

Holiness can be Dangerous – Numbers 4

Good Morning – this is 4rd presentation on Numbers

THE HOLINESS OF GOD CAN BE DANGEROUS

When we began this series on the Book of Numbers, I said that we'd come across Biblical concepts regarding the Holiness of God that will seem foreign to us, that might even shock us when we first encounter them. One such incident dealt with the death of Abihu and Nadab, the sons of Aaron the High Priest, who tried to approach God with incense for prayer but they use "strange fire" to ignite the incense. Strange fire = coals not from the altar of sacrifice. And, God struck them dead.

We're going to look at another incident today – only this one is more familiar – the incident in 2 Book of Samuel of Uzzah touching the Ark of the Covenant to prevent it from falling into the mud – and God struck him dead. The Book of Numbers explains why that happened.

But first, I want to begin by stating that both incidents have to do with God protecting His Holiness.

What does Holiness *mean*? Well, I readily admit that I'm **totally inadequately** to describe it. **But I can sense that Holiness exists.**

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Take for example...

- Negro spiritual: Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

The lyrics are haunting – something stirs inside of me when I hear those words. "Causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they crucified my Lord?"

I can sense a deep truth there, an echo of a bottomless and profound mystery, a glimpse into eternity that God grants only infrequently. I can't describe it, but it washes over me. I can feel it in my soul. It's real. It's deep, it's overwhelming, it's even somewhat scary, and I realize that I am totally inadequate to describe it.

God is Holy – He is totally different than us. We can become Holy – but only if He declares it to be so. Where He is becomes Holy because of the fact that He is there. What we're going to see today is that objects can become holy because they were in His presence. Holiness can be transmitted – that idea sounds so foreign to us – but we see it several times in the Torah.

This is not magic, this is not superstition – it is reality. In the Torah, objects became holy by being in God's presence

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and they retained that holy state as long as He allowed. They had no intrinsic merit on their own. It is not the same as the Catholic Church's use of holy water or relics. Objects dedicated to the service of God become holy because they were in God's presence. And once they become Holy, only those to whom God has granted the required level of Holiness can touch them.

OK – even though it may seem strange right now – just put this in the back of your mind for the moment, but let me tell you up front that this all leads to the Cross.

OK – RECAP ON WHERE WE ARE IN THE BOOK

- The Israelites are at Mt Sinai, making the final preparations to leave for the Promised Land. They've been here for a little more than a year.
- Vast encampment – between 2–3 million people, living in tents. Camped in a specific order by tribes around a structure called the Wilderness Tabernacle, sometimes called the tent of Meeting.

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SLIDE: OK – remember the layout of the Israelite camp in the wilderness – layout was according to specific directions given by God.

The tabernacle with the Ark of the Covenant, menorah etc. was smack in the center of the camp with the Levites camped around it, separating the Tabernacle from the rest of the tribes.

OK? Now, I'm going to read from Numbers chapter 3, starting in verse 20:

Numbers 3: 20 –

These were the Levite clans, according to their families.

²¹ To Gershon belonged the clans (or subclans) of the Libnites and Shimeites; these were the Gershonite clans. ²² The number of all the males a month old or more who were counted was 7,500. ²³ The Gershonite clans were to camp on the west, behind the tabernacle. ²⁴ The leader of the families of the Gershonites was Eliasaph son of Lael. ²⁵ At the tent of meeting, the Gershonites were responsible for the care of the tabernacle and tent, its coverings, the curtain at the entrance to the tent of meeting, ²⁶ the curtains of the

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courtyard, the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard surrounding the tabernacle and altar, and the ropes —and everything related to their use.

²⁷ To Kohath belonged the clans of the Amramites, Izharites, Hebronites and Uzzielites; these were the Kohathite clans.

²⁸ The number of all the males a month old or more was 8,600. The Kohathites were responsible for the care of the sanctuary. ²⁹ The Kohathite clans were to camp on the south side of the tabernacle. ³⁰ The leader of the families of the Kohathite clans was Elizaphan son of Uzziel. ³¹ They were responsible for the care of the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the articles of the sanctuary used in ministering, the curtain, and everything related to their use. ³² The chief leader of the Levites was Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest. He was appointed over those who were responsible for the care of the sanctuary.

