

*Bringing the Ark of the Covenant into the new capital Jerusalem had some ill-fated consequences.  
There may be more to learn about the event and why it happened in the way it did.  
Even so - it is a story of a passionate leader and a passionate community.*

You just can't make these stories up.

We won't ever know what really happened – and that probably does not matter.

What matters is for us to learn something about their lives – how we may be alike or different.

Maybe their stories can help us tell our own stories -

about how we experience the holy –

how we envision the sacred in our lives – how we encounter God.

David is a character who was just bigger than life.

The stories of David give us a picture of a man with all his graces and his shortcomings.

David was the young shepherd who befriended Saul's son Jonathan.

David killed a giant with a sling shot.

He played the lyre and wrote poetry. He is the author of many of our Psalms.

He was a blend of brain and brawn and passion.

He has become king.

And now the conquest for territory seems complete

and the 12 tribes that came together out there in the desert – seem settled.

The time must have seemed right

to bring this great symbol of the power and presence of God into the new capital.



The ark was built to hold the stone tablets Moses brought down from the mountain.

It is also referenced that the staff that Aaron carried before the Pharaoh – was placed there.

The third thing in the ark was a jar of manna –  
mementoes of how God cared for them in the wilderness.

This is what it looked like.

In Exodus we find the directions for Moses to build the ark.

The ark was a box made of acacia wood – covered both inside and outside with gold.

Two cherubim are on top as if sitting on the edge with their wings spread out -  
touching or almost touching one another.

We don't know what they looked like but their golden wings spread over the ark.

Men carried it by poles secured through four rings at the bottom and sides.

Gold covered boxes with carrying poles were also found in the tomb of King Tut.

There are numerous examples of such boxes in ancient Egypt and Babylonia.

The box was 45 inches long and 27 inches wide and 27 inches tall.

Here is an artist's picture that was done to the specifications in Exodus. (slide)

As the people traveled in the wilderness the ark was carried in front of them.

It preceded them as they crossed the Red Sea - and as they circled Jericho.

And later it stayed in the temple where Eli had been until his sons took it into battle  
and lost it to the Philistines.

But the Philistines returned it.

The Bible describes several times when sudden death was inflicted by direct contact with the ark.

Jewish legend reports incidences when priests attempting to carry the ark -  
were thrown into the air and then to the ground again.

The ark sometimes shot sparks that would occasionally kill its bearers.

For some thirty years now it has been in the house of Abinadab  
and cared for by his sons Uzzah and Ahio.



Now that David has established Jerusalem as his seat of power -  
he wants to restore the ark to the center of the people's shared life.  
Abinadab and his sons , Uzzah and Ahio, were transporting the ark to Jerusalem.

Thousands of people have taken the journey to be a part of moving the ark  
from its temporary home to its new home.

This whole celebration represents the culmination of a series of building projects in Jerusalem.

There was a new and magnificent home for David.

Jerusalem is now the political center and soon it will be the religious center also -  
where symbolically God will be in the center of things.

It was a visible symbol of God's awesome presence.

What could go wrong? Well – plenty.



And now back to David and the new city of Jerusalem - and new technology.  
The new technology was the wheel – discovered reportedly by the Philistines.

So the ark was coming to Jerusalem on an ox cart – on wheels.

And in the midst of this great celebration of singing and dancing -  
at some point it begins to slip –

or an oxen pulling the wagon stumbles - and the ark starts to slide.

Uzzah – who had cared for it in his home all these years moves toward it to steady it.

All of a sudden he drops dead.

Bad things sometimes happened to people who came near it -

and even in its resting place for the past 30 years –

the story is told of persons being killed who came to close.

Perhaps Uzzah should have known better but seeing the thing falter –  
reached out to catch it if he could.



But the cause of these various mishaps may be explained by some events  
that occurred many centuries later -

Benjamin Franklin's early experiments with the Leyden Jar.

I realize that may seem out of the blue.

The Leyden Jar was the experiment that led to the building of a battery.

In the mid 1700's it was discovered that a container with a metal lining on the inside  
and a metal hull on the outside stores and generates electrostatic energy.

They called them capacitors.

Ben Franklin used this concept with his lightning rod experiment.



Think about this wooden box covered with gold inside and out -  
and the friction that is caused by the contents moving or the poles and rings as it is carried.

Some say that these phenomena are consistent with high voltage electrical discharge -  
or electric shock. If so, consider the consequences to one who touches it.<sup>1</sup>

Should we consider that when Moses built the ark -  
back there in the wilderness -  
that he could have actually constructed a giant battery?

That is certainly beyond my expertise.

But that is not my point.

I guess my point is – if you are going to move a box made of wood  
with a solid gold lining and a gold cover – and friction that happens when moved -  
be very careful.

Who knows – the new wheels may have given just the amount of friction to ruin the day.

The whole celebration was called off –  
and the ark was stored at someone else's house for another three months.

We don't know if they used the wheels the second time  
or if they were just careful not to touch it – in the hot sun.

But the ark finally arrived – and David – and a lot of others danced before it.  
It was a celebration – with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.



There is one more turn to the story -  
and that was David's wife Michel – the daughter of Saul -  
a member of the previous royal family – is said to have despised David's music and dancing.  
Perhaps it was not regal enough.  
There are sometimes those who just can't express joy – and that may be why she is in the story.  
Or – like someone said (Angela Monet) centuries later  
"Those who danced were thought to be quite insane by those who could not hear the music."  
I believe life does want to offer us music – maybe God offers us music -  
through which to encounter and enjoy life.

But – can't you just see him – so secure of God's love that he was free to dance -  
and invite others to join.

I think of how Friedrich Nietzsche in the 19<sup>th</sup> century said:

“Without music – life would be a mistake.

I would only believe in a God who knew how to dance.”

And John Maxwell's thought that,

“A great leader's courage to fulfill his vision comes from passion – not position.

These thoughts seem to characterize David as the beloved king that Israel remembers.

There was more dancing and rejoicing – there were offerings and prayers -

as they finally carried the ark to their new city on the hill.

The story ends in an experience that we also share with the people of ancient Israel.

They share a meal.

Food is distributed and shared -

“among all the people - the whole multitude of Israel – both men and women.

Each had a cake of bread - a portion of meat - and a cake of raisins.”

Each one had enough – great and powerful along with small and ordinary -

and each with a spirit of gratitude and awe to take home with them.

You can't ask for more than that.

Our story for today – with its tragedy and its intrigue – and its success -

is about a passionate leader and a nation of people who try their best -

to live in the presence of God.

They brought this great symbol of that presence -

into the center of their new society –and their way of life.

We listen to their stories as a way to continue our own journey

of discovering the divine - and living into the mystery of God.

it gives us inspiration and vitality

to find our own passions and live them fully.

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Simonelic. *Energy of the Ark of the Covenant*. 2000