

The Ark Comes to Jerusalem

Printed Text • 1 Chronicles 15:1–3, 14–16, 25–28

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXPLORE the purpose and significance of the Ark of the Covenant; REFLECT on the sacredness of worship; and RECOGNIZE and respond to those things that invite us to worship God.

In Focus

As a child, Anthony watched His grandmother take the Bible from her nightstand and walk to the tree in her backyard each evening to read. This was one of his most vivid memories of his summer visits to his grandparents' house in Tennessee. Grandma's devotions were like clockwork—at 7:30 each evening after dinner—she was reading Scripture. He could hear her humming an old hymn as she gazed across the yard after reading portions of Scripture.

When the call came that Grandma had died, Anthony—now a grown man—and his father, traveled to Tennessee to make arrangements.

Anthony thought he would be strong in facing Grandma's death. She had lived a good life and reached more than threescore years and ten that the Bible promised. However, when he arrived at the house and looked at the nightstand, he saw her worn torn Bible open to one of her favorite Psalms and the memories of her quoting from it came back to him. He recalled the sacred moments she spent meditating through it and the regularity of her worship. As he remembered the old songs she sang, his father entered the room and the two decided to pray.

They thanked God for Grandma's example. They asked forgiveness for the crowdedness of their lives, which often caused them to neglect prayer and Bible meditation. They asked for God's strength and His direction for the days ahead. They thanked God that the sacred book had called them to worship, just as it had called Grandma's—and they realized her legacy of faith was indeed the most precious gift she could have left behind.

Today's lesson reminds us to respond to God's faithfulness with expressions of praise and gratitude for who He is and what He has done for us and others.

Keep In Mind

"And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant" (2 Kings 23:3. KJV).

Words You Should Know

- A. Prophet** (1 Chronicles 17:1) nabiy'(Heb.) – A person ordained by God to speak God's truth to the people.
- B. House** (vv. 1, 4, 6, 10, 12, 14) bayith(Heb.) – A family abode or the establishment of a household through the descendants of a particular person.
- C. Covenant** (v. 1) beriyth (Heb.) – Abinding agreement.

D. Sheepecote (v. 7) naveh (Heb.) – A sheeppen or holding area for shepherds and sheep as they travel from place to place in search of pasture.

Say It Correctly

Pslatery. SAL-tery

Cornet. COR-net

KJV

1 Chronicles 15:1 And David made him houses in the city of David, and prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched for it a tent.

2 Then David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him for ever.

3 And David gathered all Israel together to Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the Lord unto his place, which he had prepared for it.

14 So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel.

15 And the children of the Levites bare the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded according to the word of the Lord.

16 And David spake to the chief of the Levites to appoint their brethren to be the singers with instruments of musick, psalteries and harps and cymbals, sounding, by lifting up the voice with joy..

3 So David, and the elders of Israel, and the captains over thousands, went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the house of Obededom with joy.

26 And it came to pass, when God helped the Levites that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that they offered seven bullocks and seven rams.

27 And David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, and all the Levites that bare the ark, and the singers, and Chenaniah the master of the song with the singers: David also had upon him an ephod of linen.

28 Thus all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the Lord with shouting, and with sound of the cornet, and with trumpets, and with cymbals, making a noise with psalteries and harps.

NLT

1 Chronicles 15:1 David now built several buildings for himself in the City of David. He also prepared a place for the Ark of God and set up a special tent for it.

2 Then he commanded, "No one except the Levites may carry the Ark of God. The Lord has chosen them to carry the Ark of the Lord and to serve him forever."

3 Then David summoned all Israel to Jerusalem to bring the Ark of the Lord to the place he had prepared for it.

14 So the priests and the Levites purified themselves in order to bring the Ark of the Lord, the God of Israel, to Jerusalem.

15 Then the Levites carried the Ark of God on their shoulders with its carrying poles, just as the Lord had instructed Moses.

