

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 וַיֵּקָם א וַיֵּלֶךְ דָּוִד וְכָל־הָעָם
אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ מִבְּעָלֵי יְהוָה לְהַעֲלוֹת מִשָּׁם
אֶת אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר־נִקְרָא שֵׁם שָׁם
יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת יֹשֵׁב הַפְּרָכִים עָלָיו: 3 וַיִּרְכָּבוּ
אֶת־אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל־עֲגֹלָה חֲדָשָׁה
וַיִּשְׂאֶהוּ מִבֵּית אַבִּינָדָב אֲשֶׁר בְּגִבְעָה וְעֹזָא
וְאָחִיו בְּנֵי אַבִּינָדָב נְהַגִּים אֶת־הָעֲגֹלָה
חֲדָשָׁה: 4 וַיִּשְׂאֶהוּ מִבֵּית אַבִּינָדָב אֲשֶׁר
בְּגִבְעָה עִם אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים וְאָחִיו הֵלֵךְ
לִפְנֵי הָאֲרוֹן: 5 וְדָוִד א וְכָל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל
מִשְׁחָקִים לִפְנֵי יְהוָה בְּכָל עֲצֵי בְרוֹשִׁים
וּבְכַנְרֹת וּבְנֹבְלִים וּבְתַפִּים וּבְמִנְעֻנְעִים
וּבַצִּלְצִלִּים:

6 וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד־גֶּרֶן נָכוֹן וַיִּשְׁלַח עֲזָה אֶל־
אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּאָּחֲזוּ בּוֹ כִּי שָׁמְטוּ
הַבָּקָר: 7 וַיַּחֲרֵאֶף יְהוָה בְּעֲזָה וַיַּכְהוּ 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

his disrespect; there he died, next to the Ark of God. 8] David, distressed because the Eternal had broken out there against Uzzah, named that place Peretz-Uzzah, and so it is called to this day.

9] That day David was terrified of the Eternal, and he said, "How can I let the Ark of the Eternal come to me?" 10] So David was not willing to have the Ark brought to him at the City of David; instead, David diverted it to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. 11] The Ark of the Eternal remained at the house of Obed-Edom for three months, and [during that time] the Eternal blessed Obed-Edom and all his family.

12] When David was told that the Eternal had blessed Obed-Edom and all his family because of the Ark of God, David went and had the Ark of God brought up from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David, with rejoicing. 13] When the Ark bearers had gone six steps, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. 14] David, dressed in a linen tunic, skipped before the Eternal with all his might. 15] And so David and the whole House of Israel brought up the Ark of the Eternal with shouting and blasts of the shofar.

16] As the Ark of the Eternal entered the City of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, was looking out the window; when she observed King David

swinging—and suddenly the man guiding the cart dropped dead. Such a death is especially hard to explain. That it was God who "struck down" the hapless Uzzah was the chronicler's interpretation of the inexplicable. But this account also conveys the awe and fear with which ancient Israel regarded the Ark, which represented the divine Presence. Touching it however innocently was seen as playing with fire.

Disrespect. So the Targum; or, "error." The Hebrew word occurs only here in the Bible and its root meaning is not clear. A parallel account in Chronicles says that he laid a hand on the Ark.

8] *Distressed.* וַיַּיָּחַר, *va-yichar*, also used for God's anger (v. 7), so some translators suggest that David was angry with God. But this sentiment does not fit

הָאֱלֹהִים: וַיַּיָּחַר לְדָוִד עַל אֲשֶׁר פָּרַץ יְהוָה פָּרֶץ בְּעֵזוֹ וַיִּקְרָא לַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא פֶּרֶץ עֵזוֹ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה:

9 וַיִּרְא דָּוִד אֶת־יְהוָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וַיֹּאמֶר אֵיךְ יָבוֹא אֵלַי אָרוֹן יְהוָה: 10 וְלֹא־אָבֹה דָּוִד לְהַסִּיר אֵלָיו אֶת־אָרוֹן יְהוָה עַל־עֵיר דָּוִד וַיִּטְהוּ דָּוִד בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא עַבְד־אָדָם הַגִּתִּי: 11 וַיֵּשֶׁב אָרוֹן יְהוָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא בְּבֵית עֲבֵד אָדָם הַגִּתִּי שְׁלֹשָׁה חֳדָשִׁים וַיְבָרַךְ יְהוָה אֶת־עֲבֵד אָדָם וְאֶת־כָּל־בֵּיתוֹ:

12 וַיִּגַּד לַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד לֵאמֹר בָּרַךְ יְהוָה אֶת־בֵּית עֲבֵד אָדָם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ בְּעֵבֹר אָרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּלֶּךְ דָּוִד וַיַּעַל אֶת־אָרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים מִבֵּית עֲבֵד אָדָם עֵיר דָּוִד בְּשִׂמְחָה: 13 וַיְהִי כִּי צָעְדוּ נְשָׂאֵי אָרוֹן יְהוָה שֹׁשֶׁה צָעָדִים וַיִּזְבַּח שׂוֹר וּמְרִיא: 14 וְדָוִד מְכַרְפֵּר בְּכָל־עֵז לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְדָוִד חָגוֹר אֶפֶוד בָּד: 15 וְדָוִד וְכָל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מַעֲלִים אֶת־אָרוֹן יְהוָה בַּתְּרוּעָה וּבְקוֹל שׁוֹפָר:

16 וְהָיָה אָרוֹן יְהוָה בָּא עִיר דָּוִד וּמִיכָל בַּת־שָׁאוּל נֹשֶׁקֶפָה וּבְעַד הַחֲלוֹן וַתִּרְא אֶת־

David, who was at all times submissive to God. And in David's case the full expression matches what is used elsewhere to indicate distress. Indeed, he was terrified (v. 9), seeing the death as a bad omen.

10] *City of David.* Located to the east and south of the present walls of Jerusalem.

Obed-Edom the Gittite. His name suggests that he was a non-Israelite whom David commandeered.

13] *Six steps.* The first steps were crucial, and after David saw that things were going well he brought a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

14] *Tunic.* The text speaks of an *efod*; the shape of which is not fully clear. Its wearing emphasized the king's role as a priest (Exod. 28:4), in which capacity he proceeded to bless the people (v. 18).