

LESSON 1

MARCH 2, 2008

THE ARK COMES TO JERUSALEM

BIBLE BASIS: Lesson Scripture: I Chronicles 15:1-3, 14-16, 25-28

BIBLE TRUTH: We must worship God with great enthusiasm.

MEMORY VERSE: ... David gathered all Israel together to Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the LORD unto his place, which he had prepared for it.
I Chronicles 15:3

LESSON AIM: That you will understand the sequence of events that David initiated to bring the ark of God to Jerusalem.

LESSON SCRIPTURE

commanded, according to the word of the LORD.

I 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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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

15. And the children of the Levites bare the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon, as Moses

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.

LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON

AIM: To help you see the symbols of God's presence.

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.

BIBLE LEARNING

AIM: To help you see the importance of preparation.

I. ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE ARK (I Chronicles 15:1-3)

A. David's Preparations (verse 1)

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.

The *city of David* is, of course, Jerusalem. Before David attempts to bring up *the ark*, he improves that city's infrastructure in certain ways (*made him houses; see also II Samuel 5:9-11; I 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 (**II Samuel 6:17; I Chronicles 16:1, 39; 21:29**). We may speculate that the tent is patterned in some way after the tabernacle. The tabernacle probably will not be brought to Jerusalem for many years (**II Chronicles 1:6, 13, 5:5**).

When God revealed instructions to Moses for building the tabernacle and its furnishings (**Exodus 25–31:11; 35:4–40**), the ark of the covenant was the first article to be described (**Exodus 25:10–22**). It was the most important item because it was precisely between the two cherubim on top of the ark where God met with Moses and gave His commands for the Israelites (**Exodus 25:22; Numbers 7:89**).

QUESTION

1. What symbols have you found to be helpful in reminding you that God is near? Under what circumstances can a symbol be harmful?

B. Levites' Task (verse 2)

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.

David's statement *none ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites* seems to be reflected in Deuteronomy 10:8; 18:1–5. A certain violation of this rule contributed to the death of Uzzah that marked the first attempt to move it (**I 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 verse 9**). That mistake involved both *how* as well as *who* in moving the ark.

QUESTION

2. 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?

C. Israel's Gathering (verse 3)

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.

This is a good summary of all that David originally tried to do regarding the first attempt to bring the ark *to Jerusalem* (**I Chronicles 13:1–5**). This second gathering is thus a natural continuation of this all important project. In I Chronicles

15:4-12, 17-24 (not in today's text), the author gives details regarding whom *all Israel includes*.

II. BRINGING OF THE ARK (I Chronicles 15:14-16)

A. Sanctification (verse 14)

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

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 I Chronicles 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; Leviticus 8:5-36).

QUESTION

3. What can we do to prepare ourselves for drawing near to God?

B. Transportation (verse 15)

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.

We have already mentioned that the issue of transporting *the ark of God* includes issues of both *who* and *how*. Perhaps those who initially put the ark on a

cart in I Chronicles 13:7 were ignorant of the implications of Exodus 25:10-15; 37:1-5. *The Levites* must carry the ark by putting its *staves* (poles) *upon their shoulders*. The rings for the poles are a permanent part of the ark for this very purpose. No one is to touch the ark on penalty of death (**again, see II Samuel 6:68; I Chronicles 13:9-11; 15:13**).

C. Authorization (verse 16)

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

With the ark in Jerusalem, the city will become a center for worship. Hence the need for musicians and *singers* from among the *Levites*.

QUESTION

4. Which songs bring you into a worshipful state of mind? Why?

To this end David delegates the *chief of the Levites* to *appoint* those with such abilities to sing and to play musical instruments (see **I Chronicles 15:17-24, not in today's text; see also II Samuel 6:5**). The three mentioned instruments --namely, *psalteries* (*lyres*), *harps*, and *cymbals*--are three of the most common listed in the Chronicles (**I Chronicles 16:5; 25:1, 6; II Chronicles 5:12; 29:25**). Nehemiah 12:27 lists these important instruments as they came to be used hundreds of years later.

