



First Chronicles - Chapter Thirteen

II 1 Chronicles 10:1-2 Chronicles 9:31 - The United Kingdom of David and Solomon (continues)

Summary of Chapter Thirteen

During the days of Eli the priest Israel was at war with the Philistines and they took the Ark of the Covenant into their camp believing that it would bring them victory. However, they were defeated and the Philistines captured the ark. Yet the Lord brought plagues upon the Philistines and caused an image of their god Dagon to collapse before it and so the Philistines sent the ark back and it was taken to the house of Abinadab in Kiriath-jearim.

This chapter now tells how David gathered all the people of Israel and they agreed that the ark should be brought to Jerusalem. David led the procession in great celebration as the ark was brought from Kiriath-jearim but one of the bearers Uzzah laid his hand on the ark to steady and God struck him dead. David was both angry with and fearful of God for this and so the ark was left with the household of Obed-edom for three months.

II.b 1 Chronicles 13:1-16:43 - David's Transfer of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem

The ark signified the Mosaic covenant and was the symbol and location of God's presence on earth. However, it had been neglected throughout Saul's reign, being laid up in the village of Kiriath-jearim. David's concern for the ark is a sign of his commitment to God and his faithful regard for Israel's religious foundation from the time of Moses. His acting on this concern leads directly to the establishment of God's covenant with him in Chapter 17, and the Davidic covenant in turn becomes the new, enlarged basis of Israel's existence. The Mosaic covenant, however, always remains the foundation. The Chronicler departs from the order of his source (2 Samuel Chapters 5-6) to present David's first attempt to retrieve the ark, which

is recorded also in 2 Samuel 6:1-11, before the establishment of his home and family in Jerusalem and his defeat of the Philistines. This is recorded in 1 Chronicles 14:1-17 that equates to 2 Samuel 5:11-25. The point of this repositioning of material is to show where David's true priorities lie.

II.b.i 1 Chronicles 13:1-14 - The Ark Brought from Kiriath-jearim

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ David consulted with the commanders of the thousands and of the hundreds, with every leader. ² David said to the whole assembly of Israel, 'If it seems good to you, and if it is the will of the Lord our God, let us send abroad to our kindred who remain in all the land of Israel, including the priests and Levites in the cities that have pasture lands, that they may come together to us. ³ Then let us bring again the ark of our God to us; for we did not turn to it in the days of Saul.' ⁴ The whole assembly agreed to do so, for the thing pleased all the people.

1 Chronicles 13:1-4

David's consultation of every leader and the whole assembly of Israel shows a concern with national unity and popular participation in issues touching the nation's life. The decision to retrieve the ark is taken jointly, rather than being purely David's concern. Notably, the text does not say that David consulted with the Lord. A group of godly men with good intention would soon make a significant mistake because they took counsel with each other, but not with the Lord.

Then let us bring again the ark of our God to us. This was the Ark of the Covenant, which God commanded Moses to make more than 400 years before David's time. It was a wooden box and the word ark means box or chest, and it was completely covered with gold and with an ornate gold lid or top known as the mercy seat. It was 3 feet 9 inches long, 2 feet 3 inches wide and 2 feet 3 inches high. In it were the tablets of the law that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai, a jar of manna from their forty years in the wilderness, and Aaron's rod that miraculously budded as a confirmation of his leadership. The ark had come back from the land of the Philistines some 70 years before this: **<<And the people of Kiriath-jearim came and took up the ark of the Lord, and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill. They consecrated his son, Eleazar, to have charge of the ark of the Lord>>** (1 Samuel 7:1). In those years it sat at the house of Abinadab, but now David and the people wanted to bring it back to the centre of the national consciousness.



The Ark of the Covenant

For we did not turn to it in the days of Saul. The idea is that the people should ‘seek’ the ark just as they should ‘seek’ the face of God: *<<if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land>>* (2 Chronicles 7:14). To seek or turn to the ark would mean caring for it rightly as the focus of worship. Seeking God will emerge as a major theme of the narrative. David’s reign will mark a decisive change from the days of Saul in the people’s commitment to God and to the divinely authorised emblems of Israelite faith.

The whole assembly agreed to do so, for the thing pleased all the people. The idea of bringing the Ark of the Covenant back to the centre of Israel’s consciousness was good; their method of bringing it would soon be exposed as faulty. It was good for both David and for the Israelites to have the ark in Jerusalem. He knew that it was not he but the Lord who was their true King. His own rule must depend upon the will and counsel of God. This it was not only necessary for him to know, the fact must also be recognised by the people.

⁵ So David assembled all Israel from the Shihor of Egypt to Lebohamath, to bring the ark of God from Kiriath-jearim. ⁶ And David and

all Israel went up to Baalah, that is, to Kiriath-jearim, which belongs to Judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, the Lord, who is enthroned on the cherubim, which is called by his name.