16 David also ordered the Levite leaders to appoint a choir of Levites who were singers and musicians to sing joyful songs to the accompaniment of harps, lyres, and cymbals.

26 Then David and the elders of Israel and the generals of the army went to the house of Obed-edom to bring the Ark of the Lord's Covenant up to Jerusalem with a great celebration.

26 And because God was clearly helping the Levites as they carried the Ark of the Lord's Covenant, they sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams.

27 David was dressed in a robe of fine linen, as were all the Levites who carried the Ark, and also the singers, and Kenaniah the choir leader. David was also wearing a priestly garment.

28 So all Israel brought up the Ark of the Lord's Covenant with shouts of joy, the blowing of rams' horns and trumpets, the crashing of cymbals, and loud playing on harps and lyres.

The People, Places, and Times

The Ark of the Covenant. God instructed the Children of Israel to build a Tabernacle and several pieces of furniture for it after their exodus from captivity in Egypt (Exodus 25:10–22). One piece of furniture, the ark, measured two and a half cubits in length, and a cubit and a half in both width and height. A cubit is an ancient unit of measurement believed to equal about 18 inches. This wooden box was then covered in gold and was carried by two staffs made also of acacia wood, covered with gold. Mounted upon the ark was the mercy seat, a slightly raised platform, covered with pure gold. The mercy seat was surrounded by two cherubim made of gold, one mounted at each side of the seat.

The Ark of the Covenant resided within the Holy of Holies, the innermost room of the Tabernacle. Access was only permitted once per year, on the Day of Atonement. Access was restricted to one person, the high priest, who would enter the Holy of Holies with the blood of a goat, on behalf of his own and the people of Israel's sins. The goat's blood was sprinkled onto the mercy seat to make atonement for the sins of the people of Israel.

Background

The Ark of the Covenant had been a mainstay in the spiritual lives of the Children of Israel following their flight from Egypt. However, during the reign of King Saul, God's people had become disconnected from the ark, which represented God's presence. David, upon capturing Jerusalem and making it the capital city of Israel, sought to cure this disconnection by reuniting the people with the ark.

King David's first attempt at transporting the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem was a failure. Not only was the attempt unsuccessful, but it resulted in the death of one of the men, Uzza, assisting with its transporting. God had stricken Uzza to convey His anger toward David and Israel for not following His prescribed orders for transporting the ark (Exodus 25:14–15; Numbers 4:4–15; 7:9). Although David and Israel made what they may have considered adequate preparations for handling the ark, they were, in essence, inadequate, because they were not according to God's specific instructions. As a consequence of David and Israel's disobedience and carelessness, they were forced to temporarily store the ark with the family of Obedom for three months (1 Chronicles 13:14).

This point is not to be taken lightly by believers today. Often we choose to make seemingly "good" plans concerning various areas of our lives, only to have the plans fail miserably because they were not God's plans! However, God is so merciful that He often grants us, as He did David and Israel, a second chance by allowing us another opportunity to follow His plan in the manner He originally dictated.

At-A-Glance

1. Preparing for the Ark of the Covenant (1 Chronicles 15:1–3, 14–16)
2. Bringing the Ark to Jerusalem (vv. 25–28)

In Depth

1. Preparing for the Ark of the Covenant (1 Chronicles 15:1–3, 14–16)

David took extra care to prepare the place for the Ark of the Covenant. It is noteworthy that David pitched the tent that the ark was to inhabit at the same time he erected a home for himself and his family. After preparing the place where the ark would dwell, David gave specific instructions concerning those who should carry the ark (v. 2). David was obviously applying the lessons learned from his previous failed attempt to transport the ark that resulted in the death of Uzza (13:6–10). The wisdom of David in this instance is often overlooked by modern believers. Instead of following the example of David and learning from past failures, we prefer to repeatedly learn lessons by enrolling and re-enrolling in the school of hard knocks.

