

THE ARK BROUGHT TO JERUSALEM

II Samuel 6

The transition from Saul to David should be centered about Jonathan. The loyalty of both David and Jonathan to Saul, in spite of Saul's jealousy and hatred, should be stressed, and the fact that David could win victories because, like Jonathan, he trusted and obeyed the Lord. The sin of Uzzah and its punishment is the most dramatic part of the lesson for today, but it should not be allowed to dwarf the importance of the actual bringing of the ark to Jerusalem.

Doctrinal Points

Sin is doing what we know to be wrong.

To do what seems to us the "natural" thing may not be right.

The laws of God are eternal and not to be changed or interpreted to suit the desires of men.

We cannot overcome temptation by reasoning about it.

Notes for Parents

David, the second great king of Israel, was very different from Saul. He had grown up as a shepherd boy in Bethlehem and, although he also became a great warrior, he never lost the attitude of childlike trust and reliance upon the Lord which is pictured by sheep and shepherds, and which is essential to our spiritual development. "Verily, I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein." David was also a player on the harp or lyre, and it was through him that many of the Psalms were written.

After David had come to the throne and established his capital at Jerusalem, he knew that he should bring the ark there because the ark was meant to be the center of Jewish life. The command-

ments are to be written on our hearts. For twenty years the ark had been at the city of Kirjathjearim, where it had been taken from Bethshemesh after the Philistines returned it.

The strange story of Uzzah which is part of our lesson for today has often troubled people because to us it might seem quite natural and right that when the oxen shook the cart on which the ark was being carried, Uzzah should have put out his hand to steady it. It was natural but it was not right. The ark was the holiest thing the Jews possessed. Again and again its power had been demonstrated in their history. But Uzzah was thinking of it as just an ordinary chest, as his act showed. All the Levites knew that only the anointed priests were to touch it, but the people needed to be reminded of its holiness and power. The tables of stone on which the commandments had been written by the finger of God at Sinai were in the ark. The Lord's power comes to us only as we keep the commandments. They are not man-made laws, but the laws of God. We cannot tamper with them and we should trust them completely. They stand forever by their own power.



Primary

Stress the reason why the Lord's spirit departed from Saul, the character of David, and Jonathan as the connecting link in the story. In telling about Uzzah, point out that Uzzah should have known better than to try to steady the ark. Tell the children that after the ark was set up in Jerusalem, Jerusalem became the center of the life of the nation.

The second king of Israel was David. David lived in Bethlehem, the same place where the Lord was born long afterward. The Lord sent Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint David, who was then hardly more than a boy. And after David was anointed, the spirit of the Lord was with him instead of with Saul. You have heard the story of how David killed the giant Goliath.

David was a shepherd boy, but he was also a warrior.

The people praised him so much that Saul became jealous and tried to kill him.

But Jonathan and David had become fast friends, and Jonathan saved him.

David had to run away and live in hiding, but he was loyal to Saul as long as Saul lived.

Finally, however, Saul and Jonathan were both killed in battle by the Philistines, and then David became king.

During his reign he conquered all the enemies of Israel.

This was because he always obeyed the Lord.

He captured Jerusalem and made it his capital.

Then he wanted to bring the ark to Jerusalem.

The ark was at Kirjathjearim, also called Baale.

How did they take it from Kirjathjearim?

What did Uzzah do?

What happened to him?

Why was his act so bad?

Into whose house was the ark taken for a time?

What did it do for the household?

What effect did this have on David?

David went before the ark all the way to Jerusalem with singing and dancing, stopping every so often to offer sacrifices to the Lord. This is how the ark finally came back to be the very center of the life of the Israelites.

David built a new tabernacle for the ark on Mount Zion, one of the hills in the city of Jerusalem.

Junior

In speaking of the punishment of Uzzah, point out that sin is doing what we know to be wrong. The ark was the holiest thing the Jews had, and a sin against it was therefore the most serious sin of all. Have the children look up the references in Chronicles, and also Joshua 9:17, where Kirjathjearim is named as one of the cities of the Gibeonites, and I Samuel 6:21 and 7:1-2, where the ark is taken to Kirjathjearim. This will help to tie today's story in with other lessons they have had this year. See how much the children can tell about the ark.

Samuel told Saul that because of his disobedience the Lord had rejected him and would choose as the next king “a man after his own heart.” Then the Lord sent Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint David, and the Bible tells us that after David was anointed, “the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul” and was with David instead.

