**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**2 SAMUEL-003. DEATH AND LIFE FROM THE ARK by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1.* *Again, David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. 2. And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the Lord of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims. 3. And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart. 4. And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark. 5. And David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals. 6. And when they came to Nachon's thrashing-floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. 7. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God. 8. And David was displeased, because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah: and he called the name of the place Perez-uzzah to this day. 9. And David was afraid of the Lord that day, and said, How shall the ark of the Lord come to me? 10. So David would not remove the ark of the Lord unto him into the city of David: but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. 11. And the ark of the Lord continued in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months: and the Lord blessed Obed-edom, and all his household. 12. And it was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God. So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness.."*

*2 Samuel 6:1-12*

**I.** The first section (verses 1-5) describes the joyful reception and procession. The parallel account in 1 Chronicles states that Baalah, or Baale, was Kirjath-jearim. Probably the former was the more ancient Canaanitish name, and indicates that it had been a Baal sanctuary. If so, the presence of the ark there was at once a symbol and an omen, showing Jehovah's conquest over the obscene and bloody gods of the land, and forecasting His triumph over all the gods of the nations. Every Baale shall one day be a resting-place of the ark of God. The solemn designation of the ark, as called by the Name, the name of the Lord of Hosts, that dwelleth between the cherubim, is significant on this, its reappearance after so long eclipse, and, by emphasising its awful sanctity, prepares for the incidents which are to follow. The manner of the ark's transport was irregular; for the law strictly enjoined its being carried by the Levites by means of bearing-poles resting on their shoulders; and the copying of the Philistines cart, though a new one was made for the purpose, indicates the desuetude into which the decencies of worship had fallen in seventy years. In 1 Chronicles, the singular words in verse 5, which describe David as playing before the Lord on the very unlikely things for such a purpose, all manner of instruments of fir wood, become with all their might: even with songs which seems much more reasonable. A slight alteration in three letters and the transposition of two would bring our text into conformity with I Chronicles, and the conjectural emendation is tempting. Who ever heard of fir-wood musical instruments? The specified ones which follow were certainly not made of it, and songs could scarcely fail to be mentioned.

At all events, we see the glad procession streaming out of the little city buried among its woods; the cart drawn by meek oxen, and loaded with the unadorned wooden chest, in the midst; the two sons or descendants of its faithful custodian honoured to be the teamsters; the king with the harp which had cheered him in many a sad hour of exile; and the crowd making a joyful noise before the Lord, which might sound discord in our ears, as some lifted up shrill songs, some touched stringed instruments, some beat on timbrels, some rattled metal rods with movable rings, and some clashed cymbals together. It was a wild scene, in which there was a dangerous resemblance to the frantic jubilations of idolatrous worship. No doubt there were true hearts in that crowd, and none truer than David's. No doubt we have to beware of applying our Christian standards to these early times, and must let a good deal that is sensuous and turbid pass, as, no doubt, God let it pass. But confession of sin in leaving the ark so long forgotten would have been better than this tumultuous joy; and if there had been more trembling in it, it would not have passed so soon into wild terror. Still, on the other hand, that rejoicing crowd does represent, though in crude form, the effect which the consciousness of God's presence should ever have. His felt nearness should be, as the Psalmist says, the gladness of my joy. Much of our modern religion is far too gloomy, and it is thought to be a sign of devotion and spiritual-mindedness to be sad and of a mortified countenance. Unquestionably, Christianity brings men into the continual presence of very solemn truths about themselves and the world which may well sober them, and make what the world calls mirth incongruous.

There is no music in the life

That rings with idiot laughter solely.

But the Man of Sorrows said that His purpose for us was that His joy might remain in us, and that our joy might be full; and we but imperfectly apprehend the gospel if we do not feel that its joys much more abound than its sorrows, and that they even burn brightest, like the lights on safety-buoys, when drenched by stormy seas.

