

6:1–2 David’s twin victories against the Philistines guaranteed that Israel’s enemy would be motivated to return and fight another day. David was especially aware that his decision to dispose of the Philistine gods (cf. 5:21) would invite reprisals, perhaps even a second Philistine attempt to take possession of the ark of the covenant (cf. 1 Sam 4:11; 5:1). An attack against Israel to acquire and destroy the ark would have been particularly attractive due to the fact that the ark was located only a few miles from their own territory. In an apparent effort to forestall any such undertaking by the Philistines, “David brought together out of Israel” (v. 1) a comparatively large force of “thirty thousand chosen men”—an elite force that was truly national (cf. 1 Chr 13:5), not merely tribal, in nature—“to bring up ... the ark of God” (v. 2) and remove it to a safer location.³⁹ Since the days of Samuel’s childhood, the ark was kept in a private residence in a small village in the

³⁹ Here, as elsewhere, many scholars seriously question or reject the numerical data from the MT. Typical of this perspective is H. P. Smith, *Samuel*, 292. The LXX’s number is even higher, stating that David had seventy thousand men. Typical of those who are skeptical of even the MT’s number in H. P. Smith, *Samuel*, 292.

northwestern regions of Judahite territory (cf. 1 Sam 7:1–2). Accordingly, David assembled the troops at “Baalath of Judah,” otherwise known as Kiriath Jearim, the Israelite settlement in which the ark was situated (1 Sam 6:21–7:2).

David was especially concerned to prevent the ark from falling into enemy hands because of its significance for Israel’s religion. The ark was the object most closely associated with Israel’s God, a truth expressed by the writer’s notation that the “Name—the name of Yahweh of Armies, He who is seated on the cherubim—is called upon it.”⁴⁰ The ark contained the written agreement between Israel and the Lord (cf. Exod 25:16; 40:20; Deut 10:5; 1 Kgs 8:9), was a place of divine revelation (Exod 25:22; Num 7:89), and was in fact the Lord’s throne (cf. 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Kgs 19:15; Pss 80:1; 99:1; Isa 37:16). An object of such overwhelming significance would certainly make a valuable prize for the Philistines and was worthy of the massive protective

⁴⁰ The difficult clause אֲשֶׁר-נִקְרָא שֵׁם שֵׁם יְהוָה יְהוָה צָבָא וְזֶה יוֹשֵׁב הַכְּרֻבִּים עָלָיו is to be understood as a construction parallel to Deut 28:10. As such, the preposition עָלָיו is not attached to יוֹשֵׁב הַכְּרֻבִּים but rather to נִקְרָא שֵׁם.

force called up by David.

6:3–5 David had the men “set the ark of God on a new cart” (v. 3), the employment of a new cart being a sign of respect for the holy object. As respectful and well-intended as David’s effort was, however, it violated Torah guidelines regarding the transport of the ark (cf. **Num 4:15; 7:9**). In fact, David’s actions in this matter were more like those of the spiritually ignorant Philistines (cf. **1 Sam 6:7, 10**).

Celebrating was accompanied by “songs”⁴¹ and by harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals” (v. 5). The musical instruments included both stringed (harp and lyre) and percussion

⁴¹ The **MT** reads בְּכֹל עֵצֵי בְרוֹשִׁים, lit., “with all woods of cypress/fir/pine”—an apparent reference to the primary material out of which the musical instruments were constructed. The **NIV**, as well as almost all versions (but not **NKJV** or **NASB**), regularly substitutes the variant reading of **1 Chr 13:8**, בְּכֹל עֵז וְשִׁירִים. Clearly a close consonantal connection exists between the two readings; neither enjoys the complete support of the **LXX**. Thus, translators are left to judge for themselves which—if either—of the **MT** readings best preserves the original. I prefer retaining the Samuel reading in Samuel and the Chronicles reading in Chronicles.

instruments (tambourine, sistrum [a type of rattle], and cymbal). Leading the procession was Ahio, one of the “sons of Abinadab” (v. 4), with his brother Uzzah “guiding the cart” from behind. The passage implicitly assumes that Ahio and Uzzah were Levites from the clan of Kohath (cf. **Num 4:4–20**).

