

# ***Chariots of the Gods?***



## **in the light of Reason & the Scriptures**

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With utter fascination I began my study of VonDaniken. I was intrigued with his theory, as well as the many and varied proofs proposed in its favour. VonDaniken's books, boldly propound the view that extra-terrestrial beings visited earth in the pre-historic past, artificially inseminated ape-like beings to produce the human race, taught these beings language, writing and technological skills, then boarded their space ships and returned to the stars. In presenting his theory, Von Daniken raises many questions that are a challenge to all fields of science, history and theology. He accompanies his claims with mind-boggling evidence drawn from archaeology, history, palaeontology, anthropology, biology, theology, science fiction, mythology and sheer imagination. "Admittedly," writes VonDaniken, "this speculation is still full of holes....Yet...I should like to attribute a minimal percentage of probability to my hypotheses." This, however, ought not to be done blindly. We must honestly approach the facts with the openness and critical discernment necessary to distinguish truth from falsehood. VonDaniken's writings should, indeed must, be critically evaluated.

## **BE CRITICAL OF CLAIMS**

In his TV documentary and books VonDaniken claims to take the Bible literally. Unfortunately claims are not always true. Some who claim to treat Scripture honestly and literally, do no such thing. Those who naively believe the claim, blind themselves to deception under the guise of genuineness. Such is the case with VonDaniken. His actual view of the Bible is summed up in his book *Gods From Outer Space* where he states that, "The Old Testament is a wonderful collection of laws and practical instructions for civilization, of myths and bits of genuine history." (Pg.155). From this intellectual launching pad VonDaniken cruises through the pages of Scripture and many other information sources gathering what he believes to be evidence for his hypothesis. A pursuit of all of these has been the subject of a number of books, but this is too broad a perspective for presentation here. For now, let's look at what characterizes VonDaniken's use of the Bible.

## **THE ARK OF THE COVENANT**

On page forty of *Chariots of the Gods?*, VonDaniken refers to the Ark of the Covenant



as an "electrical conductor", a fact that, to him, is self-evident, due to its being overlaid with gold, an excellent electrical conductor. What he in fact means to say, as the documentary clarifies, is that he believes the Ark of the Covenant was an electrical capacitor. For substantiation of this idea he very convincingly cites first of all the Biblical instructions for building the Ark, the special clothing of the priests who were entrusted with the Ark's care and transport, and the apparent electrical

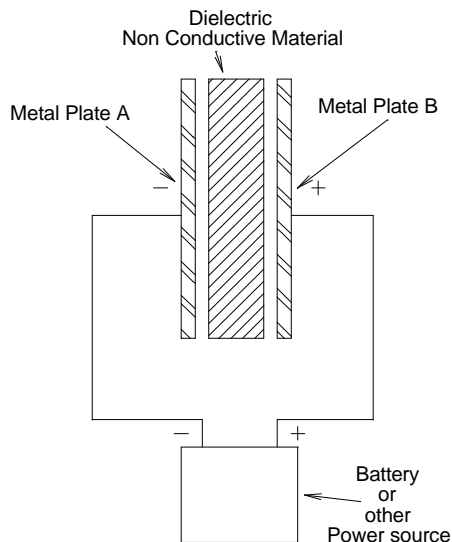
charge it possessed, as evidenced by the death of Uzzah when he touched it. Furthermore he claims that a scale model of the Ark of the Covenant was made in Michigan, but it had to be destroyed because of the "intense electrical charge it developed". (Quote from documentary)

In order to appreciate his argument here, we must first understand what a capacitor is and how it works. To be honest, VonDaniken's descriptions of the Ark certainly contribute nothing to this. In fact, he even seems painfully ignorant of the physical properties of a capacitor.

A capacitor is a simple object capable of and used for the storage of electricity. Its basic components are two pieces of metal separated completely from one another by a non-conductor. As such a capacitor neither develops electrical charge nor can it generate electricity. A capacitor merely stores an electrical charge. A capacitor becomes charged when

a direct current source, such as a battery, is connected, one terminal to each metal plate. In this circumstance, electricity, which is a flow of negative electrons, runs into the one plate (A) charging it negatively. Being separated from plate (B) by a non-conductor, plate (A) is unable to pass its excess electrons to plate (B). Negatively charged electrons in plate (B) are repelled by the charge on plate (A) and, flow back to the battery or to any DC (direct current) power source. This continues until the voltage between the plates is equal to the battery or other DC power-source voltage, at which time current flow stops. Removing the battery, therefore, leaves plate (A) negatively charged and plate (B) positively charged. Unless someone should short out the plates either by connecting them with each other by means of a conductive substance, the plates will hold this charge almost indefinitely. (The charge will, however, dissipate slowly over time due to ionization of atmospheric gases and leakage of the insulating material between the plates.

