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## First Step, Stumble

### II Samuel 6:1-11

**Intro:** I brought another Bible with me today. It's an old Bible: a wide-margined Cambridge, KJV. You wouldn't know it by looking at it b/c all the gold lettering has worn off of the binder. It's a very non-descript looking Bible. Anyone looking over my bookshelf would easily pass over it unless they had an inordinate interest in old leather. Otherwise, it would mean nothing to them. But this is not just an old Bible – it's was a wedding gift given to me by my father & the flyleaf contains a personal message to me from his heart. I prize this Bible very much b/c I know its significance.

In the same way, you might not too excited about an ancient wooden box 3'9" long, 2' 3" wide & high; plated in gold called the ark of the covenant. But, your disregard may change somewhat when you realize the true significance of this old piece of sacred furniture; that it represents **the very presence of God** among His people. This story about the ark should matter to all of us b/c **ch6** isn't really a **journal** of the ark's travels it is a revelation of the God of Israel

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**1-2- ark-** Except for a brief mention in **I Sam 14:8**, We haven't seen the ark since **I Sam 4-6** when the Philistines captured it in battle & then quickly returned to Israel on a new cart pulled by 2 milk cows. The ark of the covenant was supposed to be kept in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle b/c it symbolized the glorious throne of God but for over 75 yrs, the ark wasn't housed in the tabernacle at Shiloh. After it was returned by the Philistines it had a short stay in Beth-Shemesh, then it was sent it to Kirjath-Jearim to be guarded in the house of Abinadab.

Before we get too far into the story, let's look at the significance of what the ark actually represents. **Num 10:35-36** gives a hint. So closely was the ark identified w/ **YHWH**'s presence that when the ark moved out to lead Israel Moses would say, "**Rise up, O Lord!**" & when the ark came to rest at the next campsite Moses would say, "**Return, O Lord!**" This close association between the ark & **YHWH** doesn't mean the ark was an image of **YHWH** it simply was a **sacred illustration** of His presence. But, if the ark signifies God's presence, what sort of God does it imply is present?

1) Ark reveals **YHWH**'s **rulership**. David makes this point in **I Chron 28:2**

when he refers to the ark as **the footstool of our God**. Kings sit on thrones & use footstools. So, if the ark is **YHWH**'s footstool then obviously **YHWH** is King!

2) Ark speaks of **YHWH**'s **reconciliation**. Every year on the Day of Atonement the high priest would sprinkle the blood of the sin offering on the lid of the ark & in front of the ark; the requirement for reconciling sinners to Himself.

3) Ark emphasizes **YHWH**'s **revelation**. Inside the ark lay the stone tablets that contained the covenant commandments. Also, the ark was the location where **YHWH** would meet with Moses to deliver further instructions for Israel. The Ark of the covenant was the place of **YHWH**'s **directing word**!

Knowing all this, it's easy to see why David wanted the ark in Jerusalem but I don't think it was just b/c of the ark's spiritual significance. I believe David truly wanted to honor the Lord & give Him His rightful place as king of Israel & that couldn't happen when the ark was in some backwater location. If Jerusalem was to be the new capitol of a united Israel, then it was necessary that **YHWH**'s presence should be there as well. Also, David had a secret desire in his heart to 1 day build a permanent sanctuary for **YHWH** & the 1<sup>st</sup> step would be to bring the ark to Jerusalem.

There was also a **political reason** for moving the ark to Jerusalem b/c the ark symbolized "**One nation under God**."

**I Chron 13:1-6** elaborates more on this occasion. David involved all the key leaders of Israel in planning this event & invited all the priest & Levites to come & participate in the proceedings. It was David's desire that past divisions & tribal differences would be forgotten as the people focused on the Lord, whose presence meant security & victory!

All the traffic & noise in Kirjath-Jearim really mattered. By bringing the ark to Jerusalem, David's saying that **YHWH**'s presence can no longer remain out on the back roads, it must now be the central focus & reality of his kingdom! The worship of **YHWH**, this **ruling, reconciling, revealing** God, must be at the heart of Israel's national life. Having the ark in Jerusalem will be an open declaration that this **majestic, pardoning, speaking** God is in the midst of His people.

So, what's **ch6** teaching us (in light of **ch5**)? In **ch5**, David put a hurt the Jebusites & spanked the Philistines: twice! But now, his only concern is in

honoring his God & uniting his kingdom in worshipping their God. This isn't to say that whipping Jebusites & Philistines doesn't matter; it just insinuates that God's people are not sustained by crises only. God's people do not thrive by defeating Philistines, they thrive by seeking God's face. It's easy for the modern church to lose sight of this truth. We always seem to be able to dredge up more adrenaline over the latest moral emergency (or ethical, social, political). There's always something out there that gets our blood boiling but here's the thing: crises may stimulate us to action but they do not sustain our life. the church must never look to the latest "cause" for her life. We cannot ignore the enemies outside the walls of the church but we also **must not** be absorbed by them. War must **never** replace worship. The real question isn't "Who is against us?" but "Who is among us?"

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**3-8-** It was fun, loud & religious! Dancing & singing with all the instruments – Kirjath-jearim was rocking! The ark was traveling on a new cart pulled by oxen with Uzzah & Ahio serving as attendants. But a funny thing happened on the way to Jerusalem, around the vicinity of Nachon's threshing floor. It took a minute for everyone to realize it. The dancing stopped; then the music stopped. All eyes focused on Uzzah, on the ground: writhing, twitching, then still. Someone called 911. Turn out the lights guys – the party's over!

