

Faith and the Shroud of Turin : No Sign Shall Be Given

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A Controversy Surrounding Shroud Of Turin And The Sudarium, Scriptural Basis, Genuine Faith And Signs, Jesus' Dealings With Unbelievers, Doubting Thomas, Just Because God Says So, A More Sure Word Of Prophecy, Faith Is Not Produced By Human Effort, Faith Is Created By And Built Upon God's Word, Faith Is A Certain Knowing When There Is Yet No Physical Evidence, Endtime Lack Of Faith And Demand For Signs, Our Human Pride, Slow To Believe, Danger Of Requiring Signs And Miracles Can Be Deception, Question And Test All Signs And Manifestations, When Spiritual Gifts And Manifestations Cease, False Worship Of Physical Objects, Ancient Israel's Idolatry, King Hezekiah Destroys Nehushtan The Brass Serpent, Modern Idols Pollute Our Christian Faith, Medical Profession's Caduceus Symbol And Rod Of Asclepius, Modern Pill Gods, My Personal Experiences, Are Modern Bible-Related Archeological Discoveries A Sign Of God's Mercy, God's Unsearchable Ways, We Should Operate And Believe According To Our Own Measure Of Faith, Be Cautious Regarding What You Accept As True And Believe, Satan: False Angel Of Light Deceiver And His Emissaries, Glorious Future

As many of you will no doubt already know, a great deal of controversy surrounds the authenticity of the world-famous Shroud of Turin, which is alleged to be the actual burial cloth -- or linen clothes -- of Jesus Christ, as well as the Sudarium -- or face cloth -- which is recorded in the Gospel of John as having been found folded, and placed separately from the burial cloth in the tomb, following the Lord's Resurrection. In the following verses, the word "napkin" is referring to the customary face cloth -- or handkerchief -- and is derived from the Greek word "soudarion":

"Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the

sepulchre. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. 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. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead."

John 20:3-9, KJV

As I point out in articles such as "Are Personal Tragedies Due to Sin?", "A Biblical Cafeteria, Or the Whole Course?", and "Lying Wonders of the Endtime", it is my personal belief that faith which requires physical signs, miracles and other evidence before one will choose to believe, is not really true faith at all. Even Jesus seemed to be perturbed on some occasions by this human need for physical signs and miracles before people would accept Him as the promised Redeemer and Messiah. This was particularly true when it came to His own kinsmen who dwelt in Galilee, where the Lord had not only been raised to adulthood, but where He likewise performed His first public miracles. This is why Jesus made the following comment regarding the Galileans during the early part of His ministry:

". . . A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house."

Mark 6:4, KJV

In the fourth chapter of the Gospel of John, following His encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, we find the Lord saying the following to the nobleman from Galilee, whose son He was about to heal:

". . . Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe."

John 4:48, KJV

Two chapters later, shortly after the incident during which Jesus had walked on the surface of the Sea of Galilee, the people took ship to Capernaum in order to meet up with Him and His Disciples. Once they had arrived at the location, we again find some of them asking the Lord to prove Himself to them, by saying the following:

". . . What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work?"

John 6:30, KJV

If Jesus' own countrymen from Galilee found it difficult to accept His claims of being the Messiah, the hardened, blind, self-righteous and so-called "Law-abiding" religious elders -- the Scribes and the Pharisees -- were even more skeptical of His claims. Thus, they repeatedly tested Him regarding His knowledge of the Law, and they tempted Him to prove Himself by performing signs and miracles. On one particular occasion, Jesus was so fed up with their unbelief that He responded to them in the following manner:

"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."

Matthew 12:39-40, KJV

"And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation."

Mark 8:12, KJV

"And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation."

Luke 11:29-30, KJV

This need for confirmatory signs was not just limited to the common people, or even to the unbelieving Jewish leadership. We know that Jesus' own Disciples were also weak in faith on occasions; and more than anyone else, it was expedient that they be fully convinced of His Messiahship, due to the great job which lay ahead of them in the future. The incident with which most people -- Christian and non-Christian alike -- are familiar, occurred following the Lord's Resurrection, during the second time that He appeared to His Disciples. As most Christians know, the Apostle Thomas was quite skeptical of the Lord's Resurrection; so much so, that he is recorded by

John as having said the following on that occasion:

". . . Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."

John 20:25, KJV

It is then that Jesus miraculously appears the second time, and lovingly rebukes Thomas by saying the following to him:

". . . Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

John 20:29, KJV

With these words, Jesus eternalizes one of the main messages which He has conveyed throughout the Gospels. That message is that we must believe simply because He says so, and simply because His Father says so. Nothing else should be necessary or required. His word should suffice. It should be final. It should stand on its own merit. If His word is not sufficient, then, in my view, it reflects upon our own lack of faith, and our own slowness to obey, and nothing more.