³³ To Merari belonged the clans of the Mahlites and the Mushites; these were the Merarite clans. ³⁴ The number of all the males a month old or more who were counted was 6,200.

³⁵ The leader of the families of the Merarite clans was Zurriel son of Abihail; they were to camp on the north side of the tabernacle. ³⁶ The Merarites were appointed to take care of the frames of the tabernacle, its crossbars, posts, bases, all its equipment, and everything related to their use, ³⁷ as well as the posts of the surrounding courtyard with their bases, tent pegs and ropes.

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³⁸ Moses and Aaron and his sons were to camp to the east of the tabernacle, toward the sunrise, in front of the tent of meeting. They were responsible for the care of the sanctuary on behalf of the Israelites. Anyone else who approached the sanctuary was to be put to death.

We learn here that there were three major Levite clans:

- **Gershon, Kohath and Merari** – each clan was assigned specific duties regarding care of the Tabernacle.

SLIDE: HERE'S A BLOWUP OF THE TABERNACLE AREA

- This whole structure was considered the Tabernacle.(dimensions = 150' x 75')
- Surrounded by fabric walls about 7 feet high, and you could only enter from the east side of the compound.
- Altar, Laver, holy place w/furniture, Holy of holies w/Ark of Covenant – **this was the Holiest Place on earth and the Most Dangerous Place on earth** – as we will see in a minute!

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- God gave the 3 Levites clans specific direction on where they were to camp
- Moses, Aaron & sons camped on the east side (CLICK).
- 3 clans camped around the Tabernacle, serving as a protective barrier for the other tribes and God's Holiness (CLICK)
- **God cannot allow His Holiness to be defiled**, so He gave strict instructions that no unauthorized person could approach the tabernacle under penalty of death. Levites would be expected to automatically kill them - w/o trial.

Often when we think of the Levites, we think about the Levite choir. But at this point in history, they had only two main duties: taking care of the tabernacle when it was moved, and guarding it when it was at rest. This would change when the Temple was erected in Jerusalem and thus there was no need to pack and unpack the tabernacle anymore. But at this time here in the wilderness, the Levites were God's bodyguards and His labor force, so to speak.

All the Levites had specific responsibilities assigned to them. Such is all this with the body of Christ today. No one is set aside and no one is given a pass; everyone has his duty. Not one Believer ever got passed over for a Spiritual gift.

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That one chooses to ignore his assignment and sit on the sidelines doesn't mean he/she doesn't have a purpose awaiting him.

We can complain all we want that the Church is perhaps broken and malfunctioning and point to what others do wrong. But at least they DO; at least they stand at the plate and take their swings. **Worship and walking with God is a contact sport; it's dangerous and you can get hurt**. If you're not battered and bruised to some degree then you've probably been sitting it out too long.

You will remember that the Levies were one of the 13 tribes of Israel but were separated away for the service in the Tabernacle. This is a foundational pattern in the Bible – God divides, elects, and then separates.

- God had divided and separated the entire population of the world into two groups: Hebrews and gentiles.
- These Hebrews....now the nation of Israel.....were also divided into two groups: the 12 tribes and the tribe of Levi.
- And we have recently seen the tribe of Levi divided into two groups, the Priests and the non-priests, the Levites.

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- In this process of dividing, electing and separating, **absolutely NO merit** is stated for why one certain line of people was to be of a higher holy status than another. **God does it for reasons that are completely His own.**
- There was nothing inherently special about Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob. There was nothing inherently special about the Tribe of Levi, and there was nothing particularly special about Aaron's descendants (who were the priests of Israel) than any of the other sons of Levi. **God simply, for His own good reasons, elected them.**

About the best that can be said for the person or group that was divided away from the others and assigned a special level of holiness above all the others is that that person or group accepted the offer.

This is a spiritual reality that completely flies in the face of the modern world – doesn't it? "Chosen people"? – isn't that a bit arrogant?

Such a principle **would be denounced** in the newspaper & on TV today as intolerant and arrogant. And yet – 5,000 years of Scriptural evidence plainly shows that **Yehoveh does**

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give certain groups or people different status; and again it does not come from works. It comes by grace.

