



**Sunday School Lesson Summary for March 2, 2008
Released on Wednesday, February 27, 2008**

"The Ark Brought to Jerusalem"

Lesson: 1 Chronicles 15:1–3, 14–16, 25–28.

Background Scripture: 1 Chronicles 13, 15.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 150.

Times: possibly 1000 B.C.

Place: Jerusalem

HOW TO SAY IT

CHENANANIAH. Ken-uh-nee-uh.

CHERUBIM. *chair*-uh-bim.

EPHOD. *ee*-fod.

GIBEON. *Gib*-e-un (G as in *get*).

LEVITES. *Lee*-vites.

MELCHIZEDEK. Mel-*kiz*-eh-dek.

OBED-EDOM. *O*-bed-*ee*-dum.

PHILISTINES. *Fuh-liss*-teens or *Fill*-us-teens.

SHILOH. *Shy*-low.

UZZAH. *Uz*-zuh.

ZECHARIAH. *Zek*-uh-*rye*-uh (strong accent on *rye*)

LESSON TEXT

1 Chronicles 15:1–3, 14–16, 25–28

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

2Then 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.

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

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

15And 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.

16And 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.

.....

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.

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to show that the sacred ark was carried by sanctified Levites to Jerusalem and placed in a tent until a temple could be built by Solomon—David's son.

Principle: to teach how something sacred can serve as a visual aid to teach people about the presence of God.

Application: to urge God's people to serve Him with respect and joy.

INTRODUCTION

Symbols of God's Presence

I once visited a certain church to conduct a Bible study. The building was functional, practical, and not "showy." But eight stained-glass windows in the sanctuary overwhelmed me with their messages. On the left were four Old Testament symbols: the tree of life, a rainbow with Noah's ark, a burning bush, and a pillar of fire. On the right were four New Testament symbols: a stable (for Jesus' birth), a cross, an empty tomb, and a dove descending. The impact of these eight beautiful windows has never left me.

These symbols clearly communicate God's presence or promise. As long as Adam and Eve had access to the tree of life, they could live forever in God's presence. Every time we see a rainbow, it reminds us of God's promise never to flood the earth again. Moses knew he was in God's presence when he approached a burning bush. The pillar of fire was a clear demonstration of God's presence in the midst of the Hebrew people.

On the New Testament side, the symbols are just as powerful. The stable symbolizes that the Word of God became flesh. The cross has always been a symbol of God's promised forgiveness. Of course, without the empty tomb of the resurrection there would be no salvation for the world; the resurrection assures us that God is still here. Finally, the dove is a symbol of God's Spirit, which is present within every Christian. Today's lesson focuses on another important symbol of God's presence for Old Testament believers: the Ark of the Covenant.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The Ark of the Covenant was ancient Israel's most precious symbol of God's presence. The construction of the ark is recorded in Exodus 37:1–9. That happened in about 1446 BC. Within the ark of the covenant eventually were placed the testimony, a gold jar of manna that the Israelites had gathered during their time in the wilderness, and Aaron's budded rod (Exodus 40:20; Hebrews 9:4).

Four gold rings were fastened to the ark. Poles were inserted through these rings for transporting it. The ark was never to be carried in any way other than by Levites with those poles on their shoulders (Exodus 25:13–15; 37:5; 1 Chronicles 15:2, 15). Since the ark was top-heavy, using a cart to carry it was dangerous (1 Chronicles 13:7–10). Indeed, the top cover itself (called *mercy seat* or *atonement cover*) was made out of gold—an extremely heavy substance (Exodus 25:17).

The Ark of the Covenant symbolized the throne of God (see 1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chronicles 13:6; Psalm 80:1; 99:1). Perhaps more precisely, the space between the cherubim on the atonement cover represented the "footstool" of God (see 1 Chronicles 28:2; Psalm 99:5). Atonement for sin was made by sprinkling the blood of bulls and goats before the mercy seat (Leviticus 16:11–16). The importance of the Ark of the Covenant to the Hebrew people cannot be overstated!

