

David Seeks to Retrieve the Ark (1 Chr 13)

Building a House for God's Name: Studies in 1 & 2 Chronicles

I. REVIEW: BUILDING A HOUSE FOR GOD'S NAME

- A. As the Lord has been at work in our church over the last season, he has been calling us into a season of "*building the house*". This is in line with the vision of what God has put in front of us to become and build a praying church that pursues his presence and his purposes for Kansas City.
- B. One of the ways we are seeking to strengthen and establish what God has put before us is by preaching through the books of Chronicles. The books of Chronicles were written to those returning from the Babylonian exile with the charge to rebuild the house of the Lord (cf. 1 Chr 9.1-2).
- C. The message of these books is that the people of God are designed to live under the rule of the right Davidic King and in accordance with the rightly ordered worship of the Lord. This vision of living under the blessings of God's kingdom is meant to orient people's hearts toward a wholehearted pursuit of God.
- D. 1 Chronicles 13 kicks off a new section that is concerned with establishing the house of God in Jerusalem as the centerpiece of David's kingdom. This work will happen in stages — as David seeks to return the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem (1 Chr 13-16), seeks to build a house for God (1 Chr 17), and organizes and administrates his kingdom toward making preparations for Solomon to build the Temple (1 Chr 18-29).
- E. David possessed a unique revelation of the importance of worship in the economy of God. This is primarily expressed in David's vow to bring the ark of the covenant back to Israel, to build a house for the Lord, and to establish the orders of Levitical worship at the *center* of his governmental strategy.

¹Remember, O LORD, in David's favor, all the hardships he endured, ²how he swore to the LORD and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob, ³"I will not enter my house or get into my bed, ⁴I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, ⁵until I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob." (Ps 132.1-5)

- F. This chapter outlines David's initial attempt to bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem and the dire results of David and the peoples' hasty endeavor.
- G. Outline of 1 Chronicles 13-14
 - 1. David and all Israel determine to retrieve the ark (13.1-4)
 - 2. The failed attempt to retrieve the ark (13.5-14)
 - a. The unqualified transport (13.5-8)
 - b. Uzzah's death (13.9-10)
 - c. David's response (13.11-12)
 - d. The ark in the house of Obed-Edom (13.13-14)
 - 3. David's successes (1 Chr 14.1-17)
 - a. Hiram brings David resources to build a house (14.1-6)
 - b. David demonstrates his faithfulness to the Lord by seeking him (14.7-17)

II. THE CAPTIVITY OF THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

- A. Upon ascending to the throne, David sets out to bring the ark of the covenant back to the people of God. In verse 3, he demonstrates that Israel did not *seek it* in the days of Saul (demonstrating a contrast between the heart of David and Saul's treachery in 1 Chr 10.13-14).

²And David said to all the assembly of Israel, "If it seems good to you and from the Lord our God, let us send abroad to our brothers who remain in all the lands of Israel, as well as to the priests and Levites in the cities that have pasturelands, that they may be gathered to us. ³Then let us bring again the ark of our God to us, for we did not seek it in the days of Saul." ⁴All the assembly agreed to do so, for the thing was right in the eyes of all the people. (1 Chr 13.2-4)

- B. The ark of the covenant was the most important artifact within the tabernacle of Moses. It was commanded by God to be built according to the heavenly pattern shown to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 25.40; Heb 8.5), and was skillfully crafted by Bezaleel (Exod 35.12; 37.1-9; Heb 9.1-5), the first man to be said to be filled with the Spirit (Exod 35.31).
- C. The ark was a small wooden box (3'9"L x 2'3"W x 2'3"H) overlaid with gold inside and out. Atop the ark was the Mercy Seat and the Cherubim. Within the ark were kept the tablets of the Law given to Moses, a golden pot filled with manna from the wilderness, and the staff of Aaron that had budded. The ark was to be placed within the tabernacle behind the veil in the Holiest of All (Exod 26.34; 39.35).

D. It is clear that the ark represented:

1. ***The Throne of God:*** In the Biblical worldview, there was a dynamic relationship between the Holy of Holies (specifically the ark) and the throne of God in the heavens. The ark was the physical, earthly representation of God's heavenly throne, also known as his footstool.

²And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale-judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the Lord of hosts who sits enthroned on the cherubim. (2 Sam 6.2)

⁵Exalt the Lord our God; worship at his footstool! Holy is he! (Ps 99.5)

¹Thus says the Lord: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?"

2. ***The Presence of God:*** Throughout the OT, the presence of God filled the tabernacle/Temple (specifically the Holy of Holies). Because of this, the ark was considered an earthly representation of God's presence among his people.

³⁴Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (Exod 40.34)

⁷the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "A god has come into the camp" (1 Sam 4.7)

3. ***The Glory of God:*** Closely tied to the concept of God's presence is the reality of God's manifest glory. The ark was also associated with the glory of God in the midst of his people to lead, guide, and protect them.

²¹And she named the child Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel!" because the ark of God had been captured... ²²And she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured." (1 Sam 4.21-22)

- E. At the time of David's ascension to the throne, the ark of the covenant had been kept in Kiriath-jearim for over 60 years. The Israelites had taken it into battle against the Philistines in hopes of garnering God's favor (1 Sam 4.1-3), but were soundly destroyed by the Philistines (1 Sam 4.4-20). After some time among the Philistines (1 Sam 5), the ark was returned to Israel and kept in the house of Abinidab (1 Sam 6.1-7.3).
- F. During this time, we see from David's statement, the people of Israel did not seek the Lord. The implication is that the primary manner in which they were to seek him was by coming into his presence — which had departed from Israel in this season because they had abandoned the divine order of worship given by God to Moses.

