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*David Danced Before the Ark*  
*Bible Background 2 SAMUEL 6*

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## Lesson 2: September 12, 2021

**2 SAMUEL 6:1–5, 14–19** Celebration can be diverse in form and include various actions. How do we celebrate great events in our lives? King David expressed his joy and celebration of God by leading God's people in music and dance.

**Printed Text • 2 SAMUEL 6:1–5, 14–19 | Devotional Reading • ECCLESIASTES 3:1–9**

**KJV 2 Samuel 6:1** Again, David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand.

**2** And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the LORD of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims.

**3** And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart.

**4** And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark.

**5** And David and all the house of Israel played before the LORD on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals.

**14** And David danced before the LORD with all his might; and 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** And 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 dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.

**17** And they brought in the ark of the LORD, and set it in his place, in the midst of the tabernacle that David had pitched for it: and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.

**18** And as soon as David had made an end of offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts.

**19** And he dealt among all the people, even among the whole multitude of Israel, as well to the women as men, to every one a cake of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine. So all the people departed every one to his house.

**NLT 2 Samuel 6:1** Then David again gathered all the elite troops in Israel, 30,000 in all.

**2** He led them to Baalah of Judah to bring back the Ark of God, which bears the name of the LORD of Heaven's Armies, who is enthroned between the cherubim.

**3** They placed the Ark of God on a new cart and brought it from Abinadab's house, which was on a hill. Uzzah and Ahio, Abinadab's sons, were guiding the cart

**4** that carried the Ark of God. Ahio walked in front of the Ark.

**5** David and all the people of Israel were celebrating before the LORD, singing songs and playing all kinds of musical instruments—lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets, and cymbals.

**14** And David danced before the LORD with all his might, wearing a priestly garment.

**15** So David and all the people of Israel brought up the Ark of the LORD with shouts of joy and the blowing of rams' horns.

**16** But as the Ark of the LORD entered the City of David, Michal, the daughter of Saul, looked down from her window. When she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she was filled with contempt for him.

**17** They brought the Ark of the LORD and set it in its place inside the special tent David had prepared for it. And David sacrificed burnt offerings and peace offerings to the LORD.

**18** When he had finished his sacrifices, David blessed the people in the name of the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

**19** Then he gave to every Israelite man and woman in the crowd a loaf of bread, a cake of dates, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people returned to their homes.

### **People, Places, and Times**

**The Ark's Journey.** During the wilderness wanderings, the Ark was kept in the Tabernacle wherever the camp moved, but once the Israelites were established in the Promised Land, the Ark and entire Tabernacle complex were kept in Bethel (Judges 20:27). At one point during Samuel's time as a judge, the Philistines captured the Ark in battle (1 Samuel 4). God sent signs and sickness on the Philistines until they returned the sacred object to Israel at Bethshemesh. God also struck down seventy men of Beth-shemesh who tried to look inside the Ark. The people there called for the priests of Kiriath-jearim to retrieve the Ark. No attempt was made to return it to the Tabernacle, and it remained in Kiriath-jearim for twenty years (1 Samuel 7:2).

### **Background**

As David had been newly crowned King, the relocation of the Ark was a major act. It was significant that one of David's top priorities was related to Israel's spiritual life. David consulted with his officials and his proposal to move the Ark was met with enthusiastic agreement. The Ark had been at Baalah of Judah (also called Kiriath-jearim), according to 1 Chronicles 13:1-8. Before David could execute his plan, he was delayed by two unsuccessful Philistine attacks. He captured the city of Jerusalem and set up a government there. Once established in Jerusalem, David returned his attention to the moving of the Ark.