After the ark was built and placed in the tabernacle, it stayed with the Israelites throughout their wilderness wanderings. Eventually it was placed in Shiloh, about 30 miles northeast of Jerusalem, after the conquest of the promised land (Joshua 18:1). Through an unusual series of events, the ark ended up in a private residence, where it remained in obscurity for some time (1 Samuel 4:4–7:2). The tabernacle that had housed the ark was located elsewhere at that time, separated from the ark (1 Chronicles 16:39; 21:29; 2 Chronicles 1:3, 13). It was under these conditions that David sought to bring the ark to Jerusalem and place it within a specially prepared tent (1 Chronicles 13:5; 15:1).

Today's background texts of 1 Chronicles 13 and 15 must be understood as part of a literary unit, namely chapters 13–17. This unit brings us to an important stage in the establishment of Jerusalem as both a political and religious center for the newly united kingdom under King David. This stage began when David brought the ark to Jerusalem (chapter 13) and concluded when God gave His promise concerning David's dynasty (chapter 17).

By the time David became king, more than 400 years had elapsed since the Ark of the Covenant had come into being. First Chronicles 13 recounts the first attempt at bringing the ark to Jerusalem. That attempt ended in failure. Someone, either David or the priests, made a serious mistake by appointing the wrong people to move the ark (1 Chronicles 15:13a).

Another mistake was in transporting the ark in the wrong manner (1 Chronicles 15:13b). The result was a tragedy that halted the process (2 Samuel 6:1–7; 1 Chronicles 13:1–10). David was despondent: "How shall I bring the ark of God home to me?" (1 Chronicles 13:12b; compare 2 Samuel 6:9). For three months the project languished until everyone, including David, recognized that God had blessed the household of Obed-edom, where the ark was housed temporarily (1 Chronicles 13:13, 14).

The author of Chronicles arranged his material to show that David's first major decision and act as king of a united Israel was to bring the ark to Jerusalem. Our printed text picks up the story of King David's second attempt at this project.

QUESTIONS

THE PLACE READIED—1 Chronicles 15:1–3.

1. Why was the Ark of the Covenant at the house of Obed-edom?

The last we heard about the Ark of the Covenant is the statement in 1 Chronicles 13:13, which says, "And the ark of God remained with the family of Obed-edom in his house three months. And the Lord blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that he had." The ark was there because of the disastrous first attempt to move it to Jerusalem (vs. 1–12). When the cart on which the ark was riding was jostled and Uzzah took hold of it to steady it, God slew him. The ark was not being moved as God had instructed.

The parallel record of this incident, found in 2 Samuel 6, tells us that when Uzzah died, David became angry (v. 8) and "was afraid of the Lord that day, and said, How shall the ark of the Lord come to me? So David would not remove the ark of the Lord unto him into the city of David: but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite" (vs. 9,10).

2. What did David hear that likely led him to again bring the ark to Jerusalem?

It was three months later when David had heard that God was richly blessing the house of Obbededom because of the presence of the ark there. Perhaps during that three months David looked into the law of God and reviewed the instructions given to Moses regarding how to move the Ark of the Covenant. This time he would do it right.

3. How did David prepare before moving the “ark of the Lord God” (1 Chronicles 15:1)?

The *city of David* is also known as Jerusalem. Before David attempts to bring up *the ark*, he improves that city’s infrastructure in certain ways (*made him houses*; see also 2 Samuel 5:9–11; 1 Chronicles 14:1). This is entirely appropriate, as the population of Jerusalem probably numbers only around 2,000 at the time in an area of no more than 12 acres.

Part of this city-improvement plan involves preparing *a place for the ark of God*. We are not certain where this is, but it is likely the highest place in the area, later to be known as Mount Zion (see Psalm 132:13). Today one observes the Dome of the Rock mosque close to that location.

With the tabernacle still located in Gibeon, David must devise a special *tent* for the ark (2 Samuel 6:17; 1 Chronicles 16:1, 39; 21:29). We may speculate that the tent is patterned in some way after the tabernacle. The tabernacle proper will not be brought to Jerusalem for many years (2 Chronicles 1:6, 13, 5:5).