The basic requirements of a capacitor, therefore, are merely that two plates of metal (conductors), be separated from one another by a non-conductor, such as wood. Then, the capacitor must be charged by a direct current power source, for, contrary to what the documentary may have suggested, a capacitor does not and cannot develop or generate electrical charge. It merely stores the charge it is given.



VonDaniken claims that the Ark of the Covenant fulfills the requirements of a capacitor. I studied this thoroughly with the openness VonDaniken requested of me. I was willing to accept the possibility that the Ark of the Covenant was a capacitor if it would prove itself to be one. Admittedly, I was not sure what such new knowledge would mean, but I was willing to sincerely seek the truth and deal with the implications after I was sure. My investigation began in the book of Exodus, chapter 25, verse 10 where the instructions for the construction of the Ark of the Covenant are found.

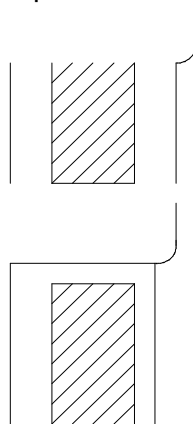
The first direction for its construction is that it be an “ark”, an English translation for a Hebrew word meaning “ark, chest or coffin.” Since the ark was constructed in such a way that it could be opened (Ex. 40:20) and the lid for the ark, with its solid gold cherubim (angels), is

described in Ex. 25:17-21, we must conclude that what is described here is a coffin-like wooden chest composed of a bottom and four sides, measuring approximately three feet by five feet, and two feet three inches high.

This wooden chest was overlaid with pure gold on the inside and on the outside (verse 11) thus fulfilling the basic physical requirements for a capacitor. The inside gold plate was separated from the outside gold plate by wood, a non-conductor. The Bible, however, goes on to say that “a crown of gold” was to be molded “round about” the Ark. The Hebrew word here translated “crown” is “zer”, meaning “border, ring, ledge, edge”.

This could have two possible meanings. It could mean that the outside gold plate included a lip which rose vertically above the top edge of the wood, to hold the lid of the Ark in place. It could mean an edge covering the top end of the box thus joining the inner and outer plates, possibly including a vertical ridge around the Ark in order to hold the lid of the Ark in place.

There is at least one consideration which would lend weight to the latter interpretation, and that is, that, if the top edge of the wood in the Ark were open to the air it would also be exposed to humidity variations according to atmospheric conditions. It is unlikely that a skilled craftsman would make anything in this fashion, since changing moisture levels would cause expansion and contraction of the wood in the Ark disturbing the adhesion of the gold plating.



VonDaniken's interpretation that the plates were not joined in this fashion is very unlikely but is necessary if the Ark is to be a capacitor. Joining the inner and outer plates of the Ark would destroy its possibility of being an electrical capacitor. Remember, the basic requirement for a capacitor is two metallic plates completely separated from one another by a non-conductor.

For transporting the Ark, four rings were cast of pure gold and put in the four corners of the Ark. These accommodated staves of shittim wood overlaid with gold (verses 12-14). Realizing the weight of a gold plated wooden box three feet by five feet, by two feet, three inches covered with a solid gold lid and angels, and the fact that the Ark would be carried long distances over rough terrain between priests on foot, how likely is it that these rings would make contact only with the outside gold plate? Would it not be more likely that they would be anchored through the wood and through the inner plate for greater strength?

Whatever, the clincher comes with the last item to be added, that is, the mercy seat. This lid for the Ark, was made of "pure gold" topped with golden cherubim (verse 17). It was not wood overlaid with gold, but solid gold. Even if the inner and outer plates were completely separated from one another, the solid gold mercy seat would join the two plates and make it impossible for the Ark to be an electrical capacitor. On the basis of the Scriptural qualifications for the building of the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 25), guidelines that were followed to the letter (Ex. 27), the Ark of the Covenant would neither develop nor hold any charge. It was not an electrical capacitor.



VonDaniken goes on to say, "Without actually consulting Exodus, I seem to remember that the Ark was often surrounded by flashing sparks" (Pg. 40,41). According to him, therefore, the Ark must have been electrically charged. I would challenge him not to base his

theorizing on a faulty memory, for nowhere in Exodus or anywhere in the Bible for that matter is there any indication or description of "flashing sparks" or lights or evidence of electrical power discharging from the Ark.