That, my dear friends, is the pattern for those of us today who are set apart as saved Believers. God selected us before the foundation of the world to be His saved ones. Why? We're not inherently any better than our neighbors – in fact, I can name quite a few people I know who have not accepted Christ and yet do more good works than I do. We don't know why we were chosen, but the Old and New Testaments **shout** at us that:

1. God chose us before we chose Him
2. His choice wasn't because of any personal merit on our part. God just did it – and only He knows why.

We can neither earn our salvation nor remain in it by our own merits. Christ alone, the innocent sacrifice, saves us – and makes us holy. Why? Because that's the way God says it is.

By accepting it we were assigned a special level of righteousness and holiness above all others on our planet. Our salvation in Yeshua is as much a mystery as to "why me?" as it is was to why Abraham and not somebody else.....why Isaac and not Ishmael.....why Jacob and not Esau.

Yet it is so because it is God's will. Israel is a completely set-apart nation for God, and the rest of the world is not.

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The Tabernacle, The Tent and Joshua

OK – I want to stop for a minute and address the issue as to who can be in the Tabernacle, sometimes referred to the Tent of Meeting, because it came up several months ago in an incident involving God, Moses and Joshua. God says in Numbers that only the priests can enter the Tent that contained the Holy Place and, and only the High Priest can enter the Holy of Holies. Anyone else would die. But in Exodus 33 (mentioned several months ago), we see Joshua at a structure called the “tent of meeting”.

CLICK *Ex. 33:7-11 "Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the "tent of meeting." Anyone inquiring of the LORD would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. ⁸ And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. ⁹ As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the LORD spoke with Moses. ¹⁰ Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to their tent. ¹¹ The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.*

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First of all, let me say that the passage does not clearly say that Joshua was actually inside of the tent – it could probably mean that Joshua didn't leave the tent unguarded. But, let's assume that Joshua did enter the tent, what does that mean? We know that Joshua was of the tribe of Ephraim, definitely not a priest – priests were from family of Aaron in the tribe of Levi. God said that only people who are authorized (i.e., the priests) can approach near to Him, and only in the manner He spells out (Nadab and Abihu neglected this part, to their demise). Did God allow Joshua, who appears to be an unauthorized person (i.e., non-priest), into this holy area?

The confusion – which is understandable – arises two reasons: first, the tent here in Exodus 33 is referred to as the 'Tent of Meeting', which is the same name applied to the 'Wilderness Tabernacle' (the tent structure with the sacred furniture); second, the Pillar of Cloud, symbolizing God's presence, comes down & the Lord speaks Moses at both places. Are they the same place? No.

The Exodus 33 "tent of meeting" was a completely different structure from the tent of meeting/a.k.a. "the tabernacle".

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CLICKS: We know this from several items:

1) The tent in Exodus 33 was “outside the camp”, whereas the Tabernacle was at the very center of the camp.

2) There is no mention of the sacred furniture (Ark of the Covenant, menorah, the altar of sacrifice or the laver) at the Exodus 33 tent.

3) And, according to the chronology of the Torah, the Holy Tabernacle was not erected and dedicated until Exodus Chapter 40.

CLICK: So, the tent in Exodus 33 which Joshua may have entered was a temporary structure that Moses used to come and pray and converse with God. It may have been Moses’ personal tent, we don’t know. But, it was just a tent. Joshua was perfectly safe to be there; but he was smart enough to keep his head down when God showed up to talk with Moses. Joshua certainly would have stayed away from a tent containing the Ark of the Covenant – and we’ll see why today.

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SLIDE: DUTIES OF THE LEVITE CLANS

When the Cloud of God's presence moved, signaling the camp to follow it, the Tabernacle had to be disassembled, moved and reassembled. The Levites did the **blue collar tasks** associated with the Tabernacle, and they were to follow the directions of the priests.

- The clan of Kohath was in charge of the sacred furniture; Gerhson – the fabrics and coverings (tent fabrics); and Merari – structural components (poles, pegs, stands, wooden planks)

Now – as we saw with the death of Nadab and Abihu, **the Holiness of God can be definitely dangerous** for anyone who attempts to approach Him on other than His terms.

The Levites therefore had extremely dangerous jobs because they lived and worked next to and in the Tabernacle. The clan of Kohath – in particular – had the most dangerous job – they were responsible for transporting the Sacred Objects when the nation was on the move.