4. Why were only Levites to carry the ark (v. 2)?

God had given Moses specific directions for moving the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant (and all the other articles in the tabernacle). Everything was to be done under the oversight of the descendants of Aaron. The larger body of the Levites were to do the actual moving. Their duties in the moving of the tabernacle were spelled out in detail. The move began with the descendants of Aaron covering the ark with the veil, a covering of badger skins, and a blue cloth (Num. 4:5).

This explains why David ordered, “None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites” (1 Chron. 15:2). He had reminded himself that these were the ones God had specifically chosen for this task. It was the Levitic tribe that had been set apart to lead in all the worship of God and in the transportation of the tabernacle and everything associated with it while the people wandered through the wilderness toward Canaan.

A certain violation of this rule contributed to the death of Uzzah that marked the first attempt to move it (1 Chronicles 13:7–10; 15:13). Even though he seems to have been a Levite, he apparently was not one of the lawful ones to transport the ark, considering the improper manner in which the first attempt was made (see Numbers 7:1–9, especially v. 9). That mistake involved both *how* as well as *who* in moving the ark.

5. What was a time when one of your plans failed because of poor execution even though your heart was in the right place? How did you grow spiritually as a result of that experience?

David had the right heart in both of his attempts to move the ark. Yet 1 Chronicles 13 demonstrates a good idea with poor execution. The happy ending of the 1 Chronicles 15 account shows that David learned from his mistake. As his son

Solomon observed, "He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding" (Proverbs 15:32).

Whenever we draw near to God, we must do so on His terms. A sincere heart is important, but people can be sincerely wrong. Zeal must be based on knowledge (Romans 10:2). Popular thinking is sincere in believing that there are many roads to God, but Jesus taught differently: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

6. What did the ark symbolize for the people of Israel?

The Ark of the Covenant was a crucial symbol of God's presence with the people of Israel. Throughout the wilderness wanderings, the ark had been the primary symbol of God's presence with Israel. During those days, God had often alluded to "the place which the Lord thy God hath chosen to put his name" (Deut. 12:21; 16:11; 2 Chron. 7:12), meaning Jerusalem.

"Because the ark was God's throne among His people, it was a symbol of His presence and power with them wherever it went. There are quite a number of miracles recorded in the Old Testament surrounding the ark: With the presence of the ark, the waters of the River Jordan divided so the Israelites could cross on dry land, and the walls of Jericho fell so that the Israelites could capture it (Joshua 3:14-17, 6:6-21). Yet the ark could not be treated with irreverence because it was also a symbol of God's judgment and wrath.

When the Israelites fought their enemies the Philistines during the time of the prophet Samuel, they disregarded the commands of the Lord and took the ark out to the battlefield with them, "summoning" God's presence. God caused the Philistines to win the battle and "the glory departed from Israel, for the ark of the Lord was taken" (1 Samuel 4:22). However, God showed His power to the Philistines when He caused their idol, Dagon, to fall to the ground when the ark was placed next to it, and several Philistine cities were plagued heavily when the ark was in their midst (1 Samuel 5). Ultimately, the ark was returned to Israel." (GoodSeed International, ©2004–2006; The Tabernacle Place)

7. What had happened to the ark that led people to forget its importance?

Upon Israel's arrival in the land of Canaan, the tabernacle had been set up in Shiloh, about twenty miles north of Jerusalem (Josh. 18:1). It was still there when Eli was the high priest (1 Sam. 1:3). During his days, the ark was taken to the battlefield when Israel was fighting the Philistines (4:4–9). When Israel was defeated, the ark was captured. After God's hand of judgment came upon the Philistines, they eventually returned it (6:1–18). The ark ended up in Kirjath-jearim, where it stayed for nearly one hundred years.

From this, it is easy to see why the ark had not been thought of by many of the people of Israel. David intended to bring it back into the prominence it had once been given.

8. Why did David gather "all Israel together" (v. 3)?

Verse 3 is a good summary of all that David originally tried to do regarding the first attempt to bring the ark *to Jerusalem* (1 Chronicles 13:1–5). This second gathering is thus a natural continuation of this all-important project. In 1 Chronicles 15:4–12, 17–24 (not in today's text), the author gives details regarding whom *all Israel* includes.