6:6–7 As the oxcart was being pulled down the hill, an unforeseen tragedy occurred, as “the oxen stumbled” (**NASB**, “the oxen nearly upset *it*”). Instinctively, the levitical priest Uzzah reached out and “took hold of the ark of God” to stabilize and protect it. However, in so doing he committed a capital offense established in the Torah (cf. **Num 4:15**). Since he was not an Aaronic priest, he was prohibited from touching this holiest object in the Yahwistic faith. Uzzah’s conscientious effort to protect the ark actually defiled it; accordingly, “the LORD’S anger burned against Uzzah” (v. 7). Uzzah’s act violated a divinely established taboo and was therefore “irreverent”; appropriately, “God”—not some impersonal force—“struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God.” For the third time in the books of Samuel (cf. **1 Sam 5:3–12; 6:19–20**), the Lord had demonstrated that he was capable of defending the ark. As on the second occasion, the

threat was not from a Philistine but from Israelites who disobeyed Torah guidelines regarding proper treatment of the Lord's throne.

6:8–12 David, who had acted with noble intentions in the matter of moving the ark, was angry. The stated reason for David's emotional storm was "because the LORD had broken out against Uzzah" (v. 8)—a clause that could either mean that David was mad at God for killing Uzzah (unlikely, since God was merely enforcing the Torah) or that he was upset that Uzzah had acted in such a way as to cause God to bring fatal judgment to bear (more likely). An Israelite tragedy was exactly what he attempted to avoid, and when Uzzah died, the king memorialized the event by renaming the accident site "Perez Uzzah" (= "Uzzah's Breach"/"The Outburst against Uzzah").

Having witnessed a dramatic demonstration of the Lord's zeal to protect his holiness, David became "afraid of the LORD that day" (v. 9). His deepened respect for the Lord's power and for his willingness to use it against anyone who would violate the Torah caused David to ask, "How can the ark of the LORD ever come to me?" Brueggemann notes the fear generated by this event was positive, for "when people are no longer awed,

respectful, or fearful of God's holiness, the community is put at risk."⁴²

David's intention had been to move the ark "to be with him in the City of David" (v. 10). There in the former Jebusite fortress the ark would have been protected from any Philistine reprisals. Once in Jerusalem, it would have played a useful role in increasing the prestige of the newly established national capital by locating the divine throne in the same city as David's.⁴³ However, the recent turn of events had changed David's plans, perhaps because he feared that some further transgression would cause the Lord's judgment to destroy the new capital.

Accordingly, David ordered that the ark be taken to the house of a Levite⁴⁴ (cf.

⁴² Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 249.

⁴³ J.-M. de Tarragon suggests that David was especially motivated to bring the ark to Jerusalem to provide a historic connection between Shiloh and Jerusalem and thus acting as a unifying force within the nation ("David et l'arche: II Samuel, VI," *RB* 86 [1979]: 514–23).

⁴⁴ Gordon (*I and II Samuel*, 233) asserts that Obed-Edom was a Philistine from Gath who may eventually have been enrolled in the ranks of the Levitical priests. This position is questionable since the practice of adopting Philistine men into the holiest tribe of Israel—or into any Israelite tribe, for that

1 Chr 15:16–18), Obed-Edom the Gittite” (v. 11). He was associated with a location of uncertain identity that had an olive or wine press (Hb. *gat*). Perhaps Obed-Edom’s residence was the closest levitical residence to the disaster; at that site, they hoped, further catastrophes could be avoided. The plan worked well; during the “three months” it was there, blessings—not curses—attended Obed-Edom and everything around him (v. 12; cf. 1 Chr 26:5). The blessing on Obed-Edom’s household seemingly took the form of fertility (cf. 1 Chr 26:8).

When David learned that a proper levitical household might experience blessings “because of the ark of God,” he concluded that Jerusalem, too, could benefit from the presence of the ark. So David completed his plans to bring the ark to the City of David. As in the first attempt three months prior, the ark’s pilgrimage to Jerusalem was carried out “with rejoicing.”

6:13–15 But there was one significant difference between the two attempts to transport the sacred throne; this time Levites carried it by hand (v. 13; cf. Num matter—is not explicitly affirmed anywhere in the OT. Cf. Baldwin, who recognizes a probable Levitical origin of Obed-Edom (1 and 2 Samuel, 208).

4:15), not transporting it on a cart (cf. v. 3). Costly fellowship offerings⁴⁵ consisting of “a bull and a fattened calf” were offered to the Lord after the Levites “had taken six steps.” This ritual pause after six steps suggests a symbolic significance, perhaps a sort of Sabbath rest, suggesting a consecration of the entire journey ⁴⁶

For the occasion of this almost ten-mile journey, David had prepared both his capital city and himself. First, he had erected a special tent in Jerusalem that would house the ark (cf. v. 17). According to 1 Chr 16:39–40, this was done without removing the tent in Gibeon, which was still used to house the remainder of the sacred tabernacle furnishings.⁴⁷ Second,

⁴⁵ The biblical text does not state what category of sacrifice was offered, but the Torah explicitly permitted the slaughter of a bull (שׁוֹר) for fellowship offerings (שְׁלָמִים); cf. Lev 4:10; 9:4, 18. Certainly such a voluntary offering would have been appropriate on this occasion.

