

A Galatian Sojourn of the Shroud of Turin? Pollen, Paul, and a Public Portrayal of Christ  
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We begin this brief look at a particular New Testament text by acknowledging one relevant fact: New Testament scholars have, for the most part, avoided the Shroud of Turin. Professor Simon J. Joseph, a New Testament scholar himself, discussed this in “The Shroud and the ‘Historical Jesus:’ Challenging the Disciplinary Divide” (2012). He is right to say that “Today, most biblical scholars, whatever their personal faith-commitments and affiliations might be, do not rely on theological arguments—or medieval relics—to settle historical problems.” He goes on to state particular reasons biblical scholars have not addressed the Shroud.

The first reason Professor Joseph gives is the belief, bolstered by the 1988 radiocarbon dating results, that the Shroud is a medieval forgery. Joseph notes however that scholars were ignoring the Shroud long before that.

Second, since their areas of specialty are biblical languages, various kinds of text criticism, and theology, not medicine, anatomy, spectrometry, botany, etc., biblical scholars do not feel competent to engage in a subject that would take them into these other fields. Joseph adds that there “may be risk of professional embarrassment.”

Third, and most important, is “methodological constraint.” “Biblical studies, like all scientific fields of study, operates under the presupposition of methodological naturalism. Methodological naturalism assumes the non-existence of any supernatural or paranormal phenomena influencing historical events.”

Professor Joseph says, the Shroud could revolutionize New Testament studies. With all due respect to Professor Joseph, I would state things more strongly. The Shroud threatens not to revolutionize biblical studies, but to exalt the work of some while absolutely destroying the work of others. The Shroud tells us that the Gospels present a more faithful telling of the Jesus story than many scholars have been willing to accept or concede. Think of J. D. Crossan who contends that Jesus’ body was never placed in a tomb, but left on the cross for dogs to eat. Think of Marcus Borg and Bart Ehrman, who like Crossan deny the Resurrection and much more. The Shroud is a problem for all such scholars who present a historical Jesus vastly different from the Christ of faith as revealed in the Bible. The more evidence that accumulates for the authenticity of the Shroud, the more the Shroud threatens to be the ice burg to their Titanic, and they steer far from it.

Sammeli Juntunen, a Finnish theological professor, wrote of the Shroud’s challenge to theologians who would place the Resurrection of Jesus outside history (“Theological Considerations in front of a Copy of the Shroud of Turin” available at [www.shroud.com](http://www.shroud.com)). The Shroud, says Juntunen, wants to place the Resurrection among “hard facts.” So, for theologians as well as biblical scholars the Shroud is unwelcome. What liberal biblical scholars and theologians have invested in degrees, careers, faculty positions and publications tends to lose its value the more one learns of the Shroud. No wonder they stay away.

The lack of attention to the Shroud from New Testament scholars and theologians helps to explain why we are just now considering the possibility of another New Testament reference outside the Gospels’ narratives of the burial of Jesus and the discovery of his empty tomb. That reference is Galatians 3:1.

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified (ESV).

This paper will look briefly at the ways this passage has been understood in the past, before anyone thought it might be connected in some way with the Shroud. We shall evaluate the various proposals for understanding St. Paul's words, and we shall evaluate them against the proposal that Paul refers to the Shroud, used by early missionaries in the Galatian region.

Luke, a friend and missionary assistant to Paul, wrote the Gospel that bears his name, and the Acts of the Apostles. In reporting the events following the Resurrection of Jesus, Luke says:

He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

Acts 1:3 (ESV)

“By many proofs,” *en pollois tekmariais...* What were these? In his Gospel Luke specifically mentions a linen shroud purchased by Joseph of Arimathea for Jesus' burial in a stone cut tomb (23:53). Why he does this is best explained by a knowledge on his part that the shroud had significance later on, beyond what Luke would write of in his Gospel. That tallies with the mention of the shroud by all four Gospel writers, and a non-canonical writing we will visit now.

