

## The Holiness of God

2 Samuel 6:1–23

Key Verse: 6:14

*“David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might,”*

What do you think of when I say “**holy?**” Some may think of it in a good way like **Almighty** God, the Holy Spirit or the Holy Bible. And yet others may think of negatively like a person with a holier than thou attitude, sometimes called a holy roller. While others **might just think of a cow**. However through this passage we want to think **about** the holiness of God and what it means to us.

The last time we heard about the ark of God, it was sitting on some guys lawn. It had been captured by the Philistines (1 Sa 4:11) and then returned seven months later to Israel at Beth Shemesh. While it was there 70 men looked into it and all of them were killed. In fear, the people sent it to Kiriath Jearim where it came to rest at Abinadab’s house. And there it sat for about 100 long years all the while being separated from the tabernacle where it was supposed to be. Now David had been crowned king and he took Jerusalem, a neutral place, and made it the political capital of the kingdom. All that remained was to get the ark and place it in the new tabernacle, that he would build and Jerusalem would be the religious center of the nation as well.

So David chose thirty thousand men specifically for this mission from Israel and to the house of Abinadab and bring it to Jerusalem. **Take a look at verse 2.** “He and all his men went to Baalah in Judah (which is another name for Kiriath Jearim - Josh 15:9) to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim on the ark.” In this verse we see the ark of God described as that which bore the name of God himself and He was enthroned on it. The ark represented the presence of God who dwelled among His people in a special way. (Ex 25:22) **It was** completely covered in gold and on the cover was two “cherubim,” two angels, and between them it was called the “mercy seat,” that’s where God himself would sit. This is where the priest would pour the blood of the sacrifice when the ark was in the tabernacle. And because it represented God himself, it should be handled with the utmost reverence, even when just moving it.

So, “they set the ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the **new cart** <sup>4</sup> with the ark of God on it, and Ahio was walking in front of it. <sup>5</sup> David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD, with songs and with **harps**, lyres, tambourines, **sistrums** and cymbals.” (v3-5) Everything seems to be going great at this point, they made a new cart with oxen are they’re singing and dancing and playing music as they’re bringing the ark home. But then something goes terribly wrong. **Take a look at verses 6-7.** “When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. <sup>7</sup> The LORD’s anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God.” Everything seems to be good they’re singing and celebrating when **suddenly** the ox that are pulling the cart stumble and fearing that the ark was in danger of being overturned, Uzzah, reacts almost without thinking and grabs the ark to keep it from falling. This was a natural reaction after all the ark was one of Israel’s national treasures. They should protect it. It would be the same as if the Declaration of Independence, or our Constitution were in danger, naturally you would want to protect them.

However when Uzzah grabs the ark God strikes him dead right there. And the mood totally changes. Gone is the air of celebration. And in its place there may have been screams of confusion and bewilderment as a man lay dead in the road next to the ark. The whole procession completely stops, maybe people even scatter away from the ark thinking they might be next. And once again the ark is left where it sits, this time in the suburb of the capital Jerusalem.

Why would the Lord's anger burn against Uzzah if he was only trying to help? And the Lord's anger is not just "I'm mad at you", it's a smack down, deadly anger. Why would God do this? It seems so random, so tragic, so absolute, so strict, so harsh. On the surface what David was doing looks good. He was the only one in a long time who even thought about the ark of God. It never even crossed Saul's mind. And David wanted to bring it to the capital city so that the presence of God would be there and the people could worship the Lord. I believe that David's intentions were good and sincere but we learn that good intentions aren't always enough, because even good intentions that are done in the wrong way can not please the holy God. The problem was here was that David didn't follow God's instructions. God gave very specific instructions when it came to handling holy items, especially those that were in the temple. The Levites were supposed to be responsible for the care of all holy items, including the ark. But even though they were the chosen one to carry out the task, they had to be really careful because they couldn't touch it (Nu 18) or even look at it or they would die because of its holiness. (Nu 4) How could they move it if they could touch it? Since they couldn't look at it, they had to cover it with a blue holy cloth and they had to carry it only by the **wooden poles** attached to its sides. God gave the Israelites specific instructions when in his presence or handling holy items for a purpose, firstly it was to learn respect for God and secondly it was for their protection and safety.

And for whatever reason, when David brought the ark up, he didn't follow God's specific instructions on how to treat God's holy items. Instead he used the Philistine method with oxen and a cart. Maybe he thought, "at least it's a new cart, so it's ok?" I don't know. But one thing is clear, it's not smart idea who follow the Philistines, who worship a different god, when it pertains to the Almighty Creator God. This is a good principal to use in our lives even today.

Our God is the **holy God**. Holy means separate, or set apart. Our God is set apart from this world. Our God is above this world, outside of space and time. He created all things and holds the heavens in the palm of His hand. He is spirit and eternal and beyond our understanding. And as mortal men, we have to listen to God especially if we want to approach him, because of his holiness. When Moses returned to the Israelites, after receiving the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai, his face was glowing because of God's holiness and all the people were afraid. (Ex 34) God gave us His law to follow for our protection and learning. When the Philistines had the ark they suffered from diseases sent by God, but they were relieved of their suffering, because the law hadn't been given to them. (1 Sa 6) But Uzzah, who was a Levite and well trained in God's law, he suffered death because he did not obey God's law. The severity of Uzzah's punishment may seem to us too harsh for the nature of the offense. But it does us no good to sit in judgment of how God rules his kingdom. If you have ever been to traffic court, you know you can't argue with the judge, you go to jail. And besides, the divine purpose of the ark was to inspire us to be in awe of God's majesty, submission to His law, and have a profound reverence for when we worship Him.