**II.** The second section contains the dread vindication of the sanctity of the ark, which changed joy into terror, and silenced the songs. At some bad place in the rocky and steep track, the oxen stumbled or were restive. The spot is called in Samuel the threshing-floor of Nachon, but in Chronicles the owner is named Chidon. As the former word means a stroke and the latter destruction, they are probably not to be taken as proper names, but as applied to the place after this event. The name given by David, however--Perez-uzzah--proved the more permanent to this day. Uzzah, who was driving while his brother went in front to pilot the way, naturally stretched out his hand to steady his freight, just as if it had been a sack of corn; and, as if he had touched an electric wire, fell dead, as the story graphically says, by the ark of God. What confusion and panic would agitate the joyous singers, and how their songs would die on their lips!

What harm was there in Uzzah's action? It was most natural, and, in one point of view, commendable. Any careful waggoner would have done the same with any valuable article he had in charge. Yes; that was just the point of his error and sin, that he saw no difference between the ark and any other valuable article. His intention to help was right enough; but there was profound insensibility to the awful sacredness of the ark, on which even its Levitical bearers were forbidden to lay hands. All his life Uzzah had been accustomed to its presence. It had been one of the familiar pieces of furniture in Abinadab's house, and, no doubt, familiarity had had its usual effect. Do none of us ministers, teachers, and others, to whom the gospel and the worship and ordinances of the Church have been familiar from infancy, treat them in the same fashion? Many a hand is laid on the ark, sometimes to keep it from falling, with more criminal carelessness of its sacredness than Uzzah showed. Note, too, how swiftly an irreverent habit of treating holy things grows. The first error was in breaking the commanded order for removal of the ark by the Levites. Once in the cart, the rest follows. The smallest breach in the feeling of awe and reverence will soon lead to more complete profanation. There is nothing more delicate than the sense of awe. Trifled with ever so little, it speedily disappears. There is far too little of it in our modern religion. Perfect love casts out fear and deepens awe which hath not torment.

Was not the punishment in excess of the sin? We must remember the times, the long neglect of the ark, the decay of religion in Saul's reign, the critical character of the moment as the beginning of a new era, when it was all-important to print deep the impression of sanctity, and the rude material which had to be dealt with; and we must not forget that God, in His punishments, does not adopt men's ideas of death as such a very dreadful thing. Many since have followed in David's wake, and been displeased, because the Lord broke forth upon Uzzah; but he and they have been wrong. He ought to have known better, and to have understood the lesson of the solemn corpse that lay there by the ark; instead of which he gives way to mere terror, and was afraid of the Lord. David afraid of the Lord! What had become of the rapturous love and strong trust which ring clear through his psalms? Is this the man who called God his rock and fortress and deliverer, his buckler and the horn of his salvation and his high tower, and poured out his soul in burning words, which glow yet through all the centuries and the darkness of earth? It was ill for David to fall thus below himself, but well for us that the eclipse of his faith and love should be recorded, to hearten us, when the like emotions fall asleep in our souls. His consciousness of impurity was wholesome and sound, but his cowering before the ark, as if it were the seat of arbitrary anger, which might flame out destruction for no discernible reason, was a woful darkening of his loving insight into the heart of God.

**III.** The last section (verses 10-12) gives us the blessings on the house of Obed-edom and the glad removal of the ark to Jerusalem. Obed-edom is called a Gittite, or man of Gath; but he does not appear to have been a Philistine immigrant, but a native of another Gath, a Levitical city, and himself a Levite. There is an Obededom in the lists of David's Levites in Chronicles who is probably the same man. He did not fear to receive the ark, and, worthily received, the presence which had been a source of disaster and death to idolaters, to profanely curious pryers into its secret, and to presumptuous irreverence, became a fountain of unbroken blessing. This twofold effect of the same presence is but a symbol of a solemn law which runs through all life, and is especially manifest in the effects of Christ's work upon men. Everything has two handles, and it depends on ourselves by which of them we lay hold of it, and whether we shall receive a shock that kills, or blessings. The same circumstances of poverty, or wealth, or sorrow, or temptation, make one man better and another worse. The same presence of God will be to one man a joy; to another, a terror. What maketh heaven, that maketh hell. The same gospel received is the fountain of life, purity, peace; and, rejected or neglected, is the source of harm and death. Jesus Christ is set for the fall and rising again of many. Either He is the savour of life unto life, the rock on which we build, or He is the savour of death unto death, the stone on which we stumble and break our limbs.