

The Obed-edoms in First Chronicles – Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D.

The Obed-edom with whom the Ark of the Covenant was left for three months after the death of Uzza is said to have been a “Gittite” (or Gathite, 1 Chr. 13:13–14). This means he could have been a Philistine from Gath who accepted Jehovah as his God, moved to Israel and probably later became a member of David’s bodyguard (i.e., a Cherethite). Still, in view of the Ark’s having been captured and kept seven months in Philistia (1 Sam. 5–6), it seems unlikely that David would have deposited it with *any* Philistine.

Moreover, the context in the Book of First Chronicles is unmistakable. Chapter 13 verse 14 states that the house of Obed-edom the Gittite was “blessed” by the LORD for his having kept the Ark for three months. Now at 1 Chronicles 26:1, 4–5, and 8 (also vs. 15) we find an Obed-edom who was a *porter* of the family of the Korahites,¹ and verse 5 records that “God blessed him”. We take this connection as being one of the main keys for identifying the various Obed-edoms in this section of Scripture. Consequently, these men are one and the same. Further, he was a Levite from the levitical city of Gath-rimmon (thus a Gittite) located in the tribe of Dan (Josh. 19:40, 45).

It should and must be acknowledged that the Obed-edom who took in the Ark of God is the major person by that name that appears in First Chronicles. Having faithfully fulfilled that task and obviously already one of the levitical musicians, he was apparently specially honored by being placed in the “second degree” to sing and play the harp (1 Chr. 15:16, 18).² Furthermore, we note that the man Jeiel follows Obed-edom’s name at 15:18 and also at 15:21, where both are said to play the harp for the procession which was bringing back the Ark. These two are also so identified at 1 Chr. 16:5. He is the same as in the above and was Obed-edom #1.

The Obed-eden in 15:25 is obviously the same man as at 13:13–14, so he is also Obed-edom #1. However, the Obed-eden at 15:24 is not the same individual. Verses 15:23–24 speak of seven priests blowing trumpets as they paraded in front of the Ark and names four “doorkeepers”,³ obviously two marched behind the chest and two in front of the seven priests. Here we find the name “Obed-edom” followed by a Jehiah, not by Jeiel (as at 15:18, 21, and 16:5). Further, nothing is said of this Obed-edom as playing the harp. The tasks are different. Again, 15:24 is a different person. He was Obed-edom #2.

As to 16:38, the latter Obed-edom is said to be the son of Juduthun⁴ and is further clearly set apart from the preceding Obed-edom in the verse by the word “also”. He was Obed-edom #3. Indeed, the first Obed-eden here is the same as #1 above. That he is said to be a *porter* along with 68 brethren wonderfully confirms our previous “blessed” connection of 13:14 with 26:1 and 26:5, for 26:8 adds that this Obed-edom had 62 brethren that were *porters*. Taken with the fact that both passages deal with an Obed-edom, that all his brethren were *porters*, and that 68 and 62 are “close”, we proclaim these data as the other main key for unlocking our puzzle and that our thesis is thus proven. How? Because the number “discrepancy” is merely an apparent one. David brought the Ark back to Jerusalem circa 1047 BC (the 68), but he reorganized the duties of the priests, levites and porters in his final year, 1015 BC (the 62, cp. 1 Chr. 23:1 ff. to 26:21). That the numbers differ somewhat after 32 years is no inconsistency whatever. In fact, were they the same would we not then be puzzled? Thus, there are three Obed-edoms in the passages before us – obviously “Obed-edom” was a common name at this time, much as John is today.

¹ Kohath was the third son of Levi, the son of Jacob and Leah. He became the founder of the great Kohathite family (Gen. 46:11; Exo. 6:16 and 18) of which Moses and Aaron were members (Exo. 6:20). The Kohathites were subdivided into the houses of the Amramites, the Izharites, the Hebronites, and the Uzzielites (Exo. 6:18; Num. 3:27).

Now Korah was of the family of Kohath, house of Izar (Exo. 6:21; Num. 16:21). Out of envy over leadership, Dathan, Abiram, and Korah rebelled against Moses (Korah’s first cousin). God defended the authority He had placed on Moses and Aaron by opening the ground wherein the rebels were swallowed up. Korah’s descendants are called both Korahites as well as Korathites – they were a “father’s house” among the Kohathites. Heman the singer (1 Chr. 15:17, 16:41–42, 25:4–5) and Samuel the prophet were Korahites (1 Chr. 6:33–38).

² Here it is stated that this Obed-edom is a Levite and a porter. The first degree were the chief singers in vs. 17: the Kohathite Heman, the Gershonite Asaph, and the Merarite Ethan.

³ Both “porters” and “doorkeepers” are translated from the same Hebrew word (<yrvx, plural, Strongs #7778).

⁴ This Jeduthun is not the chief musician Jeduthun (1 Chr. 16:41–42, 25:1 and 3; 2 Chr. 5:12) who was also known as Ethan (1 Chr. 6:44, 15:17) and was a descendant of Merari. The Jeduthun in 1 Chr. 16:38b, whose son was Obed-edom, was a descendant of Korah (1 Chr. 26:1, 4) and a grandson of Kohath.