### **At-A-Glance**

1. Extracting the Ark (2 Samuel 6:1–5)
2. If At First You Don't Succeed (vv. 14–15)
3. Celebration and Criticism (vv. 16–19)

### **In Depth**

### **1. Extracting the Ark (2 Samuel 6:1–5)**

The Ark of the Lord symbolized God's presence and was the holiest of the items in the Tabernacle. At one point, the Ark had been captured by the Philistines in battle. Even after its return, the Ark of the Lord had been neglected under Saul. The extraction of the Ark from Kiriath Jearim required extensive planning. David selected a large force of 30,000 men in case they were attacked by the Philistines. This force was accompanied by a large number of Israelites who wanted to be included in the procession. This was an occasion for great celebration for the people of Israel. They had a new cart to transport the Ark. The sons of Abinadab were selected to guide the cart that would transport the sacred Ark (cf. 1 Samuel 7:1). There was singing and the music of various instruments as they prepared for the successful moving of the Ark. It is easy to get swept up in all this pomp and celebration, however, even though the Israelites want to do a good thing, they have not discussed the matter with God. Had they taken a moment to do so, they would have known all their preparations were for nothing.

*Read Psalms 127:1. How does this advice relate to David's careful preparation to move the Ark the first time?*

### **2. If At First You Don't Succeed (vv. 14–15)**

Verses 6-13 describe the tragic death of one of the Israelites in the first attempt to bring the Ark to Jerusalem. While not the focus of this lesson, this knowledge gives crucial insight to the remaining verses. David makes a second attempt to bring the Ark to Jerusalem three months later (vv. 14–15). The people of Israel did not dwell on past failures. In the three months that passed, David learned that placing the Ark on a cart was forbidden. The Ark and all other sacred items were to be carried on the shoulders of Levite priests (Numbers 7:9). Keeping the Lord's commands in mind, David made a second attempt to move the Ark. Again, he did so with a great celebration. David wore priestly garments and danced before the Lord with all his might. The people of Israel shouted for joy and offered sacrifices (2 Samuel 6:13) as the instruments played.

*When has taking time to consult the Lord changed your plans for the better?*

### **3. Celebration and Criticism (vv. 16–19)**

Though his first attempt did not go as planned, David's second attempt to bring the Ark to Jerusalem was a success. After seventy years of neglect, the Ark was again publicly hailed as the sacred object it was. The Ark, symbolizing God's presence with His people, had been brought to Jerusalem, making it the religious and governing center of the nation. After a tragic first attempt, the success of the second attempt must have been that much sweeter. All of Israel celebrated with him.

In the midst of the celebratory entry into the city, Michal, David's wife and the daughter of Saul, looked at David's display of praise with disdain. David, however, was focused on worship, praise and the fellowship of God's people. He offered sacrifices to God and blessed the people, both men and women, with gifts of food and wine to take home with them. It was a joyous day, and David's praise for God's grace was not to be diminished.

*How do we articulate doubts without antagonizing others?*

## **Search the Scriptures**

1. What are the various forms of worship employed when Israel moved the Ark (2 Samuel 6:5, 14–15, 17)?
2. Once the Ark made it safely to Jerusalem, what did David do (2 Samuel 6:17–18)?

## **Discuss the Meaning**

1. David made both attempts to move the Ark with great praise and celebration. Israel's acts of worship showed great reverence for the ark, which was among the holiest things in the Tabernacle. In a culture that does not value God, how can we maintain reverence and awe for the Lord?
2. Michal had contempt for David based on his demonstrative worship. The church can be a setting in which people from different generations, cultural backgrounds, and socioeconomic status are worshipping together. How can we respect everyone's freedom to worship?

## **Liberating Lesson**

Bringing the ark to Jerusalem was no easy task. It required planning, a tremendous amount of resources, and great effort. David was not deterred by what this endeavor would require. His commitment to Israel's spiritual health was such that he committed himself to bringing the symbol of God's presence to Jerusalem despite the cost. Similarly, spiritual growth requires effort on our part. We may not need to assemble 30,000 people to take a dangerous journey, but we must be intentional about the things of God. We must actively swim against the pull of modern culture and its endless supply of empty pursuits to live the life that God intends.

## **Application for Activation**

David was intentional about bringing the symbol of God's presence to Jerusalem. Likewise, we must be intentional about cultivating God's presence in our own lives. Do you have a plan for your spiritual growth? Do you have times devoted to prayer, study, and personal worship each week? Are there certain times of the year when you fast or spend an extended period of time alone with God? When moving the ark, David had the support of Israel. In addition to 30,000 warriors, a large company of Israelites went with him to retrieve the ark. They sang, danced, and offered sacrifices. The church exists as a community to encourage and equip. As a body, let us support one another as we pursue the things of God and create an atmosphere of sincere worship.