You remember the story of how David killed the giant Goliath with his sling and a smooth stone from the brook. Before that victory Saul had made David his armorbearer, and David and Jonathan had become sworn friends. David won victories for Saul, but when the people began to sing David's praises and to say that David's victories were greater than Saul's, Saul became jealous and tried to kill David. Jonathan saved David's life, but David had to go into hiding. Finally Saul and Jonathan were both killed in a battle with the Philistines and David was made king. At first he was accepted by only part of the people and had his capital in Hebron in the southern part of the land—you remember that Hebron had been Abraham's home—but after seven years, in which he continued to win victories, the people in the northern part of the country accepted him also. Then he took the city of Jerusalem from the Jebusites and made it his capital.

David's next thought was to bring the ark of God to Jerusalem. Baale (= Judah) is another name for Kirjathjearim. Kirjathjearim was one of the cities which had belonged to the Gibeonite League; you remember the Gibeonites who came to make a peace treaty with Joshua.

How was the ark taken from Kirjathjearim?

This was a violation of the law, for the ark should have been carried on the shoulders of the Levites. If it had been, it could not have been shaken as it was by the oxen, and Uzzah would not have been tempted.

What did Uzzah do when the oxen shook the ark?

What happened to him?

Can you see why his fault was so serious? It was because it showed that he did not really believe in the power of the ark to care for itself. This was something like Saul's attitude toward Samuel's advice, wasn't it? The things we do impulsively show what is really deep inside of us.

What was in the ark?

When people today think that the commandments are not really

the Lord's laws for all people in all times, and that they need to be changed a little or explained in such a way as to suit conditions in the world, it is like Uzzah's putting forth his hand to steady the ark. The Lord knows what we need better than we do, and His laws do not change. They have just as much power to bring peace and happiness as they ever had.

Where did David have the ark taken after Uzzah's death?

How long was it there?

What induced David to take it to Jerusalem finally?

In I Chronicles 15:11-15 we learn that this time the ark was carried according to the law.

What did David do as the ark was carried toward Jerusalem?

Who despised him for doing this?

What was her punishment?

Where did David put the ark in Jerusalem?

Read I Chronicles 15:1 and II Chronicles 1:3-6. We learn from these that the tabernacle which David pitched for the ark in Jerusalem was not the original tabernacle, which at this time was set up in Gibeon, one of the Levitical cities. It was still there in the early days of Solomon's reign, but no one knows what finally became of it. The real power in the tabernacle came through the ark, just as we can have power from the Lord only as we keep the commandments.

Intermediate

The lesson for this class should be centered around the meaning of this final journey of the ark to Jerusalem, the various incidents being taken up in the order of the journey. More will be done for this class in the next lesson with the meaning of Mount Zion and of the three kings.

After David's victory over Goliath, he was for a time a favorite with Saul, and David and Jonathan swore eternal friendship. Saul, however, soon realized that it was David whom the Lord favored, and he tried to get rid of him in various ways. Jonathan at first would not believe that his father hated David, but when he was convinced he warned David to flee. In exile David gathered a band

of fighting men around him and won victories, always considering himself as the faithful servant of Saul and not making any effort to supplant him. But when Saul and Jonathan were both killed in a battle against the Philistines, the people in the southern part of the land—where David had been living—made him king, the people in the northern part setting up as king a son of Saul named Ishbosheth. David reigned in Hebron for seven and a half years. Then Ishbosheth's own captains murdered him and all the people accepted David as king. He took the city of Jerusalem from the Jebusites and made it his capital, reigning there for another thirty-three years, forty years in all.

The second book of Samuel tells the story of the reign of David. Our lesson is concerned with his bringing the ark of the covenant from Kirjathjearim—where it had been ever since the Philistines returned it—to Jerusalem, where he set it up in a new tabernacle or tent on Mount Zion, one of the hills within the city. At the beginning of this lesson we have the story of a punishment which seems out of all proportion to the crime committed. We might think it quite natural and right that Uzzah, seeing the ark shaken, should put forth his hand to steady it. But we must realize that even in the literal story, all the Jews knew about the ark and its power and how it was to be borne and handled. The ark would not have been shaken in the first place if it had been borne on the shoulders of the Levites as the law required, and Uzzah's act showed a lack of belief in the power of the ark and a self-confident sense of superiority to it. It is the same sort of feeling which prompts people today to say that, although the commandments were right and necessary at the time the Lord gave them, today He would give laws more in keeping with modern ideas of what is right and wrong. The real sin involved in this story is the failure to acknowledge that the laws of God are eternal and are not to be changed or interpreted to suit the desires of men. It is putting the opinions of men above the wisdom of God, and this leads to spiritual death. So Uzzah died there by the ark of God.

