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Tonight, we explore one of the Bible's most powerful artifacts.

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Anybody who is unworthy could be blinded,

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00:00:11,800 --> 00:00:14,040

or if they touch it, they'll be killed.

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A holy relic that's been missing for over 2,000 years.

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People continue to believe that the Ark is still out there,

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00:00:21,720 --> 00:00:23,480

that it still can be found.

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Now we uncover the top theories surrounding its disappearance.

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00:00:28,840 --> 00:00:30,920

It was simply carried to Ethiopia.

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It's in the Vatican's secret archives.

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He hid it in anticipation of the Babylonian destruction.

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Can a new search finally reveal its location?

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I'm confident that this is the mother loan.

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What became of the legendary Ark of the Covenant?

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And can it ever be found?

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The Ark of the Covenant

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The Ark of the Covenant

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Qumran, Israel, 2014.

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After 16 years of hard work,

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researcher Jim Barfield believes he's closing in on one of history's most mysterious artifacts.

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This ancient Jewish settlement is where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in 1947.

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But I believe it hides an even greater treasure.

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I believe I've found the location of the greatest biblical archaeological discovery,

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the Ark of the Covenant.

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If Barfield is correct, he could solve a mystery that begins thousands of years ago.

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According to the book of Exodus, the story of the Ark dates back to ancient Egypt in the 13th century BCE.

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The Exodus is one of the most famous stories ever told.

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Moses and the Israelites survive a plague that takes the firstborn sons of the land.

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Moses leads the Israelites out of the land of Egypt,

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and they move across the Red Sea, where the waters miraculously part when he holds up his magical staff.

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They arrive at a mountain in which God gives them the Ten Commandments.

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The Israelites build a holy vessel, a sacred box, to hold these tablets of the commandments.

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It's called the Ark of the Covenant.

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The Bible gives a very clear description as to what the Ark of the Covenant looks like.

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God himself is in fact the architect of this,

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and so is very precise about the measurements and the way that it has to be built.

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It's made of acacia wood, two and a half cubits long, one and a half cubits wide, and one and a half cubits high,

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or about 52 inches long, 31 inches wide, 31 inches high.

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It's covered entirely in gold inside and out.

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It has four gold rings on which poles are attached for it to be carried.

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Finally, it's topped off with an ornate gold lid that has two sculptures of cherubim on top.

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According to the Old Testament, the Israelites carry the Ark for 40 years, wandering through the desert.

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Along the way, it displays great power.

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In the Book of Joshua, when they reach the river Jordan, the Ark miraculously dries up the waters so that they can cross.

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The first battle that the Israelites fight is against the great city of Jericho.

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Israelites were commanded to circle the city seven times, blow the horns,

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and then in the presence of the Ark, the walls of Jericho would fall.

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The Israelites would take the city and they would gain possession of that area of the land of Israel.

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Further accounts in 1st and 2nd Samuel note that anybody who is unworthy,

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who even looks at the Ark, could be blinded, or if they touch it, they'll be killed.

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There's also the story of the Philistines. The Philistines capture the Ark.

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They're suddenly afflicted with a plague of mice or rats and with horrible boils that the Philistines get all over their bodies.

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They actually end up giving the Ark back to the Israelites and along with it,

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00:04:27,720 --> 00:04:34,720

a coffer filled with gold sculptures and kind of an apology for having taken the Ark in the first place.

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Eventually the Ark is brought to Jerusalem where King Solomon builds the first Jewish temple at a place called the Temple Mount.

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He houses the Ark inside with a special room called the Holy of Holies.

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The temple is completed by around 950 BCE and for four centuries,

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the Ark in the temple becomes the center sort of strumming heart of the Kingdom of Israel.

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The Ark of the Covenant was the focal point of religious devotion,

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a place where God spoke to the world.

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Then war breaks out in 587 BCE.

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The Babylonians attack Jerusalem and finally destroy the city after a 30 month siege

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and the Babylonians are absolutely brutal.

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They tear down the temple.

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They force Setakaya to watch every one of his sons murdered in front of him.

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They then blind him so that this image is the last thing he sees.

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They take him to Babylon and they make him a prisoner there until his death.

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They also set Jerusalem on fire and everything burns, including perhaps the Ark.

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This isn't just a Bible story.

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We have archaeological evidence that the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem.

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Babylon loots the city before it burns and we have some records of some of the things they took,

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but something that's never mentioned in any of those records is the Ark of the Covenant,

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something that would have certainly been mentioned had they taken it.

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So a large amount of historians believe that the Ark of the Covenant was in Jerusalem up to 587 BCE.

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After that, it's almost entirely absent from the biblical text.

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Is that really it? Is this immensely powerful object really gone?