III. DAVID FAILS TO RETRIEVE THE ARK

- A. Once gathering the nation and realizing the need for the ark of the covenant at the heart of Israel's national life, David sets out to retrieve the ark from the house of Abinidab in Kiriath-jearim.
- B. The centerpiece of this story is the death of Uzzah, as the Lord breaks out against him as he reaches out to grab the ark from falling off the cart.

C. Upon first reading, this action at the hand of God may seem unreasonable and far too intense. To rightly understand the reality of Uzzah's death requires several pieces of background information.

1. The people of Israel were given specific instructions by Moses for how the ark was to be transported. It was to be carried by Levites on poles and it was to be covered.

⁵When the camp is to set out, Aaron and his sons shall go in and take down the veil of the screen and cover the ark of the testimony with it. ⁶Then they shall put on it a covering of goatskin and spread on top of that a cloth all of blue, and shall put in its poles. (Num 4.5-6)

⁸At that time the Lord set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord (Deut 10.5)

2. The transportation of the ark on a cart seems to be inspired by the actions of the Philistines, not based on the commandments of God.

¹⁰The men did so, and took two milk cows and yoked them to the cart and shut up their calves at home. ¹¹And they put the ark of the Lord on the cart and the box with the golden mice and the images of their tumors (I Sam 6.10-11)

3. We must also remember the holiness and glory of God. To be in the presence of God requires that we are there in the *manner* that he has given. We must remember that God is to be worshiped and he is to be worshiped in the way that he has revealed.

D. David's response is illustrative for us in navigating stories in the Scripture (and realities in our own lives) where we are tempted to judge the actions of God.

1. Initially, upon Uzzah's death, David is *angry*. The first emotion experienced by David is one of anger (i.e., "this is not right!"). Many times, when we encounter situations, we do not understand — specifically in how God deals with humanity and leads history — we are tempted to become angry. We believe that our evaluations are perfect ("isn't Uzzah an innocent man!", "isn't death a bit severe?!") and we seek to put God on trial. This leads us to expect God to justify himself and his ways to us in order for us to trust him.
2. David's anger with God turns to the *fear of God*. The fear of the Lord is a different posture than anger at the Lord in situations we do not understand. This posture begins with the perfection, holiness, and justice of God and seeks to conform our lives according to his ways.

E. The fear of the Lord leads David to abandon the initial retrieval of the ark — placing it for a three-month season in the house of Obed-edom (1 Chr 13.13-14). During this time, the Lord continued to bless David (1 Chr 14.1-6) — likely for his desire to honor the Lord and place worship of him at the center of God's people. We also see that during this time David cultivated a heart of *seeking* the Lord again and again (1 Chr 14.8-17). The posture of seeking the Lord is a necessary result of the fear of the Lord.

IV. THE HOLY ONE AND THE FEAR OF THE LORD

- A. Throughout the Bible, we see that one of the primary aspects of God's nature is his perfect holiness. The holiness of God is not only his moral perfection, but the truth that he is completely and utterly distinct from all of his creation.
- B. The reality of God's holiness is intended to cause our hearts to be filled with awe and wonder, to seek to approach him with reverence and submission.

¹Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? (Exod 15.11)

²The Lord is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the people. ³Let them praise your great and awesome name! Holy is he! ...⁵Exalt the Lord our God; worship at his footstool! Holy is he! (Ps 99.2-3, 5)

C. The holiness of God demands that we worship him alone as God.

²I am the Lord your God... ³You shall have no other gods before me. (Exod 20.3)

¹³It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. ¹⁴You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you — ¹⁵for the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God — lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth (Deut 6.13-15)

D. The holiness of God necessitates that we offer *right worship* to him.

⁴But Nadab and Abihu died before the Lord when they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord in the wilderness of Sinai (Num 3.4)

E. To order our lives in accordance with God's commandments (offering rightly ordered worship to him) is closely tied to the concept of the fear of the Lord.

1. In the Proverbs the fear of the Lord is said to be the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1.7).

2. The fear of the Lord is not related to being afraid of God, because the love of God casts out all fear (cf. 1 John 4.18). Rather, the fear of the Lord is a reverence for his holiness, his glory, and his majesty that results in a sobriety that longs to be conformed to his reality.

3. Elements of the fear of the Lord:

a. Knowledge that *God sees all* things.

³The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good... ¹¹Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the Lord; how much more the hearts of the children of man! (Prov 15.3, 11)

b. Knowledge that *God cares* about our lives.

⁹For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him. (2 Chr 16.9)

c. Knowledge that *God evaluates* our lives in accordance with his character and nature.

¹²So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. (Rom 14.12)

4. When we connect to these realities by revelation, our desire is to be *pleasing to him* in our lives.

⁹And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God. (Col 1.9-10)

F. The gift of God in Christ does not remove the necessary reverence of approaching his holiness in the fear of the Lord. The beauty of the gospel is that it removes the fear of experiencing God's condemning wrath because of our sin — we must still offer rightly ordered (acceptable) worship in reverence and awe.

¹⁸For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest ¹⁹and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them... ²²But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. ²⁵See that you do not refuse him who is speaking... ²⁸Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, ²⁹for our God is a consuming fire. (Heb 12.18-29)