III. WORSHIPPING BEFORE THE ARK (I Chronicles 15:25-28)

A. Ark Retrieved (verse 25)

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 Obed-edom with joy.

God had blessed Obed-edom's household over the three months that *the ark of the covenant* was in his house (**I Chronicles 13:14**). This fact gives courage to David to make a second attempt at bringing the ark to Jerusalem (**II Samuel 6:12**). In I Chronicles 14, the author indicates that God also is blessing David in all that he does. So *with joy* David and all the leaders of Israel go to Obed-edom's house to *bring up* the ark to the high hill above David's palace. Things are looking up!

B. Sacrifices Offered (verse 26)

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.

This verse tells us about the sacrifices that are made at the beginning of this trip. First Chronicles 16:1 tells us about offerings made as the trip concludes. Second Samuel 6:13 adds to the richness of the imagery.

C. Linen Worn (verse 27)

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.

At first glance, *David* may appear to be improperly dressed, for he is wearing garments reserved for *Levites*, especially the *ephod of linen*. This is a tightly fitted white undergarment that is sleeveless. It usually comes down only to the hips. It is worn by those serving at the tent of meeting (**see I Samuel 2:18; 22:18**).

In a sense, David is acting in a priestly mode in bringing the ark into Jerusalem as he offers sacrifices and blesses the people (**I Chronicles 16:2**). His actions are not without precedent when we consider Psalm 110 and the "priest king" Melchizedek (**also see Genesis 14:18-20**). It is possible we are viewing David, in a sense, as a priest king (**compare Zechariah 6:9-15; also see Acts 2:29, 30, which refers to David as a prophet**).

D. Joy Evident (verse 28)

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.

Ancient Israelite worship music is culturally different from what is called "contemporary worship" today. But there is one thing the two have in common: they are both loud (**compare Ezra**

3:13; Nehemiah 12:43; Psalm 150). The louder the better! By the use of percussion, wind, and string instruments, the gathering crowd of Israelites and their gifted musicians make a tremendous joyful noise to the Lord.

We may be able to imagine how loud this worship is by counting the number of musicians in I Chronicles 15:19-22. There we see three musicians on cymbals, eight on psalteries (lyres), and six on harps. The number of singers is unknown. But I Chronicles 15:5-10 reveals hundreds of Levites to be present, all singing.

QUESTION

5. First Chronicles 15:25-28 describes an all-out worship celebration. What would an all-out worship celebration look like today? How would we know if such a celebration had gone “too far”? Or is it even possible to go “too far”? Explain.

BIBLE APPLICATION

AIM: To help you learn to rejoice in the symbol of God’s presence.

Worshiping 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” (**I 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.

STUDENTS’ RESPONSE

AIM: To help with your desire for worship and praise.

Exercise #1: *Their Worship, and Ours.* Read aloud Psalm 150. Based on what you have heard in today’s text (**including I Chronicles 16:1, 2**) and in Psalm 150, make a list of similarities and contrasts between worship practices in ancient Israel and in our congregation today. Answers should be organized into the following categories: 1. Types of worship activities; 2. Types of musical instruments used (if any); 3. Things for which God is praised; 4. Religious symbols used; 5. Involvement of the congregation.

Write on a sheet of paper several ways you can make your worship more enthusiastic.

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.

PREPARE FOR NEXT SUNDAY

Read I Chronicles 17:1-4, 6-15 to see how God made a covenant with David.

MEMORY VERSE TO REMEMBER

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

I Chronicles 15:3

DAILY HOME BIBLE READINGS

MONDAY

**Let Everything Praise the Lord
(Psalm 150)**

TUESDAY

**The Ark of God
(I Chronicles 15:1-3, 11-15)**

WEDNESDAY

**Music, Joy, and Celebration
(I Chronicles 15:16-24)**

THURSDAY

**Bringing the Ark of the Covenant
(I Chronicles 15:25-29)**

FRIDAY

**Ministering Before the Ark
(I Chronicles 16:1-6)**

SATURDAY

**A Psalm of Thanksgiving
(I Chronicles 16:7-36)**

SUNDAY

**Worship Before the Ark
(I Chronicles 16:37-43)**