Jerome, (d. 400) biblical scholar beyond peer in his time, provides us with some quotations from the now-lost Gospel of the Hebrews. He writes:

Also the gospel called according to the Hebrews, recently translated by me into Greek and Latin, which Origen often uses, says, after the resurrection of the Savior: "Now the Lord, *when he had given the linen cloth to the servant of the priest*, went to James and appeared to him (for James had sworn that he would not eat bread from that hour in which he had drunk the Lord's cup until he should see him risen from among them that sleep)"... Bernard Throckmorton. *Gospel Parallels*, third edition revised. 1967, Thomas Nelson Publishers, page 190.

This quotation from the Gospel According to the Hebrews comes to us without a larger context, but we have enough here to say at the very least that Jesus' burial shroud was considered a lasting emblem of his death and resurrection by those who used the Gospel of the Hebrews, written c. 80-150.

What would the early church have done with an item like Jesus' burial cloth, if they had it? We would expect the leaders to have saved and preserved it, especially if it came to bear the image of Jesus, whether that happened instantly or gradually. In the missionary environment of the Apostolic Church, we must also realize that the Shroud could be a valuable tool in the hands of missionary apostles.

The idea that Paul could be alluding to the Shroud of Turin in Galatians 3:1 may seem completely fanciful at first. But if missionaries in fact used the Shroud of Turin with its image of Jesus as evidence of his crucifixion and resurrection, the greatest missionary,

Paul, would almost certainly have known it. To this discussion we must now add one more important item of information. There is proof that the Shroud of Turin was exposed to the open air of the Anatolian region, which includes Galatia.

Dr. Max Frei was a member of the STURP team which subjected the Shroud to a battery of tests in 1978. Dr. Frei collected pollen samples from the Shroud. His work has for the most part been acknowledged as sound by others, though Dr. Frei died before he could complete all of it. Dr. Frei reported:

“The palynology thus allows us to say that during its history (including manufacturing) the Shroud resided in Palestine. This result does not explain the presence of pollen of steppe plants that are missing in Palestine or are extremely rare there. According to palynology, the Shroud must have been exposed to open air in Turkey because 20 of the found species are abundant in Anatolia (Urfa, etc..) and four around Constantinople, and are completely lacking in the Central and Western Europe”. M. Frei, *Il passato della Sindone alla luce della palinologia*, p. 193 in *La Sindone e la scienza. Atti del II congresso internazionale di Sindonologia* (Turin, 1978), ed. P. Coero-Borga, Turin, pp. 191-200.

### **The Situation In Galatia**

Paul traveled through southern Galatia on what is now called his First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:1-14:27). Indeed, he returned on his Second and Third journeys. In his Letter to the Galatians he laments that the Galatians have “so quickly” (1:6) turned from what he preached to accept another gospel. Other Christians, known today as Judaizers, had come to Galatia after Paul with their own message which was in conflict with his. We cannot know if the Galatians were theologically astute enough to be aware of the profound difference between Paul’s message and that of the Judaizers. But Paul was!

Biblical scholars debate what they term a northern Galatian hypothesis, a southern Galatian hypothesis, and yet a third hypothesis as to when Paul wrote his letter and which of the residents of Galatia he addressed. These issues go beyond the scope of this paper, but whoever Paul wrote to, and whenever he wrote, there can be no doubt that the Judaizers were the reason for his letter.

The Judaizers taught that Gentiles could be saved by Jesus as long as they became Jews through circumcision. Perhaps some of them left it at this, and perhaps others insisted on keeping more of the Law of Moses. Paul, himself a scholar of the Law, saw any required obedience to the Law for what it really was: a competing means to salvation, “a different gospel (1:6).”

The Judaizers were traveling on the heels of the great Apostle. They were missionaries. Before the Jerusalem Council (c. 50) the opinions of the Judaizers had not yet been overruled by the Twelve and James. So, could an item such as the Shroud of Turin have come into their hands? Might they, or anyone, have used such an item to evangelize? The answer to both these questions is: yes, especially if the matters prompting the Letter to the Galatians came early in Paul’s missionary career, earlier than the Jerusalem Council. Whoever in the Jerusalem church kept the Shroud would most

likely have been on good terms with Jewish Christians of other locations. Indeed, Jewish Christians did live in other places early on. Paul's encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road dates to a year and a half after the resurrection. Christians were in Damascus already in numbers justifying Paul's journey to arrest them. The persecution that followed Stephen's martyrdom scattered believers to many cities.

