



1 Chronicles 13:9-11

(9) And when they came to Chidon's threshing floor, Uzza put out his hand to hold the ark, for the oxen stumbled. (10) Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzza, and He struck him because he put his hand to the ark; and he died there before God. (11) And David became angry because of the LORD's outbreak against Uzza; therefore that place is called Perez Uzza to this day.

New King James Version

1 Chronicles 13:1-3 introduces an episode containing a presumptuous act, immediately followed by a sobering display of divine justice. However, this time, one of the most respected names in Israelite history is directly involved. It is the story of Uzza's sudden death while moving the Ark of the Covenant, the most sacred and revered of Israelite objects. The Ark, representing the throne of [God](#) and containing the tablets of stone Moses received from God on Mount Sinai, normally resided in the Holy of Holies.

David desired to move the Ark to Jerusalem to continue to consolidate the kingdom under himself. As they were moving it on an oxcart, the oxen stumbled, and the Ark appeared to be toppling to the ground. Uzza, in what may have been pure reflex, put out his hand to steady the Ark, but upon touching it, he was immediately struck dead (verses 9-10)! At first, David was angry that God ruined his party (verses 8, 11) - as the whole atmosphere of the Ark's transfer was celebratory - but shortly after, he became extremely fearful (verse 12).

The Bible shows God to be longsuffering and slow to anger. Why did they not hear His voice from heaven saying, "Thank you, Uzza, for keeping the Ark from getting damaged and dirty"? Instead, He exploded in anger and slew Uzza on the spot! However, God had given strict instructions for transporting the Ark, found in [Numbers 4:4](#), 15, 17-20:

This is the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of meeting, relating to the most holy things: . . . And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary,

when the camp is set to go, then the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them; but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These are the things in the tabernacle of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry. . . . Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: "Do not cut off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites; but do this in regard to them, that they may live and not die when they approach the most holy things; Aaron and his sons shall go in and appoint each of them to his service and his task. But they shall not go in to watch while the holy things are being covered, lest they die."

The Bible nowhere indicates that Uzza was a Kohathite. If he was, what God did is even more understandable. Everyone in the whole procedure from David on down was guilty of disobeying God's instructions regarding the most holy things. David failed to consult with the High Priest - or any priest, for that matter - regarding how the Ark should be moved. Evidently, no priest protested that proper procedures were not being followed.

The Kohathites were not even supposed to *look* on the uncovered Ark. To God, when Uzza reached out and touched the Ark as it seemed about to topple off the cart, it was no act of heroism but the final act of desecration, arrogance, and presumption. The last thing presumed was that Uzza's hand was less defiling than the earth that he feared would contaminate the Ark.

God's instruction in [Exodus 20:24-25](#) regards building Him an altar. An altar made for His worship had to be constructed of earth or unhewn stones. No altar defiled by man's sinful hand was suitable. Dirt cannot sin; it always follows the nature God established. God did not want the symbol of His throne contaminated by the evil that manifested itself in a whole string of rebellions against His specific instructions. There was nothing arbitrary, capricious, or whimsical in God's action.

[Jesus](#) teaches us to address God as "Father," a title suggesting familiarity, yet we are also to pray, "Hallowed be Your name." God shows in these two incidents that, if reverence is due to the symbols used in His worship, how much greater reverence must be given to the realities of the New Covenant?

Those involved in this incident were well-intentioned, but it illustrates for all generations that God still requires conformity with His directives concerning holy objects. Deviation from orthodoxy can be deadly.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

The Berean: Daily Verse and Commentary for 1 Chronicles 13:9-11 (<http://www.theberean.org>)

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