⁴⁶ Youngblood (“1, 2 Samuel,” 873), following McCarter (1 Samuel) and R. A. Carlson (*David the Chosen King* [Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1964]), suggests that David had the priests offer sacrifices every six steps until the group arrived at the worship site in Jerusalem.

⁴⁷ David’s desire to build a temple for Yahweh

he prepared and wore special ritual garments: “a linen ephod” (v. 14), a piece of clothing otherwise reserved in Israelite society for priests and Levites (cf. [Exod 28:6](#); [1 Sam 2:18](#); [22:18](#)), and, according to [1 Chr 15:27](#), a “robe of fine linen.”

David’s use of the ephod suggests that he possessed the credentials of a priest.⁴⁸

in Jerusalem after he had previously made provisions for the Yahwistic worship center in Gibeon—including the installation of Zadok as priest there (cf. [1 Chr 16:39](#))—suggests a change in plans regarding the structure of Israelite religion during his administration. For one or more reasons—a desire to fulfill the Torah’s expectation that Yahwistic worship was to be centralized or his desire to increase the significance of Jerusalem—he took steps to move all, or at least the most important, Yahwistic activities to Jerusalem. Though he would later be denied the privilege of building the temple in Jerusalem, he took considerable efforts to facilitate the accomplishment of this task. Accordingly, at some point he transferred Zadok to serve at the Jerusalem tent ([2 Sam 15:25–29](#)), and provisions were stockpiled for the Jerusalem temple’s construction (cf. [1 Chr 22:2–16](#)).

⁴⁸ For a differing opinion cf. A. Phillips, “David’s Linen Ephod,” *VT* 19 (1969): 485–87, who takes the position that David’s linen ephod was in fact a brief loincloth, not a

How David attained sacerdotal status is not described in the Bible, but the acquisition of priestly status “in the order of Melchizedek” by the Davidic family line is hinted at in [Ps 110:4](#).⁴⁹ If indeed this title applied to David as well as one of his descendants (cf. [Heb 7:14–21](#)), he most likely acquired it by right of conquest: having conquered Jerusalem, he became possessor of all the titles and honors traditionally accorded to the king of the city. Melchizedek having been

Salem’s/Jerusalem’s priest-king of God Most High (cf. [Gen 14:18](#); [Heb 7:1](#))—that is, of Yahweh (cf. [Gen 14:22](#)), David as king of Jerusalem would have become a priest of Yahweh. However, as a Yahwistic priest in the order of Melchizedek, David would have been prohibited from performing his duties explicitly reserved for the Aaronic priesthood (cf. comments on vv. 17–18). His status as a Melchizedekian priest would not have restricted him from leading in certain aspects of worship, and this he did with vigor: David “danced [lit., “was dancing”] before the

priestly garment. Cf. E. H. Merrill, “Royal Priesthood: An Old Testament Messianic Motif,” *BibSac* 150 (1993): 50–61.

⁴⁹ The notation of a possible linkage between David and Melchizedek is found also in Gordon, *I and II Samuel*, 235.

LORD with all his might.” His actions were accompanied by “shouts and the sound of trumpets” (v. 15). Trumpets—ones blown by Levitical priests—had also been sounded during a movement of the ark in the days of Joshua (cf. [Josh 6:4–20](#)).

6:16–19 Missing from the procession bringing the ark to Jerusalem was “Michal daughter of Saul” (v. 16), who viewed the festivities from a palace window. It is unclear why Michal was absent from the event, since other women were permitted to be present (cf. v. 19), but the tone of the passage suggests that it was due to her jaded attitude toward the Lord and his anointed; previously she had been connected with the use of a teraphim, an object considered an abomination to the Lord (cf. [1 Sam 15:23](#); [19:13](#)). Michal could have resented David for forcing her to leave Paltiel as well (cf. [3:14–16](#)). During the triumphal moments when the ark passed through the streets of the royal fortress, David’s unbounded enthusiasm for his God expressed itself in “leaping and dancing before the LORD” (v. 16). His enthusiasm was not appreciated by Michal. In her attitudes and actions she was truly a “daughter of Saul” (vv. 20, 23) and not a wife of David.

