

2 Samuel 5:1 – 6:23

The Setting: David Becomes King Over All Israel

² Sam.5:1 Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, “Behold, we are your bone and your flesh.” ² Previously, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and in. And the LORD said to you, ‘You will shepherd My people Israel, and you will be a ruler over Israel.’” ³ So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them before the LORD at Hebron; then they anointed David king over Israel. ⁴ David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years. ⁵ At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years over all Israel and Judah.

The Setting: David Captures Jerusalem & Defeats Philistines

⁶ Now the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, and they said to David, “You shall not come in here, but the blind and lame will turn you away”; thinking, “David cannot enter here.” ⁷ Nevertheless, David captured the stronghold of Zion, that is the city of David...¹⁸ Now the Philistines came and spread themselves out in the valley of Rephaim. ¹⁹ Then David inquired of the LORD, saying, “Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will You give them into my hand?” And the LORD said to David, “Go up, for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand.” ²⁰ So David came to Baal-perazim and defeated them there; and he said, “The LORD has broken through my enemies before me like the breakthrough of waters.” Therefore he named that place Baal-perazim. ²¹ They abandoned their idols there, so David and his men carried them away. ²² Now the Philistines came up once again and spread themselves out in the valley of Rephaim. ²³ When David inquired of the LORD, He said, “You shall not go directly up; circle around behind them and come at them in front of the balsam trees. ²⁴ It shall be, when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then you shall act promptly, for then the LORD will have gone out before you to strike the army of the Philistines.” ²⁵ Then David did so, just as the LORD had commanded him, and struck down the Philistines from Geba as far as Gezer.

The First Attempt

² Sam.6:1 Now David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. ² And David arose and went with all the people who were with him to Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God which is called by the Name, the very name of the LORD of hosts who is enthroned above the cherubim. ³ They placed the ark of God on a new cart that they might bring it from the house of Abinadab which was on the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were leading the new cart. ⁴ So they brought it with the ark of God from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill; and Ahio was walking ahead of the ark. ⁵ Meanwhile, David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD with all kinds of instruments made of fir wood, and with lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets and cymbals. ⁶ But when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset it. ⁷ And the anger of the LORD burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God. ⁸ David became angry because of the LORD’S outburst against Uzzah, and that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day. ⁹ So David was afraid of the LORD that day; and he said, “How can the ark of the LORD come to me?” ¹⁰ And David was unwilling to move the ark of the LORD into the city of David with him; but David took it aside to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. ¹¹ Thus 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.

The Second Attempt

¹² Now it was told King David, saying, “The LORD has blessed the house of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, on account of the ark of God.” David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness. ¹³ And so it was, that when the bearers of the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. ¹⁴ And David was dancing before the LORD with all his might, and David was wearing a linen ephod. ¹⁵ So David and all the house of Israel were bringing up the ark of the LORD with shouting and the sound of the trumpet. ¹⁶ Then it happened as the ark of the LORD came into the city of David that Michal the 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 So they brought in the ark of the LORD and set it in its place inside the tent which David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. ¹⁸ When David had finished offering the burnt offering and the peace offering, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts. ¹⁹ Further, he distributed to all the people, to all the multitude of Israel, both to men and women, a cake of bread and one of dates and one of raisins to each one. Then all the people departed each to his house. ²⁰ But when

David returned to bless his household, Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, “How the king of Israel distinguished himself today! He uncovered himself today in the eyes of his servants’ maids as one of the foolish ones shamelessly uncovers himself!”²¹ So David said to Michal, “It was before the LORD, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel; therefore I will celebrate before the LORD.²² I will be more lightly esteemed than this and will be humble in my own eyes, but with the maids of whom you have spoken, with them I will be distinguished.”²³ Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.

Historical and Cultural Background:

- *Victory Processions and Spoils of War:* Jewish law required that men from the tribe of Levi carry the ark on poles (Ex.25:12 – 15). The Philistines had put the ark on a cart because they didn’t know any better (1 Sam.4 – 7).
- *The Ark of the Covenant:* The ark symbolized God’s throne as God guarded the garden of Eden. The angels on the lid of the ark (Ex.25:10 – 22) represented the angels stationed at the gate to Eden with a flaming sword (Gen.3:24). God was not confined to the ark, but God was especially manifested to Israel and the world at the threshold of that boundary. When David’s son Solomon dedicated the temple with the ark in it, God “took his seat” above the ark as the shining cloud-pillar of light and fire (1 Kings 8:10).
- *King David:* David is portrayed as an “Adam” figure. For example, in his early days, David learned to guard his family’s flock from the lion and the bear (1 Sam.17:36), as Adam once ruled over the beasts (Gen.1:26 – 28; 2:19 – 20). When God brought Eve to Adam, Adam exclaimed with joy, “This is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen.2:23). Compare to what the elders of Israel say to David in 5:1.
- *God Took Uzzah’s Life:* The language indicates, in a metaphorical sense, that God’s face was towards Uzzah in a certain intensified way. In Hebrew, body parts are often associated with actions and emotions, for humans and for God. In 2 Samuel 6:6, the Hebrew word (“aph”) for God’s “anger” is also translated elsewhere “nostrils, face.” Back in Genesis 2, God breathed into Adam’s “nostrils, face.”
- *Linen Ephod:* David wore this on his second attempt at bringing the ark into Jerusalem. It was a garment usually worn by priests, a sleeveless vest that went to the hip or longer. David came to acquire one in 1 Samuel 21 – 22.

Questions / Process

1. Take 10 minutes in personal study of 2 Sam.6. Look for what makes David's first attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem different from his second attempt. Read the background points,
2. Let's start with any questions or weird things about the text. Typically, you'll get:
 - a. Did God 'live' above the ark?
 - i. Leader, answer this quickly: God intensified His presence there, so in that sense, yes, but God was not "contained" there.
 - ii. Notice King Solomon said, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built?" in 1 Kings 8:27.
 - b. Why did God kill Uzzah? Was that fair? (Leader: Postpone dealing with this until you understand the difference between the two attempts.)
 - c. What was David really angry about in 6:8?
 - d. Why was Michal upset?
3. How is David being portrayed as an "Adam" figure, and why?
 - a. He is like Adam, and the entire nation of Israel is like Eve.
 - b. God establishing David as king is portrayed as a marriage between the throne and the people. King Saul was not portrayed as the opposite: the people betrayed God (1 Sam.10:19). The issue seemed to be not the kingship per se, but the motivation, timing, and person.
 - i. The Israelites had been afraid of losing Samuel and yet not trusting God to send Israel leaders spontaneously and as the need arose (1 Sam.8:4 – 9).
 - ii. They wanted a king to lead a stable army for national, military defense (1 Sam.8:19 – 21).
 - iii. So it's like Israel was looking for someone to date before they were ready!
 - iv. It's not that David was perfect, as he makes mistakes even here, but he loved the Lord. So Israel would learn how to love God better by being led by David.
 - c. Adam and Eve were supposed to be in God's presence in the garden of Eden (Gen.2). Even afterwards, it seems like they were supposed to respect God's presence at the threshold of the garden when God appeared as the flaming sword between the angels (Gen.3:24). So when King David brings the ark, it symbolized God's throne being at the center of Israel's community life. God would later appear above the ark as the shining cloud-pillar of light and fire (1 Kings 8:10). When the ark comes to the capital, it was like God presiding over the marriage of "Adam and Eve," King David and the people.
 - d. Mount Zion would eventually become a retelling of Mount Eden.
 - i. Eden was a mountain
 1. Ezekiel called it a mountain (Ezk.28:13 – 14)
 2. The four rivers that *diverged* from the original Eden indicate water going from higher elevation to a lower elevation (Gen.2:10). Normally, rivers *converge* because water finds the lowest place.
 - ii. Zion was a mountain
 1. Not a very high mountain, but relative to its surroundings, it was higher elevation.
 2. It would become a retelling of Mount Sinai and the Sinai covenant.
 - iii. King David and his son King Solomon would later build the temple there, which was a solid version of the tabernacle.
 1. And the tabernacle was a retelling of Mount Sinai.
 2. The high priest going into the holy of holies once a year on Yom Kippur was a retelling of Moses going up to the top of Mount Sinai to renew the covenant.
4. Let's try to understand the difference between the two attempts at bringing the ark to Zion, and then we'll see if that answers most of the questions about God taking Uzzah's life. What kind of a procession is the first attempt? Clues?
 - a. Thirty thousand soldiers
 - b. Follows on the heels of military victory
 - c. Ark is brought in a cart as if it were a spoil of war
 - i. Similar to what David did to the idols of the Philistines in 2 Sam.5:21
 - ii. Like how the Philistines treated the ark in 1 Sam.4 – 7.

