

DAVID:

SHEPHERD, PSALMIST, KING

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE CONVEYANCE OF THE ARK TO MOUNT ZION (II Samuel 6)

“Hark! what a sound, and too Divine for hearing,
Stirs on the earth, and trembles in the air!
Is it the thunder of the Lord’s appearing?
Is it the music of his people’s prayer?
Surely He cometh! and a thousand voices
Shout to the saints, and to the deaf are dumb!
Surely He cometh! and the earth rejoices,
Glad in his coming, who hath sworn, I come.”

- F. Myers

As soon as David had acquired a capital, he was eager to make it the religious, as well as the political, center of the national life. With this object in view, he resolved to place in a temporary structure hard by his palace, the almost forgotten Ark; which, since its return from the land of the Philistines, had found a temporary resting-place in the “*city of the woods*,” some eleven miles south west of Jerusalem, in the house, and under the care of Abinadab.

In all probability, David felt unable to remove the Tabernacle which, after Saul’s slaughter of the priests, had been set up in the high place that was at Gibeon because Zadok, the priest, and his brethren the priests, ministered to it, and maintained the burnt-offering continually upon the altar. An old root of jealousy lay between the families of Zadok and Abiathar; and it was wiser in every way not to bring them together, or to interfere with the religious rites which had been maintained through the broken years of recent history (I Chronicles 16:39, etc).. But David’s purpose would be sufficiently served by securing the presence of the Ark in the heart of the new city. He would not, however, take any step upon his own initiative; but consulted with the captains of thousands and of hundreds, even with every leader. With their acquiescence he sent abroad everywhere throughout all the land of Israel to gather priests, Levites, and people, to bring again the sacred emblem.

I. THE MISTAKE OF THE CART

It was a great procession that wended its way that day to the little town. In addition to a vast host of priests and Levites, and a great concourse of people, there were thirty thousand chosen soldiers, whose presence would be sufficient to protect the assembly from any hostile incursion or surprise.

Probably we owe Psalm 132 to this occasion; in which the royal singer records the determination which he had formed in the days of his affliction, that whenever he should be delivered from them, and established in his kingdom, one of his earliest acts would be to find out a place for the Lord, a tabernacle for the mighty one of Jacob.

Then follow the magnificent stanzas which refer directly to this event:

**“Lo, we heard of it in Ephratah:
We found it in the fields of the wood (Kirjath-jearim).
We will go into his tabernacles;
We will worship at his footstool.
Arise, O Lord, into thy rest,
Thou, and the ark of thy strength.”**

But one fatal mistake marred the events of the day, and postponed the fulfillment of the nation’s high hope and resolve.

It was strictly ordained in the law of Moses, that Levites alone, specially consecrated to the task, should bear the Ark upon their shoulders, not touching it with their hands, lest they should die (Numbers 4:15; 7:9).

Nothing could be clearer than this specific injunction, or more obvious than the reason for it, in enforcing the sanctity of all that pertained to the service of the Most High. This command had, however, fallen into disuse with much else; and it was arranged that the Ark should be carried on a new cart driven by the two sons of Abinadab. This mistake could not be passed over.

That the Philistines had used such a cart with impunity had been permitted because they did it ignorantly; but for Israel to set aside the repeated injunction of the Levitical law, and follow their own caprice, could not be condoned, lest the entire Levitical code should be treated as a dead letter, and sink into disuetude.

The oxen started amid a blast of song and trumpet, and for the first two miles all went well, until they came upon a piece of rough road, on which the oxen stumbled, and the ark shook so violently as to be in danger of being precipitated to the ground.

Then Uzzah, the younger son of Abinadab, who perhaps had become too familiar with the sacred emblem, put out his hand to steady it, and instantly fell dead.

The effect on the procession was terrific. Horror silenced the song, and panic spread through the awed crowd, as the tidings of the catastrophe spread backward through its ranks. David was greatly dismayed.

He was afraid of God that day, and said, How shall I bring the Ark of God home to me? So he directed that the Ark should be deposited in the house of Obed-edom, a Levite, who lived in the vicinity, and there it remained for three months. The terrified crowds returned to Jerusalem, in consternation and dismay.

It has been suggested in some quarters that the breach of Uzzah was a needlessly severe act of God a too stern treatment of a sin of ignorance. On the other hand, it must be borne in mind how important it was at this juncture to insist on literal obedience to the ancient code. If it had been permitted to man's caprice to set its injunctions at defiance, it is easy to see that the entire system might have fallen into disuse, and its important functions been left unrealized.