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I'll read from Numbers Chapter 4:

Numbers 4:4 "This is the work of the Kohathites at the tent of meeting: the care of the most holy things. ⁵ When the camp is to move, Aaron and his sons are to go in and take down the shielding curtain and put it over the ark of the covenant law. ⁶ Then they are to cover the curtain with a durable leather, spread a cloth of solid blue over that and put the poles in place...

VERSE 17: The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ¹⁸ "See that the Kohathite tribal clans are not destroyed from among the Levites. ¹⁹ So that they may live and not die when they come near the most holy things, do this for them: Aaron and his sons are to go into the sanctuary and assign to each man his work and what he is to carry. ²⁰ But the Kohathites must not go in to look at the holy things, even for a moment, or they will die."

Try to picture the scene – the Cloud lifts from the Holy of Holies and moves away from the camp. Moses begins to shout at the top of his lungs: "Let God arise and His enemies be scattered." The camp becomes a beehive of activity, taking down tents, packing up the kitchen utensils. The Tribe of Judah heads out... etc. Let's go, God is moving.

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But, the Levites have to wait to pack up the tabernacle – they had to wait for the priests to go into the Holy Place and Holy of Holies to cover the Sacred Objects so that no unauthorized person could see them. Once covered, the Kohathites would then go in and, using wooden poles in the loops of the furniture, they'd carry it on their shoulders. Then, the rest of the Levites would then take down the tent walls and pack them and join in the movement.

This is not ancient superstition; this was very real – and very dangerous. God was not playing the old bogey man – He was protecting the concept of Holiness. We have here the situation of where objects that were in the presence of God have become holy, that have taken on some part of His holiness, and therefore only those who a high enough status of holiness can be in their uncovered presence. This is foreign to our 21st century thinking – but here it is. There are degrees of holiness. God had not given the clan of Kohath a high-enough status of holiness to touch or even see the furniture.

In verses 17–20, the Kohathites had such a dangerous job that God specifically ordered Moses and Aaron that they pay special attention to see to it that these Levites did not all get killed off while performing their duties! The priests had to go in first and wrap the furniture in a designated manner

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and insure that the Kohathites would not even see the furniture. And once it was packed up, the Kohathites then went in and carried the furniture using wooden poles.

Click By the way, all those drawings depicting the Israelites carrying the Ark of the Covenant UNCOVERED thru the wilderness or when marching around the City of Jericho are *not accurate*. It had to be covered – it was a matter of life and death.

Now – my western worldview asks a question – HOW were the priests able to enter the Holy of Holies and cover the Ark of the Covenant? I thought that only the High Priest could go in, and then only once a year on the Day of the Atonement.

Well, the priests were already authorized to enter the Holy Place where the Menorah was located, so the issue per se is not that they couldn't *touch* sacred furniture – it was that they could not be *in the very presence* of God – the Holy of Holies – when God was there. They were allowed to enter and pack up the Ark of the Covenant because the Cloud of God's Presence had obviously moved away and the camp was

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on the move. Therefore, God was no longer present in the Holy of Holies then. Since He wasn't there, the regular priests could go in and wrap the Ark. Then, the Kohathites could come in and carry the furniture on their shoulders using the wooden poles.

- OK. But **WHY** couldn't the Kohathites even LOOK at the furniture – even when the Cloud had moved away?

***** Because “Grace” is free and it is a gift.** Simply – God didn't give the Kohathites the grace to have that level of holiness. In a sense, the sacred objects were “above their pay grade”. *That's not fair*, you may say. Well, it's true that the priests weren't any better people than the other Kohathites (remember – they were all in the same clan), but God *elected* to give the priests a higher level of holiness for His own reasons, not because of their inherent goodness. God deals with us either through grace or fairness. I prefer grace.

So, here's another concept dealing with God's Holiness that's difficult to understand – His Holiness resided with some objects. **Only** the priests were allowed to see the holy furniture. This level of holiness was transferred by God – not earned by the object or person. God gave a measure of holiness to the priests and they could do this, the high priest with a higher degree of holiness could do that, and no one

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else. This is a difficult concept to grasp, but here it is. We'll see this principle again several more times in the Book of Numbers, both with the concept of holiness and also with uncleanness.

