

FURTHER CLAIMS ABOUT THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

Jonathan Gray's paper, "Update", Newsletter no. 17 (Feb. to April 1997) has recently been distributed. The startling claim in this issue is about a sample of blood taken from the alleged site of Jesus' crucifixion at Jerusalem.

A summary of the claims so far is as follows: It is claimed that the true site of Jesus' crucifixion has been found, and the tomb nearby in which His body was laid also. It is claimed that the Ark of the Covenant and equipment from the Holy Place of the temple have been found in a cave, some twenty feet directly below the site of Jesus' cross. It is further claimed that the splitting of rocks that occurred when Jesus died allowed blood from Jesus' side, when the soldier pierced His side, to fall through a crack that opened up, onto the stone case that enclosed the Ark of the Covenant, and through another crack in that stone case onto the Mercy Seat itself.

If these claims are true, there are remarkable consequences. The Gospel writers who reported the splitting of the rocks and the spear thrust into Jesus' side, from which blood and water flowed, did themselves not realise the fact that Jesus' blood was a remarkably literal fulfilment of the sacrificial blood that the high priest sprinkled on the ark of the covenant once each year to still the accusing voice of the Law against human sin. In any case, the "Septuagint", the Greek translation of the Old Testament often quoted by the apostles, uses a word, "*hilastērion*" meaning "propitiation", for the Mercy Seat, the solid gold lid of the Ark of the Covenant, in passages such as Leviticus chapter 16, about the Day of Atonement. That is the very same word that Paul uses for Jesus in Romans 3:25, and John uses a related word for Him, *hilasmos*, in 1 John 2:2.

The article on pages 8-11 now claims that Ron Wyatt took dried samples of the blood that had come down through the crack onto the lid of the stone case, and had it analysed at Nashville, Tennessee. It is claimed that with the use of an electron microscope it was possible to find the chromosomal content of the blood. It was allegedly found that the blood was human, but did not have the normal 46 chromosomes, but only 24 chromosomes. It is claimed that the tests showed that, of these, 23 had come from the mother, and there was one Y-chromosome, indicating that the blood belonged to a male. It is claimed that no human blood like this had ever been known to exist.

We know that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, and had no human father. If this analysis is correct, it is remarkable confirmation of Jesus' virgin birth. It would agree with the biblical record of the conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit. The claim is that in this case the Y-chromosome came from the Holy Spirit as well.

It was pointed out that the technological means to test the chromosomal content of blood has been developed only very recently. In a further discussion whether such a blood sample could have lasted so long, two statements are quoted from Professor Steve Jones, in *The Language of Genes* (1993): "*Paternity can be tested beyond the grave. DNA is tough stuff, which can persist long after the death of its owner*" (p. 21) and "*The Egyptian Pharaoh Tutankhamen was buried about the same time as another mummy, Smenkhare. Their blood groups can still be identified. The pattern of gene sharing suggests that the two Pharaohs were brothers*" (p. 24).

As further answers whether blood can survive for so long, reference was made to the miraculous preservation of the Israelites' shoes in the wilderness for forty years (Deut 29:3,5). There was another claim, that four leather scrolls of the law, found behind the Ark of the Covenant, had also been very well preserved, although the wooden beams and skins that the Jews had used to cover the other furniture stored in the cave had rotted away almost to mere dust.

The writer then makes reference to two Scripture passages, one the statement in Psalm 16:10, (quoted in Ac 2:27), "*You will not leave My soul in hell, or allow Your Holy One to see decay.*" It is suggested that, if Jesus' body did not decay, God may also have had a purpose in preserving Jesus' blood at that place. The other verse is the principle, "*The life of the flesh is in the blood*" (Lv 17: 11). Blood was reserved for atonement. That was why God had forbidden the drinking of blood in any form in the Old Testament.

If all this is so, perhaps one of the most important comments to make is that it is wrong to think that Jesus' blood was present only at the place of His crucifixion nearly two thousand years ago, where it made atonement for the sin of the world. We should not forget the sacramental dimension, that with the wine of the Lord's Supper Jesus has, in a miraculous way, been giving believers down through the centuries both His very body and His very blood. That is something that Jonathan Gray himself would probably reject.

One of the frustrating things about the claims that have been made by Ron Wyatt and Jonathan Gray is that the discoveries that they claim to have made are so difficult to verify. The alleged site of Noah's ark is a dangerous area, because of the current fighting by Kurds there, as Ron Wyatt found out to his cost. The alleged

site of Mount Sinai (Jebel el Laws) in Arabia is closed to visitors, because the Saudis don't want tourists, because they would allegedly bring in corrupting Western influences. The sites of Sodom and Gomorrah and the Red Sea crossing are more accessible. At least the Gulf of Aqaba is accessible from the Egyptian side, though the Egyptian tourist agencies would prefer tourists to go to the apparently spurious site at the monastery of St Catherine in the "Sinai" peninsula.

In the Old Testament Uzzah was killed for daring to put out his hand to steady the ark, when it looked like falling off a cart. We don't expect that any more. However, we must say that, if these claims are true, though the Ark of the Covenant and the other equipment of the temple, including the solid gold candlestick, must be among the most valuable items from the ancient world still in existence, they have served their purpose. Together with the rest of the Jewish ceremonial law, including the whole sacrificial system, they were shadows pointing forward to Christ, and have been fulfilled in Him. Nevertheless, if these claims are true, they would provide both amazing confirmation of the biblical record, and amazing evidence of the remarkable ways of God, in making such use of the presence of the ark at such a place, in His omniscience, when it was unknown to Jews and apostles and anyone else since the time of Nebuchadnezzar's capture of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

The claim about the Ark of the Covenant is even more difficult to verify. If it is true, the Israelis could never allow tourists to see it. In the Old Testament only the High Priest was allowed to see it, and only once each year, and only with blood. The recent conflict with the Palestinians over tunnelling near the Moslem mosque on the former site of Solomon's temple would make attempt to open up tunnels in that area sensitive also. The Israelis would never be likely to allow publicity of a claim that linked the Israelite Ark of the Covenant with the blood of Jesus, whom they have rejected as the Messiah. There are radical elements in modern Israel who would be foolhardy enough to get possession of the Ark of the Covenant and carry out horrendous acts, on the assumption that God was on their side.

Those who would like to purchase a book on the subject should send \$25 to Jonathan Gray, PO Box 3370 Rundle Mall, Adelaide, SA 5000 (postage included). Those who would like a CD-ROM on the subject can obtain one from the same address for \$59.50, postage included. Its title is *The Ark of the Covenant*.