Meanwhile, the celebrative group set the ark in its place of honor (v. 17; cf. [Ps](#)

[76:2](#) [Hb. v. 3]). Then David, once again acting sacerdotally, “sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowships before the LORD.” It is unclear from the text whether David actually officiated at these sacrifices or merely directed Levites to perform these tasks. If he did perform the sacrifices himself, he may have been acting in accordance with a precedent set by Melchizedek.

Priestly parallels certainly exist between David and Melchizedek in two other matters: pronouncing a blessing upon the Lord’s people and providing a food gift for those who had received the blessing (cf. [Gen 14:18–19](#)). As David “blessed the people in [Hb. “by”] the name of the LORD Almighty” (v. 18), Melchizedek blessed “Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth” ([Gen 14:19](#)). Also Melchizedek brought Abram and his men “bread and wine” ([Gen 14:18](#)); David “gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each person in the whole crowd of Israelites” (v. 19).

Both men and women participated in the climactic events of sacrifice and gift-giving as the ark came to rest in its new home. After the participants each had received a blessing and a token food gift from the Lord’s royal priest, they “went to

their homes.”

6:20–23 Following the conclusion of his public duties, David would not neglect his own household on this day of blessing (v. 20). But even before he could pronounce a word of blessing, Michal, daughter of Saul, began to berate him. She first accused him of “disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants”—thus exposing his nakedness. Second, she equated him with a “vulgar fellow” [Hb. *rēqîm*; “empty/worthless one”; cf. **Judg 9:4; 11:3; 2 Chr 13:7**]. Implicitly she suggested that immoral sexual urges, not zeal for the Lord, had motivated his enthusiastic activities in the festivities of the day.⁵⁰

David rejected Michal’s slanderous accusations; “it was before the LORD” (v. 21)—not the young women—that David was celebrating. Furthermore, his actions

⁵⁰ J. R. Porter’s hypothesis that David was participating in a syncretistic religious ritual that blended together cultic copulation with orthodox Yahwism is without merit, since it runs counter to the biblical presentation of David as a faithful man of the Torah, i.e., a man after Yahweh’s heart (“The Interpretation of 2 Samuel vi and Psalm cxxxii,” *JTS* 5 [1954]: 161–73). Furthermore, it is a fanciful interpretation based on the viewpoint of Michal that the biblical text rejects (v. 23).

were appropriate for one who had been “appointed” by the Lord as “ruler over the LORD’S people Israel.” David’s celebratory acts earlier in the day expressed the king’s unbridled joy in having been selected by the Lord for such significant service. Besides, assuming he was dressed as a properly outfitted Yahwistic priest, David’s energetic dancing could not have exposed his nakedness and so violated the Torah’s requirements (cf. **Exod 20:26**) since he was wearing a linen undergarment. In rejecting David, Michal was also rejecting the Lord because it was he who “chose” David in preference to Michal’s “father or anyone from his house” to lead Israel. More probably, Michal’s rejection of David actually was symptomatic of an underlying problem in her relationship with God.

Though David’s pious actions might have resulted in some embarrassing moments, David was willing to “become even more undignified” (v. 22), if necessary, to honor the Lord. He would even allow himself to be “humiliated” (Hb. *šāpal*) in his own eyes for the Lord’s sake. Elsewhere in the Old Testament (cf. **Prov 29:23**) *šāpal* is understood as a virtue signifying proper humility before the Lord. People of true faith, such as “these slave girls” who attended the Yahwistic celebra-

tion, would interpret David's actions for what they were—expressions of unrestrained, authentic faith; thus the king would “be held in honor” by people of faith. Like the people of profound faith throughout the ages, David was willing to risk being misunderstood and humiliated as he pursued a deeper relationship with God (cf. [1 Cor 3:18](#); [4:10](#)).

As a result of this incident “Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death” (v. [23](#)). In the Torah a blessing associated with obedience to the Lord is a fruitful womb (cf. [Exod 23:26](#); [Deut 7:14](#); [28:11](#)). To an audience knowledgeable of the Torah, Michal's unproductive womb would have been interpreted as a curse sent against a disobedient wife—not as evidence of a husband's neglect of a marital duty.⁵¹ Michal's lack of faith would mean that the house of Saul would be forever separate from Israel's eternal royal dynasty.

⁵¹ For an interpretation that views this verse as pointing to David's disassociation with Michal, cf. Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, [211](#), and McCarter, *II Samuel*, [187](#). But the verse implies an act of Yahweh, not an act of David.