

A CLUMSY OX—OR A CARELESS CART DRIVER?

INTRODUCTION:

Just 6 months ago—on Sunday, November 21st, 2021—a joy-filled Christmas parade in Waukesha, Wisconsin, comprised of school marching bands, children waving pompoms, and Milwaukee’s famous Dancing Grannies, ended abruptly—and tragically—when Darrell Brooks Jr drove through police barricades with his SUV and plowed his way through the parade, killing 6 and injuring 62 others.

The celebrating and music instantly stopped. Singing turned into shrieks and sobbing; laughter turned into crying; and the joy on faces quickly gave way to terror. Anticipation regarding what was next in the parade line was instantly replaced by a frantic search for loved ones that had accompanied the parade-goers. And then came the sirens... Not a pleasant scene to be reminded of, is it?

Some of you may be surprised to learn that there was a parade *in the Bible* that also ended *in death*! Please take your Bibles and turn to II Samuel 6 and follow along as I read verses 3-7. The death was obviously *not caused* by a reckless criminal in an SUV, though, was it? Instead, *God Himself* killed Uzzah!

But *why*? What was Uzzah’s “error” that was so horrible and wicked that God killed him on the spot? Did God *overreact*—or was God *just* in doing what He did? That is what we are going to look at this morning.

In order to really understand the significance of what happened, we need to start with...

1. The description of the ark

There are primarily *two arks* referred to in the Bible—the one that God *had Noah build* to rescue Noah and his family *from the flood*—and the one referred to here. It is obviously important to *pay attention to the context* to know which one is being talked about! Probably a month or so ago in children’s Sunday School, we were looking at *this* ark—often referred to as the ark of the covenant. The young people were a bit confused because the only ark *they were familiar with* was the one that *Noah built*!

And just this past Sunday, Mac and I were talking after church about going to the life-sized Ark down in Kentucky. We talked about that some, then he motioned with his hand as to how he thought the shape of it may have been. For some reason, I thought he had switched gears and was now talking about the ark of the covenant! Needless to say, it was *the young guy*—not the senior saint—who was *confused*!

So what is this “ark of *God*?” It is called that in verses 2,3,6,7, and 12. It is also called the ark *of the LORD* in verses 9,10,11,13,15,16, and 17. So “ark *of God*” and “ark *of the LORD*” are obviously being used here interchangeably. We get a little more of an idea of what the ark is from a phrase found in the 2nd half of vs 2: “the LORD of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims.” Will come back to that in a little bit.

A. The specifics of the ark

The ark was a “box” for lack of a better word that was roughly 4 ft long x 2-1/2 ft wide by x 2-1/2 ft deep. It was made of acacia (shittim) wood that was covered inside and out *with gold*. God had given Moses *detailed instructions* on how to construct the ark in Exodus 25:10-22. I’m not going to have you turn there but notice on your outline the last couple of verses from that passage.

Exodus 25:21 “And thou shalt put the mercy seat above **upon the ark**; and **in the ark** thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee.” So the ark *had a cover*—called the mercy seat—and *inside the ark* would be placed a copy of the testimony—a reference to the 10 Commandments.

Now **Exodus 25:22** “And there **I will meet with thee**, and **I will commune** with thee from above the mercy seat, **from between the two cherubims** which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.”

God will commune with them from *where*? From *above the mercy seat*, from *between the two cherubims*. That is why vs 2 refers to God as “the LORD of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims.”

On the back of your outline, I have a picture of what one person thinks the ark...and the mercy seat...and the cherubim looked like. The other thing I want to bring to your attention as you look at the picture is the **poles** on the side of the ark. Our KJ Bibles refers to them as “staves” and they were used to **carry** the ark. More on that later, too!