Another difficult concept concerns the fact that the objects remained holy. Holy ground became holy only when God's presence is there, but when God's presence moved away, the ground returned to its ordinary state again. But here, holiness attached itself to some man-made objects on a lingering basis. This was not magic – holiness remained only as long as God permits it to remain – but He did so for reasons of His own. It is speculation on my part, but I believe He allowed it to remain because the objects were associated with the Atonement of sin and the Worship of Him. Even if we don't understand it, we have to accept it.

Is this only an OT concept and not for the 21st century?
Consider this statement in the NT:

So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without

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discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. 1 Cor 11: 27

Same concept – *failure to discern holiness*, in this case, Christ in our brothers and sisters and in the bread and blood of remembrance – resulted in sickness and even death.

Now, my conclusion from reading these passages is that I have only the vaguest understanding of the Holiness of God and how it permeates the life of Christians. The more I look at this, the more feel so inadequate to speak about it. But, it all speaks to the merits we take on from the sacrifice of Christ.

Thank You Jesus – You are our Holiness.

DEDICATION OF THE TABERNACLE – THE CARTS

OK. The Tabernacle was finally finished, and God instructs it to be dedicated. In Number 7, we have a description of the scene at the dedication (after which the Tabernacle was open for business). There is something new

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in the world, something commanded by God for man to do. And therefore it is necessarily good. **The world is a better place.**

I want to briefly look at the dedication because it contains some important information and a very interesting bit of trivia. Numbers Chapter 7, starting in verse 1:

"When Moses finished setting up the tabernacle, he anointed and consecrated it and all its furnishings. He also anointed and consecrated the altar and all its utensils.² Then the leaders of Israel, the heads of families who were the tribal leaders in charge of those who were counted, made offerings.³ They brought as their gifts before the LORD six covered carts and twelve oxen—an ox from each leader and a cart from every two. These they presented before the tabernacle.

⁴ The LORD said to Moses, ⁵ "Accept these from them, that they may be used in the work at the tent of meeting. Give them to the Levites as each man's work requires."

⁶ So Moses took the carts and oxen and gave them to the Levites.⁷ He gave two carts and four oxen to the Gershonites, as their work required,⁸ and he gave four carts and eight oxen to the Merarites, as their work required. They were all under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron, the priest. [Verse ⁹] But Moses did not give any

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carts to the Kohathites, because they were to carry on their shoulders the holy things, for which they were responsible. 10: When the altar was anointed, the leaders brought their offerings for its DEDICATION and presented them before the altar.

➤ SLIDE – SHOWING NUMBER OF CARTS

Ok – Verse 9 explains that the clan of Kohath did not receive ANY carts: they were to carry the most precious Ark of the Covenant and the other holy furniture; the Ark of the Covenant was to be carried on the *shoulders* of the Levites, not laid in the back of a wagon.

Click – Like you see sometimes where leader is carried in a chair by four individuals with the poles on their shoulders. This was the respect Israel was to give to the Ark – even though God wasn't directly present over the Ark during the move, the sacred furniture had become so *Holy* that it demanded a special respect.

This regulation of the Levites carrying the Ark on their shoulders was apparently ignored by Israel's leadership

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sometime after they entered the Promised Land, and it brought with it the promised consequences.

CLICK: There's something very interesting here that we miss when we're not able to read this passage in Hebrew. In verse 10 of Number 7, the word that is usually translated "consecration" or "dedication", is **Hanukkah**. Yes, it's the same word as used for the Holiday celebrated in the fall to recognize the rededication of the Temple to Yehoveh after having been defiled by the Syrians in the 2nd century bc – 1200 years after this dedication here in Numbers. The first use of the word 'Hanukkah' is here in Numbers when the dwelling place of God on earth was placed into operation.

UZZAH AND THE ARK

Let's look at an incident dealing with the Ark that occurred about 350 years after the Israelites entered the land.

Under King Saul, respect for the Ark had degenerated into treating it as a good-luck charm; the priesthood became corrupted and the prophet Samuel warned about coming disaster. King Saul took the Ark into a battle with the

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Philistines; the Philistines greatly feared the Ark's arrival, but they were no cowards. Because God was not with Saul now, Saul was killed and the Ark captured and put into temple of Dagon, the god of the Philistines.

