

Ancient Excuses

Franklin Church of Christ
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AM Worship

Introduction:

Using our imagination, let's travel back through time, back to a more barbaric time. It is approximately 1000 B.C. and is about the eighth year of David's reign. Israel has recently come out of some difficult days. The kingdom has been divided between David, ruling over Judah, and Ish-Bosheth, ruling everyone else. It took two years for David to reunite the kingdom. About six years later, David has moved the capital from Hebron to Jerusalem and is now moving the Ark of the Covenant there. It is a joyous occasion (**I Chronicles 13:8**).

Picture yourself as Ahio, son of Abinidab. You and your brother, Uzzah, have been specially chosen by David to transport the Ark. Using the poles, you carefully set the Ark on the new cart. You and your brother now begin the 7.6-mile journey to Jerusalem, escorting the Ark amid the people who are singing, shouting, dancing and celebrating. Approximately halfway to Jerusalem, the unthinkable happens. The oxen somehow upset the cart and the Ark is going to fall to the ground. Without thinking, your brother reaches out, grabs hold of the Ark and steadies it. Relief washes over you since your brother has saved the day. But in the next instant, tragedy strikes. You are stunned. The celebration is silenced. Even King David is angered. God did not view Uzzah's action as you did. His anger burned and He struck Uzzah dead for touching the ark.

Over time and with study of the Law, David realized that this tragedy occurred because only Levites were allowed to transport the Ark (**I Chronicles 15:2**). Aghast at this awful occurrence, you strive to make sense of your brother's death. In your personal prayers of anguish, you offer what seem to be valid excuses in defense of your brother. Yet, God, being omniscient, knew these excuses and brought judgment upon Uzzah anyway. Consider the excuses you could make.

Discussion:

- I. Uzzah only intended to do good.
 - A. Uzzah was not intending to violate the law of God. Uzzah had only the best intentions. After all, what would you have done if you had been behind the cart and had seen that it was going to fall to the ground? Surely it is not ever wrong to do good.
 - B. However, this is human reasoning that does not consider the greater context of God's pattern. To make this excuse, we must think God's pattern is not important. Uzzah and the people of Israel were sinning even before Uzzah touched the Ark. Uzzah had no business transporting the Ark to begin with. The Ark had no business being transported on a new cart. God had authorized the means of transport for the Ark of the Covenant in **Numbers 4:5-6, 15**. The Kohathites, of Levi, were to transport the Ark, carrying it by its poles. The fact is, sin was involved before Uzzah ever touched the Ark. He was only in this situation, because God's pattern had already been discarded.
 - C. God does not think as men do (**Isaiah 55:8**). That something seems good, does not make it right. There was a way that seemed right to Uzzah, but its way led to death (**Proverbs 14:12**).
- II. You never said we couldn't transport the Ark.
 - A. Though David was angered, he obviously went back to the Law to learn why God struck Uzzah. This judgment came because God said Levites were to carry the Ark (**I Chronicles 15:2, 13**).
 - B. David could have searched the scripture from front to back, reading every word and not once found where it said Judah's tribesman could not carry the Ark. Not one single time does it say Abinidab's family, which had cared for the Ark for more than forty year, could not transport it.
 - C. This fails to take into account that God does not work solely on the basis of condemnation. To be lawful an action must be authorized. As demonstrated earlier, God commanded a particular family to transport the ark, the Kohathites from among the Levites (**Numbers 4:5-6, 15**). God did not have to then say no one else could do it. Specifying this family ruled out any other family. Instead of asking where God condemned Uzzah transporting the Ark, we should ask where God authorized it. The answer—nowhere.
- III. How can you hold Uzzah accountable when he didn't know the pattern.
 - A. It is very apparent that the Law of God regarding transporting the Ark had been forgotten. There is no doubt that had David known only those from Levi could carry the Ark, this would never have happened. Surely it was not proper to hold Uzzah accountable for a pattern he did not know.
 - B. Notice David's words to the Levites in **I Chronicles 15:13**. Part of the reason this judgment took place is because they acted without seeking God according to His ordinance. They sinned because they did not study to learn whether they had authority to act. The guilt lay not just in violating the law, but in not first seeking out the pattern and then following it. Not knowing the pattern was no excuse, because the pattern had clearly been revealed. Anyone who could read could easily determine the pattern.

