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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A1873 ~ The Ark Comes to Jerusalem.

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The Ark of the Covenant that's referred to in the Old Testament of the Bible symbolised God's presence among His people, the nation of Israel. The Ark's history started when God told Moses, soon after leaving Egypt with the Israelites, to make a Tabernacle or Tent of Meeting, to house the holy objects that Moses was to make and to put in there.

There were two rooms in the Tent of Meeting: one was the holy place where the priests and Levites carried out their work, and the second called the Most Holy Place was to house only the Ark of the Covenant of God.

God warned Moses to make the Ark of the Covenant exactly as he'd been told to, as a wooden box overlaid with gold inside and out. Two angels with outstretched wings were to face each other and look down at the top of the box, known as the Mercy Seat. When it was in its place in the Most Holy Place, God's presence filled the Tent of Meeting. Only once a year on the Day of Atonement was the high priest to take the blood of a sacrifice into the Most Holy Place and pray for God's forgiveness of the people's sins.

Every time Moses and the people moved from one place to another, the priests and the Levites, who were the descendants of the first Israelite high priest, Aaron, packed up everything and carried it to the next stopping place, before setting everything up again for the people to worship God. When Moses' successor, Joshua, led the people into the Promised Land of Canaan, the Tabernacle was set up at a place called Gilgal, close to the border of the Promised Land. After a number of years there, the Tabernacle was moved to a much more central location at Shiloh, where it stayed for 350 years.

The Ark was captured by the Philistines after the high priest at Shiloh, Eli, allowed his sons to take it into battle with them. But the Philistines returned it to Israel only 7 months later, after being plagued by serious health complaints wherever the Ark was taken; the Philistines had good reasons to fear the Lord. The Ark was returned to Israel on a cart drawn by two cows to the town of Beth Shemesh. After the Israelites offered sacrifices to thank the Lord for its return, the men treated the Ark with disrespect. They looked inside at the Ten Commandment stone tablets in there, as well as a pot of manna and Aaron's rod that had sprouted to indicate that he was to be high priest. God punished the men who looked and 70 men died.

In fear, the people of Beth Shemesh sent messengers to the people of Kirjath Jearim, who came and brought the Ark to the house of a man named Abinadab. His son, Eleazar, was consecrated to take care of the Ark and he did so for 20 years. The Tabernacle of God at Shiloh, from which the Ark had been removed from, was now either destroyed by the Philistines or the prophet Samuel had moved it to the city of Nob.

When Saul was king of Israel, he had a tabernacle in his home town of Gibeah. This tabernacle had the altar of burnt offerings but not the Ark. After King David of Israel had his palace built in Jerusalem, he desired to bring the Ark of the Covenant to a new tent that he'd built beside his palace on Mount Zion.

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David wanted to honour God and bring blessings to himself and the people by having the Ark brought to the new capital of Jerusalem. He had a new tent made to house it; 30,000 choice men assisted in the transfer and the people were enthusiastic about this. But as David had lived so long among the Philistines before he became king that he unconsciously ignored the law of God.

So many times when David was unsure of what he should be doing, he enquired of the Lord and the Lord told him what to do. Yet this time, David didn't ask of the Lord and the event ended in tragedy. It just goes to show that when we think we know what we're doing, we can make a complete mess of things. Because the Philistines had returned the Ark on a cart, David may have also thought that this method was satisfactory. But it wasn't.

If the Ark had been on the shoulders of the Levites as it should have been, God would not have judged Uzzah and killed him for touching the Ark. As a result, David was shocked and angry. David realised that he was a sinful person and he too, became afraid that the Lord's presence and the Ark itself might cause his premature death as well.

Why did the Lord punish Uzzah so severely? Wasn't he only trying to stop the Ark from falling to the ground? But even so, he was the wrong man to do this – or to even try. God is so utterly holy that ordinary humans cannot look on Him or in Old Testament days, even a symbol of Him, and survive. Only the priests ordained by God were allowed to handle the most sacred objects, like the Ark of the Covenant. If Uzzah had been a Levite and touched the Ark, he still would have died, because he was not a priest. Even the great leader Moses, with all the direct talks that he had with God, couldn't see God directly. Before Jesus came to fulfil and change this situation, sinful people had to observe a complete barrier between themselves and their holy God.

What can we learn from Uzzah's fate? We often assume that if our intentions are good, God will approve of whatever we do. But this is a mistaken assumption. By punishing Uzzah, God once again demonstrated to the Israelites that their wellbeing, both as individuals and a nation, were dependent on their respect for God's holiness and their obedience to His commands. And the same is true for us today.

After Uzzah's death, the plans to bring the Ark to Jerusalem were changed and it was taken to the house of a man named Obed-Edom, where it stayed for three months. During that time, God greatly blessed that man and his family. When David heard this, he believed then that God's anger was appeased.

David consulted about the necessary procedures and three months after their first disastrous attempt, the Israelites had a second try to move the Ark, this time using the instructions God had given to Moses. This time bringing the Ark to Jerusalem was a very happy occasion and the people rejoiced at its return.

Full of joy at a wonderful day, David went home to bless his family, only to have his wife, Michal, come out and show him her contempt. She had watched David in the procession, dancing before the people in what she considered was an undignified manner and without wearing his royal robes. And in her heart she had despised him and what he was doing. She may well have resented David taking her back to be his wife after separating her from her second husband, as a way to strengthen his claim on the throne of Israel. Whatever the reasons, there was no longer any love between David and Michal as there had first been.

No doubt as David's first wife, Michal would have resented all the other wives David had acquired since their marriage. After all, she was of royal blood, but the rest weren't. Maybe too, Michal was also unable to have children, as there's no mention of any children to her second husband either. If she'd had a son, her son might have taken the throne when David died, but this wasn't God's plan.

Who's more important: God or people? This is a test for us too. David was concerned about what God thought; but Michal was concerned only with what she and the people thought. David sought the praise of God; Michal wanted him to have the praise of men. Are we more concerned about what God thinks of us than what people do?

Should Christians be concerned about this ancient Jewish Ark, which hasn't been seen for the past 2,600 years? We Christians have our own 'Ark', and we call Him the Lord Jesus Christ. In Colossians, Chapter 2, it says: "For in Him [that's Jesus] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Jesus Himself said in Matthew, Chapter 28: "I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Is it more important to us to please Jesus than to please our family or ourselves? We need to have the right attitude to Him and be in constant touch through prayer. But, first, our sins can be separating our prayers from His ears. To pray and then to live in known sinfulness is like refusing our help from heaven. All the praying in the world won't help us if we're determined to live in sin, yet claim to belong to God. The psalmist also said in Psalm 66: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the LORD will not hear [me]."

For personal revival to take place in our lives, there must be repentance from all known sin. This includes not only the sins of doing wrong, but the sins where we've failed to do things that we should have done.

In James, Chapter 4, it says: "To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin." If the Lord is prompting you to share the gospel and you say "No"; if the Lord is asking you to share freely of your finances and invest in His kingdom and you refuse to; if the Lord is encouraging you to pray more and you don't want to, these can be sins of failure to do God's will for us.

God wants to change your life fully and forgive you of all your sins. Is there something you're doing now that you know that you shouldn't be doing as a follower of Jesus? If so, you need to turn from it and forsake it. This is what repentance and full surrender to Christ's Lordship is all about. You never will experience a personal revival until you do.

In Psalm 139, it says: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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