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After centuries of it being this kind of center of worship, all of a sudden it just disappears?

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Nobody wants this to be the end of the Ark.

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According to some ancient texts, it's not.

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There's a reason why so many people continue to believe that the Ark is still out there, that it still can be found.

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There's a reason they're still looking for it.

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It's because there are stories that the Ark narrowly escaped the temple's destruction in Jerusalem.

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These stories come from first and second century Jewish sources, including one called the Mishnah.

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And the Mishnah is actually a collection of oral traditions that claim to go all the way back to the destruction of the temple at the hands of the Babylonians.

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In one such story, one rabbi, Yehuda, tells that before the Babylonian destruction of the temple,

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an earlier king, Josiah, worried about the Ark and he hid it in anticipation of the Babylonian destruction.

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According to Rabbi Yehuda, the Ark is hidden with a chest of gold and a sacred walking stick carried by Moses' brother, Aaron.

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King Josiah also hides this chest that the Philistines sent to the Israelites along with the Ark of the Covenant in an effort to say,

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we're sorry we stole the Ark of the Covenant from you.

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Rabbi Yehuda offered the idea that the priests of Jerusalem prepared a secret underground chamber beneath the temple mount and that's where they hid the Ark.

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The site of Solomon's original temple, the temple mount, has long been a powerful and mysterious location.

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There are at least 35 acres of ancient rooms and over 50 tunnels that we know of under the temple mount.

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Some of these date all the way back to King Solomon.

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Many Orthodox Jews believe that the Ark of the Covenant was hidden in one of these chambers and that one day it will be rediscovered.

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It's 1970 and one theory about the Ark of the Covenant is about to be tested.

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As Israeli authorities begin excavations close to Jerusalem's western wall near the site of Solomon's original temple.

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It's a major archaeological dig.

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The western wall runs along the west side of the temple mount and beneath it are thousands of years of construction, structures, tunnels, artifacts.

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This is a huge project planned to take a total of 18 years.

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It's a project that also creates religious tension as the site is now home to the dome of the rock, an Islamic shrine built in 691 AD.

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Because the temple mount is under Islamic control, you also have the political part of this which is Israelis digging into the Islamic part of the city.

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And any excavation that cuts under the temple mount by the Israeli government would just be a political time bomb.

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But if you believe like many Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem that the Ark of the Covenant is hidden in the temple mount, then this excavation project is coming tantalizingly close.

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One such believer is Rabbi Yehuda Getz.

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Rabbi Getz is not affiliated with this dig, right? This is an Israeli government scientific excavation.

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But Rabbi Getz wants to find the Ark of the Covenant.

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And in the middle of that excavation Rabbi Getz realizes that they are close to where he believes the Ark of the Covenant might be.

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So Rabbi Getz gathers up some workmen and begins a secret excavation of his own.

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Getz chooses a spot called the Warren Gate which leads straight under the temple mount.

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He's had 11 years to prepare for this moment.

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He's reviewed archaeological reports, ancient maps, he's consulted with experts, and he is convinced that this is the closest possible location to the Holy of Holies chamber that once held the Ark.

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After some weeks of digging, Muslim worshipers in the Al Aqsa Mosque hear all kinds of banging going on under their floor.

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And so the Muslim guards go down to see what's going on and they encounter a group of Israeli young people smuggling dirt out of these tunnels.

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A violent confrontation ensues between these amateur excavators armed only with shovels, hose, and pigs and the guards rushing in from all sides.

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Israeli police have to come to quell a full-scale underground riot.

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In 1982 the government orders the tunnel to be resealed and it remains cemented shut to this day.

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Rabbi Yehuda gets claimed that at the end of the tunnel that he dug he could see something.

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Something golden and something glowing. Is it perhaps the Ark of the Covenant?

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We may never know how close Rabbi gets to the Ark of the Covenant.

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But those tunnels are still there and maybe if sometime the political situation changes in Israel we might be able to access them and perhaps reveal that the Rabbi was right all along.

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Others believe that whatever Rabbi gets spotted in 1981 it wasn't the Ark because that relic was moved centuries earlier.

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After the Babylonians destroyed the first temple let's just assume that the Ark is safely underneath the Temple Mount.

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And as years go by other conquering people come and go and the Ark is still there.

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Eventually the Jews are allowed to return to Jerusalem and they build a second temple on the same site.

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And then a new sheriff comes to town.

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In 63 BCE the Roman Empire conquers the entire Eastern Mediterranean region.

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And when the Jews rebel against Rome Rome decimates them.

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The Romans destroy the second temple in 70 AD and they dismantle it stone by stone taking its treasures back to Rome.

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Some believe one of those treasures is the Ark.

