

II Samuel ch.6 *“Giving God His Place”*

Introduction:

Apart from its appearance in I Samuel 14:18, the Ark of the Covenant has not been mentioned in the book of Samuel since I Samuel 7:2, where the narrator made the observation that it remained at Kiriath Jearim for twenty years. Those “*twenty years*” refers to how long it was between when the Ark was returned to Israel from Philistia to the end of Samuel’s judgeship (I Sam.7:15). To understand the entire length of time that elapsed where the Ark was kept at Kiriath Jearim we must add to those twenty years at least forty years (the length of Saul’s reign), plus the few years that had passed since David first became king of Judah. Together these details indicate that the Ark languished in exile for almost seventy years. For at least that long, the Ark of the Covenant had been separated from the tabernacle and other places of worship. Now David was seeking to change the marginalization of the Ark by taking it to Jerusalem, the new political capital of the kingdom.

By bringing the Ark to Jerusalem, David would establish the city as the religious center of the nation. That this was David’s intent is made clear by parallels that archeologists have found in the historical records of the Akkadians and Phoenicians. Those parallels demonstrate that bringing an object like the Ark into a city would indicate that the city was being designated as the central place in a nation’s worship of their God. The placement of the Ark in the capital city would have had profound cultural significance. For ever since the Sumerian Kingdom, a royal city that was at the center of the nation’s political structure, had also been the center of that kingdom’s religious life. Thus, before the people of Israel at the time, bringing the Ark to Jerusalem would have legitimized David’s reign more powerfully than anything else could have.

The Ark’s arrival in Jerusalem was also a fulfillment of a prophecy that God had given through Moses (Deut.12:5).

The story of the solemn procession that led the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem is also told in First Chronicles (13:15–16). The difference is that the Book of Chronicles was written with a greater focus on liturgical and Levitical matters, whereas the Book of Samuel is a more concise and matter-of-fact account of what took place. An additional difference is that the Chronicler omitted the confrontation between David and Michal that is included in this Book.

Despite the differences of focus between the two books (Samuel and Chronicles) there are a number of close parallels between the two narratives. And further insight is gained into what occurred here in Psalms 24 & 68. These Davidic Psalms reflect on the ceremonial procession of the Ark that is narrated in this chapter.

During his reign, Saul had never shown any interest in the Ark of the Covenant. This detail then represents yet another contrast between Saul and David. For in contrast to how Saul ignored the Ark, David chose to move the Ark to the new capital of Israel as one of the first things that David did as king of Israel.

The attentive reader will have become accustomed to noticing when David's actions are preceded by an inquiry of Yahweh and when they are not. In the present instance, no mention is made of David praying about how or whether he should fetch the Ark from Kiriath Jearim, and because of this, costly mistakes were made.

I. The First Ascent to Jerusalem-a lesson in fear: (vs.1-10)

In verse one we read, "*Again David gathered all the choice men of Israel, thirty thousand.*" The Hebrew word translated as "*again*", as with its English counterpart indicates that what is written involves the repetition of some detail. In this verse the word was used because the gathering that David was orchestrating here was the second general assembly to take place during his short time as king, the previous one having taken place in Hebron at his coronation as king over Israel.

In First Chronicles we find a parallel with this passage (13:5-8). In that Book, the paragraph that precedes the parallel (vs.1-4) recorded that David conferred with his army officers before announcing to the whole assembly of Israel his plans to bring the Ark to Jerusalem in accordance with the will of Yahweh. This informs us that David did not decide to do this for political expediency, but because it was what God wanted him to do. The town where the Ark had been for approximately seventy years was Kiriath Jearim. It was located about halfway between Jerusalem and Gezer. We were informed in the previous chapter (vs.25) that this was the furthest point to which David had pursued the fleeing Philistines whom he had driven out of Israel's territory. Therefore, the rout of the Philistines enabled David to be in the position to bring the Ark to Jerusalem. And the conquest of Jerusalem and its establishment as the new capital of Israel had happened only shortly before David's victory over the Philistines (5:6-12).

We are told that those who were gathered by David were thirty thousand choice men. The Hebrew term translated as "*choice men*" seems to have been a technical term for select warriors, meaning that these men were chosen because of their prowess in warfare. Therefore, this was not a reference to a gathering of Israelite men in general, but specifically to a group of elite soldiers. But why would David gather soldiers specifically to escort the Ark? The reason seems to be that this sort of entourage fit the cultural pattern of the day, where pagan nations bringing or returning an idol to an important location in their territory would be done with pomp and celebration, and a significant military presence. If the pagan gods were worthy of such spectacle, certainly David would have considered the true God even more worthy of it. In addition, in light of the Ark's significance in past military campaigns, it would only be appropriate for a large contingent of soldiers to accompany the Ark on Yahweh's regal journey to the nation's new capital.

