



BIBLE RADIO PRODUCTIONS

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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A2270 ~ The Ark of God Captured.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

While Moses was leading the people of Israel at Mt Sinai after they'd left Egypt, God told Moses to build a Tabernacle, or Tent of Meeting, for the people to worship Him there and a place to bring their gifts and sin offerings too. One of the pieces of furniture God commanded Moses to put into the most sacred 'Holy of Holies' section of the Tent of Meeting was called a 'Covenant Box', sometimes also known as the 'Ark of the Covenant of God'. The word 'Ark' simply means 'box'.

The Ark was made of wood and overlaid with gold both inside and out. At each corner was a gold ring, through which a pole was passed each side so that the Levites could carry the ark whenever the camp of the Israelites was moved to another place. The lid on top of the box was known as the 'Mercy Seat', on which stood two solid-gold angel figures with wings outstretched toward each other while looking down at the Mercy Seat. These angel representations on the Mercy Seat were there to be a visible reminder of the majesty, holiness and power of God Himself. God in heaven is continually praised and worshipped by all the angels.

When the Ark was placed in the Tent of Meeting, it held the two stone tablets on which were written the Ten Commandments – the moral law of God.

Only once a year on the solemn Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies where the Ark was kept and atone for his own sins as well as the sins of the Israelites. As instructed in the Bible book of Leviticus, Chapter 16, the high priest was to sprinkle the blood of a sacrificed animal onto the Mercy Seat to appease the wrath and anger of God for the past sins committed. This was the only place in the world where this atonement could take place. As a result, the Ark of the Covenant was the central symbol of God's presence with His people.

In Judges, Chapter 6, God commanded Joshua to take the Ark of the Covenant into battle while the Israelites marched around the city of Jericho; the people were victorious after God caused the strong walls of Jericho to crash down before them. Three hundred years later, when the Israelites were battling the Philistines, the Israelites lost the first battle. They concluded that God wasn't with them, so two wicked priests at the time, Phinehas and Hophni, the sons of the High Priest Eli, took the Ark of the Covenant from Shiloh and they carried it onto the battlefield.

Why did God allow the Ark to be captured? When the elders of Israel decided to take the Ark from its place in Shiloh and onto the battlefield, they failed to understand that the Ark was **not** the same thing as the Lord's presence. The Ark was only a symbol of God's presence and mighty throne. The Israelites, however, began treating the Ark as if it were an idol or magical object that could bring them a desired victory in battle. As a result, the people were trying to manipulate God and make Him do whatever they wanted, even though the Lord had given them no indication that He wanted the Ark taken from its place in Shiloh.

Yet when the Ark reached the Israelite camp, they shouted with joy, thinking that victory was surely now theirs. But when the Philistines found out about the Ark being with them, they looked on the Ark as being another pagan god. Although the Philistines were afraid of Israel's God because they had heard all the stories of the miraculous Red Sea crossing and other great wonders God had done for the Israelites. They rallied themselves together and God allowed them to convincingly defeat the Israelites.

How were the circumstances different from the Jericho battle? The Israelites had forsaken their God. In 1 Samuel, Chapter 7, Samuel told the defeated Israelites to return to the Lord with all their hearts, serve Him and then get rid of all the foreign idol gods that they'd been worshipping. When they had done that, Samuel told them that the Lord would then deliver them from the hands of the Philistines. Samuel had the people assemble together so he could pray to the Lord on their behalf.

Presuming on God and doing things that God hasn't said to be done, has been repeated many times throughout history. The most prominent event of this type of behaviour we read about during Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Satan took Jesus to the very top of the temple in Jerusalem and told Him to jump off. It was 400 feet, or just over 120 metres, to the ground but Satan claimed that God wouldn't let Jesus be harmed. If Jesus did jump as Satan told Him to do, was Jesus following God's will for His life? No! But Satan quoted and twisted Scripture to try to convince Jesus that His heavenly Father would protect Him. However, Jesus wisely refused.

In each of the temptations that Satan brought against Jesus, Jesus responded by quoting Scripture verses back to him. It's so important for Christians to do the same today. We need to quote Bible verses and send Satan fleeing as soon as a suspect thought enters our mind or feeling in our heart. It's no good saying that we know there's a verse somewhere in the Bible speaking against a certain temptation when we're preparing to give in to that sinful attraction. If we make it a habit to think about key Scripture verses when bringing a request or praise point to God, Satan will find it much harder to lead us astray. Not only will a believer who keeps a storehouse of verses at the ready, have peace of mind, but they will also find that their brain function will increase in the power and guidance of God's Holy Spirit.