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There are many artworks and writings from the Romans describing the many spoils from the Jewish war.

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The Ark of the Covenant is not shown among any of them.

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But did the Romans know that they captured the Ark if they captured the Ark?

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Well they didn't know what they captured in the temple.

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They called the menorah the great candelabrum that the Jews had built for the temple.

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They just call it a candlestick.

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With or without the Ark the temple spoils are paraded around the city of Rome before they are put on display in the ironically named temple of peace.

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That faces the Colosseum which is at that time being built and largely funded by spoils from the Jewish war.

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The temple of peace stands in Rome for nearly 500 years.

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After that if the Ark is there we don't know where it goes.

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Rome is invaded by barbarians and falls in the year 476 AD.

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For hundreds of years it seems that the Ark has just disappeared until the 12th century when it is mentioned in a book.

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It's supposedly still in Rome but it is not at the temple of peace.

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The book is called the descriptio lateran inso-siciliziae.

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It's written by John the Deacon and he works at the Lateran Basilica in Rome.

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And he claims that this is where the Ark of the Covenant is being kept.

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It's the oldest church in Rome founded in the year 324 AD while the temple of peace is still standing and it's only located a half a mile away.

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Some theorists believe that after Constantine legalizes Christianity in the Roman Empire in the year 312 this church is built right away to house the Christian relics of Rome.

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Around 1160 this is exactly what John the Deacon writes.

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He says that the Ark of the Covenant and many other temple treasures are stored in the Lateran Church beneath the altar.

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600 years later the Ark is mentioned again in papal records.

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In 1745 the Pope at the time, Benedict XIV, has three sacred objects moved from the Lateran Treasury.

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There's the staff of Moses, there's Aaron's rod, and lastly there's the Ark of the Covenant.

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Now this is the last mention of the Ark in Rome, but some theorists believe that the Ark has remained in the possession of the Popes ever since and they think it's in the Vatican's secret archives.

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Hidden beneath St. Peter's Square the archives have an estimated 53 miles of shelves holding thousands of years worth of church documents and artifacts.

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They have the correspondence of Martin Luther, they have Henry VIII's request for a marriage annulment.

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Who knows what else is in the Vatican archives?

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Could the Ark of the Covenant be down there?

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But let's be very clear, no Pope, no church official has ever claimed that the Vatican has possession of the Ark of the Covenant.

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What the Ethiopians say, according to their religion, is that these Ark hunters focused on what happened following the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC are all on a wild goose chase.

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The Ethiopians believe that actually the Ark left Jerusalem about 350 years earlier than the destruction of the temple.

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And it wasn't lost in a war and it wasn't destroyed, it was simply picked up and carried off.

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And it ends up being carried all the way to Ethiopia where it remains to this day.

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According to this tradition, the Ark leaves Jerusalem during the reign of King Solomon.

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In the Bible's first book of Kings and second Chronicles, there's a story of King Solomon who greets in his kingdom a queen.

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While she's known as the Queen of Sheba and her origins were actually unknown, modern day historians associate her with the land of Ethiopia.

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In the Bible, the Queen of Sheba comes to Jerusalem to test the wisdom of the mighty King Solomon.

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She brings him gold and all kinds of presents and having discovered that he is everything she's heard.

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Queen of Sheba returns to her kingdom in Africa.

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But the Ethiopian texts like to elaborate on this story that the Queen of Sheba comes to visit Solomon and by the time she returns, she's pregnant with Solomon's baby.

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And she gives birth to a son and names him Menelik.

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Menelik is raised in Ethiopia and when he comes of age, his mother, the Queen of Sheba, decides it's time for him to go to Jerusalem and meet King Solomon, his biological father.

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So they meet for the first time and Solomon is really favorably impressed with this young man.

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He asks Menelik to stay and to become his heir.

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Menelik declines, returning to Ethiopia as his mother's heir.

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When Menelik returns to Ethiopia, he's shocked to discover that along with his supplies, he finds the Ark of the Covenant.

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Now, Ethiopian accounts vary as to whether this was a gift from Solomon or whether someone in his entourage stole it.

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But the Ark of the Covenant is there in Ethiopia and they believe the Ark is rightfully theirs.

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Unlike, say, the story of the Philistines taking the Ark for themselves, nothing bad happens to these Ethiopians for having the Ark of the Covenant there.

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There's no plagues, there's no tumors, there's no walls collapsing and no instant death for the people who gaze upon it.

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00:19:27,720 --> 00:19:30,720

Instead, Menelik's kingdom thrives.

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Menelik's family line, which claims to be the Solomonic dynasty, flourishes for 2,000 years and to this day, the church that they founded claims to possess the Ark of the Covenant.