The documentary, *Chariots of the Gods?* cited the priest's clothing as further substantiation for the theory that the Ark of the Covenant was an electrically charged capacitor. It claimed that the priests wore special gloves and shoes while carrying the Ark in order to insulate them from harm. Yet Exodus 28, where the clothing of Aaron and his sons is described, neither shoes nor gloves are mentioned. Indeed, one would be hard pressed to find the word "glove" in Scripture at all. On the contrary, in reading Exodus 28, one is impressed immediately with the deep symbolic significance of the priestly garb and with the fact that it would be of no more insulating value than any other clothing. Indeed, all the gold and gems included in the high priestly garb would form a very good conductor which would light up much like a Christmas tree if he were to receive an electrical charge of appreciable voltage.

What was the Ark then? Where did its power come from? Why did Uzzah die (II Sam. 6: 1-7) when he touched the Ark of the Covenant? It could not be merely by touching it, since,

even if it were a capacitor, in order to short it out Uzzah would have had to touch both the inner and outer plates. In order to do this he would have had to use his third hand to lift its solid gold lid. No, the Ark was the place of God's official residence among his people at that time. God is spirit. As such He permeates and transcends His creation. Yet, for the purpose of communication with man He localized Himself in an audio-visual, so that, in a sense, the Ark was God's official dwelling on earth. The Ark was the crude likeness which looked forward to the full revelation of God through His Son. As the official representation of the presence of God among His people, the Ark was to be revered as though it were actually God Himself. The priests and people, therefore, were commanded to keep their distance not because the Ark was a dangerous capacitor but out of reverence for God. (Lev. 16:2). Even in transport the Ark was to be covered with a veil (Num. 4:5) symbolizing the fact that God is so wonderful that man cannot look on Him unveiled and live (Ex. 33). The power of the Ark was not a power inherent in the Ark, but rather a power inherent in the omnipotence of God. It is this power that won the battles. It is this power which divided the waters. It is this power that slew Uzzah. He was slain by a righteously and rightly indignant God as an example to a people whose familiarity bordered on desecration. God had clearly commanded that the Ark was to be carried by four people by means of the staves which went through the rings in its corners (Ex. 25:14), yet they bore it upon an ox cart (11 Sam. 6:3,6). God had commanded that it be veiled for transport (Num. 4:5) yet it was borne naked before the people (II Sam. 6:3). Then, Uzzah, though seeking to be helpful, was presumptuous enough to seize hold of the naked representation of the glory of God. In indignation and wrath at such familiarity and lack of respect for the absolute holiness of the Absolute God, He slew him there. You and I might consider this harsh, though we have no right to question the ways of our God, but none can say that it was done in vain. The whole nation of Israel and David, its king, re-evaluated their ways. Through this experience they came to view God not so much as their pal, but rather with the awe and wonder due to His holy nature. The lesson? Beware of being too familiar with God! Never lose the awe and wonder of Who He is!

### **SODOM AND GOMORRAH**

On page 35 of *Chariots of the Gods?*, VonDaniken looks at the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. (Gen. 19:1-28)

Let us imagine for a moment, that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed according to plan, i.e., deliberately by a nuclear explosion. Those who were to escape it -- such as the Lot family -- had to stay a few miles from the centre of the explosion in the mountains, for the rock faces would naturally absorb the powerful dangerous rays. And -- we all know the story -- Lot's wife turned around and looked straight at the atomic sun. Nowadays no one is surprised that she fell dead on the spot. (Pg. 36-37)

At first, VonDaniken's explanation might seem feasible, but how well does it accord with the Scriptural account upon which he claims to base his reasoning? Recorded in verse 17 is the angels' command that Lot, and his family should flee for their life, making sure not to look over their shoulder. They were not to stay in the plain but rather to "escape to the mountains, lest they be consumed." On the basis of this, and the fact that radiation spreads out in straight lines, VonDaniken concludes that an atomic bomb must have destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. Sounds reasonable, except for one thing: Lot did not go to the mountains. He walked to another small city of the plain, named Zoar (verses 19-20). Despite the fact that Lot did not flee to the protection of the mountains, somehow he survived. If it actually were an atomic explosion, how can this be? Would not the radiation from an atomic explosion have killed him? But then, Lot's wife did not survive for, according to VonDaniken, she was directly exposed to the radiation. But notice, that the only difference between her exposure and that of her husband and daughters was the side of her body. If such intense radiation were in fact beaming toward the fleeing family, would it really make much difference whether it penetrated the back or the front of a person? Does radiation that strikes one's front kill while that which

strikes one's back causes little or no harm? This is certainly inconsistent with our present understanding and experience of the effects of radiation. No. If radiation had been involved the whole family would have suffered damage, while the wife might perhaps have also suffered blindness as well as radiation burns. Since this is not the case, it is likely something else was involved in the death of Lot's wife.

