

Where is the Ark of the Covenant Today?

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If you've seen the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, Indiana Jones was searching for the Ark of the Covenant before Hitler could find it. It raises the question—where is the Ark of the Covenant today? And how was it lost in the first place?

Some people believe the Ark must be found before the Jews can rebuild their temple and start animal sacrifices again as prophesied in Scripture. That's not necessarily true. The Second Temple, which existed during the time of Christ, did not have the Ark. When the high priest went into the Temple on the Day of Atonement, he sprinkled the blood on the floor where the Ark would have been.



The last time the Ark's location is mentioned is in 2 Chronicles 35 when King Josiah of Judah ordered the priests to put it in the Temple. Then it vanished. Later, when King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, they took all the vessels from the Temple. However, there was no mention of the Ark being taken, so it is assumed it was hidden before the invasion. But where did they hide it? Where is it today? Here are several theories of its location:

1. Hidden in a cave on Mt. Nebo in Jordan

The non-canonical book 2 Maccabees describes what supposedly happened to the Ark before the Babylonian invasion:

The records show that it was the prophet Jeremiah who...prompted by a divine message...gave orders that the Tent of Meeting and the ark should go with him. Then he went away to the mountain from the top of which Moses saw God's Promised Land. When he reached the mountain, Jeremiah found a cave-dwelling; he carried the tent, the ark, and the incense-altar into it, then blocked up the entrance. Some of his companions came to mark out the way, but were unable to find it. When Jeremiah learned of this he reprimanded them. "The place shall remain unknown," he said, "until God finally gathers His people together and shows mercy to them. The Lord will bring these things to light again, and the glory of the Lord will appear with the cloud, as it was seen both in the time of Moses and when Solomon prayed that the shrine might be worthily consecrated." (2 Maccabees 2:4-8, Douay-Rheims translation)

The "mountain from the top of which Moses saw God's Promised Land" is Mount Nebo, which is located in Jordan by the Dead Sea. However, no one has ever found it there.

2. Taken to Ethiopia

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church claims to possess the Ark of the Covenant. Through the centuries, Ethiopian Christians have claimed that the Ark is being guarded in the Church of Our Lady Mary of Zion in the small town of Aksum, in their country's northern highlands. They say it arrived nearly 3,000 years ago and has been guarded by a succession of monks who are forbidden to set foot outside the chapel grounds until they die.

Why would the Ark be in Ethiopia?

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Church of Our Lady Mary of Zion

The *Kebra Negast* (Glory of the Kings), Ethiopia's chronicle of its royal line, says that the Queen of Sheba traveled to Jerusalem to hear King Solomon's wisdom. On her way home, she bore Solomon's son, Menelik. At age 20, Menelik went to visit his father Solomon.

On his return journey, Solomon ordered the firstborn of the elders to accompany him. Unbeknownst to Menelik, they had taken the Ark and carried it with them to Ethiopia and left a forgery in Jerusalem. The *Kebra Negast* was supposedly written to validate the claim by Menelik's descendants that their right to rule was God-given, based on an unbroken succession from Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

On June 25, 2009, the patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Ethiopia said he would announce to the world the next day the unveiling of the Ark of the Covenant. The next day, the patriarch announced that he would not unveil the Ark after all, but he would simply attest to its current status.

The problem is that the King Josiah mentions the Ark in the Temple over 300 years after Solomon's death. This fact eliminates the Ethiopian possibility.

3. Hidden under the Temple Mount

A second century rabbinic work called the Tosefta states that King Josiah hid the Ark, along with the jar of manna and the rod of Aaron which budded. This was done to prevent them from being carried off into Babylon, as had already happened to the other vessels. Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Shimon, in the same rabbinic work, purport that the Ark was taken into Babylon. However, Rabbi Yehudah said that the Ark was stored away in its own place, meaning somewhere under the Temple Mount.

A text translated in 2014 called the Treatise of the Vessels (*Massekhet Kelim* in Hebrew) indicates that the Ark and other temple vessels were hidden. It says the "treasures were concealed by a number of Levites and prophets," writes James Davila, a professor at the University of St. Andrews, who was the first to translate it into English. Davila believes the treatise is fiction.

The treatise says that the treasures from Solomon's Temple were recorded "on a tablet of bronze," a metal like the Copper Scroll, which was one of the Dead Sea Scrolls that dates back 1,900 years. The Copper Scroll also discusses the location of hidden treasure, although not from Solomon's Temple.

However, the text does not pinpoint the exact location of the Ark and states that it "shall not be revealed until the day of the coming of the Messiah son of David."

In 1981, three rabbis tunneled under the Temple site and claimed to have found the Ark hidden by King Josiah. **Click the link to watch a short video about the discovery.**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4m7tg6y2xBQ>



Which is the correct location? Only God knows. It's unlikely that Nebuchadnezzar captured it because it surely would have been mentioned in Scripture. It is very possible that Israel has it and will reveal it when the time is right to rebuild the Temple.

Making Life Count Ministries
P.O. Box 680174
Prattville, Alabama 36068
www.makinglifecount.net