

The Books of 1 and 2 Chronicles, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 6: The Ark Brought to Jerusalem

1 Chronicles 15:1–16:43

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this lesson establishes a principle the church must never lose: God determines how He is to be worshiped, and acceptable worship seeks Him 'according to the rule.' David's recovery of the Levitical manner of carrying the ark, after the deadly failure of the new cart, dramatizes that worship is not a matter of human preference but of divine prescription. The careful teacher will draw the New Covenant application: we do not bind the ark, the Levitical priesthood, or the ceremonies of the Law on the church, for these belonged to the Old Covenant. Instead we worship by the apostolic pattern revealed in the New Testament, doing all in the name of the Lord Jesus, in spirit and in truth. The same principle that guided David, namely that God authorizes the manner of His worship, still governs us.

Yet the lesson also aims at the heart of the worshiper. Chapter 16 overflows with joy, music, and thanksgiving, teaching that reverence and exuberance are not rivals. The student should leave both more careful and more glad, examining whether his worship is shaped by God's word and whether it is offered with the wholehearted joy that fills the psalm of thanks. The goal is a believer who worships God truly and gladly, whose praise is so God-centered that it spills over as witness to the nations. That is worship that forms the worshiper into the likeness of Christ.

Question 1

Student Question:

What does David's insistence that only the Levites carry the ark (15:2, 11–15) teach us about the principle that God determines how He is to be worshiped?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

David's first words in chapter 15 set the corrective tone: 'No one but the Levites may carry the ark of God, for the LORD chose them to carry the ark of the LORD and to minister to him forever' (15:2). This is the precise point at which the first attempt had failed; now David recovers the divine rule.

The instruction was not David's invention. God had spoken clearly through Moses that the Kohathite Levites were to carry the holy things on their shoulders by means of poles, and were never to touch them (Numbers 4:15; 7:9). David is not adding a preference; he is submitting to a command long since given. Worship is to be governed by what God has authorized.

The Chronicler stresses that this is a return to Scripture: 'as Moses had commanded according to the word of the LORD' (15:15). The remedy for worship gone wrong is always the same, a return to what God has actually said rather than to what seems good to us.

For the church, the abiding principle is that God, not man, determines the manner of acceptable worship. We do not carry over the Levitical ceremonies, for they belonged to the Old Covenant; but we do carry over the principle that worship follows divine instruction, now revealed in the New Testament for the Lord's church.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God determines how He is to be worshiped; worship follows His authorization.
- The remedy for wrong worship is a return to what God has actually commanded.
- David recovered an ancient rule rather than inventing a new method.
- The principle of authorized worship carries into the New Covenant, though the Old ceremonies do not.

Discussion Prompts

- Why did David insist that only the Levites carry the ark this time?
- How is the principle of authorized worship different from binding Old Covenant ceremonies?
- Where do we today most need to return to 'what God has actually said' about worship?

Question 2

Student Question:

David said, 'because we did not seek him according to the rule, the LORD broke out against us' (15:13); where do you most need to stop asking 'did I mean well?' and start asking 'did I do it God's way?'

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 13 is the diagnostic heart of the chapter: 'because you did not carry it the first time, the LORD our God broke out against us, because we did not seek him according to the rule.' David names the real problem. It was not insufficient sincerity; it was a failure to seek God His way.

This question turns that confession on the student. We are skilled at the comforting question, 'Did I mean well?' and reluctant to ask the harder one, 'Did I do it God's way?' David models the harder honesty, and it leads not to despair but to correction and renewed joy.

The application reaches beyond formal worship into the whole of life. In our service, our giving, our parenting, our handling of conflict, the issue is whether we have sought God's revealed will or simply followed our instincts and called it good.

Note that the chapter does not end David's worship; it purifies it. Seeking God 'according to the rule' is not a cold legalism that kills joy. It clears the obstacle so that true, glad worship can finally come home, as chapter 16 shows.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- We prefer 'Did I mean well?' to the harder 'Did I do it God's way?'
- Honest correction leads to renewed joy, not despair.
- The principle applies beyond formal worship to all of life and service.
- Seeking God 'according to the rule' clears the way for true gladness.