Over and over again throughout the Gospels, Jesus tells us that our faith should be built upon the sure, solid Word of God, and not upon physical manifestations or evidence of any kind; and that includes the Shroud of Turin, the Sudarium or any other kind of alleged signs and miracles. The sureness, reliability and solid nature of God's Word is revealed to us in verses such as the following:

"God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"

Numbers 23:19, KJV

"Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:"

Isaiah 46:9-10, KJV

"And when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them."

Ezekiel 33:33, KJV

"I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him. That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past."

Ecclesiastes 3:14-15, KJV

"God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged."

Romans 3:4, KJV

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:"

2 Timothy 3:16, KJV

"In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;"

Titus 1:2, KJV

"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 . . . 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, KJV

"I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name."

Psalms 138:2, KJV

". . . For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven . . . Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word . . . Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever."

Psalms 119:89, 14, 160, KJV

While miracles, signs and manifestations may possibly result as a by-product of our faith, they should not be necessary to create faith within us to begin with. Faith is a Gift which

comes from God alone. As I point out in "Death: Final Battle, Final Victory", faith is not something which we can create, produce or work up within ourselves by some human effort. It is not a work of the flesh. We cannot try or pretend to have faith. We either have it, or else we do not. Anything other than this is just self-deception. As the Apostle Paul informs us in his Epistle to the Romans, faith is born within through the careful study of God's Word. Whether it is the spoken Word, or the written Word, the Word of God plants the seed of faith in our hearts, as we see here:

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

Romans 10:17, KJV

In his Epistle to the Hebrews, Paul also tells us that faith is a kind of inner hope for things which cannot yet be seen. It is an inexplicable certain knowing, even when there is no physical evidence to support that which we believe. He also informs us that without such faith, we cannot please God, as we see here:

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen . . . But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

Hebrews 11:1, 6, KJV

Tragically, in the skeptical, science-oriented society of our modern times, many people have become like the Apostle Thomas of old. We require physical evidence, signs, miracles and manifestations before we will believe; and even then, a lot of people will still scoff and doubt what is before them. Sadly, this lack of faith in God and His Word is not limited to non-Christians alone. As I note in "Lying Wonders of the Endtime", this need for evidence to strengthen one's faith seems to be particularly true with the Roman Catholic faith. If there is any "if" in our hearts, then it is not genuine faith, in my view. Jesus fully understood human nature. Thus, on one occasion in the Gospel of Luke He said the following:

". . . Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"

Luke 18:8, KJV

The Lord's words are like a hot iron which sears our very conscience. They force each of us to ask ourselves, "Do I have faith? Do I truly believe? Will I abandon my faith in a moment of personal crisis as Peter did?". It is so easy for our pride to get in the way, and to even deceive us to the point that we may be tempted to think, "Well, if I had been Peter, or any of the others, I would have never abandoned the Lord. I would never have denied knowing Him." But if we require physical evidence, signs, manifestations, and other miracles -- such as the Shroud of Turin, the Sudarium, the so-called Marian apparitions, etc. -- then our faith is no better -- and possibly even less -- than that of the First Century Disciples who were also slow to believe, as we see by this verse where Jesus chides the two Disciples who are walking on the road to Emmaus:

"Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:"
Luke 24:25, KJV

As I point out in the aforementioned articles, there exists a serious danger when people require evidence, manifestations, miracles and other physical signs before they will believe. Such people who are weak in faith can easily become victims of human or Satanic deception. While some of my readers will probably be offended by my words, personally, I have no doubt that to varying degrees, this is precisely what is happening within the Roman Catholic faith -- as well as within certain Protestant denominations -- where quite an assortment of odd occurrences have been happening for a number of years now. I discuss some of these strange incidents in articles such as "God's Golden Teeth, or Satan's Delusion?" and "Have You Been Slain in the Spirit?".

The fact of the matter is that people want signs, miracles and manifestations in order to increase their faith; so that is exactly what they are now getting. But do these miracles, signs and manifestations really originate from God, or is it possible they actually come from someone else? Is it possible that some of these so-called miracles and manifestations are in reality deceptive ruses which are being engineered by some unscrupulous televangelists whose only desire is to increase the number of their followers, while at the same time, they fill their coffers with donations from the gullible people

who they deceive?

It becomes rather evident then that we should question and try -- or test -- all of these alleged signs, miracles and manifestations before we choose to just blindly accept them as being genuine, because there are many false prophets and deceivers in the world today. Please consider the wisdom of this verse and beware:

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world."