I Samuel 5

"After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. Then they carried the ark into Dagon's temple and set it beside Dagon. When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! They took Dagon and put him back in his place. But the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold; only his body remained. ⁵ That is why to this day neither the priests of Dagon nor any others who enter Dagon's temple at Ashdod step on the threshold.

The LORD's hand was heavy on the people of Ashdod and its vicinity; he brought devastation on them and afflicted them with tumors (actually, the word probably indicated **hemorrhoids**). When the people of Ashdod saw what was happening, they said, "The ark of the god of Israel must not stay here with us, because his hand is heavy on us and on Dagon our god." So they called together all the rulers

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of the Philistines and asked them, "What shall we do with the ark of the god of Israel?"

1st Book of Samuel goes on to say they moved the Ark to another city and the same thing happened. So they tried to move it to a third Philistine city and the people went nuts with fear. Finally, the Philistines decide to send it back.

CLICK: The Philistines put the Ark on a new cart w/2 oxen and included a sin offering (5 golden mice and 5 golden models of hemorrhoids – imagine that). They let the cart & oxen go by themselves w/o a driver – and the oxen went straight for Israelite territory.

The Israelites put the Ark into a house of a man named Abinadab in a town named Kiriath-jearim (also named Baal-Judah) and stayed it there for 20 years in the care of Abinadab and his son Eliazer. The town is a small hilltop community located about 8 miles northwest of Jerusalem, so it would have been considerably less than a day's journey from Jerusalem to travel to the Abinadav's home.

David, now the King after Saul's death, wanted to unify the tribes like they had been 400 years earlier. He directed that the Ark of the Covenant – **the holiest object that ever**

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graced the planet – be brought to the newly conquered capital of Jerusalem – (no Temple as yet, just brought to Jerusalem & placed in a tent near David's residence). We pick the story up in the 2nd Book of Samuel, Chapter 6:

“David again brought together all the able young men of Israel—thirty thousand. ² He and all his men went to Baalah in Judah 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. They set the ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah (ooz-zaw) and Ahio (**akh-yo**), sons of Abinadab, were guiding the new cart with the ark of God on it, and Ahio was walking in front of it. David and all Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD, with castanets, harps, lyres, timbrels, sistrums and cymbals.

⁶ When they came to the threshing floor of Nakon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. 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.

Then David was angry because the LORD's wrath had broken out against Uzzah, and to this day that place is called Perez Uzzah.

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David was afraid of the LORD that day and said, "How can the ark of the LORD ever come to me?" He was not willing to take the ark of the LORD to be with him in the City of David. Instead, he took it to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. 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.

OK. The Ark has resided in the house of Abinadab for some 20 years. Abinadab is thought to have been either a priest or a Levite, because in I Sam., it says that he had a son named Eliazer, which is a common name for a priest. So, whether priest or regular Levite, Abinadab's two sons (or possibly grandsons) Uzzah and Ahio (*Akh-yo*) would also have been priests or Levites. David, accompanied by 30,000 prominent men, went to Kiriath-jearim to bring the Ark to Jerusalem.

OK so far. They then put it on an ox-drawn cart guided by Uzzah, while his brother walked ahead. People are celebrating as the column nears Jerusalem. But then, one of the oxen stumbled, (probably at God's direction), and the Ark looked like it was going to fall. Uzzah instinctively, without thinking, reacts and reaches out his hand to keep it from falling down in the mud.

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What was God's reaction to Uzzah keeping the ark from falling into the mud? Did heaven open up and a voice from God say "Thank you, Uzzah!" No...

God reacts instantly, striking down Uzzah. Uzzah dies right there beside the cart in the presence of the people. Rejoicing immediately turned to mourning and terror. David was so unnerved by this act of God that he would stopped the column and had the Ark placed in the nearby home of Obed-edom the Gittite, where it remained for months.

David got mad at God for this, but in reality, this whole thing was David's fault – he was personally negligent in allowing the Ark to be transported in such a manner.

Click: Three errors:

There were three things done in error here.

1st error – Use of Cart

We read just a moment ago that the Ark was required to be carried on the shoulders of Levites. God had instructed that bearing the Ark would be a **personal thing**. The clan of Kohath was not given a cart – they were required to carry it using wooden poles.