Discussion Prompts

- In what area are you avoiding the question, 'Did I do this God's way?'
- How can honest self-correction become a doorway to joy rather than guilt?
- What is one place this week to trade good intentions for actual obedience?

Question 3

Student Question:

Why does the Chronicler give such detailed attention to the appointment of singers and musicians (15:16–24), and what does it reveal about the place of ordered, intentional praise in the worship of God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Chronicler devotes careful attention to David's appointment of singers, instrumentalists, and gatekeepers (15:16–24). This is not idle detail. Worship in Israel was to be ordered, skilled, and intentional, not haphazard. David organized the praise of God with the same seriousness he gave to carrying the ark.

The musicians were appointed 'to raise sounds of joy' (15:16). Order and joy go together here. Structure does not stifle the praise; it serves it. The careful arrangement frees the worship to be wholehearted and unifying rather than chaotic.

We should not import the specific Levitical orders into the church, for they belonged to the Old Covenant. But the principle that the worship of God deserves intentional preparation and wholehearted skill is timeless. Casual, careless worship dishonors a great God.

For the New Testament believer, this challenges the notion that worship is something we drift into unprepared. Whether in the assembly or in private devotion, praise that is thoughtful, prepared, and offered with our best honors the One who is worthy.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The worship of God deserves intentional, prepared, wholehearted offering.
- Order and joy are partners, not opposites, in worship.
- The Old Covenant orders are not bound on the church, but the principle of reverent care abides.
- Careless, drifting worship dishonors a worthy God.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the Chronicler take such care to describe the appointment of singers?
- How can preparation and order actually deepen, rather than deaden, worship?
- What would more intentional preparation for worship look like for you?

Question 4

Student Question:

When your worship feels routine or scattered, what would more intentional, prepared, wholehearted praise look like in your own life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question applies the intentionality of David's musicians to the student's own worship life. Much of our worship suffers not from bad theology but from inattention; we arrive scattered, distracted, and unprepared, and then wonder why it feels flat.

David's example suggests that wholehearted praise is cultivated, not merely felt. The singers were appointed, trained, and arranged. Likewise, our private and public worship can be tended: hearts prepared, distractions set aside, attention gathered toward God.

Application is practical. What would it look like to come to the Lord's Day assembly having already turned the heart toward God? What would it look like to give private devotion the same intentionality we give to things we consider important?

The goal is not mechanical ritual but engaged, prepared, glad worship. When we bring our best attention to God, routine gives way to genuine encounter.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Wholehearted worship is cultivated through intentionality, not just emotion.
- Scattered, unprepared hearts produce flat worship.
- Both private and public worship benefit from deliberate preparation.
- Engaged attention turns routine into genuine encounter with God.

Discussion Prompts

- What distracts you most in worship, and how might you prepare against it?

- How could you ready your heart before the Lord's Day assembly?
- What is one habit that would make your private worship more wholehearted?

Question 5

Student Question:

David danced and worshiped with all his might while Michal despised him (15:29); what does this teach about the place of joyful, undignified, God-centered exuberance in worship?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

As the ark entered the city, David 'was dancing and celebrating' with all his might (15:29). His joy was uninhibited, even undignified by royal standards. Michal, watching from a window, 'despised him in her heart.' Here are two responses to God-centered exuberance: glad abandon and cold contempt.

David's joy was not self-display; it was praise overflowing. He was so caught up in the LORD's honor that he gave no thought to his own. This is worship that has lost itself in the greatness of God, the very opposite of self-conscious religion.

The Chronicler records Michal's scorn without comment here, but the lesson is plain. Exuberant, heartfelt praise will sometimes look foolish to onlookers, and the worshiper must decide whose opinion matters most. David chose the audience of One.

We must not turn this into a mandate to copy David's particular forms; the point is the heart, a gladness in God so real it is unembarrassed. Reverence (chapter 15) and joy (this scene) belong together. The same David who carefully obeyed God's rule also danced before Him with all his might.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God-centered joy can look undignified to onlookers and still be right.
- True praise loses self-consciousness in the greatness of God.
- The worshiper must choose whose opinion matters most.
- Reverence and exuberant joy belong together, not in opposition.

