

David Dances before the Ark

2 Samuel 6:1-5, 14-19

¹ David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. ² David and all the people with him set out and went from Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim. ³ They carried the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart ⁴ with the ark of God; and Ahio went in front of the ark. ⁵ David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the LORD with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. . . .

¹⁴ David danced before the LORD with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. ¹⁵ So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

¹⁶ As the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.

¹⁷ They brought in the ark of the LORD, and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and offerings of well-being

before the LORD. ¹⁸ When David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts, ¹⁹ and distributed food among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people went back to their homes.

Theme Statement

God has brought safety and unity to Israel. Watch and listen as David and Israel worship wholeheartedly in a variety of ways. The focus is on God's presence through the ark and God's saving grace for Israel.

Exploring the Word

King David celebrates before the Lord. After years of struggle and war against Israel's enemy, the Philistines, and against former king Saul, the God of Israel gives David victory and power. At last Israel has peace and unity under David.

What is the proper response to the Lord who has blessed David and all Israel? Worship. So David brings the ark, the mercy seat of God, to Jerusalem. The ark is the Lord's presence and power. As Moses and Miriam sang, David testifies: God is above all gods. David makes God the center of Israel's capital, of worship, and of political life. David and all Israel worship God extravagantly that day in Jerusalem.

2 Samuel 6:1-2 The ark of the covenant

The dramatic story of the ark's return to Jerusalem begins in 1 Samuel 6—7:2. The people had mourned the absence of the ark because it was the sovereign, saving presence of God. David accomplished three important things in bringing the ark to Jerusalem: it made God the focus of Israel's

life, it made Jerusalem the central place of worship, and it established that the king of Israel is subordinate to the God of Israel.

The centrality of God is crucial to Israel's life. Before this, Israel had chased after the gods of Canaan (1 Samuel 7:3-4). Following David's reign, his son Solomon would give in to such temptation in his old age (1 Kings 11:3-5). Succeeding kings would give in to this temptation too.

2 Samuel 6:3-5 Wholehearted worship

Given God's presence, the most proper response is Israel's extravagant worship. Eugene Peterson, biblical scholar and popular writer, tells us that "dancing" (v. 5) is another way of saying "worshiping." The word *dance* describes worship four times in this chapter (vv. 5, 14, 16, and 21). The important message here is that the people's response to God's presence in the ark is wholehearted worship. The people are outside of themselves with joy because of who God is and what God has done for them. Of course they use their voices, bodies, and all instruments to celebrate God.

There is a "red flag" warning in verses 3-4. The ark, en route from Baale-judah to Jerusalem, was carried on a new cart, which was a new Canaanite technology. This is not how the ark was to be transported. It was to be physically shouldered using two poles of acacia wood slipped through gold rings (Exodus 25:12-14). This new cart was unacceptable because God was not to be transported like a powerless, inanimate Canaanite god. Israel must not fall into the temptation of thinking that it controls God and is responsible for the welfare of God. When Uzzah touched the ark, thinking he needed to protect it (God), he was punished. David was humbled by this. The story is told in 2 Samuel 6:6-11.

2 Samuel 6:14-19 David and Michal

After a three-month delay, the ark is again headed for Jerusalem with much fanfare. The procession involves King David joyfully dancing in an ephod, the priestly robe (v. 14), the gratitude of burnt offerings (v. 17), and an extravagant feeding of the people (v. 19). Blessed and fed, the people go home. King David has been shown to be both the victorious leader of Israel and God's anointed, faithful king.

But why does Michal despise her husband? First, understand that Michal, as Saul's daughter, represents the old, traditional view of tribal (pre-king and anti-king) Israel in this account. Earlier, the prophet and judge Samuel had pointed out that a king was not God's idea (1 Samuel 8:4-7). A king is risky and may abuse his power. David's ecstatic dance may have been reminiscent of a Canaanite ritual. The traditionalists would have found this appalling. Michal, representing the traditionalists, sees David's actions as dishonorable (2 Samuel 6:20). But David sees dancing as appropriate since God has appointed him king and David has returned the ark to Jerusalem.

The Word Today

Worship is the most important thing we do in response to all God has done for us and the world. But it is also something that many Christians disagree about. There are "worship wars" between and within congregations. What hymns do we sing? Do we display everything on a screen? What about a praise band? What time is the service to be? Do we have to have a confession of sin every Sunday? Length of sermon? And so on.

The return of the ark, Israel's rejoicing, and the conflict between David and Michal teach us at least two things.

First, the purpose of worship is to praise God for all God has done. Central to this in today's worship is God's gift of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Nothing in worship should obscure this good news. Disagreements must take a back seat and be worked out respectfully. If not, the gospel gets lost in our squabbling. Second, worship can take many forms as long as the gospel is not obscured and the focus is on God, not on us. Singing, music, procession, and liturgical dance must all witness to God and not become a performance or self-aggrandizing. Like it did for David, worship takes us outside of ourselves and focuses us on God.

Martin Luther recognized this biblical wisdom as he reformed worship in the 1500s. He never advocated one specific form of worship but knew that central to all worship was God's word and the sacraments. Everything was to be done so that the word of God was clearly heard. For Luther there was freedom in the gospel but not license to do whatever you please or license to set up iron-clad rubrics (rules) that restrict or obscure God's word in any way. Luther advised "each not to take himself too seriously" (*Luther's Works*, vol. 53, *Liturgy and Hymns*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965, p. 47). Good advice, because God is the focus and we (our ideas, our plans) are not. Luther pointed to the apostle Paul, who advises us to do what edifies (1 Corinthians 14:40) and is helpful to the congregation (1 Corinthians 6:12).

Questions for Discussion

Beginnings

1. What individual and group preparations would you make if a very famous person was expected to visit your study session or congregation next week?

Exploring the Word

1. Why is the ark important to David and to Israel?
2. What does David hope to accomplish in bringing the ark to Jerusalem?
3. Describe the ways the people worship wholeheartedly.
4. Why does Michal despise David? What might be her concerns?
5. How does David answer Michal's criticism?

The Word Today

1. The three parts of worship that help me focus on God are:
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - (3)
2. Who do you identify with most, David or Michal? Why?
3. On the line below, mark your response to this statement: Our worship and work as God's people are too important to take ourselves too seriously.

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, keep us focused on you in all of our worship. Give us joy in all that you have done for us. Give us tolerance and respect for the variety of ways we may worship in our congregations. Help us not to take ourselves too seriously but to center our worship on you as we give thanks and praise. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Further Study

1 Samuel 16:1-3; Philippians 2:1-5

Daily Bible Readings

M. 2 Samuel 6:1-5

F. Psalm 132:1-12

T. Hebrews 9:1-7

S. Revelation 11:15-19

W. 2 Samuel 6:6-11

S. 2 Samuel 6:12-19

T. Psalm 122

Memorization

2 Samuel 6:5

David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the LORD with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.