Doesn't this just seem odd or offensive? Uzzah was just trying to help! What's he supposed to do – let the ark slide off the cart? Why didn't YHWH cut him some slack? Why so severe, so arbitrary, so final? Shouldn't we be angry? Not really b/c if you know your Bible, you'll realize that this whole process was doomed from the very beginning. Despite David's excitement & good intentions, despite Israel's agreement & glad participation, there was 1 thing missing in all the preparations: there is no record of David seeking the mind of the Lord in this matter at all. Moving the ark to Jerusalem seemed like a great idea & everyone was enthusiastic about doing it but the king didn't follow his usual pattern of asking the Lord for direction. You see, what pleases the king & the people may not please God & what doesn't please God won't have His blessing. This attempt fails miserably b/c the Levites didn't **carry** the ark!

Long ago, YHWH had given Moses & the Levites specific instruction on how the ark was to be transported. The rules were simple: **don't touch, don't look** – **no carts**! Certain priests were assigned to cover the sacred furniture

in the tabernacle & the Levites of the Kohathite clan were called to carry the items on their shoulders (ie: **no carts**). When they used a new cart drawn by oxen, they were following the pattern of the pagan Philistines, not the pattern given to Moses on Mt. Sinia. Also, the Kohathites were **not** supposed to touch or look upon (inspect) the items **lest they die** (Num 4:15, 20). Obviously, **YHWH** didn't want them to die & the fact that He **warned** them of all this shows His great **kindness** towards His servants. So it wasn't as tho David, Uzzah & the rest of Israel had had no warning. **YHWH's** judgment against Uzzah was anything but arbitrary.

**angry-** Why? B/c of the Lord's outbreak. Literally: b/c **YHWH** had broken out with a break out against Uzzah. The Hebrew root: **to break out** is used 3Xs in **vs8**. We can't help but remember it was used 4Xs in **5:20** but there's a big difference. In **5:20**, **YHWH** breaks out against David's **enemies**; in **6:8** against David's **friends**! Here's the scary truth: God may break out against the Philistines – or Israel. God's lethal holiness can level pagans or believers!

David's anger was based on confusion. He couldn't understand why his good intentions weren't enough. But God is concerned with both our intentions & our actions. You can object to this all you want but the truth is painfully clear: you shouldn't mess around with a God that is both real & holy. He's not just your warm, fuzzy friend in the sky. We tend to forget that there is heat in His holiness. We don't need to be terrified but being scared really wouldn't hurt.

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**9-11- afraid-** Rightly so, for if **YHWH** had broken out on Uzzah, what's to stop Him from breaking out on Israel or even David for that matter. They were all complicit in this endeavor; they all knew the requirements of the Law & they all ignored them. Now David finds himself in a conundrum: he knew it was important to bring the ark into the center of Israel's life. He wanted all Israel to be excited about the presence & glory of **YHWH**. But, b/c of what happened to Uzzah, David felt he couldn't do what God wanted him to do. So he asks, "**How can the ark of the Lord come to me?**"

The lesson for us is this: God's work must be done in God's way if it is to have God's blessing. The fact that all the leaders of Israel agreed to use the cart didn't make it right. When it looked like the ark was going to fall from the cart, Uzzah presumptuously tried to steady it & was killed. God had warned

about this & every Israelite should've known.

At the beginning of a new era in biblical history, God will sometimes manifest His power in judgment to remind His people that 1 thing has not changed: **God's people *must* obey God's word**. When the tabernacle was 1<sup>st</sup> constructed, Nadab & Abihu tried to enter it in their own way & were struck dead. When Israel entered the Promise Land, Achan was executed b/c he disobeyed **YHWH**'s command & took spoil from Jericho. In the NT church, Ananias & Sapphira died b/c they lied God & the apostles. Now here, at the start of David's reign in Jerusalem, God reminds His people that they are not to imitate the pagan nations when they serve Him b/c all they need to know about it is in His Word.

Excerpt (**Ps 119:9, 11**). David's response in the rest of the **ch6** shows that he eventually discovered the answer to his own question. He found the answer by turning **to the law & to the testimony** (**Isa 8:20**). David found the answer in God's Word! The Body of Christ today needs to take note of this reminder & return to the word of God for a proper understanding of the will of God. There's no amount of unity or spiritual enthusiasm that can compensate for disobedience. When God's work is done in man's way & we imitate the world instead of obeying the Word, we can never expect the blessing of God. The crowds may approve of what we do but what about the approval of God?

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If the ark is so important, why isn't it around today? Simply put, b/c Jesus Christ fulfills all that the ark signifies! Jesus Christ, His character & nature, is the clearest & most obvious **revelation** of God to this earth. He reveals God's love, compassion & His justice & holiness. Jesus is also our **reconciliation** to God. He is our priest who brought His own blood into the sanctuary (**Heb 9:12**) & obtained eternal redemption for all who will receive Him. Jesus is also our Supreme **ruler** – He is our king! He has the right to rule over us & the power to defend us against all of our enemies. How do you keep God presence the central focus of your life? Turn your eyes upon Jesus!

Today, like David, you may find yourself in a conundrum. You may have serious questions rolling around in your heart; questions about life, death, God, His judgment, eternity. You may be beside yourself with fear or grief or even anger. But there's no need to be afraid: any question that has eternal

significance can be answered from God's Word. Don't let the not knowing eat you up; come to Jesus & find the true answers to every eternal question you might have.