In verse two we read, "*And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, whose name is called by the Name, the LORD of Hosts, who dwells between the cherubim.*" From the context it is clear that "*Baale Judah*" (which would have represented a Canaanite title) was another name for the town Kiriath Jearim (which was its

Hebrew name). This town was seven miles west of Jerusalem. Kiriath Jearim occupied a middle point on the boundaries of Judah, Benjamin, and Dan. The entourage travelled to Kiriath Jearim to bring the ark from the house of Abinadab, its custodian. The entourage travelled to Kiriath Jearim to bring the Ark from the house of Abinadab, its custodian. As for the Ark itself, it contained the tablets of the Ten Commandments (Exod.25:16; 40:20; Deut.10:5; I Kgs.8:9), and it was regarded as a symbol of Yahweh's throne (I Sam.4:4; II Kgs.19:15; Ps.80:1; 99:1; Isa.37:16). Moses identified the Ark with the presence of God. This is illustrated by how Moses would equate the movements of the Ark with the movements of Yahweh Himself (Num.10:35-36).

The solemnity of the scene that unfolds in this chapter is enhanced by the grandiose description of the Ark and the repeated references to it. The Ark is depicted as the seat of authority of Yahweh "*who is enthroned between the cherubim*" (II Kings 19:15; Ps.80:1; 99:1). The Ark is also called by "*the name*", an idiom denoting ownership. This title signifies not only Yahweh's name, but also His presence (Exod.23:21; Lev.24:11, 16). The Ark, since it represented the presence of God was to be handled with reverence, even in its transportation from place to place.

The title "*the LORD of hosts who dwells between the cherubim*" reminds the reader of previous uses of this title (Ex.25:18-20; I Sam.4:4). The Ark itself was made of Acacia wood and was four feet by two and half feet by two and a half feet (Ex.25:10-22).

In verse three we read, "*So they set the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drove the new cart.*" What happens next reveals that Abinadab and his sons did not avail themselves of the instruction in God's Word about the proper transport of the Ark, even though it was with them for years. And it therefore reveals a careless familiarity with Divine things, rather than fearful awe. David had the men "*set the ark of God on a new cart*". By employing a "*new*" cart for the move, it implies that the intent was to show respect for the holy object. Based on the local beliefs at the time, the cart being "*new*", would mean that it had a certain purity about it, and thus would normally be perceived as being a fitting vehicle by which to transport a holy object (Judges 16:7, 11; I Sam.6:7). In addition, David might have thought that this was a legitimate way of moving the Ark, because when the Philistines had used the same method there were no apparent negative results. However, no matter how well intentioned the action was, it violated the instructions in God's Law about the transporting of the Ark (Ex.25:12-14; Num.4:15; 7:9). In the Law of God, it is revealed that the Ark was to be transported on poles that were inserted through rings that were attached to the sides of the Ark. It was to be done this way so that no one would touch that holy object and die (Num.4:15). Knowing this helps the reader anticipate that the choice to move the Ark in a way contrary to God's instructions will have tragic consequences. Although David's intention was commendable, and what he wanted to do was ultimately

appropriate, the choice to do it without first consulting Yahweh or the Law of God was a serious mistake.

The specific place where the Ark had been kept was in the house of Abinadab. Abinadab was an adult and the father of Eleazar when the Ark was first brought to his house (I Sam.7:2). As observed earlier, the Ark had come to the house of Abinadab about seventy years prior to David moving it to Jerusalem. Therefore, if Abinadab had not already died, he was surely a very elderly man by this time. Therefore, Uzzah and Ahio were most likely Abinadab's grandsons rather than his literal sons. The Hebrew word translated as "*sons*" carries the sense of male offspring in general. The word can mean either sons or grandsons. In fact, this word is used in that way elsewhere in this very Book (9:9–10; 19:24). In light of the chronology, Eleazar was most likely the father of Uzzah and Ahio.

In verse four we read, "*And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill, accompanying the ark of God; and Ahio went before the ark.*" According to this verse Ahio was leading the procession, with his brother Uzzah guiding the cart from behind. Readers familiar with the Law of Moses will recognize that we now have a second problem with the way the Ark was being transported. Not only was it being moved on a cart rather than being carried on poles, those moving it were not identified as Levites from the clan of Kohath (Num 4:4–20), a mistake that would specifically be corrected by instructions from God the second time that David attempted to bring the Ark to Jerusalem (I Chron.15:13-15).

In verse five we read, "*Then David and all the house of Israel played music before the LORD on all kinds of instruments of fir wood, on harps, on stringed instruments, on tambourines, on sistrums, and on cymbals.*" The expression "*all the house of Israel*" refers to all the tribes of the nation, not to every individual in the nation.

There were three types of musical instruments that were used by Israel at this time, wind, string, and percussion. In this list there is no reference to any wind instruments. As the procession began their journey, they were accompanied by a great musical celebration. This is hardly surprising since the use of musical instruments was common in Israel's worship. Though there is some uncertainty about a meaning of a number of the words used in this verse, it is clear that the words were used to picture a vigorous celebration.