1 John 4:1, KJV

Equally important is this: Would some people's faith falter if such signs, miracles and manifestations were to suddenly cease? Would they think that God had abandoned them, or that they had at least lost favor with Him? Here are some rather interesting verses for your personal consideration:

"Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away."

1 Corinthians 13:8-10, KJV

For a deeper look at this topic, please consider reading the article entitled "Are the Gifts of the Spirit for Today?".

Aside from possible deception, whether it is of human origin, or from Satan himself, as I explain in "Lying Wonders of the Endtime", another danger which presents itself when we place our faith in physical objects, is idolatry, or idol worship. As we learn from the Scriptures, even objects which have been designated as being holy by the Lord can be misused; and, if we are not careful, can evolve into misguided worship of the same physical object, instead of worship in the Eternal God. The ancient Israelites did this many times. Do we think that we are immune to such things today; or is Satan simply more cunning than we realize?

One of the prime examples which we find in the Old Testament involves the Serpent of Brass -- or brasen serpent -- which

the Lord commanded Moses to make in the Book of Exodus. As you may recall, because of their constant murmuring in the wilderness, the Scriptures inform us that God grew angry and sent fiery serpents -- or poisonous snakes, because poison results in a burning effect -- into the encampment of the Israelites. When Moses pleaded with God to have mercy on the people, the Lord told him to make a serpent of brass, and to place it upon a pole. Afterwards, whosoever looked upon the Serpent of Brass was healed and allowed to live, as we see by the following verses:

"And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived."

Numbers 21:5-9, KJV

Sadly, we discover that the descendants of those Israelites took the Brass Serpent -- which was named Nehushtan -- which the Lord Himself had ordered to be made, and turned it into another idol, just like the other false idols which filled their places of worship -- the groves -- on the hilltops of Israel. That which was once holy, became an abomination to the Lord. As a result, hundreds of years later, during the reign of obedient King Hezekiah, God commanded the king to destroy Nehushtan, as we see by the following verse:

"He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan."

2 Kings 18:4, KJV

This presents us with a very important question: If the Jews were not immune to such things; if they took something which at one time was deemed holy and turned it into another idol; should we not be equally concerned with revered objects that have become associated with our modern Christian faith, such as the Shroud of Turin and the Sudarium, an untold number of crucifixes which probably number in the billions, countless statues which are manufactured and erected to honor Jesus, Mary and a plethora of other Roman Catholic saints, rosary beads which involve vain repetitions, etc.? Is it possible that we are simply afraid to admit that these objects have become our modern idols? Does God really accept and approve of these things?

I also find it rather ironic that the very idol which King Hezekiah destroyed -- that is, Nehushtan, the brass serpent, or "the brass thing" as it is literally translated -- is now the symbol of the modern medical profession. In actuality, there are two different symbols, and there has been a degree of confusion concerning them. The first of these two symbols -- the caduceus -- is a short staff which can be seen in the hand of the Greek god Hermes. This staff is entwined by two serpents, and is sometimes surmounted by a pair of wings. In Roman mythology, we find the equivalent of Hermes in the god Mercury, who also bore the caduceus in his left hand.

In contrast to the Greek god Hermes and the caduceus, is the Rod of Asclepius, which is associated with the Greek god of the same name. This symbol -- which is likewise known as the asklepian -- consists of a single serpent that is entwined around the rod. This Greek god is associated with healing and medicine. Sadly, even though the story of Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness is considerably older than both Greek and Roman mythology, in the sources that I looked at, the authors demonstrated a preference for highlighting the mythology, and only gave the story of Moses, and Nehushtan, very limited mention.

In thinking about this issue, I have wondered if perhaps we have placed our faith too much in the modern false gods of science and medicine -- the pill gods -- instead of in the one true God of Heaven. Have our sins become so great, and our faith so pitifully weak, that we no longer have enough faith to approach the Holy One, and expect Divine Healing from His merciful hand? How many of us prefer instead to go

to the chemical gods of the Earth, which we faithfully keep in the medicine cabinet? But, the pharmaceutical industry certainly is not complaining. They have grown rich by our lack of faith.

Reiterating the main theme of this article, our faith should stand solely on the Word of God. If it is a perfect faith, it should not require any kind of artificial props or physical evidence. Neither should it require signs, manifestations and miracles of any kind. In my own life, to my knowledge, I have never experienced anything which I can clearly say was a case of Divine Healing. Maybe God healed me on some occasions, and I just didn't realize it.

Neither have I ever experienced any kind of sign, miracle, or manifestation as some people have claimed to have had. While experiencing such things would probably be nice, and would no doubt be very inspiring, nevertheless, I honestly don't think that I need to see such manifestations, now, or ever. I have maintained my faith in God's Word, and believed in the Lord, for many years without any such outward things. As I stated earlier, faith is just knowing, without any evidence, and I do know that God is real, and that His Word is true. That is sufficient for me.