Discussion Prompts

- What does David's 'undignified' joy teach about whose approval we seek in worship?
- How do reverence and exuberance fit together rather than compete?
- When have you held back praise out of concern for how you might look?

Question 6

Student Question:

Where has self-consciousness or fear of others' opinions held back your wholehearted praise of God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses David's abandon into the student's self-awareness. Many of us carry a quiet self-consciousness into worship, more concerned with how we appear than with the God we have come to praise.

Michal's contempt represents the watching eyes we fear, the inner critic and the outer crowd. David's example invites us to let the greatness of God become so large in our sight that our self-concern shrinks.

Application is honest and gentle. Where has fear of others' opinions muted your singing, stiffened your prayers, or kept your gratitude unspoken? The aim is not theatrics but freedom, the freedom of a heart fixed on God rather than on itself.

Encourage the student that this freedom grows as we behold God more clearly. We do not work up exuberance by willpower; we are drawn into it by seeing how worthy He is.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Self-consciousness in worship springs from fear of others' opinions.
- Beholding God's greatness shrinks our self-concern.
- The goal is freedom, not theatrics.
- Wholehearted praise grows from a clearer vision of God's worth.

Discussion Prompts

- Where has fear of others' opinions held back your praise?
- How does focusing on God's worth free you from self-consciousness?
- What is one way you could worship more wholeheartedly this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

The psalm of chapter 16 commands us to 'make known his deeds among the peoples' (16:8); how is God-centered worship also meant to be a witness to the nations?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The psalm David gave to Asaph (16:8–36) is missionary from its opening lines: 'Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples!' (16:8). God-centered worship is never meant to stay inside the assembly; it overflows toward the nations.

The psalm repeatedly summons the whole earth to praise: 'Sing to the LORD, all the earth' (16:23); 'Declare his glory among the nations' (16:24); 'Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples' (16:28). Israel's worship was meant to put the glory of the true God on display before a watching world.

This anticipates the church's calling. The praise of God is meant to be a witness; when the world sees and hears a people genuinely glad in God, it is confronted with His reality. Worship and mission are not separate departments.

The careful teacher will note the line back to Abraham, that in him all nations would be blessed, a promise fulfilled in Christ through whom the gospel now goes to every people. The worship that began with the ark in Jerusalem points toward a praise gathered from every tribe and tongue.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God-centered worship overflows as witness to the nations.
- Praise puts the glory of the true God on display before the world.
- Worship and mission belong together.
- The summons to the nations anticipates the gospel going to all peoples in Christ.

Discussion Prompts

- How is heartfelt worship itself a form of witness?
- What does it mean to 'make known his deeds among the peoples' today?
- How does the psalm's call to the nations point forward to the gospel?

Question 8

Student Question:

How could the overflow of your praise become a testimony to someone outside the faith this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question moves the missionary thrust of the psalm into the student's week. Genuine gladness in God is contagious; it raises questions in those who see it and opens doors for testimony.

Application is concrete. The overflow of praise might be a word of thanks spoken openly, a song that invites a question, a joy in suffering that a coworker cannot explain. The student is asked to imagine a specific person and a specific overflow.

Note that this is witness by overflow, not by performance. We are not manufacturing a show; we are letting real worship spill into real relationships. The most persuasive testimony is often a life visibly glad in God.

Encourage the student that even small overflows count. A single grateful word, offered honestly, can be the deed of God 'made known' to someone who needed to hear it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Genuine gladness in God is contagious and opens doors for witness.
- Witness by overflow is more persuasive than performance.
- Concrete people and concrete overflows make the principle real.
- Even small overflows of praise can become testimony.

Discussion Prompts

- Who in your life might be reached by the overflow of your praise?
- What is one honest way your gratitude could spill into a conversation this week?
- How is a visibly glad life itself a testimony to God's reality?