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Every aspect of Ethiopian Orthodoxy has the Ark at its core.

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There are tens of thousands of Ethiopian Orthodox churches in the world and every one of them to be consecrated must have a replica Ark of the Covenant inside its holy of holies,

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00:19:58,720 --> 00:20:00,720

its inner sanctum chamber.

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On special occasions, the Ark of the Covenant replica can be brought out and paraded around, but even it remains covered because even these replicas are thought to have tremendous power.

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But with so many replicas, where is the real Ark?

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In Aksum, a town 20 miles from the Eritrean border is the Cathedral of Our Lady Mary of Zion.

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The Cathedral is part of a complex of buildings that represent the holiest place on earth for Ethiopian Orthodox Christians.

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It's the equivalent of the Roman Catholic Vatican.

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The new Cathedral building was constructed in the 1950s by the emperor, Hylis Alassi.

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It's adjacent to the old church, built in the 1500s on a site that had been in use since the 4th century.

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So in between two buildings, there's another smaller one and the small one is the one that's really important and it's known as the Chapel of the Tablet.

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And here is where the Ethiopians believe that the Ark of the Covenant is kept.

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The Chapel of the Tablet was built in 1965 because, according to legend, of a divine heat that was emanating from the Ark that was so hot, it actually cracked the stones of the old church that sat next door.

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So the Chapel of the Tablet is a more fortified home for the safekeeping for the Ark of the Covenant.

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It's one of the most heavily secured chapels that you would ever come across.

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There is only one person who can actually enter into that building and he's known as the Guardian Monk.

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00:21:38,720 --> 00:21:40,720

The Guardian Monk serves for life.

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00:21:40,720 --> 00:21:42,720

He needs to be a virgin.

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00:21:42,720 --> 00:21:49,720

He takes an oath of celibacy and he spends his entire life in service to the Ark of the Covenant,

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00:21:49,720 --> 00:21:52,720

making prayers and offering up incense before it.

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00:21:52,720 --> 00:21:58,720

He's not allowed to stray more than 10 feet from the building in which the Ark sits.

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00:21:58,720 --> 00:22:03,720

He's essentially bound to it, a life in service to this holy relic.

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00:22:03,720 --> 00:22:07,720

Before a Guardian Monk dies, he appoints his own successor.

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00:22:07,720 --> 00:22:12,720

It's a cycle that has continued, unbroken for generations.

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Of course, some are suspicious that all of the secrecy that surrounds the site means precisely that the Ark isn't there.

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00:22:18,720 --> 00:22:22,720

It could be that this Ark is simply another replica.

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00:22:22,720 --> 00:22:30,720

But on the rare occasions when these Guardian Monks are interviewed, they state with absolute certainty that this is the Ark of the Covenant.

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They believe it as do tens of millions of followers of Ethiopian Orthodoxy worldwide.

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00:22:36,720 --> 00:22:41,720

I think it's safe to say that there is something very precious in this Chapel.

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00:22:42,720 --> 00:22:48,720

Whether that is actually the Ark of the Covenant is ultimately impossible to say.

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00:22:48,720 --> 00:22:52,720

But there may be an opportunity to find out soon.

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00:22:52,720 --> 00:22:56,720

A new Chapel of the Tablet is currently being built behind the present one.

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00:22:56,720 --> 00:23:02,720

It's slightly larger, it has thicker walls, it will also have an ornate silver dome on the top.

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00:23:02,720 --> 00:23:09,720

As soon as this new Chapel is completed, whatever object is inside the current Chapel will have to be brought out.

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00:23:09,720 --> 00:23:15,720

Undoubtedly, they'll do it as quickly as possible under as much secrecy as possible.

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00:23:15,720 --> 00:23:19,720

If it's the Ark of the Covenant, maybe we'll finally get a glimpse of it.

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00:23:19,720 --> 00:23:21,720

And with it, some answers.

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00:23:40,720 --> 00:23:47,720

Starting around 1872, some people who call themselves the British Israelites begin organizing.

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00:23:47,720 --> 00:23:53,720

First in England, then in other parts of the British Empire, and eventually also in the United States.

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They believed that they were descended from the ancient Israelites, the same people who built the Ark,

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00:23:59,720 --> 00:24:03,720

lived in Jerusalem, and were exiled after the Babylonian destruction.

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00:24:03,720 --> 00:24:08,720

Led by three British nationalists, the group begins researching a possible connection

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00:24:08,720 --> 00:24:14,720

between the ancient Israelites and the British Anglo-Saxons.

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00:24:14,720 --> 00:24:17,720

I think it's a self-serving effort.