- iii. Note: This is in spite of the fact that when the ark was captured by the Philistines in 1 Sam.5, the idol of Dagon would fall before the ark and eventually broke, and plagues broke out among the Philistines.
 - d. David turns this into a military procession, celebrating his own victory.**
 - e. David portrays God as if God needs to be rescued.**
- 5. What would be the implications if the Israelites believed that God needed rescuing? What is it symbolically saying about God?
 - a. “It’s a good thing David and his warriors rescued God like that. They are so manly!”
 - b. We humans really make things happen.
 - c. In the Christian nationalism or Christian empire view, Christians need to take control of society by all means possible, including by lying, cheating, murdering Capitol Police like on January 6, 2021.
- 6. Why would God be angry about this?
 - a. It would lead to the view that Israel would have to “rescue God” by launching “holy war” every time. So this was for their own good.
 - b. That is the opposite of how God did not need rescuing from the Philistines in 1 Samuel 7.
 - c. That is the opposite of how God led David in decisions, even military decisions in 2 Samuel 5.
- 7. Could God have killed David and the 30,000 men? This helps to answer the Uzzah question.
 - a. Well, God had the right to take the lives of all the people involved for their presumptuousness. But God looked with favor on David.
- 8. So why did God take Uzzah’s life?
 - a. First of all, God did not consign Uzzah to hell. Uzzah still had a choice to make about Jesus.
 - i. That’s really important, because the New Testament reveals that there’s a backstory to everyone from the Old Testament.
 - ii. God brought Uzzah to Sheol, the grave, and pursued him there in the person of Jesus. According to 1 Peter 4:6, Jesus went to preach the gospel to all the people who died before he died. We don’t know what any given person decided, but that’s part of Christian faith. The church called this “Holy Saturday.”
 - iii. Belief in this was solid for 1500 years of church history, until John Calvin changed the view of what 1 Peter 3:18 – 20 and 4:6 meant.
 - b. Did God kill Uzzah by “getting in his face”?
 - i. In 2 Samuel 6:6, the Hebrew word for God’s “anger” (English) is also translated elsewhere “nostrils, face.” Back in Genesis 2, God breathed into Adam’s “nostrils, face.” So one very important question is about Hebraic anthropomorphism here. Body parts are often associated with actions and emotions, for humans and for God. It is the English translators who make that association to the emotion of anger in their translations. Are the translators correct to do this? We’ll set that question aside for now.
 - ii. Moses saw God face to face, at least in a manner of speaking, as did Uzzah. But Moses’ face shone with glory whereas Uzzah dropped dead.
 - iii. Why the difference? What Moses and Uzzah had each done to their own human natures, respectively.
 - iv. So since Jesus pursued Uzzah into Sheol, the realm of the dead (1 Peter 4:6; see above), Uzzah had the choice at that time to repent and repair the damage he did to his own human nature. Jesus shared in our fallen human nature that we all might share in his healed human nature, by his Spirit. Jesus still wanted Uzzah to participate in the restoration of his own human nature.
 - c. Uzzah was presumptuous in handling the ark that way. The ark wouldn’t break. If it fell from the cart, that might have made David and others realize they were handling it in an unfaithful way.
 - d. God said that He is ‘compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin...’ (Ex.34:6 – 7). That became a creedal statement for Israel that was repeated in many places in the Old Testament, and even in the ‘grace and truth’ statement of John 1:17. If God is ‘slow to anger,’ was He getting angry with Uzzah before Uzzah touched the ark? If so, then about what?
 - i. Uzzah’s presumably older brother Eleazar had been consecrated to care for the ark (1 Sam.7:1). Possibly, Uzzah was not supposed to be the one watching over the ark.
 - ii. Perhaps Uzzah wanted good press for his family. Uzzah and his family lived on a house ‘which was on the hill’ – a phrase notably mentioned twice in 6:3 and 4, probably

indicating something about their family status. The issue is the larger role he has towards setting up this military procession, probably to benefit the prestige of his own house.

- iii. Perhaps God was also angry about how Israel as a whole treated the ark before this? That David and the leaders of Israel left the ark in the house of Abinadab for twenty years? See 1 Samuel 7:1 – 2.