B. The symbolism behind the ark

The ark, then, became a symbol of the **presence of God**. God revealed Himself there—but was not **confined to** that location as His dwelling place. **Nothing** can confine or contain God, of course! In Solomon’s prayer while dedicating the temple he said in **I Kings 8:27** “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and **heaven of heavens cannot contain thee**; how much less this house that I have builded?”

C. The significance of the ark

To understand the significance of the ark, we need to understand the history on how the people of Israel **worshipped God** after leaving the land of Egypt—and while wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. They were obviously on the move, so the place they worshipped was **not a building**—it was a **movable tent** called the tabernacle.

Around the tabernacle was the **outer court**—a kind of “fence” that was 7-1/2 feet high made of fine-twined linen, **a curtain** of sorts. The **outer court** was 150 feet long and 75 feet wide. The **tabernacle** inside this curtained courtyard and was 15 feet wide... by 45 feet long... by 15 feet high.

The tabernacle was divided into 2 sections by a thick curtain called **a veil**. The area **behind the veil** was 15 feet by 15 feet and was called **the holy of holies**. Behind the veil—**in the holy of holies**—is where the ark of God was kept, making it the most significant piece of furniture in the entire tabernacle!

D. The sacredness of the ark

The ark was not just significant—it was also sacred! So what’s the difference? Here’s an example. A fishing pole is **significant** when it comes to fishing—but it is obviously not an item that is **sacred**. No one shows **reverence to their fishing pole** and treats it as though it were holy! The ark, on the other hand, was **both significant** and **sacred**! It was **holy**; it was to be treated in a **reverent way** because it symbolized the place where God dwelt! We see the sacredness of the ark in primarily two ways.

i. Approaching the ark

The ark was approached one day per year—on the **Day of Atonement**. The details of the Day of Atonement are found in Leviticus 16. For the sake of time, we are not going to turn there, but here is a recap.

--Only the high priest could go inside the holy of holies

--He wore special clothing and brought the **blood of a bullock**—that he sacrificed for **his sins**—inside the veil. Once inside, the blood was sprinkled with his finger **once upon** the mercy seat—and 7 times **in front** of it. --He went in a **second time** with the blood of a goat—this one sacrificed for the **sins of the people**—and sprinkled it in the same way.

How important was it that these directions be followed? Twice in this chapter, we read the phrase “that he die not.” In other words, if the high priest failed to do things the way God said, he could **lose his life!**

There is a second way we see the sacredness of the ark and it is this: **ii. Moving the ark**

It shouldn’t surprise us to learn that God not only gave instructions on how to **approach** the ark—He also gave special instructions on how to **move** the ark. We have those instructions in Numbers 4. We will be coming back here to II Sam 6, but I want us to turn now to Numbers 4.

--Vs 4. This shall be the service of the sons of Kohath. We know from vs 2 that they were from the tribe of Levi. Here are their responsibilities concerning “the most holy things.”

--Vs 5. Aaron and his sons shall take down the **covering veil**—the one that separated the holy of holies from the rest of the tabernacle—and covered the ark with it. In vs 6 it says that the outer covering was **blue**. One commentator pointed out that the ark was the only piece of furniture that had a **colored cloth over the water-proof covering**, making it stand out among all the other things that were being moved!

--Now vs 15. After Aaron and his sons covered everything, then the sons of Kohath would come and move it. How? They shall “bear it”—meaning **carry it on their shoulders**. How do we know that?

Because in Numbers 7, we read of Moses giving wagons to various Levites to help them carry certain items. **Numbers 7:9** “But unto the sons of Kohath he gave none: because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was that they should **bear upon their shoulders.**”

One more thing it is important for us to see in Numbers 4:15, found towards the end of the verse. It says, “after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall **not touch any holy thing, lest they die.**” Remember that! They could **touch the poles** to carry the ark—but **not** the ark itself!

With that as a rather long description of the ark, let’s consider next...

2. The desire of David to bring back the ark

Let’s go back to II Samuel 6. Notice verses 1-2. David’s desire to bring the ark to Jerusalem was not a bad desire—it was good one! God was not against it—He was for it!