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00:24:17,720 --> 00:24:24,720

If we can prove our ethnic or social group is descended from God's chosen people,

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00:24:24,720 --> 00:24:28,720

then that makes us that much more superior.

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00:24:28,720 --> 00:24:32,720

But, sure enough, they believe they found a connection.

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00:24:32,720 --> 00:24:38,720

The oldest records and texts about the Israelites settling in the Promised Land

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00:24:38,720 --> 00:24:42,720

said that they were divided into twelve different tribes.

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The number twelve may or may not be historically accurate,

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00:24:46,720 --> 00:24:52,720

but we do know that by the time that the Romans had occupied that territory,

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00:24:52,720 --> 00:24:58,720

after the Jewish war around the year 70, the Roman-Jewish historian Josephus,

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00:24:58,720 --> 00:25:02,720

he says at that point only two tribes still remain.

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00:25:02,720 --> 00:25:05,720

The other ten are in dispersion.

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00:25:05,720 --> 00:25:12,720

According to the British Israelites, these ten lost tribes of Israel migrated to Europe.

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According to this theory, they called themselves Isaac's sons,

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00:25:16,720 --> 00:25:20,720

and from Isaac's sons we derive the word Saxons.

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00:25:20,720 --> 00:25:25,720

We know that Saxons definitely settled in the British Isles in around the mid-fifth century.

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00:25:25,720 --> 00:25:32,720

Saxon presence there is not disputed. In fact, we owe a large chunk of the English language to the Saxons.

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00:25:32,720 --> 00:25:37,720

But did they come all the way from Jerusalem, and did they bring with them the Ark of the Covenant?

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00:25:37,720 --> 00:25:40,720

If that's true, well, where is it?

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00:25:40,720 --> 00:25:44,720

Because they believe that the lost tribes ended up in Britain,

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00:25:44,720 --> 00:25:51,720

the British Israelites start combing through history books and mythological materials looking for clues.

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00:25:51,720 --> 00:25:58,720

And they find a book of ancient Irish history mythologies called the Labour Gabbala-Iran.

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To them, this book is the missing link that connects them to the Ark.

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00:26:02,720 --> 00:26:12,720

The Labour Gabbala-Iran describes a Far East princess named Teyatefi, who comes to Ireland and marries King Ereman.

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00:26:12,720 --> 00:26:19,720

Travelling with Princess Teyatefi are an old white-haired man and his servant whose name is Bra.

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00:26:19,720 --> 00:26:27,720

The British Israelites believe that this old man was Jeremiah, accompanied by his servant Baruch, his scribe who wrote down his story.

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00:26:27,720 --> 00:26:35,720

In the book of 2nd Maccabees, it says that the Prophet Jeremiah escaped the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem

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00:26:35,720 --> 00:26:40,720

and took with him the Ark of the Covenant and a couple of other temple vessels.

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00:26:40,720 --> 00:26:48,720

The British Israelites believe that Prophet Jeremiah brought the Ark of the Covenant with Teyatefi, Ireland.

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00:26:48,720 --> 00:26:54,720

The British Israelites search the Bible for clues to Teyatefi's identity.

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00:26:54,720 --> 00:27:00,720

When they destroy Jerusalem, the Babylonians capture King Zedekiah and murder his sons.

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00:27:00,720 --> 00:27:04,720

But according to the book of Jeremiah, his daughter is spared.

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00:27:04,720 --> 00:27:10,720

This daughter, who is named Tamar, the British Israelites believe is actually Teyath.

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00:27:10,720 --> 00:27:19,720

So as the theory goes, this entourage of people is the same group who arrive with all the stuff together in Ireland.

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00:27:19,720 --> 00:27:21,720

They have brought the Ark of the Covenant.

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00:27:21,720 --> 00:27:26,720

Tamar slash Teyatefi marries, becomes a Queen of Ireland.

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00:27:26,720 --> 00:27:35,720

And when she dies, she's buried along with the Ark in an ancient sacred center that was her kingdom, now known as the Hill of Tara.

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00:27:35,720 --> 00:27:40,720

The Hill of Tara is one of Ireland's most precious national monuments.

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00:27:40,720 --> 00:27:47,720

It's a place that rival stonehenge as one of many important Neolithic sites in the British Empire.

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00:27:47,720 --> 00:27:54,720

It's the legendary seat of the ancient Irish monarchs, a place that humans have associated with great power for thousands of years.

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00:27:54,720 --> 00:28:03,720

Archaeologists at Tara have found large earthen structures, ceremonial stone monuments and hundreds of ancient burials.

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Teyat, Tamar, Tara, some people think that the site is named for the Queen who brought the Ark there.

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00:28:09,720 --> 00:28:17,720

Once the British Israelites develop their theory, they want to excavate the site, convince that they're going to find the Ark there.