In this context the expression "*before the LORD*" meant before Yahweh's invisible presence which was understood to dwell above the Ark of the Covenant.

In verse six we read, "*And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled.*" As we read this verse we are to remember that the Law of God specified that the Ark was to be carried by Levites who would bear it on their shoulders by means of poles passed through gold rings attached to the Ark (Ex.25:14; Num.4:15,20). This specific instruction was given by God because even the Levites were not to touch the Ark or even look in it because of its holiness. But we read that while the oxcart was being pulled down a hill, it passed over a rough outcropping of stone. This stone was an area that was used as a threshing place belonging to someone named

“*Nachon*”. This same individual is identified as “*Kidon*” in the parallel passage in First Chronicles (13:9). The name found here in Second Samuel is not used anywhere else in the OT. The result is that neither the exact location referred to here, nor the individual named can be identified with any certainty. As the cart passed over this stone, something unforeseen happened, the oxen stumbled (a clearer translation is found in the NASB, which renders the expression “*the oxen nearly upset it*”). When this happened, Uzzah instinctively reached out and took hold of the Ark of God to stabilize and protect it.

In verse seven we read, “*Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God.*” Most of the time in the Old Testament when we are told that Yahweh’s anger was aroused by (or burned against) His people, it is an anger directed toward them corporately. However, here Yahweh’s anger was directed toward an individual. This unusual occurrence suggests that the sin of Uzzah was particularly grave in God’s eyes. Many readers of this story find what is written here as abrupt and surprising. But that is most likely due to the fact that most modern readers are as ignorant of the Law of God as those in this incident were. The Law clearly warned that to touch the Ark would be a capital offense, that anyone who did it would die (Num.4:15). Therefore, from the viewpoint of God’s Covenant Law, what happened was quite predictable. The story here has many parallels to the story about the troubles the Philistines had with the Ark after they took into their possession. In that previous story (I Sam.6), Yahweh had demonstrated that He was capable of executing judgment on any sacrilegious treatment of the Ark. The main difference this time is that the offense was committed by a well-meaning Israelite, rather than by a Philistine pagan with no regard for Yahweh. But the basic violation was the same, a transgression against the holiness of God. Though Uzzah with good intentions was attempting to protect the Ark from either disgrace or damage, he was still guilty of ignoring God’s commandment. The sin of Uzzah is designated differently in various translations:

NKJV	NASB	NIV	NET
Error	Irreverence	Irreverent Act	Negligence

The Hebrew word translated here as “*error*” means to sin. This particular noun is used only here in the OT, but the verb that comes from the same root is used more frequently, and it means to do something thoughtless or careless. Given this basic meaning of the verb, the noun refers not to a sin that was willfully committed, but one that resulted from someone who gave no thought to what he was doing and thus did something reckless. This is why translators use words like irreverent and negligent to translate this word. The harshness of Yahweh’s punishment must be seen in the light of His absolute holiness which requires that sacred tasks be done in a sacred manner. This drastic response was necessary in order to enable the Israelites to understand that they had to respect the holiness of God, because God would not tolerate it if they disregarded this central aspect of His nature. God’s punishment was consistent with what He had done before. God had put to death

some of the men of Beth Shemesh for looking into the Ark (I Sam.6:19), and here He had executed Uzzah for touching the Ark. This is also similar to the incidents involving Nadab and Abihu (Lev.10:1, 2), Achan (Josh.7), and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11). Those individuals all failed to take Yahweh's holiness seriously, and they represented a threat that others might be tempted to follow their example. Thus, for the individual sinners the punishment was death, and for those who witnessed the event, the execution was a warning to show proper reverence to God.

As a sidenote, a passage like this one gives us evidence that supports the supernatural origin and trustworthiness of the Bible. Because this story about what happened to Uzzah goes completely against the grain of human preferences. Human beings would never have invented a story where a God acted like this, because it is not the sort of story that makes people feel good about themselves or that draws them to a religion. This contradicts the common narrative that moderns like to parrot, that the Bible and Christianity were invented as a projection of our own wish fulfillment. Because sinful human hearts do not wish for a holy God who punishes sin, they wish for a God who will indulge our darker natures while calling them good.

In verse eight we read, "*And David became angry because of the LORD's outbreak against Uzzah; and he called the name of the place Perez Uzzah to this day.*" In this verse we read that David's response to Yahweh's punishment of Uzzah was anger. The text does not specify the object of David's anger, instead we are meant to discern that from the flow of thought in the passage. Grammatically, the verse could be implying that David was angry toward God. However, that is the least likely explanation as it contradicts what we know about David, and what this verse specifically says about David's response toward God. David was devoted to God, and he had a good understanding of God's nature. He would have had confidence that God had good reasons for what He did, and David would never think he was in a position to sit in judgment of God. And the next verse tells us that David responded to what God did with fear, not anger. A second possibility is that David was angry with Uzzah for his irreverent act. But since the fault for this incident was not exclusive to Uzzah, it is more likely that the text is saying that David was angry with the situation in general. He was angry with himself, and with everyone who was involved with the move because they had all failed on a number of levels, and no one seemed to understand what they had done wrong. David and everyone else seem to have had the best intentions in the moving of the Ark, but it had gone catastrophically wrong.