II. THE SHOULDERS OF LIVING MEN

“The Lord blessed the home of Obed-edom.”

Josephus states that from the moment the Ark rested beneath his roof, a tide of golden prosperity set in, so that he passed from poverty to wealth; an evident sign that the Lord had no controversy with those who obeyed the regulations and conditions laid down in the ancient law.

In the meanwhile, David searched into the Divine directions for the conveyance of the sacred emblem; for he said: **“None ought to carry the Ark of the Lord but Levites; for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the Ark of God, and to minister unto Him for ever.”**

Again a vast concourse was gathered. This time, however, the prescribed ritual was minutely observed; and the children of the Levites bare the Ark of God upon their shoulders, with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded, according to the word of the Lord. Then the deep bass of the white-robed choirs, the clash of the cymbals of brass, the sweet strains of the bands of psalteries and harps, the measured march of the captains over thousands, the stately procession of the elders, the shoutings of the teeming crowds of all Israel together made up such a welcome as was worthy of the occasion, and thrilled the soul of David, responsive as a musical instrument to a master-hand.

Clad in a linen ephod, he leapt and danced before the Lord. So they brought in the Ark of the Lord, and set it in its place, in the midst of the tent that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings before the Lord. Then he turned to bless the people in the name of the Lord of Hosts; and distributed to them bread, and wine, and raisins. The one cloud that marred the gladness of the day was the biting speech of Michal, who had no sympathy with her husband's religion. Poor woman! perhaps she was still smarting over the loss of Phaltiel; possibly she was jealous at David's independence of her and her father's house hence the venom in her speech to the man whom she had loved, and whose life she had once saved.

III. THREE MAJESTIC PSALMS

Upon this occasion three of the greatest psalms were composed: 15, 68, and 24.

Psalm 15 was evidently composed with direct reference to the death of Uzzah, and in answer to the question:

**“Lord who shall sojourn in thy tabernacle
Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?”**

Psalm 68, which was chanted as a processional hymn. It begins with the ancient formula, uttered in the desert march each time the camp was struck:

**“Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered;
Let them also that hate him, flee before him.”**

As the Ark was borne forward, in its majestic progress, the symphony was softly played which told of the ancient days in which He went before his people and marched through the wilderness, whilst the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped at his presence.

As the Levite-bearers drew near the ascent of the road up to the citadel of Zion, the high mountains of Bashan were depicted as regarding its lowlier height with envy; and then, as the august procession swept up the steep, the choristers broke into a strophe of unrivalled grandeur, the full meaning of which could only be fulfilled in the Ascension of the Christ Himself, far above all principality and power into the presence of his Father:

**“Thou hast ascended on high,
Thou hast led captivity captive:
Thou hast received gifts for men,
Yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.”**

An enumeration of the constituent parts of that mighty host follows. The singers who went before, and the minstrels that followed after; the damsels that played with timbrels, and the great host of women publishing the tidings; little Benjamin and the princes of Judah; the princes of Zebulun and of Naphtali. Finally, the psalmist anticipates the gathering of distant nations to that sacred spot:

**“Princes shall come out of Egypt,
Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.”**

But Psalm 24 is perhaps the master-ode of the three. It begins with a marvellous conception, when we consider the narrowness of ordinary Jewish exclusiveness:

**“The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof;
The world, and they that dwell therein.”**

The first half of the psalm answers the question as to the kind of men who may stand before with God (3-6). They must be clean in hands, and pure in heart, not lifting their soul to vanity nor swearing deceitfully. No mere ablutions or external ceremonial will meet the case.

The requirement of this holy God is the righteousness which He alone can give to those who seek his face. The second half declares God’s willingness to abide with man upon the earth. The low-browed gates, beneath which Melchizedek may have come forth to greet Abraham, seemed all too low to admit the Ark borne aloft on the Levites shoulders; and they were bidden to lift up themselves, and open to the entering king.

In thunders of voice and instrument, the white-robed choirs, halting before the closed portals, cried:

**“Lift up your heads, O ye gates;
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of Glory shall come in.”**

Then from within, a single voice, as though of some startled and suspicious warder, demands:

“Who is this King of Glory?”

A question, which met with the immediate, emphatic, and mighty response:

**“The Lord strong and mighty,
The Lord mighty in battle.”**

Again the challenge to open. Again the enquiry. Again the magnificent reply, that the King of Glory for whom admittance was demanded to this ancient city, held once by demons, the nest of every unclean bird is the Lord of Hosts, to whom all angels, all demons, all the living things in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, are subject. So the Ark at last reached its resting-place.

~ end of chapter 22 ~

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