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00:28:17,720 --> 00:28:24,720

In 1899, British Israelite archaeologist Walton Adams and Charles Groom come to the site of Tara.

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The group convinces the owner of the land, Gustavus Briscoe, to let them begin digging for the Ark.

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00:28:30,720 --> 00:28:36,720

So they get to work and they're excavating for months and months and nobody's really paying attention to them.

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00:28:36,720 --> 00:28:42,720

But eventually some Irish nationalists catch wind of what's going on and they are furious.

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00:28:42,720 --> 00:28:49,720

The British Israelites only care about one thing, the Ark, and they're not very careful about how they do their business.

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00:28:49,720 --> 00:28:54,720

So they're causing untold destruction to a major cultural icon.

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00:28:54,720 --> 00:28:59,720

Nearby landowner Sir John Dillon keeps a detailed account of the excavation.

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00:28:59,720 --> 00:29:10,720

Sir John Dillon sees them taking out bones, Roman coins, and they're just discarding it like it's

rubbish and he's mortified by what they're doing.

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00:29:10,720 --> 00:29:19,720

If this is allowed to continue, they are going to succeed in laying waste to probably Ireland's most significant sacred site.

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00:29:19,720 --> 00:29:27,720

By January of 1901, a full-scale media campaign is launched to try and halt the digging.

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00:29:27,720 --> 00:29:36,720

National heroes like the writers George Moore and WB8s join in the chorus to save Tara and eventually they succeed.

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00:29:36,720 --> 00:29:47,720

These British Israelites abandon their quest for the Ark and the site is now owned by the Irish government, which is never going to let them search for the Ark again.

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00:29:47,720 --> 00:29:49,720

It's an incredible story.

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00:29:49,720 --> 00:30:02,720

They're combining the Bible with Irish mythology to place the Ark of the Covenant, one of the most powerful objects in the world, in one of the most powerful places in the world.

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00:30:02,720 --> 00:30:05,720

But without any kind of proof, it's just that, a story.

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00:30:08,720 --> 00:30:15,720

Over the years, theories have placed the powerful Ark of the Covenant everywhere from Ethiopia to Ireland.

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But historians remain skeptical that it could have traveled so far from Jerusalem.

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00:30:20,720 --> 00:30:25,720

If the Ark existed and survives, it's probably somewhere in the Middle East.

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00:30:25,720 --> 00:30:35,720

With the Babylonians closing in around the destruction of the temple, the Jews would not have had very much time, and so the best thing to do would just have been to hide it.

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00:30:35,720 --> 00:30:44,720

It's not like they can take it on a long voyage. They would have probably had to carry it on foot. It probably didn't travel very far.

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00:30:44,720 --> 00:30:49,720

So you're definitely left with a limited radius in which to look.

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00:30:49,720 --> 00:30:52,720

Could they even have gotten the Ark out of Jerusalem?

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00:30:52,720 --> 00:31:03,720

Some theorists note that before the Babylonians actually laid siege to the city, they actually surrounded it for a couple of years, and it would have been impossible to have smuggled anything in or out.

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00:31:03,720 --> 00:31:08,720

But in 2007, a new discovery challenges that thinking.

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00:31:08,720 --> 00:31:20,720

A team of archaeologists, Ronny Reich and Eli Shoukron, discovered what they call an escape hatch, a tunnel running from the Temple Mount all the way down outside of the city.

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The tunnel has walls that are up to 10 feet tall. That's plenty of space for a group of priests to have smuggled out considerable numbers of objects, including the Ark of the Covenant.

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00:31:32,720 --> 00:31:42,720

This tunnel leads under the city walls to the Kedron Valley, so now we have a possible escape route for the Ark of the Covenant.

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00:31:42,720 --> 00:31:48,720

The discovery of this tunnel connects a lot of the biblical dots of the story of the Ark.

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00:31:48,720 --> 00:31:57,720

The Book of Second Maccabees suggests that Jeremiah, the prophet, takes the Ark of the Covenant and the Temple Treasures out of the city.

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00:31:57,720 --> 00:32:05,720

So here's the big question. If this tunnel is the Ark's escape path leading to the Kedron River, where does it go from there?

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00:32:05,720 --> 00:32:11,720

According to Ark Hunter Jim Barfield, there's only one possible answer.

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00:32:11,720 --> 00:32:20,720

The Kedron River heads east and then it branches off into the Coomron River, which leads past an ancient settlement also called Coomron.

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00:32:20,720 --> 00:32:33,720

Coomron is famous because that's where the Dead Sea Scrolls are found. I've been studying Coomron for 25 years, and I believe that it's the resting place of the Ark of the Covenant as well.