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Think about the scene for a minute. They had to have placed the Ark in the cart by using the poles – if they had touched the Ark when loading it into the cart, they would have died **back at the house**. This method of transport should have been obvious to David and Uzzah. It was mainly David's fault for using the cart because he was in charge.

Where would Uzzah and Achyo (who were Levites or perhaps even priests) or David get the idea, then, that the proper and solemn way to bring the Ark of the Covenant to the Israelite capital was in a new oxcart? Answer: **from pagans (Philistines)**.

It is a sad commentary that these Levites who were to accompany the Ark on behalf of King David (and whose duty it was to not just know the Torah but to teach it) had no idea how to treat it, which means they had little to no knowledge of the Law of Moses. It apparently was assumed that the right thing to do was to transfer it there in the same manner as it was brought to them: by means of an oxcart. And they figured that it **MUST** be a new cart that had never been used because that had a nice pious ring to it.

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2nd error was Attitude

“...Israel celebrated (sachaq) in the presence of Adonai.” 2

Sam 6:5

- **Sachaq** (saw–khak) = laugh, jest, be frivolous, party

The key word is “celebrated”, which in Hebrew is **sachaq** (zaw–khak). **Sachaq** means to laugh, to mock, to make merry, to jest and to generally joke around in a frivolous manner. To translate this word as “celebrate” isn’t wrong provided the readers know that it is used in the sense of a party atmosphere. Sadly, some translations have so distorted the meaning of this word that Christian musicians have used this word as a title of a song, not knowing that has such a disrespectful connotation for their music.

*** The crowd of people was disrespectful – The story is told of a young woman from America visiting the place in Vienna where **Beethoven's piano** was on display; she had the audacity to sit down and play some rock–and–roll music on that rare instrument. The old caretaker walked over to her and remarked that the great Paderewski (Pa · de · rew · ski) had

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once visited and sat down at that piano. (Paderewski was the great Polish pianist who filled Carnegie hall in the 1920's and 30's. One of the greatest to ever live.) When the teenage tourist asked what Paderewski had played, the old custodian replied, "Nothing. He felt unworthy to play Beethoven's piano!"

David, the Levites, and the Elders of Israel all made this same grave error. They were cavalier – they thought that – as long as they invoked God's name – they could proceed any way they chose (that they had full liberty in the Lord, you see). They probably figured that the strictness of the Law and the Torah were *for their ancestors* in Moses' day, not for them hundreds of years later.

It was all about them – singing the songs and playing the instruments in a way that made them feel good. They forgot that they were involved with the Holy God of the Universe. They thought that as long as they enjoyed the observance and felt good in their hearts about it, God would approve. They did what it is so easy for us today to do: **they exchanged attention to God's holiness for the pursuit of their own happiness.**

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3rd error was Touching the Ark

The Book of Numbers plainly warned in several places – as we read – that you could not touch the Ark under penalty of death. Intentions were irrelevant – accidental touching merited the same penalty as intentional touching.

David obviously had no working knowledge of the Torah. If David knew the Law, he would instantly have known why Uzzah died. And if the Levites had known the Law they could have explained to David why Uzzah died. But since ignorance was running rampant at the moment, an abundance of caution was the wisest course of action.

And, we see that the Ark was Holy even though God wasn't immediately present there. **God wasn't hiding inside the box.** The Ark was Holy because it had been in God's immediate presence, & Yehovah had obviously allowed part of His holiness to remain with the Ark.

Uzzah evidently believed that mud would desecrate the ark, but mud is just dirt and water OBEYING God, doing what dirt was designed to do when it gets wet. Mud is not evil. God's law about touching the Ark was not meant to

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keep the Ark pure from the earth, but from the impure touch of a human hand.

Should Uzzah have allowed the Ark to tumble out of the cart and onto the ground as an alternative? The short answer is yes (even assuming that God would have permitted that to actually happen). But note – the Ark did not fall, even though Uzzah died immediately.

I think that most of us probably sympathize with Uzzah – who was seeking to serve God by keeping the Ark from crashing to the ground and perhaps becoming damaged. From this event, I'm forced to conclude several things:

1. That **God's judgment of sin is very different from how we would handle sin.**
2. **God sees things way differently than we do.** Intent didn't evidently matter. I can't honestly say that I quickly perceive the evil in this incident, but there was serious sin involved or else God would not have punished it. He is too good, too just to kill any man that didn't deserve it. God never exaggerates our sins. He looks at them as they are.