- 9. David got angry. Why?
 - a. Because Uzzah died
 - b. Because he's afraid of God now
 - c. Because he's unsure of how God will treat him
 - d. Because of the irony that God broke through the Philistines in 5:20, but broke through David's victory procession in 6:7-8. Notice the play on the word 'perez' or 'breakthrough.' He recognizes that he was acting as God's enemy. God had to 'break through' David's procession.
 - e. How does God indicate that He wants the ark to move? David notices that the ark is blessing Obed-Edom, which is a good sign: God is no longer angry. He takes this as a good sign and begins his second attempt.
- 10. What kind of procession is this second attempt? Clues?
 - a. Sacrifices all along the way, a priestly act. This was not required by the Mosaic Law; David does this on his own initiative.
 - b. David is in linen, a priestly garment
 - c. David gives gifts to the people, a priestly act signifying that peace has been made between God and His people.
 - d. **It's a priestly procession.**
- 11. Why would God be pleased by this second procession?
 - a. David is implicitly crediting God for making him king.
 - b. David is saying that God is King, not David. David is merely an intermediate.
 - c. It's saying that God is choosing to return into our midst; the ark is not a spoil of war; it is not our strength that has brought this about
 - i. It says we are grateful for God's return
 - ii. It says we reverence God as holy and awesome, as the real King of Israel.
 - iii. It communicates how God is returning to His rightful place, at the center of His people. Jerusalem is a new Eden.
 - d. Why did Michal get mad?
 - i. She thinks David is undignified as king; but David is saying that God is the real King.
 - ii. She is focused on decorum and outward appearances. But David is saying that it is such a great thing that God is in their midst, who cares!?!
 - iii. She and David have been estranged; Saul gave Michal to another man while David was fleeing in the wilderness.
 - iv. She might care about the dishonor implied upon her father Saul.
 - e. Application: Contrast in two attitudes.
 - i. Is God lucky to have us on His side? Does He need rescuing? Do we bring in His presence through our abilities? So often we say, "I did this, and God showed up."
 - ii. Or does God give us the opportunity to respond to His presence as our King? In the shift from OT to NT, God has come to dwell in us by the Spirit of Christ. He is the one who is always leading us and living His life through us.
 - f. Missional Application: Development from OT to NT
 - i. God has always wanted to dwell in the midst of His people. Not just in a building, but within our hearts.
 - ii. This event is the occasion of God coming to dwell in His tabernacle again. In the NT, Jesus' people are the new dwelling place of God. He comes into us by His Spirit.
 - iii. David writes Psalm 68 on this occasion. Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4 when he's talking about how we are the new Temple God dwells in. Only Jesus could make the true Temple of God.
- 12. (optional) In light of Uzzah's death, is God's justice really restorative? Or is it retributive after all?
 - a. Definitions:
 - i. Restorative justice is victim-centric. We ask what the victim needs in order to move forward, heal from the harm, and what the victim might need from the offender in repair

and restitution. This is a principle in Jewish law (e.g. Exodus 22:1 – 14). Restorative justice is fulfilled by the victim being healed, and the offender participating in undoing the harm he did. As relates to God, the human is the offender, and also the victim, so Uzzah has to do something to repair the damage to his own human nature.

- ii. Retributive justice is offender-centric. We ask what the offender did, and impose a consequence on the offender that is proportional to the harm. Retributive justice is fulfilled by the offender suffering a certain amount. As relates to God, if divine justice is retributive, this makes it hard to understand why God took Uzzah's life. How and why is that God's proportional response?
- b. Was God acting restoratively towards Uzzah?
 - i. Yes, since Jesus pursued Uzzah into Sheol, the realm of the dead (1 Peter 4:6; see above), Uzzah had the choice at that time to repent and repair the damage he did to his own human nature. Jesus shared in our fallen human nature that we all might share in his healed human nature, by his Spirit. Jesus still wanted Uzzah to participate in the restoration of his own human nature.
 - ii. If some Christians think divine justice is retributive, then the only way they can try to make sense of Uzzah's death is to say that God is so offended that taking Uzzah's life is proportional. That's really a stretch, as to be untenable, in my opinion.
- c. Anger and restorative justice are perfectly compatible.
 - i. But divine anger is not "satisfied" by making Israel passively endure suffering.
 - ii. Divine anger calls for the very same thing that divine love does: that Israel actively be faithful the next time, and fulfill their partnership with God.
- d. Was God acting restoratively towards David and all Israel?
 - i. Yes, because David needed to participate in undoing the harm he had done. He had to repent of his carelessness and/or arrogance about treating God's throne, the ark, as if it were a spoil of war, the result of his own victory. That's why David had to try again in the second procession. God is not "satisfied" by people suffering. God is "satisfied" by people being obedience.
 - ii. God was restoring Eden as much as possible. God advanced the larger picture of Israel as the restored human partners of God in the garden land. The divine fiery pillar of light returned to the holy mountain, this time Mount Zion. Before that, it had been on Mount Sinai. Before that, it had been on Mount Eden (Ezk.28:13 – 14). The big picture moved towards restoration.
- e. Thus, God was not acting out of the formal principle of retributive justice. It's not as simple as God feeling offended so God wanted to cause suffering. God's goal is not to cause suffering per se. God's goal is to provide the opportunity for repentance and a second chance at faithfulness, for the offender to repair the harm he did.