1 Chronicles 13:5-6

As with the decision to retrieve the ark, the mission itself involves all Israel, and not simply David's soldiers: <<*David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand*>> (2 Samuel 6:1). It was not the entire nation but a significant representation of the people. These verses describe the broadest possible participation of Israelites from the Nile or Shihor of Egypt to Lebo-hamath in the far northeast. For a comparable conception of the boundaries of the Promised Land, refer to Genesis 15:18.

The ark of God, the Lord, who is enthroned on the cherubim, which is called by his name. The ark of God represented the immediate presence and glory of God in Israel. David considered it a high priority to bring the ark out of obscurity and back into prominence. David wanted Israel to be alive with a sense of the near presence and glory of God.

The Ark of the Covenant was the representation of the throne of God in Israel. Kept in the most holy place of the Tabernacle, and later in the same place in the temple, the people never saw it. Only the high priest entered and saw the ark, and then only once a year on the Day of Atonement. In the days when Israel was fighting against the Philistines, the elders wanted to take this representation of the throne of God out of the holy of holies, cover it, and bring it into battle with them. They hoped it would give confidence that God was really with them. However, it should only usually be moved when the tabernacle was to be moved.

⁷ They carried the ark of God on a new cart, from the house of Abinadab, and Uzzah and Ahio were driving the cart. ⁸ David and all Israel were dancing before God with all their might, with song and lyres and harps and tambourines and cymbals and trumpets.

1 Chronicles 13:7-8

They carried the ark of God on a new cart. Despite their zeal, David and his companions on this occasion fail to respect the sanctity of the ark. Transporting the ark on a cart was against God's specific command. Treatment of the ark is tantamount to treatment of God himself. The ark was designed to be carried on poles in accordance with Exodus 25:12-15, and was only to be carried by Levites of the family of Koath as stated in Numbers 4:15. Transporting it by cart, as the Philistines had done in 1 Samuel Chapter 6, rather than by the Levites bearing it on poles, demonstrated a lack of reverence for the sacred object of God's presence

and for the Law of Moses. The Philistines got away with it because they were Philistines, but God expected more from his people. Israel was to take their example from God's Word, not from the innovations of the Philistines. Israel got into difficulties because they failed to recognise that worship of the true God meant they could no longer simply follow contemporary pagan practices.

The long neglect of the ark may have rendered these men unfamiliar with the very explicit commands concerning the method of its removal. Or they may have grown careless as to the importance of attending to such details.

Uzzah and Ahio were driving the cart. The names of these sons of Abinadab paint a meaningful picture. Uzzah means 'strength' and Ahio means 'friendly.'

Much service for the Lord is like this - a new cart, a big production, with strength leading and friendly out front - yet all done without inquiring of God or looking to his will. Surely David prayed for God's blessing on this big production, but he did not inquire of God regarding the production itself. This was a good thing undertaken in the wrong way.

David and all Israel were dancing before God with all their might, with song and lyres and harps and tambourines and cymbals and trumpets. Judging from the importance of the occasion and all the instruments mentioned, this was quite a production. The atmosphere was joyful, exciting, and engaging. The problem was that none of it pleased God because it was all in disobedience to his word. People are often tempted to judge a worship experience by how it makes them feel. However, when they realise that worship is about pleasing God, they are driven to his word so they can know how he wants to be worshipped.

Dancing before the Lord, as in Exodus 28:29, means that the Lord himself was present above the ark, refer to the comment made on 1 Samuel 4:3-4. Both this passage and 1 Samuel 4:1-7:2 show that the ark was not just an arbitrary symbol of God's presence, but God himself manifested his presence in a special way where the ark was, so the ark should not be treated lightly.

With song and lyres. Music is part of worship in most societies, and it was an important part of Israelite worship. The prophets in 1 Samuel 10:5 were accompanied by harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre. David sings God's praises in 2 Samuel 22:50, and in his old age he organised musicians to praise the Lord in the temple once his son Solomon had built it; refer to 1 Chronicles 15:16 and 23:1-5. The Psalms contain many references to using music in worship, as in Psalms 32, 71, 92, 149, and 150.

The harp was similar to today's concert harp. The tambourine was similar to the modern tambourine, but without the small cymbals. The lyre was basically a sound box, with arms in a U-shape supporting a bar across the top. Depictions of musicians playing the lyre in the ancient Near East are common, and some

specimens of the instrument itself have been excavated. The lyre seems to have been considered the premier instrument.

There were various types of **cymbals** in the ancient Near East; some were several inches in diameter. Some were held upright while playing, like the modern orchestral cymbal; in other cases, the two cymbals of the pair were held horizontally with rods, one above the other. If one follows an alternative translation reading ‘palm trees’ for ‘songs’ the meaning may be ‘palm fronds’ (Matthew 21:8), or ‘instruments made from palm fronds.’

In the world of ancient Israel the **trumpet** made the strongest and clearest sound; it was the sound of victory. To honour God clearly and strongly for his victory on behalf of the human race, the sound of a trumpet is heard. It was probably a *shofar* or ram’s horn as shown in the image.



