

## **The Tomb of Alexander**

This is a parable,

    this is only a parable.

Had this been an actual event I'm sure you would have already heard about it.

I couldn't believe my good fortune! It had been about three years since I'd even talked to my mentor and graduate advisor, noted 2nd Temple scholar and archeologist, Dr. Reece Chandler. Then suddenly and completely out of the blue he called me and invited me to join him for the adventure of a lifetime. "Don," he said, "you couldn't squeeze out about six weeks this spring to join me for a bit of a survey, could you?"

"Dr. Chandler, sir, I'd be absolutely honored!", I responded. "But what, if I may ask, are we going to look into?"

"Oh, my boy, it's wonderfully amazing. A certain old friend of mine (who has always had a heart for authentic scholarship) has decided to make one final contribution to benefiting the

knowledge of man and authentication of the Bible record by commissioning one last expedition.

"He has assured me that money is no object as he will carry the all expenses for our whole team. This whole matter is very important to him for he dreams that we might find one of the great and mysterious locations of antiquital history, the tomb of Alexander of Macedon."

Alexander. The name took my breath away. Alexander, shaper of the Hellenistic world and founder of the world that provided the background for the 2nd Temple era and the gospel accounts. Alexander, one of the giants of all history. "Alexander?", I trembled, "Are you serious, sir?"

"Absolutely son, and I'd love to have you join me for this and it would be a joy for your lovely wife, Sandi, to join us if her schedule would allow."

"I believe it would, sir. You know, both of our boys are grown a bit now and each of them have summer appointments and jobs back east this year so we were just going to have to worry about ourselves for the first time in 20 years."

"Well, that's just delightful then," Dr. Chandler replied. "Now Don, I'm going to count on you being especially prepared for this event. Please commit some time to brushing up on your understanding of the man and his world, won't you?"

"Oh, absolutely. I'll pull out the notes from some of your old lectures and the research that we did together, I assure you of that," I said as we concluded our conversation. Dr. Chandler told me that he'd e-mail me all the details and parameters of our trip immediately and that we'd be in touch soon.

As soon as we he hung up I immediately dialed Sandi at the office. "Sweetie," I said, "you won't believe what just happened!"

"What, you sound excited?", Sandi replied.

"I just got a call from Dr. Chandler and he wants us to go on an expedition with him this summer!"

"What do you mean, 'us'?"

"He giving me the privilege of joining him and he specifically mentioned that he'd very much like you to be part of the experience if you can get off of work."

Sandi sounded very surprised, "Me? I hardly know the man. I knew he was very close to you and he was always gracious toward me at faculty functions and things but I really don't know what I might bring to an experience like this."

"That's the point, I think," I responded. "I don't think he expects you to contribute a great deal to the project, I think he really wants this to be his gift to us."

"Well, that's all fine and good," she said, "but I'd like to know how we are to pay for all of this."

"It isn't going to cost us a dime. An old colleague of his is serving as total benefactor and is covering all expenses for the three of us. Isn't that amazing?"

"I'd say so, except for I don't have a clue of where this mighty adventure is going to be held."

I let the moment linger and then said, "How does searching for the grave of Alexander the great in Egypt sound to you?"

"Egypt! I thought that when you came back from Egypt you said you weren't sure you'd ever wish to go there again. Isn't that what you said?", she queried.

"Yes, but don't you understand? This isn't a typical tourist event. We're not going to Cairo and the pyramids and a few papyrus shops here and there on the way to the Museum. This time we are going to really see if we can discover uncover one of the great mysterious locations of ancient history.

"Apparently these men have a lead on the tomb of Alexander and we could go down in history as being part of something as famous as the Rosetta stone or Carter and Tut's tomb or the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls," I couldn't contain my excitement. "And we're not just going with any old scholar. Dr. Chandler is one of the finest men I've ever known and it would be an honor to spend a few weeks sitting at his feet again and observing him in action."

It didn't take a lot of convincing for me to get Sandi excited and so we began to make arrangements. We had to find a place for our floppy little dog, Chip, and take care of the nuts and bolts about the house and bills and things. Sandi had to set a schedule that would allow her to take off from work and still cover the bases of her responsibilities in a timely fashion.

I had to get guest speakers for my church and make sure that everything was in line for the classes that I was to teach at the two universities in the fall. I also had to get myself two months ahead of schedule for my radio program and make sure that my church family was going to be cared for well in my absence.

We spent the spring reading and studying and researching from every resource we could find on the life of Alexander. Because of my teaching in the area of 2nd Temple History I was fairly well versed in the early years of Alexander... his ascendance to power upon the assassination of his father, Philip... his dream of a Greek world... his conquest of the peninsula and the subsequent wars to the east... his defeat of the Persians and his victorious march to Egypt... the establishment of his own city, Alexandria, in the Nile delta... and his rapid conquest through the Levant and past Mesopotamia... his reception as a divine conqueror in Babylon and beyond...