- C. One would think that a family who had cared for the Ark for more than forty years could have found the time to brush up on God's pattern for dealing with it. Ignorance was no excuse.

IV. Uzzah loved God, surely that was more important than who transported the Ark?

- A. Uzzah was not an idol worshipper. His family had been devoted to caring for the Ark. They were obviously followers of Jehovah. They obviously loved Jehovah God. Surely, that was what was really important. How important can it be to maintain a pattern regarding the transportation of the Ark in comparison to being idolatrous? It almost seems as if God is majoring in minors, nitpicking and splitting hairs. If Uzzah had committed some really big sin we could understand, but such a small and trivial issue of Ark transportation is surely not worth punishment from God.
- B. No doubt, idol worship was bad. No doubt, there were sins condemned under the Old Law of graver import and more significance than Ark transportation. God demonstrated that He wants His pattern followed, even when we might believe it trivial. This is reminiscent of Nadab and Abihu who offered strange fire before the Lord. God said that their offering did not honor Him (**Leviticus 10:3**). The only thing that honors God is following His pattern. Doing anything else is dishonorable, no matter how much Uzzah may have claimed to love God.

V. King David didn't see anything wrong with it, and he is the king.

- A. This is an appeal to the higher authority. **I Chronicles 13:11** says David even became angry because of God's outburst. David did not see anything wrong with the way they were transporting the Ark. He was the king. Surely if it were wrong, he would know about it.
- B. But, David, the higher authority was wrong. And his error did not justify Uzzah. David in time, went back to scripture and learned the truth. God demonstrated with clarity that each individual is responsible for searching the scripture and learning the truth. David's ignorance did not make the new pattern correct, nor did it nullify God's pattern. **Proverbs 14:12** does not just apply to normal people like you and me. It also applies to kings, prophets, experienced teachers, etc.

VI. Of course, we are not really talking about Uzzah. We are talking about us.

- A. I am sure you have been able to figure out this lesson is not really about the past. It is about the present. I know we are no longer under the Old Covenant. The laws regarding the Ark of the Covenant are really unimportant regarding modern worship. But we know these things were written for our learning (**Romans 15:4; I Corinthians 10:11**). We are not under the Old Covenant, but we are a covenant people with God. We do not use the Ark to worship God, but we do worship God. The particular pattern presented in **I Chronicles 13** no longer applies, but God's response to rejecting His pattern does. We have a pattern reserved for us and recorded in scripture. We must follow it. Dispensing with the pattern will bring about only judgment and condemnation. Just like it did for Uzzah.
- B. No excuses worked for Uzzah, why would they work today? Yet we hear these things in various forms from our denominational friends. How many times have we been asked where something is condemned instead of hearing the question where is it authorized? How many times have we been accused of majoring in minors and nitpicking? How many times have we heard people claim that some preacher who has been studying for years doesn't see anything wrong with it? These excuses are nothing new.
- C. Even worse is when members of Christ's church start making these excuses. Too often, Christians are so afraid of offending someone in error that they end up defending error. These kinds of excuses do not remove the need for Biblical authority. They simply put us in the same situation as Uzzah.
- D. If we don't want to end up like Uzzah, we must not commit the sins he committed. We must not rely on excuses that did not work for him either. God has a pattern. It is not too difficult to understand and we are commanded to understand it (**Ephesians 5:17**). If we do not want others to end up like Uzzah, then we must hold them to God's pattern. Do not be swayed by their complaints. In the end, they will be thankful.

Conclusion:

God has a pattern for becoming one of His children. Despite the controversy that rages, it is actually very simple and clear. It only becomes difficult when man wants to interject his desires into it. One must hear the gospel of Jesus Christ (**Romans 10:17**). He must believe that Jesus is the Christ and confess his faith (**Romans 10:9-10**). He must repent of his sins (**Acts 2:38**). He must then call upon the name of the Lord in baptism for the remission of his sins (**Romans 10:13; Acts 22:16; 2:38**). Don't make excuses, just follow the pattern.