When Israel was defeated by the Philistines, the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant and took it to one of their five main cities. There they placed it in the temple beside their own god, Dagon. The Philistines believed that putting the Ark inside Dagon's temple was clear proof that Dagon had overcome Israel's God. How upset they must have been the next morning to find that Dagon's statue had fallen to the ground on its face before the Ark! And even more distressing it would have been the morning after that when the people found Dagon's head and the palms of its hands were broken off. An idol 'god' without a head and hands is a powerless god indeed!

The Lord then sent a plague on the people of that city. It was a bubonic plague, which is carried by rats and causes the lymph nodes of infected humans to swell up like tumours. Everyone has lymph nodes throughout their bodies but we're not aware of them until they swell up as a sign of sickness. As the Philistines began to get sick and die, they realised that it was Israel's God causing their distress. He was angry because His ark had been taken from the Israelites.

What should the leaders of this city do next? They asked the rulers of the other Philistine cities. The rulers didn't believe that Israel's God had sent the plague, so they said that the Ark should be sent to the next city. Once there, the plague started up in the next city, so the ark was taken to one more city and sure enough, the plague started up there as well.

Panic set in! Instead of the Philistines overpowering Israel's God, the God of Israel was overpowering them! It turned out that the Philistines couldn't manipulate or control God any more than the Israelites could. The Philistines decided to send the Ark back to Israel so it couldn't do them any more harm.

Religious Philistines said that they should send a guilt offering back with the Ark because they had stolen God's Ark and therefore needed to compensate for this crime by sending along a gift. Not only that, but they followed the cart carrying the Ark drawn by two cows along the road until it was definitely back in the Israelite territory.

What can we learn from this Old Testament record? God keeps His word. The household of Eli suffered greatly because Eli's sons didn't uphold the standard that God had set for a high priest's family. Eli's sons didn't help the Israelites to worship God, honour and respect Him and His laws. We are either for God or against Him. There is no neutral position or being in the middle. In Matthew, Chapter 12, Jesus said, "He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters." Are we trying to win the approval of people and please them, or live our lives God's way?

There's a great social disease spreading throughout the nations and governments. It's called 'political correctness'. We long to please everyone and not cause offense to anyone. We do so, however, at the cost of the truth of the Gospel and God's precious salvation to save people from going to hell. When the doctrines of Bible truths are so watered down that everyone thinks they'll be right for going to heaven, we teach a complete falsehood. A person cannot live like the devil all their life and expect a place in heaven. God has set the rule for who gets into heaven and who doesn't. It's based on who repents from their sin and receives Christ Jesus as their Lord and Saviour or who refuses to bow to Him.

There was only one place for atonement of sins in the Old Testament of the Bible, and that was at the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant. In the same way, there's also only one place for atonement in the New Testament of the Bible and current times today, and this is the cross of Jesus Christ. He alone satisfied the wrath of God, made heavenly atonement for our sins and reconciled us to God. God stands uncompromisingly on what He states very clearly in the Bible. His way of getting into heaven is not going to change just to suit us. Instead, we need to change our thinking and get right with Almighty God today. Just as God made a conditional covenant with the children of Israel through Moses, those who trust in Jesus Christ recognise that they no longer live for themselves but live to please God. This is God's way into heaven and there is no other name but the Lord Jesus that we can be saved by. Have you been putting off asking Jesus to be your Saviour? Delay no longer, for Jesus is merciful and loving!

In Romans, Chapter 3, Verse 25, the Apostle Paul said: "God offered him (that's Jesus), so that by His blood, He should become the means by which people's sins are forgiven through their faith in Him."

Where is the Ark of the Covenant now? No one knows for sure. When the 1st temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC, the Ark of the Covenant disappeared and hasn't been seen since. Some stories said that the prophet Jeremiah hid it before the army of Nebuchadnezzar could capture it. Others say that the box is in Ethiopia, while others again hope it's hidden in the Temple Mount region, to be revealed by God again one day when the next temple of Jerusalem is built. But the Ark is no longer needed for people to be cleansed of their guilt and given a heart that loves God back.

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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