David displayed leadership qualities by ensuring the ark was carried by the proper personnel. As leaders, in any capacity but especially in ministry, we can never expect to yield optimal results if the proper pieces are in improper places! On a basketball team, only an unskilled coach would allow a center to play the position of point guard, as this would hinder the flow of the offense. Similarly, in ministry, leaders should not have unfriendly persons serving as ushers, tone-deaf individuals serving as song leaders, or those lacking in knowledge of God's Word serving in teaching capacities.

Equally as important as making certain that one is called for the task is being careful not to defile God's Word while operating in that capacity. The Levites and the priests, who had been called by God, sanctified and cleansed themselves prior to touching the ark. Romans 3:23 tells us that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." This declaration is inclusive of the parishioner, the preacher, and everyone in between. Therefore, we have an obligation to seek forgiveness and to undergo a spiritual cleansing process prior to engaging in ministry, so as not to pollute God's work with our own imperfections. Just as we were taught as children to thoroughly wash our hands prior to eating, we should exercise the same care when it comes to cleansing ourselves spiritually before partaking in ministry.

2. Bringing the Ark to Jerusalem (vv. 25–28)

Only after a failed attempt, the death of a servant, and much prayer and preparation did David and Israel successfully transport the ark to Jerusalem. Therefore, it should be no surprise that the demeanor of David and Israel was one of reverence, praise, and worship to God. It is common courtesy to express gratitude when someone does a kind gesture toward you. Depending on the nature of the act, the gratitude might range anywhere from a simple word of thanks to an expensive gift of thanks. Similarly, when God proves Himself faithful to us as believers, it is only appropriate to display some form of gratitude. This might be a monetary offering, a shout of praise, a song, or a dance. However, it is most important that the gratitude be genuine, so that God will receive it accordingly.

Search the Scriptures

1. Who did David designate to carry the ark and why (1 Chronicles 15:2)?
2. What instruments were used in the processional (vv. 16, 28)?
3. What people were included in the processional and celebration of the return of the ark (vv. 3, 14, 25)?
4. What was David clothed in as the ark was carried into Jerusalem (v. 27)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What does the preparation David made for the ark indicate about the sacred nature of God's presence?
2. What is the significance of the Levites cleansing themselves prior to handling the ark?
3. What is the significance of David and Israel ushering in the ark with praise in song and with instruments?

Liberating Lesson

All of us lead lives that are full of responsibilities, chores, and tasks that must be carried out. Often these obligations make for extremely action-packed days in which we rush from one thing to another, not giving each item the care it deserves. As Christians, we must always remember to give God's dealings the utmost care and concern because God does not bless us haphazardly. He gives us only His best.

Application For Activation

Identify a time when you took part in ministry but afterward were seemingly unchanged. Now ask yourself if there was something you could have done, or not done, to assist in ushering in God's presence. Jot down three things you can do, or not do, in order to enhance your worship experience. Implement these things the next time you have an opportunity.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

1 Chronicles 15:1–3, 14–16, 25–28

1 And David made him houses in the city of David, and prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched for it a tent.

2 Then David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the LORD chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him for ever.

3 And David gathered all Israel together to Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the LORD unto his place, which he had prepared for it.

In order to understand the significance of the ark it is important to examine its placement, construction, contents, and purpose. The ark, which was to have been placed permanently in the inner sanctuary of the Tabernacle, had no lid. Instead, it was covered by the mercy seat, a solid sheet of

pure gold beaten or pounded into shape. In this way, God's mercy was the vehicle by which the priest was able to come before God on behalf of the people.

Moses was also instructed to place three items inside the finished ark: Aaron's rod, a container of the manna the Children of Israel had been fed in the wilderness, and the stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant. These three items served as symbols of God's selection, provision, and relationship with His chosen people (see Exodus 16:32–34; Numbers 17:10–11; Deuteronomy 10:2–5).