## **Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do?

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## Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned?

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## More Light on the Text

### 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 14–19

2 Samuel 6 is the record of an important episode in David's reign. Having restored the political unity of the nation and consolidating it by the establishment of the new political capital in Jerusalem, David's next concern was to make Jerusalem the capital of national worship. With this objective, David prepared to bring out the Ark, which had been neglected in Kiriath-jearim since its return from Philistia (1 Chronicles 13:3). David made its journey to Jerusalem a national affair, as the huge numbers of people present reveals (v. 1). The details given indicate something of the joy and festivity that surrounded the two stages of the Ark's journey from Baale-judah to the capital.

**1 Again, David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. 2 And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the LORD of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims.**

One of the significant themes in 1 and 2 Samuel is the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark was the object most strongly associated with Israel's God, a truth expressed by the writer's notation that the Ark belongs to God "whose name is called the name of the LORD of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims" (v. 2). An object of overwhelming significance, it contained the covenant between Israel and the Lord (cf. Exodus 25:16; 40:20). It was a place of divine revelation (Exodus 25:22; Numbers 7:89) and was, in fact, the Lord's throne (cf. 1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Kings 19:15; Psalm 99:1; Isaiah 37:16). It was captured by the Philistines but returned to Israelite territory when it became a nightmare to them and proved too embarrassingly powerful and humiliated both them and their god (1 Samuel 5). It stayed in that territory for about seventy years. When David captured Jerusalem, he purposed in his heart that it should be the city where God was to be honored and worshiped. As such, he sought to bring the Ark, the symbol of God's presence there.

**3 And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart. 4 And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark. 5 And David and all the house of Israel played before the LORD on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals.**

It must be remembered that God had given specific instructions about moving the Ark. It was to be carried with poles (Exodus 25:12–14). The Ark was constructed with rings on the four corners and poles were put through those rings. The Ark was carried on the shoulders of the Levites. However, although with good intentions and out of zeal, but without due concern for the instruction in Exodus, David made a new cart on which the Ark was to be carried (v. 3). In other words, David did the right thing but in the

wrong way. As respectful and well-intended as David's effort was, however, it violated Torah guidelines regarding the transport of the Ark (cf. Numbers 4:15; 7:9). In fact, David's actions in this matter were more like those of the spiritually ignorant Philistines (cf. 1 Samuel 6:7, 10). There was going to be a price to be paid for it. The Philistines transported the Ark contrary to God's instructions and got away with it while David did not, but note that the Philistines were not given any instructions. Added light is added responsibility. This is not to suggest that ignorance is an excuse for not doing things properly. Rather, it is a lesson for God's people to meticulously pay heed to His commandments and avoid the manifestation of zeal without knowledge.

In conclusion, one must always remember that it is not only important to do the right thing, but also it must be done the right way. This is especially true in the work of the Lord. Nowhere is this principle better illustrated than in the text for this week. The whole notion that the end justifies the means is debunked by the story of David's attempt to bring back the Ark of the Lord to Judah in his own way rather than the one prescribed by the Lord.

**14 And David danced before the LORD with all his might; and 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.**

David had intended to move the Ark to Jerusalem (v. 10), but the tragedy in verses 6-8 caused a detour and David's plan was temporarily shelved. The Ark was transferred to the house of Obed-edom. When David heard that the house of Obed-edom has received signs of God's favor due to the presence of the Ark, he revisited his original plan to bring the ark to Jerusalem. But there was to be one significant difference between the two attempts to transport the sacred throne; this time Levites carried it on poles (v. 13; cf. Numbers 4:15), not transporting it on a cart (cf. v. 3). The requirements of the law were now duly observed.