Why then did the angels command Lot and his family to flee to the mountains? To answer the question, first look at the geographical situation of Sodom and Gomorrah. Scripture describes the location of these cities as being in a plain beside a sea, a plain which, by the time of the writing of Genesis 14:1-3, had been flooded by the Dead Sea. This valley was also characterized by "tar pits" (Gen. 14:10). The recent findings of geologists verify the existence of these tar pits, as well as oil and gas deposits in the Valley of Siddim, now occupied by the Dead Sea and forming its south-eastern bay. Genesis 13:10 reveals that in the time of Abraham and Lot this plain was fertile, with lush vegetation likened to the Garden of Eden.

On the basis of this evidence, archaeologists believe it possible that, since the plain in question lies on a natural fault line in the earth's crust, an earthquake may have disturbed the tar pits which spewed forth their murky molasses much as a volcano spouts lava. The flaming asphalt would fall like napalm on that city and its inhabitants. Not one living thing survived. Genesis 19:28 records that, in looking towards the plain where Sodom and Gomorrah were located, Abraham "beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace." This description accords more closely with the results of the burning tar, oil and gas theory than it does a mushroom cloud characteristic of atomic explosions, which was graphically portrayed as the scene which met Abraham's eyes in the ***Chariots of the God*** ? documentary.

Why, then, if it were not an atomic explosion, did the angels command Lot to flee to the mountains? Well, naturally, fires spread, and God no doubt intended this one to spread in order to destroy not only the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah but also its inhabitants who would be in the fields labouring over the crops and herds. Notice that Genesis 19:28 states clearly that Abraham "looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace." Not just the part of the city within the walls was destroyed but also the inhabitants that lived and/or worked in the fields outside the walls.

In response, VonDankien, like so many others, raises the question of why a God of love would do such a thing? VonDaniken states his query this way: "God created man and was satisfied with his work. However, he seems to have repented of his deed later, because this same creator decided to destroy mankind" (Pg. 37). VonDaniken cannot understand how this fits in with the omnipotent and infinitely good God presented in the Old Testament. To answer his question, we must remind ourselves of the type of creation that pleased God so much. Genesis 1:27 reveals that "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them". Mankind, then, was made bearing the spiritual image of the invisible God within his being, an image which involves God's likeness in terms of the ability for abstract reasoning, moral consciousness and free will. God did not make man to be a puppet that would jump whenever He pulled the strings. No! He made him as Himself, with the ability and freedom to make his own choices concerning the direction of his life. God's desire was that mankind would learn to love and serve Him because he wanted to, not because he was coerced to or programmed to by instinct.

So God, showered His love upon man. In return He requested that mankind obey Him out of love and reverence. From the beginning, mankind has consistently decided to be a god unto himself and freely choose to disobey the will of God. This has caused the fall of man and has bound all mankind to a sinful existence ever since.

God's love restrained Him from killing Adam at the very moment of his sinning but, true to God's Word, "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:28). Ultimately Adam died. Though God, the loving Parent, chastens his children to keep them from sinning, nonetheless, all have wandered into sin and fallen short of God's will for their lives. This loving God is also a righteous Judge who cannot look on evil. A God of absolute justice must judge sin.

You see, the image of God in man, involving moral freewill, gives man not only the privilege of choice, but responsibility for the choices he makes. Be assured that God holds you responsible for your decisions, "the soul that sinneth, it shall die."

Since the God of justice is also the God of love, He chose to become a man, to live a perfect life among us and to take our sins upon Himself. So Christ paid for our sins by dying for us on the cross. If you accept His death for your sin and ask Him to enter and take over your life, sincerely determining to live for Him, He will take away the burden and condemnation of your sin and teach you to truly live.

Be assured that unconfessed sin, sin that is not cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ, is heinous in God's sight, just as the stench of Sodom and Gomorrah's sin was, and it will be judged just as these cities were. The parental love and justice of God demand responsibility from mankind. Apart from Christ, the price for your sins must be paid by you alone.

Our study reveals that VonDaniken's claim to integrity in his investigation and specifically in his use of Scripture is very suspect. If this is what he has done with the Bible, what has he done with other ancient writings and inscriptions? If he has been proven false here, can we trust him elsewhere? Sadly, I am left with the unavoidable impression that, for all VonDaniken's investigation, he is like one who paints astronauts, rockets and UFO's on his eye glasses, thereby seeing them everywhere he goes.