It is helpful to recognize that it is very rare in the OT for us to be told that Yahweh was the object of a human being's anger. It does happen (Gen.4:5; I Sam.15:11; Jonah 4:1) but in those cases, the text makes it clear that God is the object of human anger.

David memorialized the event by renaming the site where this tragedy took place. He called the site "*Outburst against Uzzah*". The same language was used in chapter five (vs.20). In that previous passage God's anger had been directed against

the Philistines. Below is a literal translation of both verses so that one can see that both verses stress the same words and phrases, and thus parallel each other:

5:20	6:8
And David came to Yahweh-of-outbreakings, and David struck them down there; then he said, “Yahweh has broken through my enemies before me like an outbreaking of waters; therefore he called the name of that place “Yahweh-of-outbreakings”	Now David became angry because Yahweh had broken out with an outbreak against Uzzah; so that the place is called “outbreak-of-Uzzah” to this day

That the author chose in this verse to so closely mirror the wording of the verse in the previous chapter indicates that those who were punished in these two accounts were viewed as being equally guilty before God. The impression it creates is that Uzzah, by his actions, had made himself as much an enemy of God as the Philistines were.

In verse nine we read, “*David was afraid of the LORD that day; and he said, ‘How can the ark of the LORD come to me?’*” Having witnessed a dramatic demonstration of Yahweh’s zeal to protect His holiness, David became afraid of Yahweh that day. The incident sharpened David’s understanding of God, it deepened David’s respect for the holiness and power of God, and it caused him to be more actively conscious of the fact that God was willing to strike out against anyone who would violate the commandments He had given in the Law. The experience caused David to ask, “*How can the ark of Yahweh come to me?*” The previous verse reminded us of a sobering truth about God, that He will punish sin. This verse provides the reader with an important warning. It is spiritually dangerous when God’s people are no longer awed, respectful, or fearful in regard to God’s holiness. It is dangerous because this lack of fear tends to make a person lackadaisical in regard to God’s moral imperatives. And if one is not diligently pursuing holiness, but rather simply acts impulsively, one opens oneself up to sin and judgment (Heb.12:14). David’s fear was also warranted for another reason. According to the regulations relating to kingship in God’s Law (Deut.17:14-20), the king was to read God’s Law so that he might properly fear Yahweh. Therefore, David’s unfamiliarity with the Law’s instructions (demonstrated in the mishandling of the Ark) demonstrated his own failure to take seriously his covenant responsibilities.

In regard to the rest of the verse, the reference “*that day*” of course, refers to the day of Uzzah’s death. And David’s expression of concern about moving the Ark related to his fear of what else might happen (particularly in Jerusalem) if they continued to move the Ark.

In verse ten we read, “*So David would not move the ark of the LORD with him into the City of David; but David took it aside into the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite.*” David’s intention had been to move the Ark to be with him in the City of David (this was a name that was being associated with Jerusalem because David was the one who conquered it, and he was the one who made it his capital). It is

likely that David anticipated that once the Ark was in Jerusalem, it would bring blessing and prestige to his newly established national capital. However, after what happened to Uzzah, David changed his plans. He likely feared that some further transgression by himself or others would cause judgment to fall upon the city. So, instead of pursuing his original plan, David decided to place the Ark (at least temporarily) in the home Obed-Edom. This home was probably located somewhere on the southwestern hill of Jerusalem. It is possible that this location was chosen simply because it was the nearest dwelling place to the incident, and thus it would involve the least distance over which the Ark had to be moved. The name “*Obed Edom*” means “*servant of Edom*”, and “*Edom*” was a proper name of a place, a tribe, or a god. But there isn’t anything specific in the text to indicate which of these was meant by the name or why the name was given. This man is also identified as “*the Gittite*”. A number of scholars have suggested that the title means that this man was from the Philistine city of Gath, and that he most likely settled in Israel because he had been a mercenary with David and had joined David when he left Philistine territory. However, while it is true that “*Gittite*” can refer to someone whose hometown was the Philistine city of Gath (I Sam.17:4, 23; II Sam.21:19), that is by no means the only meaning for the word. The Hebrew term is the ordinary word for a winepress, and so this title could be applied to any place name related to winepresses. Indeed, it is even possible that the designation means that Obed-Edom was originally from Gittaim. It is revealed in First Chronicles that Obed-Edom was a Levite (15:17–18, 21, 24–25; 16:4–5, 38). This probably also had something to do with why his home was chosen as the place to leave the Ark.

