



First Chronicles - Chapter Fifteen

- II [1 Chronicles 10:1-2 Chronicles 9:31 - The United Kingdom of David and Solomon \(continues\)](#)
- II.b [1 Chronicles 13:1-16:43 - David's Transfer of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem \(continues\)](#)

Summary of Chapter Fifteen

David's second attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem is successful because, as well as preparing a suitable place to receive the holy object, this time he instructs and organises the Levites and priests in the right way of transporting it. The relatively brief account of the second mission in 2 Samuel 6:12-19 has been expanded here to show it as the climax of a carefully planned religious procession. Into the account of these preparations the Chronicler has inserted lists of the Levites involved and descriptions of their musical duties. David emerges as the decisive figure in determining the new role of the Levites as the leaders of music and worship, once the ark has come to its permanent rest in Jerusalem and would no longer be borne about by them. Just as Moses set out the duties of the Levites for the wilderness days, so David does the same for the more settled period of his kingdom. At the same time, he is very solicitous about the Law of Moses as the foundation for his own innovations in worship.

II.b.iv [1 Chronicles 15:1-29 - The Ark Brought to Jerusalem](#)

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ David built houses for himself in the city of David, and he prepared a place for the ark of God and pitched a tent for it. ² Then David commanded that no one but the Levites were to carry the ark of God, for the Lord had chosen them to carry the ark of the Lord and to

minister to him for ever. ³ David assembled all Israel in Jerusalem to bring up the ark of the Lord to its place, which he had prepared for it.

1 Chronicles 15:1-3

David built houses for himself in the city of David, and he prepared a place for the ark of God and pitched a tent for it. David uses the three month interval that the ark is in the house of Obed-edom, as described in 1 Chronicles 13:14, to make the necessary preparations in procedures and personnel that were lacking in the first mission that ended in debacle. It is a reminder that while David, along with his wives and children, lived in a collection of houses or palaces, the ark remained in a tent. The tent is not the Mosaic tent of meeting or tabernacle, which was in Gibeon at the time according to 1 Chronicles 16:39, but was a temporary lodging for the ark: <<*Now when David settled in his house, David said to the prophet Nathan, 'I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the Lord is under a tent'*>> (1 Chronicles 17:1).

There were several reasons to explain why David did not bring the tabernacle from Gibeon to Jerusalem:

- He may have believed that if the tabernacle was there the people would be satisfied with that and they would lose the passion and vision for the temple God wanted built.
- It may be that the tabernacle was only moved when it was absolutely necessary, as when disaster came upon it at Shiloh or Nob.
- David simply focused on building the temple, and not in continuing the tabernacle.

Then David commanded that no one but the Levites were to carry the ark of God, for the Lord had chosen them to carry the ark of the Lord and to minister to him for ever. David now understands that violation of the law governing the correct handling of the ark had scuttled the earlier attempt; hence his words here about the Levites; refer to Deuteronomy 10:8 and 18:5. This shows that David learned from his past mistake when Uzzah was struck dead during the first attempt to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem.

⁴ Then David gathered together the descendants of Aaron and the Levites: ⁵ of the sons of Kohath, Uriel the chief, with one hundred and twenty of his kindred; ⁶ of the sons of Merari, Asaiah the chief, with two hundred and twenty of his kindred; ⁷ of the sons of Gershon, Joel the chief, with one hundred and thirty of his kindred; ⁸ of the sons of Elizaphan, Shemaiah the chief, with two hundred of his kindred; ⁹ of the sons of Hebron, Eliel the chief, with eighty of his kindred; ¹⁰ of the

sons of Uzziel, Amminadab the chief, with one hundred and twelve of his kindred.

1 Chronicles 15:4-10

David's authority is expressed in summoning the priests and Levites together for their sacred task. The three main divisions of the Levites, i.e. Kohath, Merari and Gershom are named. The Kohathites were responsible for carrying the ark in accordance with Numbers 7:9. The final three groups mentioned in vv.8-10) are also Kohathite families; refer to 1 Chronicles 6:18.

A major problem for many readers is the way that the narrative is interrupted by repetitious lists. For example, just at the moment when the ark is raised on to the Levites' shoulders, apparently unrelated lists of musicians and gatekeepers occur. The lists actually have an important function in anticipating the next section of the narrative. The Levites who sanctified themselves are shown to have had a valid ancestry; this was a key issue in postexilic Israel.

