

The two-part Book of Samuel includes the story of King David (about 1000 B.C.E.). In this episode, after David's wars with the Philistines had ended, the king wants the Ark of the Covenant brought to Jerusalem. This symbolic act is meant to give the tribal confederacy a religious center.

Both sidrah and haftarah report tragic incidents involving the Tabernacle and the Ark, respectively, and both portions raise questions: Why did Nadab, Abihu, and Uzzah die? And what was Uzzah's transgression?

שמיני

Second Samuel

6:1-7:17

Part 1

6:1] Once more David brought together Israel's best men, thirty thousand in all. 2] Then David and all the people with him went up from Baalei-Judah, to take up from there the Ark of God, on which is written the Name—the Name *God of Heaven's Hosts—Enthroned on the Cherubim*. 3] They put the Ark of God on a new cart and took it out of the house of Abinadab on the hill; Uzzah and Achio, Abinadab's sons, drove the new cart. 4] As they brought it out of Abinadab's house on the hill, with the Ark of God [on it], Achio was walking in front of the Ark, 5] while David and the rest of the Israelites were dancing before God [to the sound of] all kinds of [instruments of] cedar-wood— harps, lyres, hand-drums, rattles, and cymbals.

6] But when they got to the threshing-floor of Nachon, the oxen nearly upset [the cart], and Uzzah reached out for and seized hold of the Ark of God, 7] and the Eternal grew furious with Uzzah and God struck him down on the spot, because of

וַיִּסַּף עוֹד דָּוִד אֶת־כָּל־בְּחֹר בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל
שְׁלֹשִׁים אָלֶף: 2 וַיִּקְּמוּ אִי וַיִּלְךָ דָּוִד וְכָל־הָעָם
אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ מִבְּעָלֵי יְהוָה לְהַעֲלוֹת מִשָּׁם
אֶת אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר־נִקְרָא שֵׁם שָׁם
יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת יֹשֵׁב הַפְּרָכִים עָלָיו: 3 וַיִּרְכְּבוּ
אֶת־אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל־עֲגֹלָה חֲדָשָׁה
וַיִּשְׂאֶהוּ מִבַּיִת אַבִּינָדָב אֲשֶׁר בְּגִבְעָה וְעֹזָא
וַאֲחִיו בְּנֵי אַבִּינָדָב נְהַגִּים אֶת־הָעֲגֹלָה
חֲדָשָׁה: 4 וַיִּשְׂאֶהוּ מִבַּיִת אַבִּינָדָב אֲשֶׁר
בְּגִבְעָה עִם אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים וַאֲחִיו הִלְךָ
לִפְנֵי הָאֲרוֹן: 5 וְדָוִד וְכָל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל
מִשְׁחָקִים לִפְנֵי יְהוָה בְּכָל עֲצֵי בְרוֹשִׁים
וּבְכַנְרֹת וּבְנֹבְלִים וּבְתַפִּים וּבְמִנְעֻנְעִים
וּבְצִלְצִלִּים:

6 וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד־גֶּרֶן נָכוֹן וַיִּשְׁלַח עֲזָה אֶל־
אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּאָּחֲזוּ בּוֹ כִּי שָׁמְטוּ
הַבָּקָר: 7 וַיַּחֲרֵאֶף יְהוָה בְּעֲזָה וַיַּכֶּהוּ שָׁם
הָאֱלֹהִים עַל־הַשָּׁל וַיָּמַת שָׁם עִם אֲרוֹן

Part 2

6:1] *Thirty thousand*. The original meaning of אָלֶף (*elef*, thousand) was "unit," usually nine or ten soldiers. Most likely, David's choicest soldiers numbered thirty units, or about three thousand men.

2] *Baalei-Judah*. Another name for Kiriath-Ye'arim, some 6 mi (10 km) west of Jerusalem.

On which is written the Name. There is no other reference to God's Name being written on the Ark. Perhaps this identification was made when the Ark was temporarily captured by the Philistines.

Cherubim. Angelic, winged beings; it was understood that they functioned to protect and to serve (see Gen. 3:24; Exod. 25:18-20; haftarah for Haazinu, II Sam. 22:11).

3] *New cart*. To honor the occasion. *Abinadab*. In whose keeping the Ark had been after its liberation from the Philistines.

6] *Nearly upset*. Or, "stumbled," "defecated"; literally, "released." The exact import is in doubt.

7] *Struck him down*. The celebration was in full