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00:32:33,720 --> 00:32:40,720

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls here in 1947 stunned both the scientific and religious communities.

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00:32:40,720 --> 00:32:55,720

This is one of the biggest archaeological finds in history. 981 manuscripts, some over 2,500 years old, found buried and sealed inside 11 caves.

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00:32:55,720 --> 00:33:04,720

It's hard to overstate their importance. Here we find the oldest surviving manuscripts of many parts of the Hebrew Bible.

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00:33:04,720 --> 00:33:10,720

There's a bunch of other writings in there as well that give us all kinds of important historical information.

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00:33:10,720 --> 00:33:15,720

So as an archaeological find, the Dead Sea Scrolls are huge.

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00:33:15,720 --> 00:33:22,720

Most of the scrolls are papyrus or parchment, and most of them contain stories and scriptures.

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00:33:22,720 --> 00:33:29,720

But one of them, discovered in 1952, is made of copper. It dates back to the first century.

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00:33:29,720 --> 00:33:41,720

The Copper Scroll is not a Bible story. On that copper they have hammered instructions to find treasures from the Temple of Solomon, which I believe includes the Ark of the Covenant.

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00:33:41,720 --> 00:33:57,720

The Copper Scroll lists 64 places where various items are hidden, including hordes of gold and silver. But the text is vague and difficult to decipher, possibly to prevent outsiders from discovering the location of these sites.

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00:33:57,720 --> 00:34:13,720

The text gives a number of directions to landmarks that only locals would likely have known, like it's in the salt pit under the steps or in the cave of the old Washer's Chamber on the Third Terrace.

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00:34:13,720 --> 00:34:23,720

Barfield was a fire investigator for 23 years. After dedicating his life to solving mysteries, he turns his attention to this one.

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00:34:24,720 --> 00:34:32,720

I made it my mission to decode the Copper Scroll and find the Ark of the Covenant, and now I believe I'm on the verge of a breakthrough.

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00:34:32,720 --> 00:34:39,720

So there's a compelling trail of evidence that leads Barfield to Cameroon in search of the Ark.

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00:34:39,720 --> 00:34:51,720

There's a tunnel leading out of Jerusalem straight to a waterway. They've done excavations all along this path, and they've found coins, pottery, evidence that ancient Jews were in that area.

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00:34:51,720 --> 00:35:05,720

The waterway leads to Cameroon, which is known as a place of safekeeping, full of caves in which were found hundreds of priceless artifacts, including the Copper Scroll, a treasure map written in Hebrew, found in Cameroon.

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00:35:05,720 --> 00:35:15,720

It doesn't explicitly say in the Copper Scroll that the location for all these hidden treasures is Cameroon, but it makes sense that you might want to look there.

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00:35:15,720 --> 00:35:26,720

In 2007, I was ready to visit Cameroon. I had my own replica of the Copper Scroll. I had satellite maps and all the information that I could gather from the biblical text.

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00:35:26,720 --> 00:35:35,720

But when I got there, I had no idea what I might encounter. Was I wrong about all this? Was it wild, goose chase? There's only one way to find out.

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00:35:36,720 --> 00:35:51,720

In 2007, investigator Jim Barfield's search for the famed Ark of the Covenant brings him to the ancient Jewish settlement of Qumran, Israel.

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00:35:51,720 --> 00:36:00,720

Qumran was destroyed by the Romans, very similar to what happened in Jerusalem. But unlike Jerusalem, the Romans didn't take all the treasures.

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00:36:00,720 --> 00:36:13,720

Nearly 2,000 years later, the Ditsy Scrolls remained waiting to be discovered. And I believe still hiding at Qumran are the temple treasures of King Solomon and the Ark of the Covenant.

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00:36:14,720 --> 00:36:19,720

Barfield narrows his search based on instructions in the Copper Scroll.

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00:36:19,720 --> 00:36:36,720

Location 1 on the Copper Scroll describes 17 talents of silver service vessels. That's around 1,200 pounds or \$340,000 of pure silver. But of course, it's priceless as an archaeological find.

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00:36:36,720 --> 00:36:43,720

This copper scroll says it's at the steps heading east 40 cubits long. That's about 65 feet.

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00:36:43,720 --> 00:36:48,720

In Qumran, Barfield is only able to find one location with steps heading east.

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00:36:49,720 --> 00:36:58,720

When I get there, I measure the steps and they are exactly 40 cubits long. And I am absolutely convinced that those service vessels are buried at that location.

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00:36:59,720 --> 00:37:07,720

Remember, this is Barfield's first visit out there. He's not part of any dig. He's just really trying to line things up.

