

The Shroud

a Biblical look at the controversial Shroud of Turin

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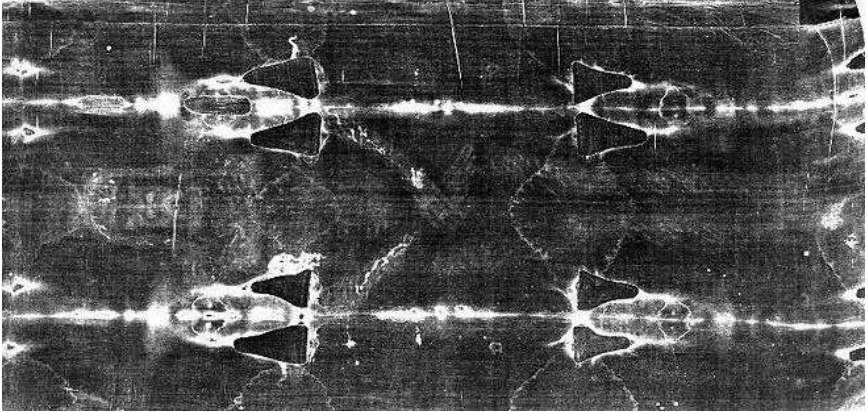


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The Shroud of Turin... is this the burial cloth of Jesus Christ? Why all this controversy surrounding this object? What would it mean if this were the actual burial cloth of the crucified Jewish Messiah? What proof is there to support this supposition? Or is the Shroud of Turin a hoax? What significance would there be in uncovering this relic as some kind of fraud? What can we glean from an examination of a topic such as this, one that is fueled by passionate, and some times heated, arguments on either side of the debate?

the shroud itself...

The shroud is a long, rectangular cloth with the negative image of what would appear to be the full frontal and backside of a crucified man of approximately 5'10" in height. The man's image lay lengthwise along the cloth as if the man were placed upon the cloth and the cloth were folded over him again lengthwise, thus providing the images for front and back.



research in antiquity...

It seems that most of the TV shows, specials, and video commentaries concerning the shroud always provide some scientific or testimonial evidence for the shroud's authenticity or illegitimacy. With regard to scientific evidence, there is carbon-14 dating, thermal imaging, pigment and fiber analysis, and etceteras. As far as testimonial evidence, researchers provide documents of antiquity to support or refute its "historical" journey from first century Judea to the present.

None of the TV shows, specials, and video commentaries that I have seen ever gives Scripture more than a cursory mention or consideration. If any commentary is made concerning the Bible, it is merely to acknowledge that

Yashua HaNazarei (Jesus of Nazareth) was scourged, made to wear a crown of thorns, and crucified.

If we read our Bibles and take Scripture seriously, there wouldn't be a controversy at all.

the hairs on his chinny-chin...

The image of the face of the man on the shroud has a full, long beard. Messiah Yashua, as a first century Jewish male, would have certainly had a beard. The Hebrew Scripture reads: "*Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard*" (Leviticus 19:27). Of the 613 Jewish Mitzvot (commandments) of Torah (the Law), this was the 345th commandment for the Jew. More literally, the observant Jew was not to "ruin the edge" of his beard, as was the practice of idolatrous priests among the heathen nations. Chasidim, ultra-orthodox, and many orthodox Jews still adhere to the practice of growing their beards out to ensure that this commandment could not possibly be broken.

Would Jesus have had a beard when He was placed in the garden tomb? The prophet Isaiah tells us that the Messiah would be beaten and His beard would be removed: "*I gave My back to the smiters, and My cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not My face from shame and spitting*" (Isaiah 50:6). The Hebrew word לְמַרְטִימַם (*LeMaratiym*), which is translated "*plucked off the hair*". It literally means "to make bald." Jesus Christ didn't just have a tuft of His beard pulled out, He had His entire beard pulled from His face!

a different do...