At that time David had a problem of competing sanctuaries as he sought to establish a central worship location in Israel. After the massacre at Nob, Abiathar joined David. This priest then served as the channel of Divine communication to David. Meanwhile however, the Tabernacle continued to be in Gibeon with Zadok, a descendent of Eleazar, functioning as the main priest there. And prior to the events recorded in this chapter, the Ark had been left in Kiriath Jearim. Therefore, bringing the Ark to Jerusalem alone would still leave a separate worship center at Gibeon. David was presumably neither strong enough nor willing at that time to go through the national trauma that would result from deposing one high priest and combining the competing sanctuaries.

II. The Second Ascent to Jerusalem-an experience of joy: (vs.11-19)

In verse eleven we read, “*The ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite three months. And the LORD blessed Obed-Edom and all his household.*” Things went well during the three months the Ark was in the house of Obed-Edom. He and his household experienced blessings and no cursing. In the case of Obed-Edom, the Divine blessing (as was often true in the OT) manifested itself in the form of numerous descendants. According to First Chronicles the household was blessed with sixty-two additions to the family (26:5-8). This convinced David that the Ark itself wasn’t dangerous. Not only by how Obed-Edom was blessed, but also because in the interim, David came to recognize that he

should not move the Ark again until he understood Yahweh's instruction about how to transport it.

In verse twelve we read, "*Now it was told King David, saying, 'The LORD has blessed the house of Obed-Edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God'. So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with gladness.*" The first portion of this verse is the hinge of the entire chapter. It allows us to understand that though God will judge His people if they rebel against Him, His desire and intent is not to bring judgment, but to bring blessings upon His people by dwelling among them. David learned this from observing how Obed-Edom's household was blessed because of the presence of the Ark in his home. Because of this David was persuaded to renew the effort to bring the Ark to Jerusalem. As in the first attempt three months prior, the Ark's pilgrimage to Jerusalem was carried out with rejoicing. But this time there would be a difference. During those three months David had learned why punishment had come upon Uzzah. It was because of the mishandling of the Ark (I Chron.15:13).

Verses twelve through nineteen constitute a single literary unit in this chapter (and there is a parallel literary unit in I Chronicles 15:25–16:3). Verse twelve begins with a reference to Yahweh blessing the household of Obed-Edom, and verse twenty (which starts the next unit), begins with a reference to David planning to bless his own household. True to its focus, First Chronicles, in its parallel narrative, gives a lengthy account that details the functions of the Levites with respect to the triumphal procession of the Ark (15:1–24). In the center of that portion of the narrative, the Chronicler summarizes the reasons for the failure of the initial attempt to bring the Ark to Jerusalem, revealing to us how David learned the truth about his failure in the first attempt. Confident that it was safe to bring the Ark up to Jerusalem, the procession began again, this time in harmony with God's Law. In this endeavor David was accompanied by the elders of Israel and commanders of the army. Although David's leadership role is emphasized in this chapter by the use of verbs in the singular, in First Chronicles the author adds that the Levites worked with David by doing the actual sacrifices at his direction.

The Hebrew term translated as "*gladness*" here is a different term than was used in verse five. That previous term denoted merrymaking or even jesting, but though this term also carries a sense of celebration, it is used in more serious contexts, such as religious festivals and the coronation of kings. Therefore, the merriment was balanced with the sober recognition of the holiness of God.

In verse thirteen we read, "*And so it was, when those bearing the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, that he sacrificed oxen and fatted sheep.*" There were a couple of very significant differences between this and the former attempt to transport the Ark. First, this time Levites carried it according to the instructions in God's Law. Second, at the outset of the journey, costly fellowship offerings were sacrificed to Yahweh, consisting of a bull and a fattened calf. After the Levites had taken six steps there was a ritual pause and the sacrifices were offered. Though some interpreters have suggested that this happened every six steps of the journey, the text seems to indicate this happened only once at the beginning. Doing the

offering after the six steps suggests a symbolic significance, perhaps a sort of Sabbath rest, suggesting a consecration of the entire journey. Oxen or bulls were commonly sacrificed as burnt offerings and fellowship offerings (Lev.1:4–6; 4:10; 9:4, 18). In First Chronicles (15:27) we read that in addition to the ephod, David was clothed in a robe of fine linen, most likely the robe of the ephod that was worn under the ephod itself (Exod.28:31). During the time of the Israelite monarchy, the kings occasionally participated with the priests (24:25; I Kgs.8:64; 9:25). But the reader should not get the wrong idea from this. These instances were exceptional because of the significance the moment had for the nation as a whole (the arrival of the Ark, the dedication of the altar or sanctuary, the great annual festivals). Ordinarily, leading the worship of Israel was exclusively a priestly role. And even here, the idea is not that David himself had sacrificed the animals, rather the reference emphasizes David's central involvement in the sacrifices, the offerings themselves were done by the priests and Levites.