Because of God's holiness we can not approach Him in ways other than His own. We can't come to God in any old way we want to. When we approach God, we must come in the way that God wants, not according to our own ideas. And when you think about it, its really no different than if we wanted to approach our president. We can't go to him in our own way, because he has a whole **team** of secret service men who would take us down if we did not approach him according to his terms. This is nothing new, it was this way from the beginning. When God called Moses from the burning bush, he had to take off his sandals in order to approach God because of the His holiness. (Ex 3) During the Passover, the Israelites had to follow very specific rules in order to be saved. They could not do as they wanted, for if they did they would not be saved.

**Take a look at verse 8.** "Then David was angry because the LORD's wrath had broken out against Uzzah, and to this day that place is called Perez Uzzah" David was angry that a well-meaning man had been killed and that his plans for a joyous return of the ark had been spoiled. He knew that it was his fault that one of his men died because they transported the ark carelessly. And so to remember his mistake, God's holiness and Uzzah's loss, David set up a national monument.

"David was afraid of the LORD that day and said, "How can the ark of the LORD ever come to me?"<sup>10</sup> He was not willing to take the ark of the LORD to be with him in the City of David. Instead, he took it aside to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite." (v9-10) David feared the Lord when he saw with his own eyes the holiness of God break out against men. And he wondered how the ark of God could ever dwell among God's people without destroying them in the process. David wasn't sure what to do not wanting to make another deadly mistake. However, the Bible says that "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, (Prvb 9:10) and God gave David wisdom to wait and pray before trying it again. So he sent the ark to the house of Obed Edom the Gittite. Now Obed was from the town of Gath-rimmon, which was one of the Levitical cities (Jos 21:24,25) and thus he was the right person to handle the ark.

Now one might think that when the ark of the Lord was dropped off on your front lawn, you might say, "oh no," but not Obed he welcomed the idea because as a Levite he feared the Lord and knew what to do. And when you know what to do, you are confident and he was blessed because of his obedience to God's law. Verse 11 says, "The ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite for three months, and the LORD blessed him and his entire household." The same hand that punished Uzzah also blessed Obed Edom. The fact that God blessed the home of Obed-Edom was a sign to David that he could try once again to move the ark to Jerusalem, So David brought the ark of God to Jerusalem with rejoicing. (v12b) One thing we notice here is that when David got the ark the second time, he is rejoicing. He is no longer fearful but rejoicing before the Lord. This shows that he completely repented and his heart and conscience were clear before the Lord so he didn't have any residual effects of fear from when the Lord broke out against him. After the tragedy David learned his lesson and inquired of the Lord before he tried to move the ark the second time. **Let's read verses 13-15.** "When those who were carrying the ark of the LORD had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf."<sup>14</sup> David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might,<sup>15</sup> while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets." At last the procession began again, this time according to God's requirements. As the ark was carried along, just to make sure, David offered a sacrifice after they took six steps. And now he was **dressed** in priestly attire (a linen ephod), and dancing and shouting for joy with the

Israelites. David was not a descendant of Aaron, and didn't ordinarily qualify to do the priestly duties, he was, however, the anointed of the Lord and thus could carry out the duties of priest and prophet. There was no fear this time. David danced, sang and played music in celebration before the Lord with all his heart. This was a wonderful day. And for the first time in a century, David united the ark, the ephod, the capital, the king and the priests all in one place.

"They brought the ark of the LORD and set it in its place inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and David sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings<sup>[1]</sup> before the LORD.<sup>18</sup> After he had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD Almighty.<sup>19</sup> Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each person in the whole crowd of Israelites, both men and women. And all the people went to their homes." (v17-19) When the ark reached Jerusalem, David thanked God for His blessing in moving the ark. He also blessed the people of Israel in the name of God Almighty and gave each of them a gift. David was truly a king that blessed the people both spiritually and materially.

But there was one person who wasn't so thankful. "As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart." (v16) "When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, 'How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!'" (v20) Look at **David's response** in verses 21-22. "David said to Michal, 'It was before the LORD, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the LORD's people Israel—I will celebrate before the LORD.'<sup>22</sup> I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor."

David had lowered himself to the same level of the ordinary people, far below that of a king. This revealed his **humbleness**, but on the other hand Michal was proud. She was in her palace looking down on the people from the window. She despised what David did before the ark because to her it was undignified. We can learn something important from Michal. When we realize the holiness of God there is a danger to become legalistic, like Michal. And when that happens, we can start to despise others who are glorifying God in their own way because they're not doing it like us. So we have to have a balance between respecting the holiness of God and being legalistic. The ark was the symbol of God with His people, but we don't have the ark anymore. Jesus became the new ark for He is Immanuel, God with us. Jesus dwelt among His people and He taught us something new. He taught us that even though our God is the holy God, we can still call Him, "Father." The Pharisees were so afraid of God's holiness, they couldn't even say His name. To them God was far away and as a result they didn't have a personal relationship with their Heavenly Father. Jesus revealed the softer side of God. We can't lose sight of God's holiness, but we can have a personal relationship with Him. And when Jesus went to heaven, he did send the Holy Spirit to be with us, just like God was with us through the ark, and Jesus was in person, now the Holy Spirit is with us in spirit. The reason I chose verse 14 "David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might," is so that we may know when we have the right attitude toward God and respect His holiness as David revealed by "wearing a linen ephod," we may have overflowing joy to "dance before the LORD with all our might."