David's fear to bring the ark further after Uzzah's death is typical

of our reluctance to go the whole way in obeying the commandments when we realize fully all that it involves. It took further experience of the blessings produced by the ark to remove David's fear. This time he took care to have the ark properly carried, and he himself accompanied it, singing, dancing, and offering sacrifices along the way (see I Chronicles 15:11 ff.)

We learn from II Chronicles 1:3-6 that the tabernacle which David pitched for the ark in the "city of David," which was the stronghold on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, was not the original tabernacle. The original tabernacle was at this time in Gibeon, and remained there until after the temple was built, after which we hear no more of it. A tent in the Word represents a state of worship from love.

David was a fighting king, who conquered all the enemies of Israel. The enemies of Israel represent our evils and the battles against them our struggles with temptation. When we are fighting our temptations, our central thought must be simple obedience to the commandments, and the tent or tabernacle is the childlike recognition of their importance which is necessary to us until the victory is won. When we are being tempted, we should not stop to reason with the tempter; we should simply obey the commandments because we really want to be good. You remember how the Lord, when He was in the wilderness, answered the devil each time with a simple quotation from the Scriptures.

At the end of our chapter we have the story of how Michal, Saul's daughter, was condemned to be childless because she despised David for dancing and singing before the ark as it was carried into the city. Michal had been given to David as his wife by Saul while David was still in the court of Saul. She pictures the kind of affection for the Lord which comes from our first natural, self-confident efforts to serve Him. This is not a humble and true love and cannot produce genuine "good fruit" in our lives. We shall perhaps understand this better when we study the difference in meaning between Saul, David, and Solomon.

Basic Correspondences

a tent or tabernacle = worship from love
the enemies of Israel = our evils and our false ideas

Senior

The lesson for this class might well be developed through a discussion of the attitude toward the ark of Uzzah, David, and Michal, pointing out at the end by way of summary the difference between Saul's son Jonathan and his daughter Michal. The place of the ark in Jerusalem will be considered further in a later lesson.

Our lesson today concerns the reign of David, the second of the three great kings of Israel. We have seen that Saul represents our first concept of divine truth when, as adults, we accept it as our ruling principle. This first concept is based largely on appearances and on confidence in our own judgment. One might think that Jonathan, who had so much more reliance on the Lord than his father had, should have been able to succeed him as king. But Jonathan, as Saul's son, represents a trust in the Lord based on external rather than internal experience. Such trust is not the kind we really need, although it can help us to maintain our faith until we are ready for a deeper and more spiritual reliance. Jonathan loved David from their first meeting, and the relation between David and Jonathan has come down through history as the outstanding example of true friendship. Jonathan saved David from the jealous rage of Saul and helped him to escape into temporary exile. But before David could come into the actual kingship, Saul and Jonathan both had to die. The kind of faith in the Lord which says, "I can see that the Lord has taken good care of me so far and I believe He will continue to do so," must give way to the kind of faith which says, "I know that whatever happens to me in this world, whether it seems good or bad, is permitted by the Lord to come to me for my spiritual welfare." Obedience to the Lord based on this kind of trust is represented by David.

The bringing of the ark to Jerusalem by David pictures the estab-

lishment of the commandments in the central place in our adult lives. The ark was never restored to its place in the original tabernacle after its capture by the Philistines. When it was sent back to the Israelites, it stopped first at Bethshemesh, and then it was taken to Kirjathjearim—called in our chapter Baale of Judah (see Joshua 15:9)—and had been kept there ever since. Kirjathjearim was a city a few miles southwest of Jerusalem. The original tabernacle at the time of our lesson had been moved to Gibeon, one of the Levitical cities, and was still there early in Solomon’s reign; after that the Word gives us no further information about it.

David’s first attempt to move the ark from Kirjathjearim ended disastrously, because he neglected the proper method of transporting it. The ark was supposed always to be carried on the shoulders of the Levites, which pictures the fact that we should always support the commandments with the power of religious devotion. Instead of this, David had it placed upon a cart drawn by oxen, a picture of a system of thought powered by the natural good affections. There are many practical reasons for obedience to the commandments, which may be expressed in such maxims as “Honesty is the best policy”; but they are not adequate as motives. In the story the oxen shook the cart. Our natural affections often prompt us to question the validity of the commandments and to reason about them in a natural and worldly way. We try to find some natural reason—not divine authority—why they should in general not be discarded. This is Uzzah putting forth his hand to steady the ark. Such attempts are often well meant. They are natural; but what is natural is not always right, as we ought to know. Uzzah had every reason to know that the ark did not need steadying by him, but he did not really reverence it or believe in its inherent divine power. He considered his own strength greater than that of the ark. This was the sin for which he died, for reliance on self and the world is what leads to spiritual death.