Concerning the Shroud of Turin and the Sudarium, I have not seen either one of them, and I probably never will see them. If they really are authentic, they should serve as a great inspiration to our faith. But even if they are not genuine, it should make absolutely no difference to us whatsoever, as far as our faith in God is concerned.

One question which some people may sincerely ask is if it is possible that, in His mercy, and knowing how weak in faith we are, God may be allowing some of these ancient Biblical relics to come to light, for the purpose of increasing our faith. Even though Jesus clearly said that no sign would be given to His unbelieving generation, other than His own Resurrection from the dead after He laid in another man's tomb for three days -- and what a sign it was! -- is it possible that God has decided that we do need some physical proof in order to boost our faith?

I honestly do not know. As some of you who are reading this may already know, in addition to the Shroud of Turin and the

Sudarium, there are certain Biblical archeologists -- such as the now-deceased Ron Wyatt -- who claim to have discovered the remains of Noah's Ark in the mountains of eastern Turkey or else in Armenia. Wyatt also claimed to have found the Ark of the Covenant situated in a cave that is directly below the alleged Crucifixion site outside of the ancient perimeters of Jerusalem. Others say that the Ark of the Covenant is really somewhere in Ethiopia, or hidden in a cave that is located at the base of Mount Nebo in Jordan. There are likewise claims of having discovered the collapsed walls of ancient Jericho.

In answering this question, I am reminded of the words of the Prophet Isaiah, who over 2,500 years ago, was inspired to write the following:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Isaiah 55:8-9, KJV

The Patriarch Job also had this to say regarding the Lord's unsearchable ways:

"Which doeth great things past finding out; yea, and wonders without number."

Job 9:10, KJV

While discussing God's plan of Salvation for Israel and the rest of the world, the Apostle Paul was likewise inspired to write the following lines:

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

Romans 11:33, KJV

In short, who am I to say what God can or cannot do, or what He may possibly allow to happen? For my part, all I know how to do is to study the Bible, and then draw my own conclusions from that. Upon examining the Scriptures, I personally feel that I am challenged with the question of whether or not I truly believe God's Word simply because He says so, without the need for any signs or physical evidence. Perhaps you the reader feel differently.

As I have stated on a number of previous occasions, we must each operate according to our own measure of faith. However, we must also make certain that our faith, and what we choose to believe, is aligned with God's Word, because that is the ultimate test. If, after making a careful examination of the Scriptures, you are persuaded of something, then obviously, you should hold your ground. The Apostle Paul offers us the following advice in his Epistle to the Romans:

". . . Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."
Romans 14:5, KJV

"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."
Romans 12:3, KJV

So my primary word of advice regarding the Shroud of Turin, the Sudarium, and the many unusual signs and manifestations which are said to be occurring in various parts of the world, is simple this: caution. I urge everyone to exercise a great deal of Spiritual Discernment when they hear of or encounter such things. Do not accept everything at face value. Test it in order to determine if it holds up against the Scriptures. Let us not forget Paul's other wise words of advice as well, which he writes in his Epistle to the Corinthians:

"Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices."
2 Corinthians 2:11, KJV

"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works."
2 Corinthians 11:13-15, KJV

So, as you can see, Satan and his minions -- including his human emissaries -- can and will deceive you if you are not careful, and if you do not remain on guard. As the Apostle Peter also warns us:

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:"
1 Peter 5:8, KJV

One thing is for certain. If we do believe; if we do have genuine faith; then Paul also tells us that we indeed have wonderful things to look forward to in the coming glorious Kingdom of God, as we see by this verse:

"But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."
1 Corinthians 2:9, KJV

So you see, this verse complements a verse I shared with you earlier, where Paul tells us that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen". In other words, Paul is telling us in his Epistle to the Corinthians that those things which we cannot see -- but which we only hope for now by faith -- will be much more wonderful than we could possibly have ever imagined. That will be the ultimate reward of our faith. So tell me; is your faith built upon the sure Word of God, the more sure word of prophecy? I certainly hope so!

With these words I will bring this article to its conclusion. I pray that you have found it informative, and that it has been a blessing in your life. If you have been blessed by it, I encourage you to share its URL link with all of your online friends. Also, if you have an account with Facebook, Twitter or Google+, I would very much appreciate if you would take the time to click on the corresponding link that is found on this page. Thanks so much, and may God bless you!

For additional information, you may want to refer to the list of reading resources below which were also mentioned in this article, or which are related to this article, and which are likewise located on the Bill's Bible Basics web server.

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Written by the WordWeaver

wordweaver777@gmail.com

<https://www.billkochman.com>