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3. And if the mere sin of touching the ark brought death upon the man, what would my sins bring upon me if Christ had not gone to the Cross in my place?

The O.T. reveals that there are two remedies for something that has accidentally become holy by means of contact with a holy object: **it is either consecrated for use by God or it is to be destroyed.** (DIE TO YOURSELF – BORN AGAIN).

By touching the immeasurably holy Ark of God, Uzzah instantaneously contracted a measure of holiness for which neither he nor anyone else was authorized to have; therefore he was destroyed (killed).

THE WOMAN WHO TOUCHED JESUS

CLICK: Ok – Uzzah died for touching the Ark because it had become Holy. And the Bible says that God never changes, that He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

But, remember the woman with a blood discharge who touched the hem of Jesus' cloak and was healed. Think about that for a moment. Jesus, Who is both God and man, walked the earth. The Divine Word was with us – John even expresses this as “the Word tabernacled with us” (John 1:14).

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And yet, this woman could touch Him and not die – in fact, she was healed. Why the difference between Uzzah and her?

CLICK The woman was able to approach Jesus because Jesus had said “Come to me, all you who are heavily burdened.”

Jesus = God became flesh to show how much He loves us and wants to dwell with us, but in a way that wasn't paralyzing for us to see..

Remember – people frightened at the Sound of God's voice, the thunder on Mt. Sinai, the bright light –> people would be so frightened that they would run away and now see how much how God cares for us.

But – the great dilemma. How does a Holy God allow an unholy creature, one who He loves but still unholy, how does He allow that creature who He loves to be in His presence knowing that to do so would automatically destroy that Who He loves? –> the Cross!

- Only those people to whom God says "Come" can approach Him. That's called 'election'.

Jesus said it was Ok to touch Him, He invited it. But – only those who are His sheep hear His voice and hear the

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invitation – that's called election. And how do people become His sheep – because they are drawn – compelled – to be so by the Father.

- **The woman thought that she had that thought to touch Jesus on her own – but she didn't; God the Father placed that thought in her head – just like He does with any of us who are called to be saved..**

We don't choose Him, He choose us. But Uzzah wasn't called then to approach Him, and he presumed his hands were cleaner than the mud. **Presumption can be deadly in the presence of Holiness.**

Is the God of the OT different than the God of the NT? NO. **The results of anyone attempting to approach a Holy God through any means other than through Christ will result in the same fate as Uzzah's – only now it will be spiritual death.**

If you haven't yet reached out to touch Jesus but have a strange sense inside that you should, do it today. The Father has chosen you. Reach out to Christ – touch Him.

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SIMON OF CYRENIA

God required that the Ark of the Covenant with the Mercy Seat had to be carried on the shoulders of the Levites using poles made out of wood. Jesus died on a cross of wood.

I wonder... remember when Jesus was carrying the cross, He fell down three times because of weakness from the beating He had endured. Finally the, Romans forced a Jewish bystander named Simon who came from Cyrenia (in modern day Libya) to carry it for Him.

Having you ever wondered why, spiritually speaking, anyone – other than the Messiah, our High Priest – was allowed to carry the cross – the wood upon which our salvation was gained? Can't say, but there is strong speculation in N.T. commentaries that Simon of Cyrene was a Levite from the clan of Kohath. We do know that he later became a Christian.

God had instructed that bearing the Ark would be a **personal thing**. The clan of Kohath was not given a cart – they were required to carry it on poles. **Carrying the Ark, like carrying one's cross, was to be a personal thing.**

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And we do know that the Hebrew name Simon means “Hearkening; listening” – Shema. Hear oh Israel – take up your cross and follow me.

Psalm 24

Of David. A psalm.

- ¹ The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;
- ² for he founded it on the seas
and established it on the waters.
- ³ Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD?
Who may stand in his holy place?
- ⁴ The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not trust in an idol
or swear by a false god.

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm

*Til on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied

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For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live, I live

And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

* No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From a life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny

* No power of hell, no scheme of man
Could ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I stand