The second time David moved the ark, he was careful to have it properly borne and to humble himself before it. This humility before the Lord is contrary to the inclinations of the natural man.

Saul's daughter Michal represents these natural inclinations. Saul had given her to David as his wife while David was still in Saul's court. When David fled into exile, Michal was given by Saul to another of his servants, but she came back to David after he became king. This is a picture of the way in which our natural inclinations seek the easy and outwardly successful path. But our natural inclinations are not the affections which produce spiritual fruit because they despise the spiritual virtue of humility, as Michal despised David. "Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death."

Adult

The relation between Saul, Jonathan, and David is a good starting point. Then discuss the general meaning of the last journey of the ark and of Uzzah's act and its punishment. Finally, tie the lesson together with the relation between Saul, Jonathan, David, and Michal. Stress the fact that the natural never develops into the spiritual. There is a discrete degree between them.

Jonathan is in a sense the connecting link between Saul and David. His friendship for David has become the classic example in history. We all know the stories of the anointing of David by Samuel at Bethlehem, when the spirit of the Lord rested upon him, having departed from Saul, the story of David's soothing Saul by playing the harp, and of his victory over Goliath. Then follows the account of David's further victories and of Saul's growing jealousy when the people began to hail David instead of Saul as their hero, and the account of Saul's efforts to get rid of David and of Jonathan's success in saving him, of David's flight and long exile, and of his victories while in exile.

David, like Saul, represents the Lord's truth ruling, but it is the truth understood in a new and deeper way, an understanding based on internal instead of on external considerations. We recall that when Samuel first found Saul, Saul was looking for his father's lost asses; but David, when he was called, was tending his father's sheep. The ass represents the affection for natural reasoning, the sheep the affection for innocence.

But David did not immediately supplant Saul, even after he had been anointed and the spirit of the Lord had passed from Saul to him. Long after we recognize the necessity of a deeper understanding of truth, the old natural habits of thought and feeling persist. Even after Saul was dead, his descendants still disputed the kingdom with David, and for a time the kingdom was actually divided. The division was essentially the same as the later division after the death of Solomon, the southern portion of the land accepting David as king—with Hebron as his capital—and the northern portion, together with the cross-Jordan country, adhering to Ishbosheth, a son of Saul. In this division, as later, the southern portion represents the inner affectional life, the northern portion the intellectual or thought realm, and the cross-Jordan country the external life. The meaning of this for us as individuals is not hard to see. David is anointed king when we realize that our first external understanding of the truth is not adequate to protect us against the attacks of evil and falsity, and that a deeper and more spiritual understanding is necessary. Saul dies and David becomes king in Hebron when, by trial and experience, our hearts have confirmed our allegiance to the new principle. But David does not become king over the whole land until we have rid ourselves of the habits of thought and conduct which sprang from our early superficial understanding.

After Jerusalem was taken, David determined to bring the ark there. In AE 700 we are told that the three last stages of the journey of the ark picture “the progress of the church with man from its ultimate to its inmost; and this because such progressions are effected by means of Divine truth, which was signified by the ark; for the man of the church progresses from the natural to the spiritual, and through that to the celestial, and this continually from the Lord by means of His Divine truth; the natural is the good of life, the spiritual is the good of charity towards the neighbor, and the celestial is the good of love to the Lord.”

The death of Uzzah is a striking incident. People often feel that Uzzah’s deed was a perfectly natural impulse and well-meant, and

did not deserve the punishment it received. It can be pointed out, even as to the literal sense of the story, that Uzzah the son of Abinadab, in whose house the ark had been kept for many years, must have been perfectly familiar with the laws concerning the handling of the ark and with the consequences which had in the past overtaken those who broke these laws. No impulse could have been strong enough to induce him to break the law if his reverence for the ark and belief in its power had been deep and sincere. His act was the expression of an inherent confidence in himself and distrust of the Lord's power for which he was really punished. Our impulses spring from habits of thought and feeling, and our habits are formed by our own choice and consent.

