

## THE SHROUD OF TURIN BY PENN CLARK

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One of the sure signs that the Easter season is upon us is the flurry of articles which appear at this time of year about the Shroud of Turin. The latest headline that caught my eye was:

*“Mystery solved? Turin Shroud linked to Resurrection of Christ”*

Finally, the mystery has been solved! The next line says, “The Turin Shroud has baffled scholars through the ages but in his new book, “The Sign” Thomas de Wesselow reveals a new theory linking the cloth to the Resurrection.”

This new book, one in a long line of books, is making an even more controversial claim in order to take it to the top of the pile. In it, the author proposes that it was the shroud that the apostles saw after the crucifixion, not the risen Christ. Upon seeing it, they actually became convinced that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead.

Nonsense!

The shroud may be baffling to some, whether they are scientists and scholars, but not to anyone who really studies God’s word. When I first met the Lord in 1978, the shroud had recently become a big news story. Even though I was a new disciple, I knew it was a fake. But how do you go about proving this? As I read the Gospel accounts of the death and burial of Jesus, it was clear to see. I used the controversy to study the Bible using the tools and techniques available to anyone, which was an edifying experience. Before we study this together, let’s see what people have said about the shroud.

### CLAIMS OF THE SHROUD

The following is a section of a news article posted on the BBC website which shows how the shroud has become more and more acceptable to people today:

*“Dating the Shroud of Turin Tests Support Claims That Cloth Was Used To Bury Jesus”*

*The Shroud of Turin is a linen cloth about 13 feet long and 3 feet wide that has been kept in the city of Turin, Italy, since 1578. It bears the image of a man with wounds similar to those suffered by Jesus.*

*According to a news article by Traci Angel in the Associated Press, the Shroud of Turin is much older than some scientists believe, according to researchers who used pollen and plant images to conclude it dates from Jerusalem before the eighth century. This study gives a boost to those who believe the shroud is the burial cloth of Jesus and contradicts a 1988 examination by scientists who said the shroud was made between 1260 and 1390. In June, the researchers said the cloth originated in the Jerusalem area, also contradicting the 1988 study, which concluded that it came from Europe.*

*The shroud’s age is implied by pollen grains found on it that match those on another cloth*

associated with Jesus Christ, botany professor Avinoam Danin of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem said Monday during the International Botanical Congress here. The 1988 study used carbon dating tests. Danin noted that the earlier study looked at only a single sample, while he used the entire piece of fabric.

*“This combination of flowers can be found in only one region of the world,” he said. “The evidence clearly points to a floral grouping from the area surrounding Jerusalem.” An image of the Gundelia tournefortii can be seen near the image of the man’s shoulder. Some experts have suggested that the plant was used for the “crown of thorns.”*

*Two pollen grains of the species were also found on the Sudarium of Oviedo, believed to be the burial face cloth of Jesus. Danin, who has done extensive study on plants in Jerusalem, said the pollen grains are native to the Gaza Strip.”*

There is a pattern to all of these articles and books about the shroud, which is to put a premium on what some scientist have to say, while minimizing what Matthew, Mark, Luke and John said.

#### LOOKING AT THE SHROUD WITH SCRIPTURE

Let’s start our study with what the Gospel writers had to say, rather than what scientist have said, to see where we should place our faith.

First of all, if scientist can find a couple of specks of pollen from the Gaza Strip, why can’t they find residue of the hundred pounds of mixed spices that they had placed around Jesus body before they laid Him in the tomb?

*“After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews’ Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby” (John 19:38-42).*

They never mention finding these spices. Perhaps they become so focused on minute specks of pollen, that cannot see the bigger flaws in their studies. For example, what did a burial clothe look like two-thousand years ago?

The shroud is one piece of cloth, which was the way a corpse was buried during in the mid-evil period. But the Bible says that they bound Jesus body in strips of linen. It clearly says that Nicodemus prepared Jesus body *“as the custom of the Jews is to bury”* (John 19:40).

The custom of the Jews was similar to the Egyptians, where they first learned their burial techniques. They would wound the corpse in strips of cloth like a mummy, tying it together and the hands and the feet. It was not one piece, but strips of cloth. You can see evidence of this in the burial clothes of Lazareth:

*“And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with **grave clothes**: and his face was bound about with a*

*napkin. Jesus said unto them, 'Loose him, and let him go'' (See John 11: 43, 44).*

Notice that it was not one piece of cloth Lazareth was wrapped in? His face was bound with a "napkin" or handkerchief. This was a separate piece of cloth made from a different kind of material. This was the same technique used when they buried Jesus:

*"Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. And he, stooping down and looking in, **saw the linen cloths lying there**; yet he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, **and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself**" (John 20:3-7).*

The Greek definition for the word *napkin* (GK 4676 Strong's Concordance) is *soudarion* which was a or sweat-cloth. It was like a towel used for wiping the perspiration from the face, or binding the face of a corpse.

Not only was it a different kind of material, but it was folded separately from the strips of linen, yet the shroud is one piece including the part that covered the face.

Do you think Jesus has holes in His wrists? The logic of this is always given that if the nails went through his palms that it would rip the hand from His bodies own weight as someone hung from the cross. Not that the Romans shared the same concern about what kind of damage the nails might do to His palms, but there are plenty of modern reenactments of the crucifixion in the Philippines each year that help us see that nails placed in the palms work just fine. Not that is our main piece of evidence. For this, we must look to scripture for that:

*"Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing" (John 20:27).*

Notice the word *hand* is used in this same verse a couple of times. Jesus said "*look at my hands*". Then He told Thomas to put his hand in the large wound in His side. The word *hands* came from the Greek word which describes "*the part you grasp with*". What have you ever grasped with your wrist? He did not say "...put your wrist in my side".

When you look at the face and body of the man on the Shroud, does it really look like someone who has just underwent grueling torture? A few thin whip lines; perhaps a broken nose; a bump on his forehead; a nice neat incision on his side; and neat row of holes along the top of his brow? Isaiah foresaw the suffering of Christ and said that people were astonished at Him and that He was completely disfigured by what the soldiers had done to Him.

*"Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men" (Isaiah 52:13,14).*

While there are those who believe that the shroud really is the burial cloth of Jesus, they are willing to be very emphatic about it. Yet, over time, there are a growing number of evangelicals who have been influenced by it. How many pieces of Christian art have you seen that show Jesus on the cross with nails going through His wrists instead of the palms of His hands? This is a direct result of exposure to the image of the shroud of the past thirty-years. I have also seen the recent portraits of Jesus modeled after the face on the Shroud. In the past, Christians bought pieces of the "real" cross while others were in searched for the real Holy Grail. In our day, people carry around photos of "Jesus in The Clouds" which some friend of a friend took when his camera went off accidentally out the window of an airplane. Some are looking for

Jesus face in watermarks and in the burn-pattern of their toast. In other words, there is something in human nature that is always looking for visible proofs to put their faith in. We need to be able to point these dear folks to scripture so that their faith does not rest upon the ever shifting wisdom of men.

The final question we should ask is, why would God create an image to worship, when His word prohibits us from doing so? (See Exodus 20:4-6)

Some say we need images to help inspire our faith. Does the Shroud really produce faith, or does it raise questions?

For me, I don't need anything outside of God's Word to inspire my faith in Christ.

Each Easter the debate over its authenticity is renewed, but for me it the shroud only serves to remind me how amazing the scriptures are in helping us solve controversies like this.

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News Sources:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/9162459/Mystery-solved-Turin-Shroud-linked-to-Resurrection-of-Christ.html>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/4210369.stm>