Question 9

Student Question:

The whole episode rests on the truth that God Himself prescribes the manner of acceptable worship (15:13–15) and is to be worshiped as He directs; how do we honor this New Testament principle today, worshiping by the apostolic pattern (Acts 20:7; John 4:23–24; Colossians 3:16–17) without binding the Old Covenant ceremonies of the ark and the Levites on the church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The doctrinal weight of the whole episode rests here: God Himself prescribes the manner of acceptable worship. David's confession, 'we did not seek him according to the rule' (15:13), and his correction, carrying the ark 'as Moses had commanded according to the word of the LORD' (15:15), establish that worship is governed by divine instruction, not human preference. This is the principle the New Testament calls us to honor still.

The careful teacher must draw the covenant distinction clearly. The ark, the Levitical priesthood, the sacrifices, and the ceremonies belonged to the Old Covenant given through Moses. These are not bound on the church; to reinstate them would be to turn back from Christ to the shadow (Hebrews 8–10; Colossians 2:16–17). We do not worship by carrying an ark or appointing Levites.

Yet the underlying principle abides and is, if anything, intensified under the New Covenant. Jesus taught that the Father 'is seeking' worshipers who worship 'in spirit and truth' (John 4:23–24). Paul instructed that we do all 'in the name of the Lord Jesus' (Colossians 3:17), by His authority.

The early church gathered on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7), sang and taught one another (Colossians 3:16), prayed, and gave. We worship by the apostolic pattern revealed in the New Testament, not by inventions of men and not by Old Covenant ceremony.

So the answer to 'how do we honor this principle today?' is twofold. Positively, we look to the New Testament to learn what God has authorized for worship and we offer it wholeheartedly: teaching, the Lord's Supper, prayer, singing, giving, all in spirit and truth and by Christ's authority. Negatively, we neither bind the Old Covenant ceremonies that pointed forward to Christ and have been fulfilled in Him, nor add human innovations that God has not authorized. Both errors miss 'the rule.'

Guard the class against two ditches. One ditch says, since the ceremonies are gone, worship is now whatever feels meaningful to us; that repeats the error of the new cart. The other ditch tries to drag the ark, the priesthood, and the sacrifices into the church, refusing the finished work of Christ. The straight road is to worship the living God by the pattern His Son and His apostles have given, reverently and gladly, in spirit and in truth.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God Himself prescribes the manner of acceptable worship; this principle abides under the New Covenant.
- The ark, Levitical priesthood, and Old Covenant ceremonies are fulfilled in Christ and not bound on the church.
- We worship by the apostolic pattern: teaching, the Lord's Supper, prayer, singing, giving, all by Christ's authority (Colossians 3:17).
- First-day worship per the apostolic example (Acts 20:7), in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24).
- Two errors to avoid: worship as mere personal preference, and reinstating Old Covenant ceremony in the church.
- Authorized worship is not cold legalism; it clears the way for true, glad praise.

Discussion Prompts

- How do we honor the principle of authorized worship without binding the Old Covenant ceremonies?
- What does the New Testament show us about how the Lord's church is to worship?
- How do we avoid both ditches: 'whatever feels meaningful' and 'reinstate the ceremonies'?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back across these chapters, name one specific way Jesus is forming you to worship Him both reverently (His way) and joyfully (with all your heart).

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the lesson: worship that is both reverent (God's way) and joyful (with all the heart). The student names one specific way Jesus is forming him through these chapters.

Possible fruit to name: a deeper resolve to worship as God directs rather than as we prefer; a greater wholeheartedness and gladness in praise; a freedom from self-consciousness; a worship that overflows as witness; a renewed care to seek God 'according to the rule.'

The aim is specificity and integration. The two emphases of the lesson, reverence and joy, are not to be chosen between but held together. The student should name how Christ is teaching him to be both more careful and more glad.

Close by lifting the eyes to Christ. The ark was a shadow of God's presence; in Christ, God dwells with His people fully, and we draw near with confidence to worship the living God. Our reverent, joyful praise is offered through Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Reverence and joy are to be held together, not chosen between.
- Spiritual formation is named in specifics.
- Christ is the one through whom we now draw near to worship God.
- The shadow of the ark gives way to the fullness of God's presence in Christ.

Discussion Prompts

- How is Jesus teaching you to be both more careful and more glad in worship?
- What single, concrete change will you make in how you worship?
- How does worshipping through Christ deepen both your reverence and your joy?