

Lesson for September 12, 2021, "David Dances Before the Ark"

Background Scripture: 2 Samuel 6

As II Samuel opens, David is returning to Ziklag after he and his men slaughtered the Amalekites. After three days there, a man came to David and told him that Saul was dead (II Samuel 1:1-4). Upon asking the young man how did he know this, the man told David that he saw Saul leaning on his sword near death. He then went to Saul who asked him to kill him to prevent him from being killed by the Philistines. The man then said he did as Saul requested and killed him and brought his crown and his bracelet to David (see II Samuel 1:5-10).

When David learned that the man was an Amalekite, he had him killed for killing King Saul, the LORD'S anointed. After David was instructed by the LORD to return to Hebron, the men of Judah anointed him king over Judah, the southern part of the land (II Samuel 2:1-7). In the meantime, Abner the captain of Saul's army, made Ish-bosheth, Saul's remaining son, king over Israel, the northern tribes of the land where he reigned for two years while David reigned for seven years and six months over Judah from Hebron (II Samuel 2:8-11).

This situation led to civil war between Judah led by Joab who served David, and Israel led by Abner who served Ish-bosheth. Following this, there was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David, and the house of David prevailed with Abner coming over to David's side (II Samuel 3:1-26). When Joab found out that David had trusted and made peace with Abner, he advised the king that Abner really meant to deceive him. Then Joab met with Abner and killed him (II Samuel 3:27-28) because he had killed his brother Asahel (II Samuel 2:22-23; 3:30). When Saul's son, Ish-bosheth heard that Abner was dead, he became fearful and troubled thinking that he might be next. But two of Saul's men turned on Ish-bosheth and murdered him while he slept and cut off his head and proudly

took it to David (II Samuel 4:2-8). When David heard from these two men what they had done, he had them killed because they slew Ish-bosheth (II Samuel 4:9-12).

After this, the elders from the tribes of the northern kingdom came to David who reigned as king over Judah in Hebron and anointed him king over the northern kingdom of Israel as well (II Samuel 5:1-5), thus uniting the nation. David then took the stronghold of Jerusalem from the Jebusites, and made it his capital (II Samuel 5:6-9). He also twice defeated the Philistines (II Samuel 5:17-25). David then turned his attention to the Ark of the Covenant desiring to bring it to Jerusalem.

The Ark of the Covenant is central to this week's lesson. The Ark of the Covenant had been taken by the Philistines before Saul was anointed king (I Samuel 4:10-11; 9:17; 10:1). They brought it to Ashdod and put it in the house of their idol god Dagon (I Samuel 5:1-2). As a result, God killed many of the men in Ashdod. Realizing that the deaths were caused by the presence of Israel's Ark of the Covenant, the people of Ashdod sent it to Gath and then to Ekron because wherever the Philistines took the ark death followed in that city (I Samuel 5:3-10). Finally, the Philistines decided that the best thing to do was return the ark to Israel (I Samuel 5:11). Before doing that, they dropped the ark off in Bethshemesh where the people there made the mistake of looking into the ark, bringing God's wrath upon them (I Samuel 6:8-19). The men of Bethshemesh had the ark taken away to Kirjath-jearim where it was kept in the home of Abinadab for twenty years (I Samuel 6:21; 7:1-3).

The text this week begins after the twenty years that the Ark of the Covenant was in the house of Abinadab. David was now king over the united kingdom of Israel and Judah (II Samuel 5:3-5).

The lesson refers to being in the presence of God. Several thousand years ago, we know about one group of people who experienced the presence of God. They were called the Israelites. After leaving Egypt they went into the wilderness and built a

beautiful tent called the Tabernacle. This was the place where they would meet with God. Inside the Tabernacle was a gold box called the Ark of the Covenant. This ark was where a small part of the presence of God would come and visit. Whenever the people saw this Ark of the Covenant, they were reminded of the presence of God. Three times, this text emphasizes the singing and dancing with which the Ark of the Lord was brought to the tent David had erected on Mount Zion.

