

You heard the reading from II Samuel. Do you have any guesses what the next four verses might be about? Why don't we just read those verses and find out:

*David returned to greet his household, and Michal, Saul's daughter, came out to meet him. She said, 'What a glorious day for the king of Israel, when he made an exhibition of himself in the sight of his servants' slave-girls, as any vulgar clown might do!' David answered her, 'But it was done in the presence of the LORD, who chose me instead of your father and his family and appointed me prince over Israel, the people of the LORD. Before the LORD I shall dance for joy, yes, and I shall earn yet more disgrace and demean myself still more in your eyes; but those slave-girls of whom you speak, they will hold me in honour for it.'*

*To her dying day Michal, Saul's daughter, was childless.*

*II Samuel 6:20-23 REB*

Nothing like a blow-out argument with one of his wives to cap off David's big day of celebrating how he finally got the Ark of the LORD to Jerusalem, the City of David! It had been bad enough when Uzzah was struck down by God's anger the first time David tried to bring the Ark of God to Jerusalem. Did David need to be struck down by Michal's anger on this day? No, he was not going to let that happen. He also was not going to admit that parading the Ark of the Lord into Jerusalem was all about cementing public opinion to support his rule. Sure, David's blatant display of linking God's divine favor and presence to David's rule and city had to be put on hold for three months, but that only gave him more time to prepare. Sacrificing a bull and a buffalo every six steps on the road into Jerusalem – that takes planning. Making and setting up a tent to house the Ark of the Lord – that takes planning. Having everything in place to make sacrifices before the Lord – that takes planning. Baking loaves of bread, portioning out meat, and having enough cakes of raisins to distribute to every man and woman who gathered in Jerusalem – that takes planning. This was not a spur of the moment, impromptu celebration. This was a strategic display of power and resources. David may have claimed that it was all done for the Lord, but David was front and center. This was King David – not David the young, innocent shepherd boy.

It should be clear to us that David was a complex human being. He was neither all good, nor all bad. He had been seasoned in battle against his enemies, and had learned how to apply political leverage. While he often repeated the claim that God had chosen him to lead Israel, did he sometimes forget that God is the King of glory, the Lord of hosts, and creator of all that is? I think at times David got a little full of himself and God would remind him of who has the ultimate authority as the King of glory.

When David initially took thirty thousand soldiers to Baalath-judah to get the Ark of God he did not handle the ark appropriately. Traditionally the Ark had always been lifted up and carried on poles – never directly handled by anyone. But for some reason David had brought a new cart that they were going to use to carry the Ark on from Abinadab's house to Jerusalem. Did using this cart show appropriate respect for the Ark of God which bore the name of the Lord of Hosts, who is enthroned upon the cherubim carved on it? Were the oxen yoked to the cart an appropriate substitution for God's people to bear the Ark of the Lord? Was the ox drawn cart simply a more convenient way to get the Ark from point A to point B? Was there already a diminished sense of holiness despite all the dancing, singing, and musical instruments being played as the cart rolled along? And because it seemed like just another load on a cart, was that why Uzzah reached out to steady the Ark when it was jostled when the oxen stumbled? Perhaps the holy presence of God seemed clearer to everyone after Uzzah lay dead on the ground next to the cart. Maybe THEN they realized that the Ark of God which bore the name of the Lord of Hosts, who is enthroned upon the cherubim should never have been put in the precarious position of being in danger of falling off a cart! Such insight came too late for Uzzah.

There was no mention of Uzzah's brother Ahio immediately mourning his brother's sudden demise. Nor did we hear that King David and all of his men mourned Uzzah's death. There is no record of David writing a song to remember Uzzah. All we're told is that David called the place Perez-uzzah (or Outbreak on Uzzah) – because David was vexed by God's anger. David was vexed because it reflected poorly on him when God brought his thirty-thousand man parade to a halt. David was vexed that the Ark of the Lord had become problematic. If God's anger was going to linger over the Ark, David didn't want the Ark to be in the City of David. So he off-loaded the Ark at the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. Wow! Just think how thrilled Obed-edom must have been to have King David hand him the responsibility of guardianship of the Ark of the Lord for the foreseeable future! Because if King David was too afraid to go any further with the Ark of the Lord – imagine how Obed-edom must have felt when it was left at his house! . . . And then imagine how vexed David must have been three months later when he learned how the Lord had blessed Obed-edom and his whole household for the entire time the Ark was there. It was as if David couldn't bear to have God's favor resting on anyone else, so he couldn't waste any time kicking his plans into high gear to get the Ark from Obed-edom's house and finally bring it to Jerusalem.

You may have noticed that the Ark of the Lord was not on a cart when it finally came into Jerusalem. No, the text states that “the bearers of the Ark of the Lord” brought the Ark into the City of David. And David made sacrifices to the Lord every time the bearers had gone six steps. It would seem that David did EVERYTHING he could to keep this second celebration from being derailed.

Do you think that was that just good planning on David's part, or do you think that David was actually trying to control God? Was David tending so carefully to the Ark of the Lord because of David's great love for God; or was David just bringing the power of having the physical seat of God's presence on the Ark into alignment with David's own political power and presence in Jerusalem? Did David think that maintaining physical control over this "God box" would guarantee that God would be on his side? Did David see this a *quid pro quo* situation – that by demonstrating respect for the Ark of God, and providing ongoing protection for it, David would in turn receive favor from God? That David's actions could control God's actions?

But is that any different from when we try to broker deals with God in our prayers? How many times have we said something like, "God, I will do X, Y, and Z if you will protect me (or my loved one) from this calamity." We want to trade "being good Christians" for God's protection. We want to stack up how we've been in worship, helped our family, read the Bible, and prayed for others as reasons why God should help or favor us. Can we control God by doing that?

Maybe we should listen again to something the psalmist said in Psalm 24:

*The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it*

*...*

*Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?*

*Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,*

*who do not lift up their souls to what is false,*

*and do not swear deceitfully.*

*They will receive blessing from the LORD,*

*and vindication from the God of their salvation.*

*Psalm 24:1, 3-5 NRSV*

Only those with "clean hands and pure hearts" receive blessing from the Lord. But that doesn't mean they can force God's hand to give it. If "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it," can we ever control God? Could even King David control what God would do?

*Who is this King of glory?*

*The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory.*

*Psalm 24:10 NRSV*

Amen.