THE LEADERS READIED—1 Chronicles 15:14–16.

9. What does it mean that the Levites "sanctified themselves" before transporting the ark (v. 14)?

A good description of what it means to sanctify oneself can be found in Exodus 19:10–15. For the priests and Levites it means at least washing the body, changing clothing (to fine linen; see 1 Chron. 15:27), and abstaining from sexual relations. Since Levites have to stay away from the common and the profane, then fasting and prayer may be part of the process, but this is not certain (see also Exodus 29; 30:17–21; 40:30–32; Lev. 8:5–36).

10. How was the ark of God moved this time (v. 15)?

We have already mentioned that the issue of transporting *the ark of God* includes issues of both *who* and *how*. If the ark of the covenant was to be moved according to God's instructions, it had to be done by the priests and Levites. Those who were the leaders are named in verse 11: Zadok and Abiathar were the priests; Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel, and Amminadab were the Levites. David referred to them as the heads of the Levite fathers' houses (v. 12) and told them to prepare and sanctify themselves and those who would serve with them.

David's explanation for this particular command reveals his understanding that they had not done this properly the last time they tried to move the ark. Because they had not had the Levites performing the work, the anger of the Lord had burst out on them. They had not sought the Lord in the matter. This was an admission that they had neglected to consult with God about the procedure before they attempted it. It was of utmost importance that the priests and Levites carry out the procedure as prescribed in the Scriptures and that they be pure in doing so.

Everyone followed God's commands. They sanctified themselves and carried the ark on their shoulders by means of poles that were run through the rings attached to the ark's corners (cf. Exod. 25:10-15). This was exactly "as Moses commanded according to the word of the Lord" (1 Chron. 15:15). No detail was being left out or slighted. Extreme care was taken in doing exactly what God had specified.

Perhaps we should take note of this in light of current practice. How careless many believers are about obedience to God's Word! Some seem to think they may choose which parts to obey. We must realize that this is a very disrespectful view of the Bible. *All Scripture "is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). All Scripture should be obeyed.*

11. What was the nature and purpose of the music performed that day (v. 16)?

Have you noticed how often music was used as part of special events recorded in the Old Testament, especially during those times when God was being honored and praised? While spoken words alone can be effective in honoring and praising God, there is something powerful and inspiring in the use of music. Music ought to be viewed as a gift from the Lord, and it should be used in ways that reflect positively on Him. Note too that music was not used haphazardly but with careful preparation.

The Levites were to carefully appoint those who would lead in the musical worship on this occasion. There was to be singing with instrumental accompaniment, and all of it was to be done in a way that would express the joy in the hearts of those involved. The Levites appointed Herman, Asaph, and Ethan to play the brass cymbals, along with others who would be effective in this ministry (1 Chron. 15:17–21). Chenaniah was to be the choir director in charge, because he was skillful as a musician (v. 22).

There are those who prefer music in church services to always be quiet and meditative. There clearly are times when that should be the case. Notice, however, the instrumentation mentioned here. You will see that the sound was probably

rather boisterous (or, lively)! The stringed instruments and harps were accompanied by cymbals. There is mention of other instruments too. Joyful music does much to cheer people up and express the joy and thanksgiving filling our hearts.

THE MOVE CELEBRATED—1 Chronicles 15:25–28.

12. Who went with David to move the ark (vs. 25, 26)?

Second Samuel 6:1 tells us that "David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand," on his first attempt to move the ark. We are not given a like number for this subsequent time, but it may have exceeded the previous one. First Chronicles 15:3 says he "gathered all Israel together to Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the Lord unto his place." Verse 25 indicates that he relied on the elders of Israel and the military captains to manage the attendance.

Once again it is mentioned that this was to be a joyful occasion. It was their intention to bring the ark of the covenant from out of the home of Obed-edom with great celebration. Since everything was being done in accordance with God's instructions, the Lord was with them.

Here is a good lesson for us! We noted earlier that it is important to carefully obey all of God's Word, and here is an indication that such faithfulness assures us of God's presence and assistance. This great undertaking would not be done through mere human effort.