A. The reason for bringing the ark back

The worship of God had been neglected during the reign of King Saul. **Eli** was a priest at that time, so were his **two sons**—Hophni and Phineas. Although Hophni and Phineas were priests, they were extremely wicked. In fact, I Sam 2:12 says “they knew not the LORD.” They **treated lightly the offerings** made to God and discouraged people from obeying the commandments of God. To them, the ark was nothing more than a **good luck charm**—so much so that they **sent out it with the army** when they went to fight the Philistines!

Even more surprising than them sending it out with the army is that God allowed the ark to be **captured by the Philistines!** Although God allowed the ark to be captured, He was **not** going to allow the Philistines to think that **their gods** were greater He—the true God of heaven! In fact, every place the ark of God ended up **brought trouble** to the Philistines!

--First, they put the ark of God **in the temple** of one of their gods—Dagon. The next day, they awoke to discover that their idol **was laying face-first** before the ark of the Lord! They put Dagon’s idol back where it was and the next morning, it was **again fallen face first** before the ark of the Lord—this time with its **head and hands cut off!**

--At the same time, all the people in the city of Ashdod began to develop tumors—probably some kind of boil—so they sent the ark to the city of Gath. The men of Gath broke out in tumors, too, so they sent the ark to Ekron. News had traveled fast and when the ark showed up at Ekron, the people there cried out “They have brought about the ark of the god of Israel to us, to slay us and our people” (I Sam 5:10).

On top of that, **mice were now overrunning** the land and a large number of Philistines began to die. After 7 months, the Philistines said, “Enough is enough—we need to send this thing back to Israel!” They were curious, though, to know if this **was really God’s hand** against them—or just coincidence.

So they came up **with a test**. First, they **put the ark on a cart**—along with **mice they had made out of gold** as an offering to God. They then took **two cows**—who had just had calves—and tied the cows to the cart. They **separated the calves from their mothers**, then turned the cows loose that were pulling the cart. Their thought was this—the cows would want to **go back home to find** their calves! If they didn’t, though, and headed straight toward the city of Beth-shemesh, they would know God was behind it. **I Sam 6:12** “And the kine [cows] took the straight way to the way of Beth-shemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left...” So the ark was now headed to the land of Israel!

A number of years went by—some commentators say as many as 70—and now David is king in Jerusalem and wants the ark brought there. It was time for God’s people to start worshipping God in the right way and part of that involved getting the ark of the covenant back to where it belonged. So it was obviously a good desire! Notice as well....

B. The respect in bringing the ark back

David was **not treating** this lightly. In fact, he was going “all out” to celebrate this occasion. Notice again vs 1. David gathered the leaders together—30,000—to witness and participate in the bringing back of the ark. In vs 5, we see a wide variety of musical instruments that would be played during this parade of sorts. In I Chronicles 13—a parallel passage to this one—there is a reference to **singing** along with the music.

This was certainly going to be a **mighty celebration**, fitting for the ark of God coming into the city of Jerusalem! One small problem—which was actually a **major catastrophe**: David failed to ensure he was transporting the ark of God **in God's way!**

--How **was it** to be transported? **On the shoulders** of the sons of Kohath!

--How **did they** transport it? The way the Philistines did—on a cart!

A man named Mitchell wrote: "*If God were worthy of their worship, why did they take no sufficient pains to worship Him according to His Word?*" (Bible Hub)

3. The disobedience and death of Uzzah

Back to vs 6. The clumsy ox **stumbled**, the ark looked as though it would **fall off the cart**, Uzzah put out his **hand to steady it...** and boom—"God smote him there for his error, and there he died by the ark of God."

The music...and singing...and parade **came to a halt** as word spread through the crowd as to what had just happened. How could God be so cruel...so harsh...so hasty... to kill a man—who seemed to be doing a heroic thing by protecting the ark?