In verses 6-12, Uzzah reaches out to steady the Ark and keep it from falling off the cart because the oxen had tripped, and he is struck dead. Yet others must have touched the Ark, to load it onto the cart. Why were they not killed too? The text does not explain the why. We can only speculate about the attitude of Uzzah.

David's dancing may have been part of a prolonged and complex liturgical procession. The details are long lost, but its intensity remains in the description of David's whirling and leaping. His gyrations almost convey a mood of desperation. David might well be terrified of the power of this Ark should anything go wrong before he got it home.

Michal seemed to be really angry for David's perceived impropriety. We must look at the context in which this celebration takes place. God had turned his face against King Saul and He had blessed David and promised him a Kingdom and a Covenant that would last forever.

That's part of the story in Samuel. It is not surprising that Michal would despise her husband David, because he was about to take her father's throne, and she knew it.

A further point can be made that David's first and deepest allegiance was to God. And he saw it only fit to dance in

celebration of the God who had chosen him and his descendants to be a covenant partner forever. Before God, David felt it to be inappropriate to come as the King of Israel, but rather as a common servant and partner with the people of God. Instead, David acknowledged the Kingship and Rule of God in Israel. In this context he perceived his royal garments to be an impediment to worship God in humility and truth.

When God calls us to be His covenant partners we are wise to remove all impediments that may stand between God and us. Rather than elevating ourselves before God, we are called to humility and awe before the God who has saved us. God is King. And He deserves our humblest devotion and praise.

When we talk about David dancing in the streets we may relate that to some stories that our missionaries have shared with us over the years about how other people express their worship for God. They may often dance and sing on their way to church on Sunday morning.

How might our faith might be affected if we sang and danced our way to church. How would non-church people perceive us? We have a lot of reason to celebrate and give praise to God.

As we celebrate and rejoice before God, as David and the Israelites did, we pass on the inheritance of our faith to generations to come. Our children and grandchildren will assimilate that which is most important to us.

We are chosen by Jesus Christ to celebrate God's love and grace toward us. We are invited to be expressive in our gratitude toward God. The Christian life is a life of joy and celebration.

When our lives are touched by the love of God, His grace flows into this world through the channel of our love, healing it, straightening its twistedness, mending its brokenness, and enlightening its darkness. The celebration of the Christian life, is to touch the lives of others and invite them to experience the blessings of God.

David was dancing. The presence of God inspired David to dance. David finishes the parade, feeds everyone, and sends them all home. After everyone has left, David goes home to his wife, Michal.

Michal is the daughter of King Saul, The king that David replaced. Michal ended up marrying King David. David walks into his house to bless his family. He was excited to celebrate more when he got home. He walks in the door and Michal, I imagine, is just standing there. She looks at David and says: "Look at the king making a fool of himself. What were you doing? What was all the dancing and carrying on for? You are the king. You should act like it. My father would never have done that. What are you thinking?"

David's, wife is embarrassed and upset. She did not appreciate David's dancing and celebrating God's presence. David says something to his wife that I think is very helpful for us. This idea should be front and center in our minds when we think about the presence of God: When we sing songs, when we pray, when we say verses out loud...anytime we worship the Lord we need to remember it is for the Lord.

Often we are so concerned about how we look and what people think about us, when we should be focusing on our God and our worship of Him.

David wasn't so concerned about what the people around him thought of him. David was focused on what God thought of Him. David's worship wasn't for the other people in the parade; David's worship was for God, alone.

God's presence is no longer inside the Ark of the Covenant. You know, it is in us. God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is inside every Christian. God's presence is in this room and we should worship like it was.

Closing: For the love that casts out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen.

Next week's lesson September 19, 2021, "Glorifying God"

Background Scripture: Mark 10:46-52, Luke 18:35-43

Sources for this lesson: The Bible, International Sunday School Commentary, Adult Sunday School Lessons, by Nathan Johnson, Faith Sermons by Faith Life, and The Present Word Lesson.