Charles Spurgeon comments on this event, “If you read the story through, you will see that it appears to be an affair of singing, and harps, and psalteries, and timbrels, and cymbals, and trumpets, and of a new cart and cattle; that is about all there is in it. There is not even a mention of humiliation of heart, or of solemn awe in the presence of that God of whom the ark was but the outward symbol. I am afraid that this first attempt was too much after the will of the Flesh, and the energy of nature.”

⁹ When they came to the threshing-floor of Chidon, Uzzah put out his hand to hold the ark, for the oxen shook it. ¹⁰ The anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; he struck him down because he put out his hand to the ark; and he died there before God. ¹¹ David was angry because the Lord had burst out against Uzzah; so that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day. ¹² David was afraid of God that day; he said, ‘How can I bring the ark of God into my care?’

1 Chronicles 13:9-12

When they came to the threshing-floor of Chidon. At a threshing floor the whole stalks of wheat are gathered and the chaff is separated from the wheat. There was a lot of chaff in this production, and God would blow away the chaff at Chidon’s threshing floor.

Uzzah put out his hand to hold the ark. Uzzah’s action was well-intentioned, but in taking hold of the ark, he similarly transgressed against its awesome holiness; refer to the comments made on 2 Samuel 6:6-11.

The anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah. The outburst of divine punishment against Uzzah both angers and frightens David, causing him to temporarily abandon the mission that had begun in such high spirits. David and Israel must learn that God's holiness is a dangerous thing and should not be treated lightly. This was strictly forbidden. Regarding the transporting of the ark: *<<the Kohathites shall come to carry these, but they must not touch the holy things, or they will die>>* (Numbers 4:15b). Uzzah touched the ark to steady it because the oxen stumbled, perhaps seeing the grain on the threshing floor, and he feared that perhaps the ark might fall off the new cart and crash to the ground. He believed that his hand on the ark was better than the ark on the ground. Uzzah made a decision in a moment to disregard God's command and do what seemed right to him. This shows that even decisions made in a moment matter before God.

He struck him down because he put out his hand to the ark; and he died there before God. God fulfilled the ominous promise of Numbers 4:15 and struck Uzzah. David wanted Israel to know the presence of the Lord and God showed up at Chidon's threshing floor - but not in the way anyone wanted. The sin of Uzzah was more than just a reflex action or instinct. God struck Uzzah because his action was based upon critical errors in his thinking:

- He erred in thinking it did not matter who transported the ark.
- He erred in thinking it did not matter how the ark was transported.
- He erred in thinking he knew all about the ark because it had been in his father's house for so long.
- He erred in thinking that God could not take care of the ark himself.
- He erred in thinking that the ground of Chidon's threshing floor was less holy than his own hand.

David was angry because the Lord had burst out against Uzzah. David's anger was based in confusion. He could not understand why his good intentions were not enough. God is concerned with both intentions and actions.

David was afraid of God that day. He did not need to be afraid of God, but afraid of his own sin. There was no problem with God or with the ark itself, as the blessing on the house of Obed-edom demonstrated. The problem was with the lack of knowledge and obedience on the part of David and those who helped him plan the transportation of the ark into Jerusalem. If the readers of Chronicles wanted Israel's former glories restored, they too must reckon with a God whose dynamic holiness could not be contained within human limitations.

How can I bring the ark of God into my care? David knew it was important to bring the ark of God into the centre of Israel's life. He wanted all Israel to be excited about the presence and glory of God. Because of what happened to Uzzah, David felt he could not do what God wanted him to do.

David's response in the following chapter shows that he found the answer to his question. He answered the question with the thought expressed later: <<*Consult God's instruction and the testimony of warning*>> (Isaiah 8:20a NIV). David found the answer in God's Word.

The whole account reinforces the principle that God is interested in the process as well as in the outcome. It would never do for David or Israel to have the attitude, "As long as we get the ark to Jerusalem, it does not matter how we do it." How they did it really did matter, and how things are done today also matters, especially in serving God.

¹³ So David did not take the ark into his care into the city of David; he took it instead to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. ¹⁴ The ark of God remained with the household of Obed-edom in his house for three months, and the Lord blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that he had.

1 Chronicles 13:13-14

Obed-edom the Gittite. A Gittite is a resident of Gath, which was one of the major cities of the Philistines. It may be that Obed-edom or his father was with David when he went over to Maach king of Gath as recorded in 1 Samuel 27:2. Leaving the ark in the house of Obed-edom may have been a case of David's foisting his dangerous burden on the first convenient person. Even so, the Lord blessed the household of Obed-edom, indicating his approval of the mission itself and Obed-edom's care of the ark, although not the way the mission was conducted. God's blessing on Obed-edom's household is recalled in 1 Chronicles 26:4-5, where Obed-edom is ranked among the Levitical gatekeepers.

When God's Word was obeyed and his holiness was respected blessing followed. God wanted the ark to be a blessing for Israel, not a curse. It might be said that the curse did not come from God's heart but from man's disobedience.