

Don't Touch that Ark!

by Kent Crockett

Read 2 Samuel 6:1-7

Do you have an accurate concept of God? God is **Love**. God is **Good**. God is **All-Powerful**. God is **All-Knowing**. God is **Merciful**. God is **Forgiving**. And there is something else that most people forget—God is **Holy**. Don't leave off holiness. We cannot truly understand His forgiveness and mercy until we first grasp the holiness of God.

In 2 Samuel 6:7, we find that God killed Uzzah for touching the Ark of the Covenant. That doesn't seem like a crime worthy of execution, does it? Why did God strike him dead?

Was it because God is love? No.

Because He is good? No.

Because He is forgiving? No.

It was because God is **holy**.

Most of us don't realize what the Ark of the Covenant was and what it represented. God commanded Moses to make the Ark, which was a box overlaid in pure gold. Inside the box were the **Ten Commandments** that Moses received on Mount Sinai—(God's Law), **some manna** from the wilderness (God's provision) and **Aaron's rod that miraculously budded** (God's miracles). Aaron was the first high priest who would represent Israel before God.

The cover or lid of the Ark was called the **mercy seat** (God's mercy). On the top of it were two golden cherubim (angels) with outstretched wings (God's presence). This was the most sacred vessel in the tabernacle because this was where God's presence was manifested.



Mercy Over Judgment

One day out of the year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle (and later in the temple after it was built), and he would sprinkle **blood** on the top of the Ark of the Covenant—the mercy seat. The mercy seat was **over** the tablets of the Ten Commandments, which was inside the Ark. When people sinned the Law was broken, which required God's judgment. But when the blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat, this act demonstrated that the **blood activated God's mercy**, and that **mercy triumphed over judgment** (James 2:13). Without the blood there would be no mercy.

The Ark was so sacred that no one could touch it. God commanded in Exodus 25:14 that it had to be carried on poles—and only by the Levites, who were the priests. There were rings on the side of the ark and the priests slipped the poles through the rings to carry it. If anyone touched it they would die (Num. 4:15).

History of the Ark

When the children of Israel went into the Promised Land, they carried the Ark into the Jordan River, which immediately parted so they could cross over. (Many people know about Moses splitting the Red Sea but most people forget that God also split the Jordan River.) When they marched around Jericho they carried the Ark with them as they marched and the walls fell down.

The Philistines were the primary foes of the Israelites. One day Israel went to battle with the Philistines and lost 4,000 men in battle (1 Sam. 4:2). They regrouped and said, "We must take the Ark of the Covenant into battle 'that it might deliver us for the power of our enemies'" (1 Sam. 4:3). Rather than using the Ark for **worship** as it was intended, they tried using it as a **weapon**.

The two evil sons of the priest Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were in charge of the Ark. They took the Ark out of the tabernacle in Shiloh and into the battle with the Philistines. Their plan backfired. Israel was defeated and lost 30,000 men, Hophni and Phinehas were killed, and the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant. On the same day the Philistines took the Ark, Phinehas's wife

gave birth to a son she named Ichabod, which means “the glory has departed”—because the Ark had been taken from Israel. Immediately after she named him, she died (1 Sam. 4:19-22).

God sent a plague of mice and tumors on the Philistines (1 Samuel 5 & 6), so they returned the Ark seven months later. After that, the Ark remained in Kiriath Jearim for 100 years and was separated from its place in the tabernacle. The Ark represented the presence of God and the **people got used to worshipping without God’s presence**. Lots of people today have learned to worship without the presence of God. It’s nothing more than a dead ritual to them.

How could they go so long without missing the Ark in the tabernacle? The reason was **apathy**—they didn’t care. It was central to their worship and sacrifices, but they didn’t care.

Throughout history the greatest threat to the advancing of the kingdom of God has been apathy. Apathy can kill anything it touches. Ask any football team what happens when apathy sets in. It can kill football teams. It can kill marriages. It can kill churches.

Most people don’t think of apathy as an enemy, but more like a bystander. A newspaper article described how dozens of tourists watched impassively as a woman drowned while trying to save her child. One person even videotaped the drowning, saying “I got the whole thing on tape.” No one watching made an attempt to help.

Apathy is a spectator sport. It watches other people participate but it doesn’t get involved. If you go into a lot of churches in the U.S. you won’t even find a pulse. Apathy visited that church and decided to become a member.

So the Israelites didn’t think they needed the Ark because apathy taught them **they could get along just fine without it**.

The Ark on an Oxcart

David wanted to establish worship on Mt. Zion by bringing the Ark to Jerusalem. But they made a huge mistake. They put the Ark on a cart pulled by oxen. Uh-oh. Remember what God commanded them in Exodus 25? They were supposed to carry it on poles. Didn’t they read their Bibles? Did they think what they were doing didn’t matter to God? **Instead of obeying God’s instructions, they came up with their own method**.