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00:37:07,720 --> 00:37:12,720

Next, Barfield turns his attention to finding location number two.

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00:37:12,720 --> 00:37:28,720

A second location on the Copper Scroll says, in the dry cistern at the great ruin courtyard of the Peristyle, in the soft sea floor is hidden polished gold. In front of the uppermost opening are 900 talents. That's an incredible 33 tons of polished gold.

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00:37:28,720 --> 00:37:42,720

So now Barfield is looking for a cistern and a courtyard, but he's still not sure that the Copper Scroll is referring to places in and around Qumran. He believes though that the sites keep lining up for him.

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00:37:42,720 --> 00:37:51,720

And when I found the location of the cistern, it was easy to determine because there was a great courtyard there that matched the description of the Copper Scroll.

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00:37:52,720 --> 00:37:58,720

Barfield is excited and he believes that he's found the 33 tons of polished gold in this location.

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00:38:08,720 --> 00:38:20,720

Locations one and two are lining up, but my ultimate goal is to find location number three, which could hold the Temple Treasures of King Solomon and the Ark of the Covenant.

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00:38:20,720 --> 00:38:33,720

The Copper Scroll describes this location as being at the north end of the Hill of Koh-Lit. Whatever the ancient Jews used to refer to as the Hill of Koh-Lit, it's been lost to the sands of time.

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00:38:33,720 --> 00:38:41,720

I realize that the hill couldn't be within Qumran because there's no hills within the ruins of Qumran, but there are several nearby.

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00:38:42,720 --> 00:38:49,720

Barfield studies satellite imagery to identify a potential candidate for the Hill of Koh-Lit.

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00:38:49,720 --> 00:39:01,720

Not only does Barfield find a hill that seems to match, when he gets there, there appears to be a cave that's sealed shut. To him, it doesn't look like a natural rock formation.

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00:39:01,720 --> 00:39:05,720

He believes the cave's location may also be a clue.

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00:39:05,720 --> 00:39:12,720

When I looked at this location on my map, locations three, two, and one were in a perfectly straight line.

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00:39:12,720 --> 00:39:19,720

It was as if whoever wrote this document was leading me to this specific location.

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00:39:19,720 --> 00:39:24,720

Barfield is eager to prove this cave is hiding something.

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00:39:24,720 --> 00:39:39,720

I decided that I would take a sample of this stone and send it off to a lab in Skokie, Illinois, where we had it examined, and they find that it is man-made mortar in a common mixture and formula from that time frame.

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00:39:39,720 --> 00:39:43,720

Why would somebody seal a random hill with concrete?

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00:39:44,720 --> 00:39:52,720

So James Barfield takes all of this evidence and requests the permission of Israeli authorities to conduct a dig.

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00:39:52,720 --> 00:39:59,720

They don't go that far, but they do allow him to return in 2014 with a parliamentary delegate named Moshe Feiglen.

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00:39:59,720 --> 00:40:03,720

This time, he's able to bring in more advanced equipment.

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00:40:03,720 --> 00:40:07,720

What we decided to do was buy an industrial metal detector.

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00:40:07,720 --> 00:40:20,720

Before I went back, we took that metal detector and I buried 30 pounds of silver in my front yard to get a baseline to make sure that while we were seeing, we could judge it against whatever we might find at Khumron.

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00:40:20,720 --> 00:40:32,720

Back in Khumron, we scanned the courtyard of the parish though, and as we got close, we just flipped the edge with the 33 tons of gold we buried, and the readings just went off the charts.

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00:40:33,720 --> 00:40:40,720

And when we get to location number three, the metal detector confirms my suspicions that this is the mother load.

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00:40:40,720 --> 00:40:53,720

According to Barfield's results, the metal detector finds five times the amount of metal in location number three than the 33 tons of gold posited for location number two.

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00:40:53,720 --> 00:40:58,720

I've already proven that something is down there, now we've got to dig it up and see what it is.

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00:40:58,720 --> 00:41:06,720

The copper scroll, the biblical text, the map, the mortar, the metal detector readings, all of these lead me with no doubt.

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00:41:06,720 --> 00:41:10,720

In this sealed cave are the greatest treasures of Israel.

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00:41:10,720 --> 00:41:16,720

When they finally give us permission to do the excavation, we're going to be face to face with the Ark of the Kremlin.

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00:41:21,720 --> 00:41:27,720

Jim Barfield is currently lobbying the Israeli Congress for permission to excavate at Khumron.

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00:41:27,720 --> 00:41:34,720

If he's successful, there's a chance that the search for the Ark of the Covenant may one day be over.

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00:41:34,720 --> 00:41:40,720

I'm Lawrence Fishburne. Thank you for watching History's Greatest Mysteries.