

As It Is Written

*Hell is full of good intentions ...”
-- St. Bernard of Clairvaux*

In this, and the following two articles, we will reflect on whether our good intentions mitigate our transgressions in the eyes of God¹. To this end, we'll examine three relevant texts -- 2 Sam 6:6-7, Lev 10:1-7, and Matt 21:28- 32.

Let's begin with the story of Uzzah, a Levite priest (2 Sam 6:6-7):

But when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset it. ⁷And the anger of the LORD burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his error² and he died there by the ark of God

What do we learn from this text?

Even though Uzzah's intention was to protect the Ark from defilement, he was nevertheless punished because he had failed to live up to his priestly obligations (He was a Levite priest after his father, Abinadab in whose house the Ark was to reside). More specifically, Uzzah could have prevented his own death by reminding David of God's very specific protocol for moving the Ark, but neglected to do so. In other words, Uzzah could have prevented all of this had he been faithful to God's instructions.

By his conduct, he allowed King David to commit two transgressions: First, David had the Ark moved on his own authority. Second, he had the Ark moved using an ox-cart in direct violation of God's command that only Levites may move the Ark and then only on their shoulders. As a member of the priestly tribe (a Levite) and as a caretaker of the Ark for twenty or so years, Uzzah's priestly obligation was to have reminded David of the correct protocols. Under no circumstances should Uzzah have complied with David's wishes. Uzzah's core error was elevating his respect for David's wishes above that of God's.

Here are the details: First, David initiates a cascade of transgressions by moving the Ark to Jerusalem under his own authority. However, instead of following the prescribed way of moving the Ark (see, for example, Exodus 25:12-14; Num 4:5-6, 15), David follows

¹ Related: in Genesis 4:6-7 God reveals to Cain that his failure to rule over his [emotions are the pathway to sin](#), i.e., he must not let his emotions get the better of him.

² The Hebrew word I've translated as 'error', is ambiguous. For example, the Greek of the LXX translates the Hebrew as "for his hastiness" while in Aramaic it is translated as "deliberate error".

the example of the Philistines by using an ox-cart³.

Uzzah, whose family had been ordered (1 Sam 7:1) to take care of the Ark decades earlier, should have been (and almost certainly was) familiar with rules concerning the ark and its movement. But when David ordered him to commit a clear transgression of God's commands, rather than correct them by pointing out proper protocols, he acquiesced to David's wishes. Uzzah's elevation of David's wishes over God's was Uzzah's fatal mistake. One obvious truth to be learned from this unhappy story is that the Uzzah's good intentions did not mitigate God's wrath.

Now, go and study

³ In 1 Chronicles 13 (and 15) David is recorded as admitting his error. Further, when he next decides to move the Ark, he is careful to follow the prescribed formula (as did Solomon, by the way, when he moves the Ark even later in 1 Kings 8).