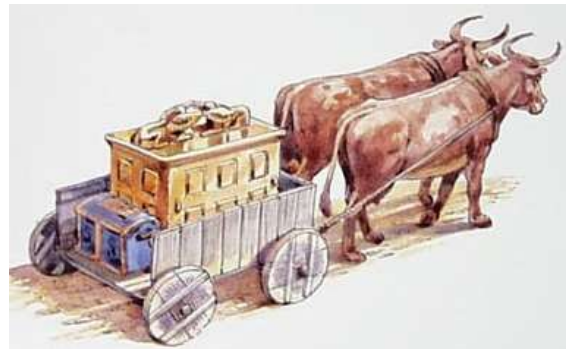
They thought their method for transporting the Ark was better than God’s. They listened to Mr. Logic. Mr. Logic gets us into a lot of trouble, doesn’t he? Mr. Logic thinks that he is smarter than God and is always suggesting better ways to do things.

Mr. Logic whispered in their ears, “Don’t use those poles. Put it on a cart (a new one, mind you, because we need to be respectful) and have some oxen pull it. This new method will be much easier. It will save the shoulders of the Levites. Don’t work harder. Work smarter!”

They didn’t seem to have a clue that God didn’t want the Ark on the cart. How did God show them that He was upset? He **upset the oxcart**. Something upset the oxen so that the Ark almost fell off the cart. Perhaps God **wanted** the Ark to fall off. It was a sign that they were transporting it wrongly—so He upset the oxen so it would fall off and they would have to carry it instead.

Sometimes we get upset because our oxcarts have been upset. And then we find out that God is the one who’s upsetting the cart so that we will change directions and do things His way.

I’m concerned that many traditional churches are so used to doing the same rituals that they will never consider changing course and doing it God’s way. But I’m also concerned that **many contemporary churches are more interested in entertaining the congregation** than teaching God’s Word. They spend way too much time creating props, making movie clips, doing skits, telling jokes, tweaking lighting and sound equipment, and passing out donuts and coffee. They’re **feeding the flock donuts instead of God’s Word**. Their members are **filled with coffee but not filled with the Holy Spirit**. They are not just carrying the Ark on a new oxcart, but they are polishing the hub caps and adding bells and whistles to it! And they wonder why the glory of God has departed. The oxcart is man’s method and never was God’s idea.



The oxcart almost tipped over when Uzzah reached out and **tried to keep the ark on the cart**. Oops. He hadn't been reading his Bible either. He forgot that God said if you touch it you will die. He forgot that this was the same Ark that was marched around Jericho. It was the same Ark that split the Jordan River. He forgot that this was the same Ark where God would manifest His presence on the Day of Atonement. **He had lost respect for the holiness of God, and when he touched the Ark, God struck him dead for his irreverence.**



They had to stop the celebration to have a funeral service. Bummer. Kind of reminds you of Annanias and Sapphira, doesn't it? God didn't say, "Well, I know he had good intentions, so I'll just forget that I told them 'Don't touch the Ark.'" No, God backed up His Word.

A lot of people in church have lost reverence for God's holiness. They think they can do whatever they want and get away with it because God is forgiving. They forget that God is also holy and we can suffer painful consequences for disobeying Him.

Look what happens in 2 Samuel 6:8. David gets angry at God for killing Uzzah. **He thought God had made His first mistake.** He was thinking, "God, we're trying to get the Ark to Jerusalem to worship You and You're killing off our helpers!"

We often get mad at God and blame Him because we think we see an injustice and it doesn't make sense to us. But this wasn't God's fault. It was Uzzah's fault. Do you ever get mad at God because something happens that you think isn't right? It's because we don't see things from God's perfect point of view, who looks at the entire picture.

What can we learn from this experience? God is a Holy God and He will judge sin. We must never forget that **the Holy Spirit's first name is HOLY**. He's not the Power Spirit, although He is all-powerful. He's not the Gift Spirit, although He does give gifts. And He's not just "the Spirit." Satan is a spirit too, but he's the UNholy spirit. God is the HOLY Spirit because that is His nature and **He is primarily concerned with making us holy**. The Ark represented the holiness of God. The Lord wants to transfer His holiness into our lives because He wants us to be a holy people.

Why does God want us to be holy?

1. Holiness makes us like Jesus.

God wants us holy because He is holy (1 Pet. 1:16). Max Lucado said, "God loves us just the way we are, but He wants us to be just the way Christ is." Holiness is the process where He transforms us to be like Him. God doesn't just want us to respect His holiness, but to receive His holiness. We receive Jesus, who makes us holy and wants to live His holy life through us every day.

2. Holiness helps others see Jesus.

A man eating in a restaurant held up his glass of water and said, "Waiter! Is the water you serve always this cloudy?" The waiter said, "There's nothing wrong with the water here, sir. You just happen to be drinking out of a dirty glass."

The Holy Spirit is like the pure water. But if the glass is dirty, it misrepresents God to others. Living in holiness is keeping the glass clean so people can clearly see Jesus in us.

3. Holiness brings the blessing of God

After God struck down Uzzah for touching the Ark, David decided to not go any further down the road with it. But God didn't forbid him from moving the Ark. **He simply wanted them to move it correctly.** The Ark stayed at the house of Obed-edom the Gittite for three months (2 Samuel 6:9-11). Can you imagine have the presence of God in your house? God didn't kill Obed-edom and his family, but He blessed all that they owned. **Holiness will either kill you or bless you. It just depends on which side you are on.**

If you want to have God's blessing on your house or in your church, you must invite in the holy presence of God! And quit spending time building ox carts and polishing the hubcaps.

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