But there is a deeper lesson to be learned from the story of Uzzah. The ark represents divine truth. We have this truth in the Word, and we have ample evidence of its power in the history of the church and in the lives of individuals. There is not one of us who does not know that we should reverence the Word, should approach it only with the desire to learn how to live rightly, and should trust its power to accomplish its purpose. Yet how easily, when we are bent upon having our own way in some matter, when our good affections falter, as the oxen stumbled, we fall victims to the temptation to think that we know better than the Lord, to rely upon our own power and intelligence to think that we are doing the Word service by seeking natural explanations for the strange and wonderful occurrences recorded in its letter and trying to discover in the ideas and customs of the Hebrew people something on which they may rest. The attempt to steady the ark of the Lord, to substitute our own power for the Lord's power, our own intelligence for the guidance of the Lord's truth, leads to spiritual death. For spiritual life can be received only as we look to the Lord and trust in Him. When we think of the Word as merely a human book and try to find meaning in it on that basis, rejecting what cannot be naturally explained, we commit the sin of Uzzah. When we think of the Lord's teachings as in any way limited by His "times," we commit the sin of Uzzah. When we give more

weight to the judgment of our contemporaries than to the Word of the Lord, we commit the sin of Uzzah. And there we also die “by the ark of God.”

Jerusalem represents the Lord’s spiritual kingdom, and Mount Zion in Jerusalem represents the inmost of the church. It was upon Mount Zion that David placed the ark in a tabernacle which he had erected for it. David’s finally taking the stronghold of Zion from the hands of the Jebusites pictures the final overthrow of the idolatries which hold possession of the inmost heart. This can be accomplished only through a spiritual understanding of truth. The placing of the ark on Mount Zion represents the final uncompromising establishment of the commandments as the only laws to be tolerated in the heart. When this is done, David’s kingdom is fully established and he can go out from Jerusalem to the conquest of the Philistines, the Moabites, and the Ammonites.

The incident recorded at the end of our chapter has also its important lesson for us. Saul’s daughter Michal had been given to David by Saul at the time when David was living in Saul’s court. If we read the story in I Samuel 18, we find that Saul hoped that David would be killed in trying to provide the dowry he demanded for Michal. After David went into exile, Saul gave Michal to another husband. While David was reigning in Hebron, he demanded the return of Michal, and Ishbosheth took her from her husband and sent her back to David (II Samuel 3:13-16). Michal represents the natural affections which develop out of our first self-confident interpretations of the Lord’s truth. They like to follow the easy path, attaching themselves to whatever opinion seems popular from time to time. It is significant that although Jonathan, the good element in the development from our first understanding, died with his father, Michal lives on and is still attractive to David. It is harder to overcome natural inclinations than natural reasonings. Michal’s true character as the veritable daughter of Saul appears when she despises David and taunts him for his humility before the ark. Jonathan, although he had to die, served a good purpose. But no good ever comes of Michal: “Therefore Michal the daughter

of Saul had no child unto the day of her death.”

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 700²⁸: “Their playing and sounding all kinds of musical instruments, and David’s dancing when the ark was brought up, represented the gladness and joy that result from the affection of truth and good from the Lord through the influx of Divine truth, which was signified by the ‘ark’; the instruments mentioned, on which they played in the first journey from the house of Abinadab to the house of Obed-edom, represented gladness of mind from a natural and spiritual affection of truth; and the dancing of David, also the shouting and sound of the trumpet represented joy of heart from the affection of spiritual and celestial good. Harmonies of musical sound are from the spiritual world, and signify the affections with their gladnesses and joys.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. Who was the second king of Israel? *David*
P. Who anointed him? *Samuel*
J. Did he become king as soon as he was anointed? *no*
J. Who became his great friend? *Jonathan*
J. What made Saul jealous of David? *“Saul has killed his thousands, David his ten thousands!”*
P. Who saved David when Saul tried to kill him? *Jonathan*
J. How did Saul and Jonathan die? *in battle with Philistines*
J. What great city did David take and make his capital? *Jerusalem*
P. What did he want to bring there? *ark*
I. Where was the ark at this time? *Kirjathjearim*
P. What happened to Uzzah and why? *struck dead for steadying ark*
J. Who laughed at David for singing and dancing before the ark? *Michal*
J. What was her punishment? *to remain childless*
J. Where did David put the ark in Jerusalem? *Mount Zion*
I. What does the ark represent? *commandments loved and obeyed*
S. What is pictured by bringing the ark to Jerusalem? *putting divine law in center of life*
S. What is pictured by Uzzah’s act? *doubting power of God’s truth*