I knew those events well, but I confess that I knew little beyond the fact that on the borders of India he lost his one great battle and that was to the malarial mosquito. The man who had taken the world as a flying goat that raced across the map (just as the captive prophet, Daniel, had foretold in chapter 8) fell to dread fever and tried to get back home to die but never made it.

I was aware that Alexander had left no viable heir as his Bactrian princess bride, Roxanne, was months away from delivering their son. One would have expected an immediate war of succession but the shadow of Alexander was so dominant that his realm became too preoccupied with his burial to fully take up issues of dynasty for months. From the summer of 321 b.c., only ten years out of Macedon, the young conqueror was being taken back in a procession that snaked westward for several years.

The body of the young man was entombed on a golden carriage in a sarcophagus of gemstones and protected by purple shrouds draped from pillars that stood all around the casket. The image of the portable temple was drawn by four teams of mules four abreast. Each of the mules had harnesses of jewels and bells of fine, beaten gold. The scent of exquisite perfumes and spices continually wafted from the miniature altars and vials which were renewed every morning by priests and artisans who had also created the delicate works of art imprinted on the carriage.

Young Alexander was leaving this world, a world he'd transformed and where sixteen cities remained that bore his name.

In Babylon the procession stopped and the conqueror lay in state for more than two years. There were those who wished his body to remain there forever but it was deemed fitting that he be taken through Egypt where he was revered as a god and then returned home again on the Greek peninsula of his birth. Ptolemy, Alexander's boyhood friend and compatriot in battle hijacked the procession before they could turn to Macedonia in order to guarantee that the body would come back to Egypt and to Alexander's city.

It was in that site that Ptolemy had built a tomb of great splendor for his friend. (But, history easily recognizes that Ptolemy's motives were less than honorable. He knew that honoring Alexander in this manner would easily put his claim to ascendancy above others in the power struggle that was eventually doomed to happen. His noble tomb would serve as both the resting place of Alexander and the foundation for his own new empire.)

And so it was, Sandi and I discovered, that a whole classification of priests were drafted to serve as the attendants for the dead king. A new priestly line was established solely for the continued deification of the young man from Macedon. For generations they would attend to the tomb, even to the days of Julius Caesar who would pay homage to the site 175 years after the death of Alexander.

I couldn't believe it. We were really going. We were joining the famed Dr. Reece Chandler to see if we could find the tomb of the man who led 35,000 against the 300,000 of Darius and drove them to flight. We were going to see if we could discover the lost gravesite of the son of Philip and Olympias, conqueror of Persia, Babylon, Susa, Persepolis, and beyond.

We were really going!

Eventually the long awaited day came so Sandi and I locked our house up and dropped the key off at the Millers. Chip got dropped off with Dan and Janna and we left our car with Don and Marolyn as they drove us to the airport.

Many long hours later we stepped off the British Airways jet in Cairo. It was exactly as I'd remembered, oppressively hot with a sense of squalor all around. Dr. Chandler was so gracious as he met us at the airport and took us into the heart of the city to a hotel where we would be allowed to freshen up.

For the first few days he painstakingly taught us about the tedious tasks of archeology. We soon found that I was much too impatient and so it was determined that Sandi would be much

more adept at much of the fine, detail work that Dr. Chandler knew would be necessary. Her meticulous, patient, and exacting nature was exactly the asset he'd hoped she'd display and I was left to some of the tasks of lesser importance.

Finally, after four days in Cairo we were transported to Alexandria. This was to be our home base for the next five weeks. Dr. Chandler shared that we were going to spend time uncovering some mysterious mounds on the western edge of the city, right past the old section and the city dump.

For three-and-one-half weeks we had little results. My impatience was getting the best of me but both Dr. Chandler and Sandi had a growing sense that we were actually closing in on something rather important. Each day we actually did uncover small relics and with the caring artistry that they rendered to the pieces we did find that the implements were accurate to the time of Alexander and the farther we went the greater the detail on each piece and relic.

Then, it happened. We suddenly came to a wall. As we gently removed the accumulated debris of 2,400 years it became immediately evident that this was no ordinary brick partition. As Dr. Chandler and Sandi gently and meticulously brushed away the excess we could all see that there were magnificent hieroglyphics but they did not match the style of the sites near Cairo or in the valley of the kings. These symbols were also accompanied by decidedly more modern looking lettering. There were, without question, extended statements in both Egyptian and Greek encased on the wall.

To my dying day I'll never forget the rapturous look on Dr. Chandler's face as he turned and quietly said, "My friends, I believe we have found it."

We immediately contacted the authorities of the Egyptian Department of Antiquity. They arranged for the military to stand watch over the entrance to the site and before nightfall our dig was completely surrounded by armed guards, tourist buses, and the lights and cameras of CNN, the BBC, and multiplied other media sources of every description.

An Egyptian military flatbed was used as a temporary stage for a press conference that was called by the government. It was determined that Professor Ali Hassan of the University of Cairo would represent the government and Sandi and I were immediately impressed by the man's gracious nature and keen mind.

The four of us mounted the truck and then Sandi and I sat together behind the two renowned scholars as they fielded questions from the reporters of many nations.