In verse fourteen we read, "*Then David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was wearing a linen ephod.*" Here we read that as the journey continued David was joyously celebrating the moment by dancing before Yahweh. The expression "*before Yahweh*" means that David was doing this in the presence of Yahweh (the expression has nothing to do with where David was physically in the procession). In this case, the presence of Yahweh was understood to be above the lid of the Ark of the Covenant. For the occasion of this seven-mile journey, David had prepared both his capital city and himself. First, he had erected a special tent in Jerusalem that would house the Ark. Second, he wore special ritual garments, a linen ephod, which was a piece of clothing otherwise reserved in Israelite society for priests and Levites (Exod.28:6), and a robe of fine linen (I Chron.15:27). David wore what he did because he was joining in as the Levites performed their priestly functions. This is quite different from what Saul had done, which Samuel confronted as sin. Saul disobeyed Samuel's instructions and assumed the role of a priest and made offerings on his own, and thus he overstepped the boundaries that were set for him. David did not do this. Rather he led in the celebration while the priests performed the sacrifices. When David put on the linen Ephod, he also removed his royal attire. This seems to have been done, because the focus in that entrance celebration was the arrival of Yahweh, who was the true king of Israel.

In verse fifteen we read, "*So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet.*" This celebration was appropriate because the symbol of God's presence would now be in the capital of the kingdom and not in some remote town. Since Yahweh was their God, the center of worship needed to be established at the center of the kingdom, and since Yahweh was the true king of Israel this was another reason for God to be present in the nation's capital. The scene is punctuated with shouts of excitement and triumph celebrating the Ark's arrival. In First Chronicles (15:28) we read that both ram's horns and trumpets were used, along with cymbals, lyres, and harps (the same instruments that were used during the first procession of the Ark). The trumpets were being blown by Levitical priests (they had also been sounded during

the movement of the Ark in the days of Joshua-Josh 6:4–20). Usually, a reference to a “*trumpet*” meant a ram’s horn, that was not really a musical instrument but was basically used for giving different sorts of signals in various contexts (religious and military). One common situation in which a ram’s horn trumpet would be sounded was at a coronation, therefore, the implication here might be an enthronement ceremonial acknowledging Yahweh as Israel’s king. The trumpet that is referred to here (in contrast to the ram’s horn) was a straight metal musical instrument flared on the end, which is thought to have had a high shrill tone.

In verse sixteen we read, “*Now as the ark of the LORD came into the City of David, Michal, Saul’s daughter, looked through a window and saw King David leaping and whirling before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.*” Finally, the procession made its way into Jerusalem itself, with David continuing to celebrate Yahweh’s arrival with dancing and shouts of joy. But in contrast to the joyous scene on the street, we read that David’s enthusiasm before the people was not appreciated by Michal his wife. We are told that Michal was viewing the festivities from a palace window. In the literature of the time, the idea of a woman at a window became a narrative motif picturing a woman who was waiting for someone either with joyous expectation or anxious concern. In this case Michal is seen as being physically distant from her husband and the celebration. It is unclear why Michal was absent from the event, since other women were permitted to be present (vs.19). There is a possible hint in the closing verses of the passage because they indicate that she had very different priorities than David. An incident in her past may shed light on what we read here. When she helped David escape from her father’s men, we find out that Michal was in possession of a teraphim (an idolatrous object that was an abomination to Yahweh). Therefore, one difference between Michal and David was that she lacked David’s passionate devotion to Yahweh. Another reason for Michal’s bitterness here is that she might have still resented David for forcing her to leave her second husband Paltiel (3:14–16). But the reader should note that here she is referred to as “*Saul’s daughter*” rather than as David’s wife. This is repeated twice more in the chapter (vs.20 & 21). The reason the author chose to refer to her this way was most likely to imply that she was very much like her father. In the closing portion of the chapter, it is made clear that she, like her father, acted more like David’s enemy than as someone who loved him. This verse closes with the narrator observing that Michal “*despised him in her heart*”. The Hebrew word translated as “*despised*” means to hold a person in contempt, to disdain them, and regard them as unworthy of respect.

In verse seventeen we read, “*So they brought the ark of the LORD, and set it in its place in the midst of the tabernacle that David had erected for it. Then David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.*” The narrator, having made reference to Michal’s disdain for David, returned to the religious procession outside to conclude the story of the Ark’s arrival at the place that had been designated for it. Some time prior to its arrival, David had apparently pitched a tent in Jerusalem in which the Ark would be placed.