As soon as the procession started on its way, without any sign of divine displeasure, David offered a sacrifice as a thank-offering for the prosperous commencement, and an intercession for the successful completion of the undertaking. For the occasion, David had prepared both his capital city and himself. First, he had erected a special tent in Jerusalem that would house the Ark (cf. v. 17). He also prepared and wore special ritual garments: David was girded with a linen ephod (v. 14; Heb. ephod, ay-FODE), a piece of clothing otherwise reserved in Israelite society for priests and Levites (cf. Exodus 28:6; 1 Samuel 2:18; 22:18), and, according to 1 Chronicles 15:27, a "robe of fine linen." He laid aside his royal robes and appeared in the distinctive dress of a priest. As a king and representative of a "kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6), the king took on a priestly character; exercising on this particular occasion a priestly function in directing the sacrifices, even if he did not offer them himself (vv. 17-18), and in blessing the people (v. 18). David's actions were accompanied "with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet" (v. 15). Trumpets—ones blown by Levitical priests—had also been sounded during a movement of the Ark in the days of Joshua (cf. Joshua 6:4-20). David also danced before the Lord (v. 14). Dances were the usual expression of rejoicing on occasions of thanksgiving (Exodus 15:20; Judges 11:34) and religious festivals (Psalm 199:3).

**16 And 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 dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.**

At the moment of David's triumph, when the Ark had successfully entered Jerusalem and passed through the royal fortress, David's wife Michal had no interest in all the religious excitement and display. Michal thought that David degraded himself by this public exhibition, which, however it might have become one of his inferior servants, was unsuited to his dignity. As it was, she despised him for the very qualities that made him great, namely devotion to the Lord and spontaneity in worship. David's unbounded enthusiasm for his God expressed itself in "leaping and dancing before the LORD" (v. 16). Michal did not appreciate his enthusiasm. Although Michal was David's wife, this part of the account calls her Saul's daughter (see also vv. 20, 23). Her designation as Saul's daughter is both to characterize her as lacking in true-hearted piety, as well as distinguish her in comparison with David's other wives, as highest in position. When Michal refers to her husband David as "the king of Israel," she seems to compare him to her father Saul who once bore the title (v. 20). It was Michal's way of telling David, "you are no king," or "my father was a more dignified king!"

Michal holds herself aloof from the procession and criticizes David's conduct with a cold heart which had no part in his and the people's joyous inspiration. She despised him on account of his presumed degradation of himself, to the shame of his royal dignity (v. 20). From her vantage point at the window, Michal saw not a king's triumph but a king exposing himself.

**17 And they brought in the ark of the LORD, and set it in his place, in the midst of the tabernacle that David had pitched for it: and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. 18 And as soon as David had made an end of offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts.**

Three worship gestures marked and celebrated the ark's arrival: (1) sacrifice, (2) blessing, and (3) the distribution of food. These rituals are reminiscent of the first sacrifices that were offered before the tent of meeting by the newly ordained Aaron the priest. At that time he blessed the people, offered a burnt offering and a peace offering, entered the tent of meeting, and, upon exiting it blessed the people again (Leviticus 9:22–23). Although the details of David's action here is less elaborate than that of Aaron, its significance is neither diminished nor lost. David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord and the offerings being ended, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of Hosts which was introduced at the beginning of the account (6:2).

**19 And he dealt among all the people, even among the whole multitude of Israel, as well to the women as men, to every one a cake of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine. So all the people departed every one to his house.**

In verse 19 the king climaxes the festivities with food gifts. Each one, men and women, received a "cake of bread," a round loaf, such as was baked for sacrificial meals (cf. Exodus 29:23; Leviticus 8:24). The people also each received a measure of meat (KJV: "flesh"), likely from one of the many peace offerings made that day. Meat was not a staple of the commoner's diet then, as it is now. Meat was most commonly eaten as part of a sacrificial meal. While a burnt offering burns up the entire animal to God, a peace offering only burns some of the fat and organs of the sacrificial animal, leaving all of the meat for the people themselves to eat. Lastly, the people receive "a flagon of wine" (Heb. 'ashishah, ah-shee-SHAW) Even though the King James consistently translates this word that way, linguists now believe the word is better translated "raisin cake," a sweet treat of dried grapes that is pressed into shape, rather than baked. Both the meat and the raisin cake would be special treats to help the people celebrate this historic occasion and to show the king's generosity.