¹¹ David summoned the priests Zadok and Abiathar, and the Levites Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel, and Amminadab. ¹² He said to them, 'You are the heads of families of the Levites; sanctify yourselves, you and your kindred, so that you may bring up the ark of the Lord, the God of Israel, to the place that I have prepared for it. ¹³ Because you did not carry it the first time, the Lord our God burst out against us, because we did not give it proper care.' ¹⁴ So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord, the God of Israel. ¹⁵ And the Levites carried the ark of God on their shoulders with the poles, as Moses had commanded according to the word of the Lord.

1 Chronicles 15:11-15

David's instruction to the priests and Levites to sanctify or consecrate themselves denotes not only ritual actions and abstinences but also the internal attitude that should accompany the handling of holy things; refer to Exodus 19:14-15.

This demonstrates David's commitment to bring the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem in the right way. He had learned the lesson that the process also matters to God, not only the result. It also demonstrates that David understood that it was not only a matter of doing the right things in the process, but in having sanctified men to carry the ark. Ministry that pleases God is done in the right way, by sanctified men, for the right end result.

Sanctification required separation from every form of uncleanness and in the OT may well have included temporary abstinence from sexual intercourse (Exodus 19:15), dirty clothing (Exodus 19:14), or contact with corpses (Leviticus 21:1-4), or more permanently for the priests, not marrying a divorcee, prostitute, or even a widow (Leviticus 21:13-15).

Because we did not give it proper care. First Chronicles 13:1-4 makes it clear that David consulted with his leaders and with the people in a highly democratic way. What he did not do was consult God about the proper order. Seeking God by following his statutes is not legalism but devout regard for the word of the Lord and a safeguard against the kind of disaster that occurred at Perez-uzza during the first attempt; refer to 1 Chronicles 13:5-11.

¹⁶ David also commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their kindred as the singers to play on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise loud sounds of joy.

1 Chronicles 15:16

David also commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their kindred as the singers. This marks a turning point in the history of Israel's worship: the Levites are appointed, under David, to a new ministry of music and praise, which will be conducted in the presence of the ark; on the significance of their leadership of worship for Israel, refer to 1 Chronicles 16:4-7 and the associated comment. King David knew a lot about music and singing, but he did not over manage this ceremony. He delegated responsibility and allowed the leaders of the Levites to make the appointments. Solomon will follow in David's footsteps in the organisation of the Levites for the temple worship; refer to 2 Chronicles 8:14.

To raise loud sounds of joy. The several musical instruments mentioned were important, but not more important than these joyful voices. The singing was loud and joyful. The experience of song worship should always bring joy to the worshipper's heart.

¹⁷ So the Levites appointed Heman son of Joel; and of his kindred Asaph son of Berechiah; and of the sons of Merari, their kindred, Ethan son of Kushaiah; ¹⁸ and with them their kindred of the second order, Zechariah, Jaaziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, and Mikneiah, and the gatekeepers Obed-edom and Jeiel. ¹⁹ The singers Heman, Asaph, and Ethan were to sound bronze cymbals; ²⁰ Zechariah, Aziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Maaseiah, and Benaiah were to play harps according to Alamoth; ²¹ but Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, Obed-edom, Jeiel, and Azaziah

were to lead with lyres according to the Sheminith. ²² Chenaniah, leader of the Levites in music, was to direct the music, for he understood it. ²³ Berechiah and Elkanah were to be gatekeepers for the ark. ²⁴ Shebaniah, Joshaphat, Nethanel, Amasai, Zechariah, Benaiah, and Eliezer, the priests, were to blow the trumpets before the ark of God. Obed-edom and Jehiah also were to be gatekeepers for the ark.

1 Chronicles 15:17-24

The Levites respond to David's instructions. In contrast to the free exuberance of the earlier expedition: <<*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 13:8), only Levites duly consecrated for the task may lead the procession.

Chenaniah, leader of the Levites in music. He may have been the lead singer or performed in the role that today would be called the director of music. Chenaniah was not just a talented musician; worship music was in his soul - for he understood it.