The image on the shroud shows a man with long hair. We always picture Jesus as having long hair. Many movies portray Him as having long hair. All the pictures and icons over the centuries portray Jesus as having long hair. Many of the Shroud of Turin proponents suggest that the religious iconoclast were modeled from the shroud. These proponents theorize that if, for centuries, the shroud was accepted as being authentic, that would explain why the icons and paintings have such striking similarities to the shroud.

Would Jesus have had long hair? The apostle Paul, a first century Jewish Pharisee from Tarsus, who became a Christian after his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, writes this to the church at Corinth: "*Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head.... Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering*" (1 Corinthians 11:4, 14-15). Short hair was

not only a practice among the Jews, but it was so among the Romans and the Greeks of that time. Even a cursory study of the coinage and the sculptures of that day would tell us that. By all three cultures, long hair for men “would have been regarded as a token of effeminacy.”¹

The Jewish practice of keeping hair short is still maintained today. The observant Jew finds his interpretation from the “Vow of the Nazarite” (Numbers 6:1-21). Yes, this is the very same vow that was upon Samson in judging Israel against the Philistines. One is considered a Nazarite (not a Nazarene) when he or she makes a vow and separates himself or herself unto the LORD. The Nazarite is not to drink anything fermented, not to eat or drink anything from the grapevine, and a razor is not to come upon the head... until the vow is fulfilled or if that person’s consecration was polluted, in which case he or she would have to start again. Then the hair is cut and placed in the fire when a peace offering is sacrificed. Most rabbis commenting in the Talmud would then interpret this as a subtlety for a grooming standard. They reason that if one’s hair grows long without a haircut during the “Vow of the Nazarite,” then a man would naturally keep his hair cut at all other times; the only exception being when he has taken the Nazarite vow.

Jesus Messiah did not take the Nazarite vow. He ate and drank of the grape, and... more than likely did *not* have long hair.

marked or marred visage...

Nearly every televised show available on the shroud has a forensic specialist provide his or her expert testimony concerning the marks seen upon the backside of the man’s image. They present that the marks are indicative of a random pattern of strokes that could only be produced by the weighted leather tongs falling upon the back of one who was scourged with a Roman flagellum.

This would be very compelling evidence were it not for Scripture. In His description of the Suffering Servant, God tells us through Isaiah the prophet that the Messiah would be unrecognizable in His injuries: “*As many were astonished at Thee; His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men*” (Isaiah 52:14). More literally, His appearance would be disfigured more than any man’s ever was, beyond human recognition!

¹ Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*; Hendrickson Publishing, 1994; pg. 200

The New Testament gospel accounts are consistent with the kind of beating Jesus received to fulfill the Scripture in Isaiah 52:14: *“And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head, and a reed in His right hand: and they bowed the knee before Him, and mocked Him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon Him, and took the reed, and smote Him on the head”* (Matthew 27:29-30). The word “reed” is translated from the Greek word κάλαμον (*kalamon*). This reed was a staff or a stick. The word “smote” is translated from the Greek word ἐτυπτον (*etupton*), which means “to beat repeatedly” or “to pummel.” Jesus Christ was beaten upon the head and the face repeatedly with a stick until He was pummeled.

sheet or strips? let’s “face” it...

The shroud, as mentioned earlier, is presented as a huge, singular linen cloth that was folded over the body lengthwise which “resulted” in the image being cast or projected on both sides. Again, this is inconsistent with Scripture. Joseph of Arimathaea begged for Jesus’ body and he and Nicodemus placed the Lord in a garden tomb very near Calvary: *“Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury”* (John 19:40). The word “linen clothes” is translated from the Greek word ὀθονίος (*othoniois*), which nearly always refers to bandages or **strips** of linen cloth for swathing the dead.