Perhaps persons other than the Judaizers displayed the Shroud. Tradition places John, Andrew and Philip just farther west of Galatia in Asia Minor. John's Gospel has the most to say about Jesus' burial cloths, with the Beloved Disciple coming to faith by seeing them in the tomb. He is one logical candidate for the keeper of the Shroud. Peter came to Antioch, not far to the east of Galatia (Galatians 2:11), and the First Letter of Peter names the Galatians among those to whom he writes. He is a candidate for keeper of the Shroud as well, and he may have displayed it in Antioch to be seen by traveling Christians from elsewhere, or he may have overseen its use by other missionaries.

### **Who has bewitched you? *tis umas ebaskanen***

Paul writes to the Galatians with passion and anger. He wants to win them back, He is furious with the Judaizers, and disappointed in those Galatians the Judaizers have won over. Despite his clear and powerful proclamation of Jesus Christ crucified as the completion of the Law, the Galatians have been swayed to adopt obedience to the Law of Moses as their means of salvation. To Paul it is though they have been placed under a spell. A few commentators introduce the "evil eye" here, based on what follows ("before whose eyes"). But the evil eye refers to the stare of a magician which imparts a curse. Paul refers to something *the Galatians saw*.

Why then does Paul use language that suggests the supernatural (bewitched)? If the Judaizers, or someone else, had exhibited the Shroud in Galatia with its mysterious image of Jesus, and the result was the convincing of the Galatians to keep the Law of Moses in order to be saved, we have an answer.

### **Before whose eyes...*kat' ophthalmous***

Paul would later write to the Romans that "faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17)." This thought is consistent with Paul's activity throughout his career: announcing the good news of Jesus that people might believe and be saved. In contrast, this statement is about seeing, not hearing.

The Galatians have *seen something*. Remember that Paul is engaged in a debate in the form of a letter. If he attempts to make a point in a way that is weak or illogical, he loses. He cannot appeal to the Galatians by saying in effect: "You saw it with your own eyes," if both he and the Galatians know no one saw anything. Paul certainly means the Galatians saw something extraordinary, something which in the wrong hands had the power to "bewitch." We would have expected him to say: "It was *in your hearing* that Jesus Christ was publicly proclaimed as crucified." But that is not what he says.

**Publicly portrayed... *proographā* (1st aorist passive 3d person singular of *prographō*)**

The word *prographo* may be broken into two parts. The first, *pro*, is a preposition meaning above or before, and *grapho* means to write or draw. The *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (4<sup>th</sup> revised and augmented edition by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, University of Chicago Press, 1952) provides these meanings for *prographo*: 1. written before(hand) in the same document; 2. what is written before as in an older document; 3. show forth or proclaim publicly, proclaim, or placard in public (full entry on p. 711). The third definition makes reference to uses of *grapho* by Greek writers which carry the meaning of “draw, paint.”

Did Paul’s use of *prographo* refer to his own words, written earlier (definition 1)? No, because Paul wrote no earlier Letter to the Galatians. This is clear from the context of the Letter. “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ...” means little time has passed since Paul was there. He makes no reference to other letters, and unlike the Corinthian situation, there is no reason to even suspect any other letter from Paul to the Galatians.

Did Paul mean for *prographo* to be interpreted as: written in the past by prophets (definition 2)? While that seems attractive at first, it requires the Galatians to have actually seen Jewish Scriptures with their eyes.” This is untenable for two reasons. First, under what circumstances would Gentiles actually stand before scrolls of Isaiah, Jeremiah, or the Psalms to see what was written there? This is inconceivable. Second, even if this were the case, most Gentile Galatians would not have been able to read Hebrew Scriptures, or even a Greek translation (the Septuagint). Most of them were, like others in the Roman world, illiterate.

