



13 Art Mysteries Children Should Know

1200s B.C. Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt

ca. 1000 B.C. the Ark of the Covenant may have arrived in Jerusalem

1500 B.C. 1450 B.C. 1400 B.C. 1350 B.C. 1300 B.C. 1250 B.C. 1200 B.C. 1150 B.C. 1100 B.C. 1050 B.C. 1000 B.C. 950 B.C.

Moses' Ark of the Covenant

The Ark of the Covenant is one of the most prized objects in human history. But it has been missing for over 2,500 years.

The missing object is a chest more than 3,000 years old, made of acacia wood and plated inside and outside with pure gold. Its massive golden cover contained two winged figures, divine beings who were part human and part beast—or at least this is how it's described in the Bible's Old Testament. There it is written how God commanded Moses to make the Ark of the Covenant according to God's specifications. The Ark was meant to contain the stone tablets on which God had inscribed the Ten Commandments*, the laws that God wanted all people to follow.



Mystery:

Where is the Ark of the Covenant?

Artist of the Ark:

Unknown

Date:

The time of Moses

Location:

Israel

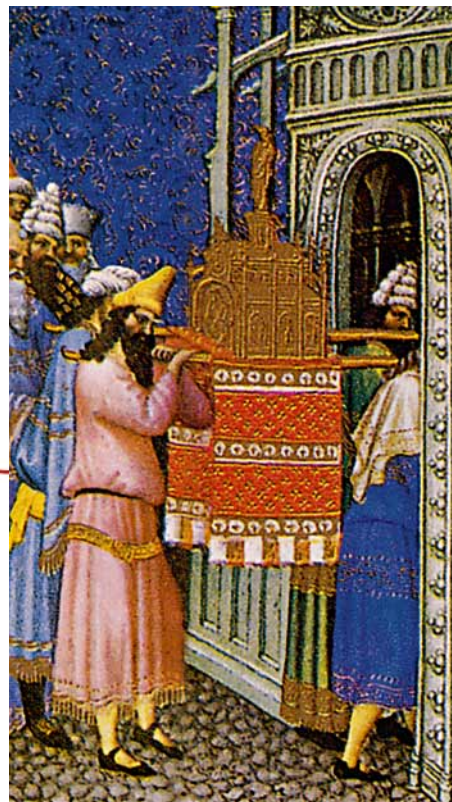
Distinguishing feature:

The Ark was created at God's command and according to God's instructions

The Ark is Carried into the Temple

Limburg brothers, ca. 1410–1416, from the Very Rich Hours of the Duke de Berry, Chantilly, Musée Condé

In this book of hours*, magnificently illustrated for the Duke de Berry by Jan, Paul, and Herman Limburg, the Ark of the Covenant shimmers in gold.



The Bible tells how the Israelites had long been forced to live in Egypt as slaves and servants. Then God chose Moses to lead them to a land where they could live in freedom. The Israelites took the Ark with them during their exodus from Egypt, and they kept it in a folding tent called a tabernacle. The Ark may have arrived in Jerusalem around 1000 B.C. There it is said to have stood for hundreds of years in the magnificent temple built by Israel's King Solomon.

Around 586 B.C. something terrible happened: The troops of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II looted the temple, destroyed it, and burnt all of Jerusalem

586 B.C. Babylonians destroy the Kingdom of Judah and the Temple of Solomon

516 B.C. completion of the Second Temple of Jerusalem

900 B.C. 850 B.C. 800 B.C. 750 B.C. 700 B.C. 650 B.C. 600 B.C. 550 B.C. 500 B.C. 450 B.C. 400 B.C. 350 B.C.



Passage through the Jordan

Raphael, 1483–1520, Rome, Vatican loggia

The Ark is believed to possess tremendous power. When the Israelites had to cross the River Jordan on their way to Jericho (in what is now Israel), the Ark supposedly held back the water so that the Israelites could walk across on dry ground.

Aaron Places a Vessel with Manna in the Ark
Nicholas of Verdun,
1181, detail of the
Verdun Altar,
Klosterneuburg,
parish church

The altarpiece made
by French goldsmith
Nicholas of Verdun is just
as golden as the Ark itself.
The altarpiece shows
scenes from the Old* and
New Testaments*.



to the ground. The Babylonians kept lists of everything they stole at that time, but the Ark is not mentioned in the lists. Could it have been destroyed? In any case, the last time the Ark is mentioned in the Bible is before the Babylonian attack.

Jews and Christians, archaeologists* and amateur researchers, scholars of religion, and adventurers would give a great deal to discover the Ark of the Covenant. Underground passages, caves, and mountains have been searched. Many suspect that the Ark is in Jordan; others think it is in the caves of Qumran in Israel. Could it have been discovered in Jerusalem 900 years ago by the Crusaders* and sent to the Pope in Rome? Or is it still in Jerusalem, possibly buried near where Solomon's Temple once stood? Today a Muslim mosque called the Dome of the Rock stands on the Temple Mount. Excavations are strictly forbidden there. In 1911 the English aristocrat, the Earl of Morley, supposedly bribed a Muslim clerk to lock him in the Dome of the Rock. He wanted to excavate secretly at night. But he was discovered before he had gotten far enough.

No one knows whether the Ark still exists or where it could be. In fact, it is not even certain that it ever existed!

Good to know

In the film *Raiders of the Lost Ark* by Steven Spielberg, Harrison Ford plays an archaeologist, Indiana Jones, who searches for the Ark.



David's Dance before the Ark
ca.1450, detail of the choir stall, Maulbronn, abbey

The Ark is often shown in Christian images, since the Jewish God is the same as the Christian God. Christians believe that God sent his son Jesus Christ to Earth to help humankind.