

The Shroud of Turin: What Does the Bible Say About It?

And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, *even* in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. **Little children, keep yourselves from idols.** Amen.

– 1 Jn. 5:20-21

To be brief, the image on the Shroud of Turin is *not* that of Jesus Christ – and there are at least two ways to tell. The first is because the image on the Shroud doesn't fit the biblical account of what Jesus looked like at the time of his death; and the second is that the mere existence of the Shroud itself is unbiblical. We'll justify these two positions by first comparing the biblical account of what Jesus looked like on the cross with that as found on the Shroud. In the Bible,...

- ...Jesus had his beard plucked from his face (Is. 50:6). The man on the Shroud has a full beard. Therefore, the image of the man on the Shroud is not that of Jesus Christ.
- ...Jesus' face was so badly beaten that you wouldn't have recognized him (Is. 52:13-15), and a thorough examination of the Gospel accounts agree. But yet, the facial features of the man on the Shroud are clearly distinguishable with no evidence of him having been beaten, with the exception of a broken nose.
- ...the headpiece was separate from the rest of the grave clothes (Jn. 11:44, 20:7); and yet, the Shroud is a single sheet showing the headpiece as part of it, and not separate.
-in preparing a body for burial, the Jews would take *individual* strips of linen and wrap the arms and legs *separate* from the body.¹ The Shroud shows them all together.
- ...myrrh and aloes were used to prepare the body for burial (Jn. 19:39). When mixed together, they form a hard shell while the Shroud is a flat, pliable, sheet.²
- ...Jesus never publicly carried his cross: he only carried it in the courtyard of the Praetorium.³ It's therefore unlikely that such a short trip would have caused the amount of damage to his shoulder blades indicated on the Shroud.

Thus, the biblical account of the crucifixion doesn't match up with the image on the Shroud; or, perhaps it's better said that the image on the Shroud doesn't match the biblical account. Either way, the net effect is that the image on the Shroud *is not* and *cannot* be that of Jesus Christ. Any one of these observations is proof enough, much less the entire group – if you believe the Bible, that is. Therefore, it having been established that the image on the Shroud doesn't match the biblical account, we'll now turn our attention to discerning whether the existence of the Shroud

¹ cp. Mt. 27:59; Mk. 15:46; Lu. 23:53a, Jn. 19:40, and Acts 5:6. Some may argue that Jesus could have been wrapped in individual linen strips and then the Shroud laid under and then over him as a single piece to get the photographic negative of his front and back. But if this were true, then the overlapping of these individual strips would have shown up as well, but they don't. This use of these individual linen strips and wrapping the arms and legs separate also explains how Lazarus was able to walk out of his tomb: his legs weren't wrapped together (Jn. 11:44).

² This explains why Lazarus needed help removing his grave clothes (Jn. 11:44). It also explains what Peter and John saw in Jesus' tomb on resurrection morning; they saw an empty hard shell with the linen headpiece lying nearby (cp. Lk. 24:12; Jn. 20:3-10). So there's much more involved in the process of preparing a body and removing its grave clothes than one might suspect; i.e. it's a much more complicated than laying a sheet over someone. Selah.

³ cp. Mt. 27:32; Mk. 15:21; Lu. 23:26, Jn. 19:17.

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itself is biblical. To do so, we need to look no further than the Second Commandment.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God,... – *Ex. 20:4-5a*

As you can see, *God's* definition of idol worship is different than ours. We have the tendency to emphasize the latter while overlooking the former: we have the tendency to emphasize the admonition not to worship images while ignoring or rejecting the other admonition not to even make them. But *God's* definition includes *both* the manufacture *and* the worship of these images – and the Shroud is an image, as are all paintings, pictures, and crucifixes of him, and this is sin.

Of course many would disagree, but no amount of human rationality can deter the simple wording found in this commandment. The fact remains that the image of the man on the Shroud doesn't fit the biblical account of what Jesus looked like at the time of his crucifixion and so it must be rejected. It must also be rejected because its very existence is an abomination as expressed by the Second Commandment. In addition, and having been asked for a sign by the (unregenerate) religious leaders of his day, Jesus replied:

But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. – *Mt. 12:39-40*

Thus, Jesus has given them, and us, one, *and only one*, proof or sign of his deity: his resurrection. This means that there is no other – including the Shroud of Turin. Jesus' response also serves to enlighten and to warn. The good news is that we serve a living God who isn't made by the hands of men (Acts 17:29). The warning is that there are those who'd have us believe otherwise. We should therefore be wary of them.

And finally, over the years, many documentaries have been produced using scientific methods to prove or disprove the authenticity of the Shroud. But of all these tests, the best that they could ever hope to prove is that the Shroud isn't a forgery; but proving that it isn't a forgery isn't the same thing as proving that it came from the body of Jesus Christ. The single best proof thus far proffered is that the image on the Shroud could only have been produced by a sudden and very intense burst of light. Now whether this is possible or not is unknown to this author (not that it matters anyway), but what is known is that a 50/50 mixture of myrrh and aloe – the same materials used in preparing a body for burial – will produce the exact same effect, and so there's nothing to be added to their argument from this.

Indeed this author is willing to concede that many of their findings are correct. But what needs to be remembered is that science doesn't establish *God's Word*, rather, it bears witness to it. So while the science may be correct in its findings, it's incorrect in its final interpretation. This author is willing to concede that the image on the Shroud is that of a man who's been crucified; but from Scripture, we also know that it's not of Jesus Christ. Selah.



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