"Do you really think Alexander is in there?"... "Professor, what do you believe you'll find?"... "Should this belong to the Egyptian people or to the nation of Greece?"... "Will all nations have access to this site or will it be held only for Egypt and the United States?"...

The questions continued and each of the men responded eloquently of their desire to preserve the site for all people. "No, we don't know what we'll find in here... it could be that the fate of this tomb is the same as the vast majority of Egypt. Alexander's grave may have been desecrated and emptied thousands of years ago..."

One last reporter, a German by accent, called out, "Herr Professor, might you give us a timetable for your entering the tomb?"

Dr. Hassan responded, "It is the determination of this team that for the safety of the site we should access it with all due haste. We fear that the longer we delay the greater the risk of this location being compromised. We will not rush, but our concern for the protection of the site will compel us to enter almost immediately. Do you not concur, Professor Chandler?"

"Oh, absolutely," he said as he stepped to the microphone bank again. "I'd rather we took some period of weeks to ascertain all that we might find from the exterior but I'm afraid that's probably not feasible. Look about you how in such a brief period of but a few hours this has stirred such frenzy. Imagine what this location will be like in a matter of days?", he shook his

head as he waved his arm over the throng gathered in the artificial light of the media. "No, I'm quite sure we will not have the luxury of delaying the unsealing of this chamber."

Sandi and I hardly slept that night and we were all pleasantly surprised when the morning light revealed that the Egyptian military had actually pushed the barriers back from the excavation site by several hundred yards. We could feel the telephoto lenses recording our every step as we left the crowd and approached the doorway.

Only one media representative was to be allowed past the military barrier with us. Eventually, Roland Ames-Durant, a noted photographer from the BBC, was selected from the pool of international journalists and cameramen to be the one to record for all time the unsealing and subsequent entry into the tomb.

Near the wall several trained Egyptian workers stood at the ready with implements that would allow them to remove the sealed stone from the entrance way. Dr. Hassan spoke to them quietly and gestured carefully to various sites on the large rectangular stone. The men nodded and bowed and then slowly began to wedge small pieces of wood and metal into the seam that had been unbroken for hundreds of generations.

Slowly the stone moaned and then began to slide forward. Our anxiety was beyond description as we watched the barricade be removed from the shaft.

Finally there was enough space to squeeze through. Dr. Hassan graciously gestured that Dr. Chandler should lead the way in but our colleague refused. He said that it was only fitting that an Egyptian should first enter the site and then as a gentleman he expressed that Sandi should go second but she deferred on that. There was no way we would precede this great man in this step back into time. So it was that we went in, Professor Hassan first, then Dr. Chandler, Sandi went third, and then I gestured to Mr. Ames-Durant that he should go so that he might not miss any of the event by being hidden behind me at the back of the line.

Roland's camera lighting was kept at a very low amount of wattage. This was to protect any pigmentation on the walls from being destroyed if at all possible. Having left the bright Egyptian morning behind it took a few moments for our eyes to adjust to the darkness, but when we became acclimated to the shaft marvelous sites were revealed to us. The corridor was perfect. It appeared untouched by human hands for it was evident that the shaft was still decorated by gold ornamentation and precious gemstones all along the length of the causeway. It was a magnificent site.

I know that documentaries have and will be made of this but I can assure you that nothing you will ever see on film could ever capture the mystery and poignancy of the moment. It was nothing that I could ever adequately describe.

Slowly Professor Hassan led us down the corridor as we sought to saturate the moment and what we were viewing. We finally approached seven marble steps that went down into a chamber. Even from the top of the staircase Durant's camera lighting revealed a glorious room below. Each of the seven steps had statues of Greek gods on either side, perfect in every way. We descended past the pantheon of Alexander to approach the decorated floor. Suddenly Dr. Chandler spoke, "Mr. Ames-Durant, please turn your lighting back down, we must protect this site from the effects of your camera if at all possible."

"But Professor," Durant replied, "I've not touched my lighting adjustments at all! In fact," and he reached to the power switch on his light, "I don't think I even need it now!" And with that the cameraman turned off the light and he was exactly correct for from the room below there was a radiance that shown up the staircase from beneath our feet.

"How can this be?", Dr. Hassan asked. "There must be a shaft that allows the natural daylight to illuminate the place."

We took three more steps and found ourselves on level ground. In front of us there stood a golden carriage with supported pillars and shrouds of purple falling down over the jeweled

sarcophagus, a casket whose lid was laid on its side and leaning up against the pillars. We were transfixed. It surely was the tomb of Alexander.

Suddenly Sandi took my hand and gasped, "Don, look over there..." and she gestured to the right of the golden carriage. We saw a brilliant young man standing, noble and strong. He looked at us and gently spoke in words I did not understand.

After a long and pregnant moment of silence Dr. Chandler whispered in awe, "It's Greek! He says he's waited so very long for us and he wants to know why we are seeking the living among the dead?"

*This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses.  
Therefore, being at the right hand of the Father exalted,  
and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit,  
he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear.*

- Acts 2:32-33