The reference to the Ark being taken into “*the tabernacle*” raises the question of whether or not this was the same tabernacle that was constructed during the time of Moses. The Hebrew word translated as “*tabernacle*” simply means “*tent*”. However, with the definite article, the implication is that the word is used to refer to the specific tent that was to be the dwelling place of the presence of God. The answer to the above question is that it is impossible to be sure whether it was or not. It is possible (maybe even likely) that the Philistines destroyed the original Mosaic tent when they overran Shiloh and carried away the Ark in the time of Eli (I Sam.4). If that is true, then apparently, at a somewhat later date, another tabernacle was constructed and installed at the high place in Gibeon (I Kgs.3:4; I Chron.16:39; 21:29; II Chron.1:3, 5, 13), which was located about six miles northwest of Jerusalem. Thus, after the event recorded in this chapter, there were in effect two tabernacles. There was one in Jerusalem that housed the Ark of the Covenant, and there was a second one in Gibeon that housed the other tabernacle furnishings (I Chron.16:39–40; I Kgs.1:39; 2:28–30; 3:4). Nowhere in the books of Samuel, Kings, or Chronicles is the Ark associated with Gibeon or with the sanctuary that was there. However, there is another possibility. There is a reference in Solomon’s time to the tabernacle in Gibeon, and there it is said to have been the one that Moses, Yahweh’s servant, had made in the desert (II Chron.1:3). Taken literally, this would mean that the original Mosaic tabernacle had survived for over four hundred years and had been in continuous use. This second option is the more compelling one because it is based on a passage that speaks more directly to the connection between the tent used in David time to the one used in Moses’ time. Some interpret this latter reference to the tabernacle in a metaphorical sense. They suggest it means that the Gibeon tabernacle was made in strict accordance with the Mosaic pattern. This conclusion is possible, but it is speculation, not evidence. So, the second position still seems to be the better one.

All of this means that in David’s time the original Mosaic tabernacle was not in use in Jerusalem. Since various offerings continued to be sacrificed without the articles that remained in Gibeon, these sacrifices were not done on the bronze altar of burnt offering (which was the pattern commanded by God through Moses). Specifically, among those sacrifices were those that are written about in this verse, the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. In particular, the fellowship offering signified the desire of the worshipers to rededicate themselves to God in Covenant allegiance. Therefore, there may be some irony intended here.

In verse eighteen we read, “*And when David had finished offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts.*” Once again, the idea here is not that David himself offered the sacrifices. Instead, the language conveys that David merely directed the Levites to make the offerings. In this case the “*people*” whom David blessed, were the citizens in general who attended this celebratory event.

In verse nineteen we read, “*Then he distributed among all the people, among the whole multitude of Israel, both the women and the men, to everyone a loaf of bread, a piece of meat, and a cake of raisins. So all the people departed, everyone to his*

house.” Peace offerings were sacrifices that were offered to God but were then eaten by the worshippers in God’s presence (Deut.27:7). Therefore, what is described in this verse is a fellowship meal. After the participants each had received the blessing and token food gifts, they went to their homes (a “*cake of raisins*” was a lump of dry compressed grapes, a nourishing and sustaining food). This ceremony would have been understood by the people to be not only a celebration of God coming to dwell in their midst it would also be a time for the people to re-dedicate themselves to living in obedience to the Covenant they had with their God.

III. Conflict over the Celebration: (vs.20-23)

In verse twenty we read, “*Then David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, ‘How glorious was the king of Israel today, uncovering himself today in the eyes of the maids of his servants, as one of the base fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!’*” In that culture, when a warrior returned victorious from battle, the women of his hometown would come out to meet him and would celebrate with music and dancing. David was not returning from a specific battle, but from an event that should have elicited the same sort of celebration, the completion of the overall conquest of the Promised Land, as pictured in the arrival of the Ark in the newly established capital of Israel. A multitude of Israelites recognized this, and the people, including women, celebrated what David was accomplishing with music and dance. It is reasonable to assume that David would have expected that his wife would celebrate this momentous occasion in much the same way as he and so many others had. However, he was quickly disappointed. David, who had just blessed his fellow celebrants, returned home to bless his own household. But even before he could pronounce that blessing, Michal began to berate him. Michal began by saying “*how glorious was the king of Israel today*”. The NASU provides a better rendering, “*how has the king of Israel distinguished himself today?*” Another good rendering of the key terms is “*honored himself*”. Therefore, Michal chided David that he had humiliated himself before the crowds by acting in an undignified way. Then she elaborated further in her criticism, accusing him of disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants, meaning that she was accusing him of exposing his nakedness to the female slaves. She was implicitly suggesting that he was motivated by immoral sexual urges and that he was trying to arouse the women of the crowd. She concluded by comparing David to “*base fellows*” who act “*shamelessly*”. The expression “*base fellows*” refers to a person who is worthless and morally bankrupt. Therefore, she was condemning him with the strongest possible language.