David built houses in Jerusalem for himself and his family. He also prepared a place for the ark in Jerusalem, which is also referred to as the City of David (see 2 Samuel 5:5–7.) In explaining how to transport the ark, David made sure the instructions given to Moses were followed. First, only the Levites were to take responsibility for the ark (see 1 Chronicles 15:2). One of the 12 tribes of Israel, the Levites were the tribal descendants of Levi, the third son of Jacob and Leah. They were set apart by God to fulfill their duties including ministering to God on behalf of the people. The priests were the descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses and the man God had assigned as the first priest. In the wilderness, the Levites had the responsibility for moving the Ark of the Covenant along with all of the furnishings of the Tabernacle. The priests had the responsibility of conducting the worship through the offering of sacrifices. The law clearly specified which animals were to be used for sacrifice and the manner in which the sacrifice was to be made. Because he knew the role of the Levites and priests was to lead people in the sacrifices and worship of God, David assigned the Levites the task of moving the ark and gave them the additional responsibility of the ministry of music.

David's preparation for returning the ark included involving all the people of Israel in what we would call corporate worship. This was a momentous occasion. It symbolized the restoration of worship to the nation and victory over Israel's enemies. God had prospered the Levite, Obededom, when the ark resided with him (see 2 Samuel 6:11). David was certain that God would prosper the nation when this symbol of communion with God was restored to national prominence. Furthermore, God was not just the God of the leaders. He was God of the nation. All the people were to participate and witness what was done in that day. Through this procession, celebration, and worship, David established his kingdom as being loyal only to Jehovah, the self-existent God, who had chosen Abraham and his descendants and later taken the Children of Israel out of bondage and through the wilderness. The return of the ark would be celebrated and the beauty of the procession would be discussed throughout Israel's generations.

15:14 So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel.

15 And the children of the Levites bare the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded according to the word of the LORD.

16 And David spake to the chief of the Levites to appoint their brethren to be the singers with instruments of musick, psalteries and harps and cymbals, sounding, by lifting up the voice with joy.

Before the ark could be moved, the priests and Levites had to sanctify themselves. In the Hebrew, the term "sanctify" (qadash, kah-DAHSH) means "to become ceremonially clean or to wash oneself in preparation for service to the Lord." The manner in which this sanctification takes place is described in Exodus 29:1–37. Strict adherence to the ritual of washing and sacrifice was necessary in order to avoid the penalty of death when approaching the ark and the Tabernacle.

It was also critical that the ark be carried in a specific manner. David had seen firsthand what transgression of God's instructions meant (see 2 Samuel 6). In this second attempt, the Levites followed God's instructions explicitly. According to the law, the ark was to be carried. It was to be laid upon the shoulders of the Levites as symbols of their carrying the worship of the Lord before the

people. It was to be held only by its staffs, which, like the ark, were made of Acacia or shittim wood overlaid with gold. The staffs were placed through rings of pure gold, which were affixed to each corner of the ark. Through its materials and construction, the ark represented the protection and covering of God over His chosen people. The rings represented God's direction. Its symbolism for the nation of Israel and the people of God in the twenty-first century cannot be overlooked.

David's own ability as a musician was well-known, and his reign was marked by his devotion to God. The return of the ark must be accompanied by praise; the worship of God must be accompanied by music and singing—a joyful noise. The instruments of David's time are described in these verses. The "psaltery" (Heb. nebel, NEH-behl) was similar in body style to a lyre and was probably played like its modern sister, the guitar. The "harp" (Heb. kinnowr, ki-NOHR) was named because of its "twanging" sound. The cymbals (Heb. metsseleth, mets-AY-leth) were probably double cymbals and gave a high pitch as they would today. This music accompanied the voices of the singers of the tribe of Levi. This entire musical praise is described as a "sounding" and uses the Hebrew term shama (shah-MAH), which means "to listen attentively." At this resounding music and song, the nation was to pay strict attention and to rejoice because of the return of God's presence.