Additionally, we see the term, *“as the manner of the Jews is to bury,”* in John 19:40. To find out more about this manner, we can look at the account of Lazarus’ resurrection in chapter 11 of John’s gospel. Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days and the Lord commanded that the stone be rolled away. After praying to the Father, Messiah Yashua said, *“Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go”* (John 11:43-44). There was a “napkin” bound upon Lazarus’ face. The word “with a napkin” is translated from Greek word σουδαρίω (*soudarioo*). This napkin was a small towel that covered the face or head of the dead. The same word is also used of handkerchiefs used for wiping sweat from the face. Well, it seems that the same kind of “napkin” was used for the Lord in His burial. Mary Magdalene told John and Simon Peter that the Lord was not in the sepulcher. They ran to the tomb and looked inside: *“Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about His head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed”* (John 20:6-8). The same Greek word translated “napkin” from John 11:44 is used here. Notice

that the cloth that would have been around the Lord's head is wrapped in a place by itself, away from the other wrappings.

From a Scriptural standpoint, the Shroud of Turin could not be the burial cloth of Jesus Christ.

importance and significance...

The issue is not whether or not the Shroud of Turin is authentic. The issue is the authority of Scripture. It is so evident in those special shows and television programs how these researchers try to prove or disprove the validity of this object through means other than the Biblical text. As a result, the real hoax perpetuated on people is not the fakery of the shroud, but blindness to the beauty, the wonder, and the inerrancy of God's Word.

In all matters, we must stand on an absolute authority; otherwise we will be reduced to the relativism of personal opinion. It is a vain (or more accurately, *insane*) man that would profess to know everything that there is to know. The science we have today is a conglomeration of theories and falls short of absolute authority. The more we learn, the more we realize we don't know.

Certainly, some skeptics and "scientists" (so-called) today may try to boldly defend themselves with the statement, "There are no absolutes!" We can reveal the idiocy of that statement with the question, "Are you **absolutely** sure?" If they stand on the premise that all is relative, they must concede that there is a possibility that there are absolutes! And for the Christian, that absolute authority is God's Word, the Bible.

On the other hand, the more we do learn, the more the Bible shines through as having had the correct scientific answer all the time. The sixty-six books of the Bible, given to us by God through over forty different authors over a period of approximately 1,500 years, is the only record of antiquity that not only boasts of being "God-breathed," but substantiates its claim through fulfilled prophecy: "*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*" (2 Timothy 3:16-17); and, "*We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*" (2 Peter 1:19-21).

So, how does one explain some of the unexplainable anomalies that the shroud seems to possess; the 3-dimensional quality of the image; the laser-like transmission of the image that is beyond our present technology, etc? Frankly, I can't explain them. Neither do I care to. Satan has been very good at getting our attention off of God and getting us to waste our time on trivialities. If Satan, as the father of lies, can disguise himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), then he's probably clever enough to provide some trickery in this world. If man is so easily deceived into eating a piece of fruit God has commanded him not to partake of, then he can be deceived by anything. *"Even him [the beast of Revelation], whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders..."* (2 Thessalonians 2:9). Man's only safeguard against deception is a life surrendered unto God.

During the time of Israel's wandering in the wilderness, the children of Israel were complaining against God and against Moses (Numbers 21). Fiery serpents bit these backbiting Israelites and many died. God told Moses to fashion a fiery serpent of brass and put it on a pole, that whoever looked upon it after they were bit, they would be healed. Many years later, in the days of King Hezekiah, there were people that found this brass serpent of Moses' and they worshipped it and burned incense to it. So Hezekiah broke it into pieces and called it Nehushtan, which means, "it's a thing of brass" (2 Kings 18:4). We are doing the same thing today; we are worshipping anything other than the God who created us.

I thank God that the shroud exists. It gives us an opportunity to look into Scripture and weigh out a matter according to the Bible, God's holy word.

Jesus Christ did come into the world. He did die the brutal death of crucifixion to redeem fallen man from sin. He was buried for three days and nights and rose again. He ascended into heaven and is alive forevermore... and He promised to return!

We must repent, turn away from a life that is independent of God, and give our lives to Jesus as the redemption He provides for us through the Cross, is our only access to the heavenly Father. Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me"* (John 14:6).

