

[R2002 : page 155]

THE ARK BROUGHT TO JERUSALEM.

– JULY 19. – 2 Sam. 6:1-12. –

Golden Text. – "O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee." – Psa. 84:12.

THE special teaching of the incident of this lesson is the reverence of the Lord. "Holy and reverend is his name;" and "the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain."* "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him." When God appeared unto Moses in the burning bush to speak with him, he commanded him, saying, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." So also when he appeared on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people of Israel, enveloped in a thick cloud, there were great demonstrations of awe-inspiring solemnity, and special restrictions to guard against any irreverent familiarity. Israel was also specially commanded to reverence his law and his sanctuary. – Psa. 111:9; Exod. 20:7; Psa. 89:7; Exod. 3:5; 19:11-13; Lev. 19:30.

*See our issue of May 15, '93.

Reverence is defined as a feeling of profound respect, often mingled with awe and affection; a feeling of worshipful regard when directed to the divine or sacred: also conduct inspired by, or conformed to, such feeling. "The fear [reverence] of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Psa. 111:10.) This is the only proper attitude of the creature toward the Creator, the Author of our being, and the Creator, Preserver and Lord of the whole universe. When he speaks, therefore, our ears should be reverently attentive to his voice, and every power alert to do his bidding. Our safety, our happiness, and that nobility of character which prompts to love and gratitude, and which promptly and wisely heeds instruction and advances in knowledge and wisdom, all depend primarily upon our supreme reverence for the Lord. And therefore the

Lord would foster and cultivate in us that becoming, filial reverence that is due to his name.

The ark of God was the symbol of the divine presence in Israel, and as such it was the most sacred thing about the typical tabernacle. It was made by divine direction, as was everything belonging to the tabernacle; and its place was in the holy of holies, where only the high priest (who represented Jesus, the great high priest) was permitted to enter; and that only once a year, on the day of atonement. As the symbol of the divine presence, like the divine presence itself, it was guarded from irreverent handling, and also from the common view. Only the priests, who typically represented the body of Christ, the saints of this age, were permitted to see or to touch it. The Levites, who represented all justified believers of this age, were appointed solemnly and reverently to bear the ark when the Tabernacle was removed from place to place, but it must be first carefully covered by the priests; for even the Levites might not look upon it nor touch it. – Num. 4:15-20.

Previous to the event of this lesson religion was at a very low ebb in Israel, and for many years the ark of the covenant had been separated from its place in the tabernacle. As the visible symbol of the divine presence, wherever the ark went the power and favor of God went with it; as, for instance, when Israel crossed over Jordan on dry land, the waters parting before them as soon as its bearers reached the brink of the river; and again when the walls of Jericho fell before it and Israel had a great victory. But when Israel sinned against God, no such power accompanied the symbol. It was even permitted to fall into the hands of their enemies, and the Philistines were allowed to capture it while Israel suffered a great defeat. But though Israel was thus punished God did not long permit the sacred emblem of his presence to remain in Gentile hands, and the Philistines were punished for retaining it until they were glad to restore it again to Israel. In returning it there were no anointed priests among the heathen to cover it, nor Levites to bear it; so the Philistines placed **[R2002 : page 156]** it upon a new cart, and left the oxen without a driver to take their own course, and God guided

them back to the land of Israel, to Beth-shemesh. Thus was the ark restored to his people. But the people of Beth-shemesh, ignoring the restrictions of the divine law with reference to the ark, presumed to look into it, and God punished them with a great slaughter in which fifty thousand and seventy men perished. Thus they were taught to fear the Lord and to reverence his commandments; and they said, "Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God, and to whom shall he [this symbol of his presence] go up from us? And they sent messengers to Kirjath-jearim....And the men of Kirjath-jearim came and fetched up the ark and brought it into the house of Abinadab...and sanctified [R2003 : page 156] Eleazer his son to keep the ark of the Lord." There it remained for twenty years. (1 Sam. 6:1-21; 7:1,2.) The Lord's dealings with Israel were on the lines of the Law Covenant made with them at Mount Horeb. The lesson to us of the New Covenant is that those favored by one part of God's covenants are held accountable proportionately. We are not, however, to think of those fifty thousand men as destroyed in the Second Death; for the trial of Israel under its Law Covenant was only typical, and did not decide the final destiny of all under it.

But when David was finally established upon the throne of all Israel he purposed to bring the ark up to Jerusalem, and to lead the people as a nation back to the hearty and reverent worship of God, the restoration of the sacred ark of the covenant being necessarily the first step to that end. He gathered together thirty thousand representative men of the nation thus to make the restoration a national act, and in so doing to call the whole people to a revival in the worship of God.

The method chosen for the conveyance of the ark to Jerusalem was not, however, according to the law which prescribed that it should be reverently borne by the Levites, but patterning after the example of the Philistines in returning it to Kirjath-jearim they set it upon a new cart drawn (probably) by oxen. While God tolerated the ignorance and inability of the Philistines, who were not his people, to comply with the requirements of his law in this matter he did not so regard the

forgetfulness or carelessness of Israel, but gave them a severe reminder of his displeasure. In the midst of the general joy and rejoicing with music of many voices and all kinds of instruments the sudden jostling of the cart seemed to endanger the position of the ark so that Uzzah put forth his hand to steady it, when instantly he was stricken down dead.

This was a severe and a most necessary rebuke. It halted the procession, and was understood by the king and all the people as a rebuke to the whole nation in that they had ignored the commandment of the Lord and had failed to properly reverence the symbol of his presence. And the fear of the Lord fell upon the king and all the people; the music and the festivities were hushed; the multitudes dispersed and thoughtfully returned to their homes: and the king, fearing to continue his purpose of taking the ark to Jerusalem, turned aside and bore it to the house of Obed-edom, a Levite, who doubtless reverently received it; for we read that in consequence "the Lord blessed the house of Obed-edom and all that he had." – 1 Chron. 13:13,14.

There the Ark remained for three months, while King David, still zealous for the Lord and anxious to lead the people to a closer observance of his worship was quietly studying the lesson of this strange providence. And it was told David, "The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God." Then David read the lesson clearly, and he determined to act upon it at once – to carry out his original purpose of bringing up the ark to the chief, the capital city, to give it the chief place of honor in the whole nation, as he had before intended, and again to call the representatives of all the people together that the restoration might be a national act and lead to a great national revival of religion. But this time he would see to it that the symbol of the divine presence should be reverently borne according to the divine directions.

"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. 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 forever...For because ye did it not at first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order. So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel. 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. 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." – 1 Chron. 15:1,2,13-15,28.

"And it was so that when they that bare the ark had gone six paces he [David] sacrificed oxen and fatlings, and David danced before the Lord with all his might [another expressive symbol of joy], and David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet." – 2 Sam. 6:13-15.

While Israel was thus taught the reverence of the Lord, the lesson applies with equal force to the Church of the Gospel age. It is not our part to change one iota of the ordinances of God. We may not turn the ordinance of the baptism of believers into the sprinkling of infants, nor change the simplicity of the Lord's supper, or the time of its observance as indicated by its superseding the celebration of the typical passover. Nor have we a right to abate the just requirements of his holy law, nor to render null and void the authority of his precepts and instructions in order to please the worldly-minded. The law and the testimonies of God must be received into good and honest hearts without regard to human philosophies and idle speculations. The reverence of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and blessed is the man that trusteth in him, and to whom a "Thus saith the Lord" is the end of all controversy on every subject.

"If our lives were but more simple,
We should take him at his word;

And our lives would be all sunshine,
In the sweetness of our Lord."