4. The defense of God regarding the death of Uzzah

So how do we **defend God** for behaving in such a way? On the one hand, **God needs no defending!**

He is God—we are not! He is perfect—we are not!

And if He does things that we **do not fully understand**, the problem is **not with Him**—it is with us! And yet...we still have questions. An instant, hasty death for an act that **could have been out of reflex** certainly causes us to question the **long-suffering** of God. So what are we to think? And what are we to learn?

The main lesson, of course, is that... A. God is holy!

And because He is holy, He **hates** sin and **punishes** sin and **does right** when He punishes sin! But let's break this down a little more. Here are some summary statements we can make based on this scenario—and the holiness of God.

1) God expects us to **know** what He says—and **obey** what He says! Both David and Uzzah **should have known** what God said regarding the proper way to transport the ark.

On a similar note, **2)** God expects us to **look to His Word** to find out how to please Him and worship Him—**not to the world!** Stated another way, **don't copy the world's way** to approach and worship God—look in the Bible!

3) Sometimes God's things can become "**common place**" to us. We see in vs 3, that the ark was being moved from the house of Abinadab. We also see in the same verse that Uzzah and Ahio were the sons of Abinadab—meaning the ark was in **their home**. It is certainly possible that the ark had lost its significance to them as the dwelling place of God and became "just another thing" in the house. Can that happen to us?

What about the way we **treat God's Word**? We are not to **worship** the Bible—we worship **the God of the Bible**—but we should not treat God's Word like it is just another book!

Holiness is not the only truth taught, here, though. A 2nd truth—and one that is easy to overlook—is this:

B. God is approachable

Notice vs 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." God **didn't strike Obed-edom dead** like He did Uzzah—He **blessed him!** And God didn't send tumors—or mice—to the household of Obed-edom—He blessed all of them, too!

Why? Because God is good...and loving...and merciful...and accepts those that come to Him **His way!** God is holy—and hates sin—but He is **not "chomping on the bit" to strike people dead!** Let's not forget that although His dwelling place was **between the cherubim**—it was also above the **mercy seat!**

He is a God of **mercy...and delights in mercy**...and—in mercy—has **provided a way** for us to approach Him! How? **Through Jesus!** Hebrews 10:19 "Having therefore, brethren, **boldness** to enter into **the holiest** by the **blood of Jesus.**" Let's think through this a little bit.

Before, only the high priest could go into the holiest place—and only once per year.

Now, anyone can come—and at any time. No priest—no mediator—is needed.

Before, it was a *fearful thing* to come into the presence of God and if you did it wrong, you could be killed!

Now, we can enter with *boldness*!

Before, a bull and a goat had to be sacrificed—and not just once. It happened *every year*; year after year.

Now, the sacrifices have ceased! Jesus died and shed His blood *once*—and the way to approach God is now complete! Heb 10:12 “But this man [Jesus], after He had offered **one sacrifice for sins for ever**, sat down on the right hand of God;”

God is holy—and still hates sin! And even though God does not “strike people dead” as quickly as He did in the OT, do not think that God is *less* holy. He *has not changed*—and He still requires we come to Him in the *way* He says. And the *way He says* is *through Jesus*.

I John 5:11-12 “And this is the record, that God hath **given to** us eternal life, and this life is **in His Son**.

¹² He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”

--Eternal life is a gift—that is tied to Christ.

--If you *have* Christ, you have eternal life.

If you *don't have* Christ, you do not have eternal life!

Pretty straightforward; there is no option “C”! You either have the Son—or you don't?

What about you? Do you have the Son?

So, what would God have us do in light of His Word this morning?

1. First, receive the Son! If you don't have Jesus as your Savior, receive Him today. Call on His mercy now!

2. What about those of us who have the Son? What does God expect of us?

--He wants us to know what He says—and do it!

--He wants us to worship Him according to His Word—not the world!

--And He wants us to value His things—not treat them as common place!