Did Paul refer to some kind of placard or picture (definition 3)? This would mean that someone actually placed Christ crucified in words on a sign, or else in the form of a picture. This answers the requirement for something visible to the eye, but upon closer examination this answer also fails. Can we really imagine someone holding up a sign before the gathered Galatians as though this would (a) convince them of Jesus’ crucifixion, or (b) help them understand crucifixion? If such a sign carried words, again, most would have been unable to read it. If it carried a picture, in what way would this have been effective for anything at all? Further, the Galatians knew what crucifixion was, and shared a universal abhorrence for it. To draw a picture of someone on a cross would not have amounted to a helpful visual aid, but an obscenity. Further still, iconography did not begin in the church for at least another century.

Did Paul refer to his own wounds? This is the best answer, short of the Shroud. Paul had suffered violence in bringing the Gospel to the Galatian cities of Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium. He frequently writes of the union of every Christian with Christ, and that is no less true for Paul himself. At the conclusion of Galatians he states: “From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus (6:17).” This need not be taken as a reference to the stigmata, as some have held. It much more probably means that the bruises, the wounds, the fractures, and scars that Paul endured were in character with what had happened to the Lord Jesus with whom Paul was united by baptism (c.f. Romans 6), and whose sufferings he was sharing in the present moment.

The difficulties with Paul's own wounds as what the Galatians saw are: (1) that this is not immediately clear in the context of the letter. If Paul is equating his own wounds, visible when he was among the Galatians, with a public image of Christ crucified, we would expect more in the way of clarification or explanation. But the Shroud is already and immediately an image of Christ crucified, needing no such clarification. (2) Paul stresses Christ crucified. Paul's wounds, unless he was referring to the stigmata, did not resemble Jesus' crucifixion wounds. Acts reports that Paul was stoned and believed dead at Lystra (14:19). Paul writes in Galatians that they would have given him their eyes if they could (4:15), implying that Paul's eyes were perhaps injured. These injuries do not comport with crucifixion. More importantly, the perfect tense Paul employs means that "crucified" (*estaurōmenos*) is something already accomplished in the past with present result. The perfect tense of "crucified" requires that the visible image of Christ appears already dead from crucifixion—the crucifixion is complete, over, and done. This contrasts with the view that Paul alludes to his own present suffering in Galatians 3:1.

Paul can speak of crucifixion with respect to all believers. The crucifixion Paul says all believers share is the result of being joined to Christ (c.f. *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical And Theological Study*, Constantine R. Campbell. Zondervan, 2012.) So in a theological sense every Christian who suffers is an example of Christ's crucifixion, but verb tense and other considerations mean that is probably not what Paul means here with relation to his own suffering, as though he were the visible image of Christ crucified that he speaks of. Paul's wounds, though visible, and though in a sense a continuation of Christ's own suffering, are far from being the kind of immediately clear refutation of the gospel of the Judaizers that Paul's words require. The Galatians saw *Christ* crucified, i.e., crucified *to death*, not *being* crucified, and they saw this with their own eyes.

## **The Shroud**

If the Shroud of Turin (1) had been brought to Galatia by missionaries, whether the Judaizers or others, or (2) if some of the Galatians had travelled to other Christian communities in Asia Minor or to Antioch and seen the Shroud there, all requirements are satisfied for understanding Paul's words in Galatians 3:1. If it was the Judaizers who displayed the Shroud, what the Galatians saw—evidence of the crucifixion—should have reinforced what Paul had preached to them, not the Judaizers' counter message. What irony! Then "O foolish Galatians," makes double sense. Before their eyes had been some image of Christ crucified, not something drawn or written by a human hand, but unique and convincing by its very nature. If the Judaizers were the ones to show the Shroud, we can also understand Paul's wry reference to bewitching.

In view of the evidence that the Shroud of Turin was exposed to the open air in Anatolia, and the problems with various conventional attempts to explain Paul's words in Galatians 3:1, the Shroud of Turin becomes at the least a plausible answer to the question of what Paul referenced as a public portrayal of Christ crucified which the Galatians saw with their own eyes.