the time when the kingdom of God will have arrived.

This time we are living in is often described as **already-but-not-yet** because the Kingdom of God has begun, being inaugurated at the death and resurrection of Jesus and will be completed and fulfilled in due course. **We are living in the last times, and await that final Revelation, when Jesus will return.**

So let's make sure that we are ready to meet our maker, that God has the central place in our individual lives and try to live with a right response to God. Amen