15:25 So David, and the elders of Israel, and the captains over thousands, went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the house of Obededom with joy.

26 And it came to pass, when God helped the Levites that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, that they offered seven bullocks and seven rams.

27 And David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, and all the Levites that bare the ark, and the singers, and Chenaniah the master of the song with the singers: David also had upon him an ephod of linen.

28 Thus all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the LORD with shouting, and with sound of the cornet, and with trumpets, and with cymbals, making a noise with psalteries and harps.

David led the return of the ark with a joyous and orderly procession, which included Israel's older leaders and captains (Heb. sar, sar). The Israelites offered sacrifices to express their gratitude to God and to ask His blessing upon their nation as the ark was returned to prominence in the worship of the people. This voluntary gesture was made in accordance with the law for the sins of the people (see Leviticus 1:1–7). A sacrifice of seven animals of each type was made. In Scripture, the number seven refers to completeness and corresponds to the number of days in creation. The sacrifice, therefore, symbolized the complete atonement of the people as they sought the complete forgiveness and presence of God in their nation and national affairs.

The leaders followed strict guidelines even regarding attire. David, as well as the Levites, wore fine linen, and he also wore an ephod (Heb. ephowd, ay-FOHD), or "mantle or outer garment." David was not attempting to step into the place of the priest. Rather, his attire represented him as the leader and as a worshiper who had donned the finest vestments in this celebration of restoration. Interestingly, it is this ephod that David is famous for having danced out of, earning the scorn of his wife, Michal, Saul's daughter (see 2 Samuel 6:15–23).

Verse 28 summarizes the mood of the celebration and symbolizes the restored relationship between God and the nation of Israel. The "shouting" (Heb. teruwah, teroo-AH) is a term that means "battle cry." This was a historic moment in the nation's history. All surrounding nations would know by the sound that God had given victory to Israel. Here, additional instruments are mentioned. The "cornet" (Heb. showphar, shoh-FAR) is a ram's horn, which was blown in battle and to sound the alarm as a warning. The "trumpet" (Heb. chatsotserah, khahts-oh-tser-AH) added to the sound of the cymbals, the harps, and the voices to signify that God had returned to Israel and that the symbol of His presence would reside with His people. The procession of the ark into the city of Jerusalem took three days. David knew that he was declaring the restored prominence of worship. His installation of

the ark using worship with singers, musicians, and apparently dancers was not just a spectacle. David was ushering in God's presence and ushering in a new direction for the nation.

The Bible clearly tells us that the violence and bloodshed of David's reign did not stop with the entrance of the ark, but David's action in restoring the priority of worship not only took precedence over the violence, but it also created a mindset among the people. In the return of the ark, the great Jehovah, who had chosen Abraham and promised him a great nation, was being honored. In this procession, the nation was remembering that Jehovah had delivered their fathers from Pharaoh's hand and brought them across the Red Sea. Through the restoration of worship, the nation was declaring before their enemies that the one, true God who had brought their forefathers out of the wilderness and across the Jordan had indeed delivered the Promised Land into their hands. David was shown to be a great king who was dependent upon the Lord and in whom the Lord was pleased.

As we reflect on today's lesson, we must remember that whether we are worshiping God in the church building or in our home, we should respond to God with expressions of praise and gratitude for who He is in our lives, for His power in the universe, and for what He has done for us. In Jesus Christ, God has fulfilled the promise of the Ark of the Covenant. In Him, God has made His abode with humanity and brought to earth the divinity that enables us to offer true worship and praise.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Deuteronomy 18:1-5

Tuesday

1 Chronicles 13:5-8, 13-14

Wednesday

1 Chronicles 15:4-13

Thursday

1 Chronicles 16:1-6

Friday

1 Chronicles 16:37-43

Saturday

Romans 12:1-8

Sunday

1 Chronicles 15:1-3, 14-16, 25-29