

## Raiders of the Lost Ark

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2 Samuel 6:1-11

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In the movie Raiders of the Lost Ark, Indiana Jones attempts to recover THE Ark before Hitler has a chance to use it in his battle to take over the world. But one thing the screenwriters miss is that the power was not necessarily found within the Ark itself, but in the Holy God which it represents. And ever since the movie was first released, I've wondered if the same things would happen today (killing those who touch it and those who look into it) because of what Christ did upon the cross.

As I mentioned last week, the torn veil in the Temple has great significance. That curtain which separated sinful man from a holy God was opened, and as the writer of Hebrews declares, *"By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place."*<sup>1</sup> (Hebrews 10:20). We are actually encouraged to boldly enter heaven's most holy place. But before we start marching right in, I think it's important for us to remember what attitude we should bring with us as we come into the presence of God. Because in the past it was irreverence and arrogance that got people killed.

Take for instance an event that happened one day when King David decided to bring the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. (**Read 2 Samuel 6:1-11**) The writer points out that Uzzah (ooz-zaw) was killed because of his irreverence (verse 7). Now, reaching out to steady a sacred artifact seems innocent enough. But Uzzah had no regard for the holiness of God. According to Numbers chapter 4, no Israelite was to touch the sacred objects in the Holy Place (*they must not touch the sacred objects, or they will die.*<sup>2</sup>) nor look at them (*must never enter the sanctuary to look at the sacred objects for even a moment, or they will die.*<sup>3</sup>). There were also specific instructions regarding how the Ark was to be moved, and placing it upon an ox cart was not an acceptable mode of transportation.

During a particular battle with the Philistines, Israel brings the Ark to battle, and the Philistines panic (**Read 1 Samuel 4:1-11**). The question here is why was

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<sup>1</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>2</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>3</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

Israel defeated and why did God allow the Ark to fall into enemy hands? Because the Ark is not some trinket or charm that would bring victory. Notice verse three says, "It will save us". Was the power in the Ark or in the hands of God? Their destruction and loss of their "Magic Trinket" was the result of their irreverent attitude.

Well, the Philistines end up suffering not because of the Ark itself, but because of their irreverent attitude toward God (**Read 1 Samuel 5**). So the Philistines send the Ark back to Israel on a cart, which was contrary to God's instructions found in Numbers 4, and it ends up in the town of Beth-shemesh (bayth **sheh**-mesh). In this town most of the people approached the Ark with reverence, but some had no regard for the holy presence of God, and He killed 70 men - <sup>19</sup> *But the Lord killed seventy men from Beth-shemesh because they looked into the Ark of the Lord. And the people mourned greatly because of what the Lord had done.* <sup>20</sup> *"Who is able to stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?" they cried out. "Where can we send the Ark from here?"* <sup>4</sup> (1 Samuel 6:19-20)

Not only would Uzzah have been familiar with these events, but also I suspect David did as well. And we have to surmise that King David orchestrated this whole ceremony. So when God's anger struck down Uzzah, David's anger was returned. Maybe he was angry with himself for not following God's commands. Or maybe he was angry that even in a time of great celebration and triumph, God still demanded that people approach Him with fear and reverence; that people keep in mind *"Who is able to stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?"*

Many Christians love what the writer of Hebrews has to say about boldly entering heaven's most holy place, but few take the time to read to the end of that section. That section of Hebrews ends with words that echo the cry found in 1 Samuel 6:20. *"It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* <sup>5</sup> (Hebrews 10:31) And in this short section the writer takes us from a time of celebrating and rejoicing (what seems to happen on Easter) to a reminder that we dare not approach God as if He were common. (**Read Hebrews 10:26-31**)

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<sup>4</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>5</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

Just because we have been invited to approach the throne does not mean we can do so carelessly and casually. We must still have fear and reverence for God, even more now than we did before. Because, what Christ has opened up for us through His death and sacrifice will take us to a place where sin is exposed, where holiness is expected, and where reverence is demanded.

Before Christ died for your sins and before you accepted His sacrifice, you stood off at a distance. You could act and respond to God in almost any way. Oh, it disappointed Him, but not as much as it does now that we have drawn near. Now that we have come close to God through Jesus, I believe He expects much more from us. He expects us to live more righteously and more holy than we did before. And I believe He demands more reverence from us as well.

I'm not sure why some Christians approach God with this casual indifference; why they feel that as long as they have Jesus in their life, they can act any way they please. Maybe it's because they've never really understood the sacrifice Jesus made on their behalf. Maybe they don't realize what it's like to have blood shed for their sins. To a Jew living in Old Testament times, there was the constant reminder daily as an innocent animal was killed because of their sin. To the early Christians, there was heart wrenching pain with the realization of what Jesus endured on their behalf. But for those of us living nearly 2000 years after the fact, the concept of shed blood has little effect on our lives. Most of us don't even know what an animal sacrifice would look like. And I think this is what causes us to view the sacrifice of Jesus as common.

What I'm trying to keep you from doing is approaching God with high fives and "whoohoo's" as if He is no more than a common rescuer. Even though He tore down the barrier between us, He still demands our holy reverence for who He is. So in these next few weeks after Easter, I would challenge you to fully realize the pain His sacrifice should have on your heart. And may that understanding wrench away any irreverence, any indifference, and any casual feelings you may have about your Lord and your God.