No doubt the priests and Levites wanted to be certain that they would not suffer God's wrath, as had Uzzah. Second Samuel 6:13 says that after the first six steps they stopped and offered sacrifices. Perhaps this was their way of consecrating the entire procession to Jerusalem. It might then be that the seven bulls and rams referred to in 1 Chronicles 15:26 made up the concluding sacrifice after their arrival. Throughout the entire journey, God was honored and glorified. Nothing about the situation was intended to exalt man.

13. What did the clothing of the participants emphasize?

It is emphasized here that David was dressed in special clothing. The linen ephod was part of the priests' clothing, and the reference to fine linen indicates he wore a type of garment reserved for those in high positions, such as priest, king, or other governmental personality. Esther 8:15 describes Mordecai after he was promoted by the king: "And Mordecai went out... in royal apparel of blue and white,... and with a garment of fine linen and purple."

The Levites, singers, and Chenaniah were also dressed in fine linen, indicating the significance and importance of this procession. Their grand attire exemplified the grandness of the presence of God, which was symbolized through the Ark of the Covenant.

14. What characterized the occasion for all involved?

The whole purpose of the occasion was the moving of the Ark of the Covenant, so it is emphasized that all Israel brought it with a great amount of rejoicing. There were people present from every tribe and every level of authority. The shouting and the playing of many instruments indicated the boundless quality of joy flowing from the hearts of those involved.

The detailed description in these verses of the celebration of the return of the Ark of the Covenant gives us a picture of an unusually joyful occasion. That which had been a symbol of God's presence for Israel for centuries was now finally arriving in Jerusalem. For the time being, the people of Israel rejoiced in knowing God was there. Are we are happy knowing He is always with us?

CONCLUSION

Worshipping in the Presence of God

The ancient Israelites rejoiced greatly, for they had placed on Zion the symbol of God's presence that was initiated by God himself. The ark itself symbolized God's throne, or at least His footstool. The status of the Israelites as God's people was based in large part on their receiving and keeping the Ten Commandments, located within the ark. God's gracious provision for His people during the wilderness wanderings was symbolized by a jar of manna, also within the ark. The God-given leadership of Moses and Aaron was signified by Aaron's budded rod, within the ark as well.

For the Christian, the greatest physical symbol of God's presence is found in the Lord's Supper. Jesus said, "This is my body, which is broken for you." To symbolize His shed blood Jesus said, "This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:24, 25). The Gospel of John makes it clear that God's spiritual presence today is His own Holy Spirit (John 16:5-15; compare Acts 5:32; Ephesians 1:13).

Look around you the next time you worship with fellow believers. What symbols of God's presence do you see? Certainly the cross is a good one. The Bible, as the revelation of God's Word, is another. But keep looking! Some of the greatest symbols of God's presence are all around you. These are the men and women who worship alongside us. God has created every human being in His image (Genesis 1:26, 27). It is we and not the animals who can reflect who God is in love, graciousness, and compassion (compare Psalm 111:4, 5).

More vital symbols of God's presence are the hungry we feed, the thirsty to whom we give drink, the strangers we welcome, the naked we clothe, the sick we look after, and the prisoners we visit. Jesus himself said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40b). God is present in those we serve.

PRACTICAL POINTS

If we have no place for God in our lives, our lives are truly empty (1 Chron. 15:1). We must always do the work of God in God's way, not ours (vs. 2-3). Spiritual preparation is necessary for spiritual service (vs. 14-15). Joyless service is not genuine service for God (v. 16). We are not capable of doing God's work without God's help (vs. 25-26). Worship should reflect true joy but always be accompanied with a sense of propriety (vs. 27-28).

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Rejoice in the symbols of God's presence.

PRAYER

Our Father, whenever we partake of the bread and cup, may we see Jesus as He is in all His love and compassion for us. May we discern the unity of the body of Christ, the church. Help us to see Christ in those we serve. Take away all selfishness and greediness in our hearts. May we reflect Your righteousness, generosity, and compassion as Your image-bearers. Be glorified in Your people. In Christ we pray, amen.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Read 1 Chronicles 17:1-27 in preparation for March 9, 2008's lesson, "God's Covenant with David." *Good studying!*

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY

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