Berechiah and Elkanah were to be gatekeepers for the ark. Obed-edom and Jehiah also were to be gatekeepers for the ark. They were appointed to keep the door of the tent, in which the ark was to be placed and kept, so that no unauthorised person might touch it; and in like manner they were to attend the ark in the way, and to guard it against the touch of profane hands.

²⁵ So David and the elders of Israel, and the commanders of the thousands, went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord from the house of Obed-edom with rejoicing. ²⁶ And because God helped the Levites who were carrying the ark of the covenant of the Lord, they sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams. ²⁷ David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, as also were all the Levites who were carrying the ark, and the singers, and Chenaniah the leader of the music of the singers; and David wore a linen ephod. ²⁸ So all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the Lord with shouting, to the sound of the horn, trumpets, and cymbals, and made loud music on harps and lyres.

1 Chronicles 15:25-28

So David and the elders of Israel, and the commanders of the thousands, went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord from the house of Obed-edom with rejoicing. David was glad to know that the presence and glory of God could bring blessing instead of a curse. He was also glad to see that when they obeyed

God they were blessed. When the worship was in the proper order it was still filled with joy and gladness. It is a mistake to feel that 'real' worship must be subdued or solemn or only in a minor key.

God helped the Levites who were carrying the ark of the covenant of the Lord.

It was not so much that the Ark of the Covenant was so heavy that they needed God's help to carry it. Rather, there was considerable pressure and stress in bearing a burden that had recently resulted in a sudden death. They needed God's help to deal with the spiritual pressure of this ministry.

The ark is consistently called **the ark of the covenant of the Lord** perhaps to stress the true focus of this chapter and the joyful solemnity of the occasion.

They sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams. David was careful not to neglect the institution of sacrifice in this second attempt to bring the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. The number seven in Jewish understanding means completion or perfection.

David wore a linen ephod. It is a mistake to think that David was immodest. **As also were all the Levites** indicates that David was dressed just like all the other priests and Levites in this procession.

So all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the Lord with shouting. This shows that David brought the ark to Jerusalem with a big production - bigger than the first attempt. David was wise enough to know that the problem with the first attempt was not that it was a big production, but that it was a big production that came from man and not from God. This section supplements 2 Samuel 6:12-16, which focuses overwhelmingly on David, to emphasise the participation of **all Israel** in the second mission to bring back the ark. References to David's own activity are muted, e.g. his ***<<leaping and dancing before the Lord>>*** (2 Samuel 6:14b), while particular details about the Levites and God's help for them are added.

²⁹ As the ark of the covenant of the Lord came to the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing; and she despised him in her heart.

1 Chronicles 15:29

Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing. David did not hold back anything in his own expression of worship. He did not dance out of obligation but out of heartfelt worship. He was glad to bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord into Jerusalem according to God's word.

This expression of David's heart showed that he had a genuine emotional link to God. There are two great errors in this area - the error of making emotions

the centre of the Christian life and the error of an emotionally detached Christian life. In the Christian life, emotions must not be manipulated and they must not be repressed.

From knowledge of ancient and modern culture it can be surmised that David's dance was not a solo performance. The context clearly puts him together with the other priests and Levites, and he probably danced with simple rhythmic steps together with other men in the way one might see Orthodox Jewish men today dance. In this context, David's linen ephod means he set aside his royal robes and dressed just like everyone else in the procession.

It should also be observed that David's dancing was appropriate in the context. This was a parade with a marching band, a grand procession and David's dancing matched the occasion. If David did this as the nation gathered on the Day of Atonement it would be out of context and wrong.

And she despised him in her heart. As the daughter of Saul, David's wife Michal shows herself to be hostile to David's concern for the ark. Second Samuel 6:20-23 provides more of Michal's complaint and of David's response to her. She sarcastically said to him: **<<How the king of Israel honoured himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' maids, as any vulgar fellow might shamelessly uncover himself!>>** (2 Samuel 6:20b). Michal seemed to indicate that she did not object to David's dancing, but to what David wore when he set aside his royal robes and danced as a man just like the other men celebrating in the procession. David acted as if he were just another worshipper in Israel, and this offended Michal. In response, David told Michal that his actions were before the Lord; that is, he simply explained the truth: "I did it for God, not for you." He went on to explain to her: **<<I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in my own eyes>>** (2 Samuel 6:22a). What David did was humbling to him. He did not dance to show others how spiritual he was.