It is helpful to note that until this final confrontation between Michal and David, the narrator has at no point included any dialogue between them. This is significant, because in narrative literature in general, and in the Bible in particular, a large part of the burden of narration is taken up by dialogue. Therefore, the absence of it between two key characters indicates a lack of relationship between them. It also sets up a conclusion of sorts to the part of the story they share. For

when dialogue between them finally does enter the narrative, it comes in the form of an explosion of hostility. Michal punctuated her disdain by doubly emphasizing the time of the event (the word “*today*” appears twice in her short outburst), and by referring to David’s activity in three derogatory ways.

Many modern interpreters take Michal’s accusations at face value and conclude that in his enthusiasm David lost control of himself and engaged in some genuinely inappropriate conduct. However, that interpretation doesn’t fit with the way the event itself was narrated. The narration never suggests that David was dressed immodestly, instead, that he was dressed and behaved in a way that was less dignified than how kings in the ancient world usually acted. There is certainly nothing in the narration that implies that David was exposing himself to the surrounding women. Even the emphasis in Michal’s rebuke was not on blatant immorality (she seemed to regard that as a result of David’s overly casual attitude), she was accusing him of lowering himself to the level of the lowest in society. She was shocked that he was wearing linen garments instead of his royal robes and dancing like a commoner. She apparently saw such behavior as beneath the dignity of a king, and as angry people often do, she exaggerated her interpretation of what she saw.

In verses twenty-one and twenty-two we read the beginning of David’s response, “*So David said to Michal, ‘It was before the LORD, who chose me instead of your father and all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel. Therefore I will play music before the LORD. And I will be even more undignified than this, and will be humble in my own sight. But as for the maidservants of whom you have spoken, by them I will be held in honor.’*” One might wonder why it was that in responding to Michal’s accusations, that David brought up the matter of his being chosen by God to be king in contrast to God’s rejection of Saul. The answer is that David was pointing out that her accusations made it clear that Michal looked at things the same way her father did. And she was forgetting that God had rejected Saul because of his inability to live according to God’s ways. Thus, she was indeed acting like Saul’s daughter (which explains why the narrator referred to her in this way several times in the chapter). She should have opened her heart and mind to see things differently, but she hadn’t.

But the rest of David’s response to Michal’s accusations was centered in one main idea, that she completely misunderstood his motivations, and because of this she misinterpreted his actions. What he had done was not for the entertainment of the slave girls who were in the throng, nor was he performing for the approval of the people in general. Everything he did in the processional was motivated by His desire to honor and worship God. David stressed that everything he had done that day was for Yahweh. David also made it clear that he was only concerned with how Yahweh evaluated what he did. The vocabulary that David used reverses that of Michal. Michal had spoken sarcastically about him not distinguishing himself before the people. In expressing this she used a Hebrew word that refers to something being weighty and thus significant. In his response David used a Hebrew word that conveyed the idea of what is light, and thus low or insignificant.

His point was that when she accused him of acting in a way that was below the glorious stature of a king, what she missed was that being exalted in the eyes of the people was unimportant to him. Instead, he wanted to demonstrate that he was nothing, and that God was the one to venerate. David explained that he and Michal had different understandings about dignity. She was concerned with how they, the royal family, was perceived by the populace, while David recognized that what was really important is that the people perceive the dignity and significance of God. He was saying that the right posture before Yahweh was humility, not self-exaltation. And when one was in the presence of Yahweh, one's own dignity was unimportant, only His dignity was important. That is why David stated that "*I will be even more undignified than this, and will be humble in my own sight*", he was saying that it was appropriate for him to lower himself at that occasion, because the celebration was about honoring God, not honoring himself, as he was only God's servant. David was not focused on his own reputation; therefore, he was willing to risk being misunderstood and humiliated as he sought to lead others in celebration of Yahweh.

And when David said, "*as for the maidservants of whom you have spoken, by them I will be held in honor*" he was saying that the slave girls that Michal mocked possessed a better spiritual orientation that she did, for they understood both what David was doing and why.

David's retort here echoes an important Biblical theme, the exaltation of the humble, and the humbling of the exalted (Matt 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14).

In verse twenty-three we read, "*Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death.*" We need to read this verse in its Biblical context. Throughout the Old Testament, blessing is associated with obedience to Yahweh, and one of the most common manifestations of His blessing is a fruitful womb (Exod.23:26; Deut.7:14; 28:11). To an audience familiar with the Law of God (such as the original readers of this Book), this statement about Michal's unproductive womb would have been interpreted as a curse that came upon a sinful woman, it would not be seen as evidence of a husband's neglect of his marital duty.

Many modern interpreters argue that the text is expressing that after this David was no longer intimate with Michal and that is why she remained childless. However, this simply ignores the context in favor of modern prejudices.

Despite the consequences that came upon Michal, there is no indication that David ended his marriage to her.

Conclusion:

This chapter illustrates the balance that exists between the goodness and severity of God. It reveals that it is our sin that brings about punishment and thus it illustrates why we should fear God. It also reveals that joy and blessing come when God's people are devoted to Him and obey Him. It reminds us that what is important in life is not living to please others but living to please God.