

THE CONSPIRACY
Confirmation of the Resurrection
Matthew 28:11-15

Despite the fact that the resurrection is man's only hope for eternal life, a majority of people continue to reject it. Through the years, many theories have been propagated for the explicit purpose of explaining away the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Even though most people aren't willing to believe in the resurrection, denying it goes against the very nature of the human heart...the way God created us...**"He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart..." (Ecclesiastes 3:11).**

Something within man isn't satisfied with this present earthly life. Man instinctively reaches out for immortality...for a life that transcends this present life and one that will continue after he dies. Throughout history countless religions and philosophies have proposed means for man to achieve immortality...ways to find a better life beyond the grave. But all have failed.

Matthew explains in this present passage, a theory disseminated by the Jewish religious leaders, that Jesus wasn't resurrected...but that His disciples managed to steal the body and hide it. This deceitful narrative was prominently passed along for almost three centuries.

I. THE PLOT: (vs. 11-12a)

Now while they were on their way, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened (vs. 11)...

While the women were running to find the disciples and tell them of the resurrection, **some of the guards** were able to overcome their fear and went **into the city and reported to the chief priest all that had transpired.**

Because these soldiers were assigned to help the Jewish religious leaders guard the tomb, they wisely went and **reported to the chief priests** first. They had much less to fear from the **chief priests** than from **Pilate**...and they were probably counting on the fact that those Jewish leaders could somehow protect them from the governor.

Included in **all** the things **that had happened** were the *earthquake*, the *rolling of the large stone away from the entrance to the tomb*, the presence of someone whose *appearance was like lightning*

and whose clothes were white as snow sitting on the stone, and the *empty tomb.*

The soldiers knew that all these things had to have a supernatural origin. What else could have caused them to shake uncontrollably ...and then pass out and become like dead men. They didn't try to **explain** what they saw...they simply **reported** it as best they could.

And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together (vs. 12a)...

The soldiers report brought *alarm...fear...and confusion* to the religious leaders...but it didn't bring *repentance* or *faith*. It brought about a *consultation*. Keep in mind that the **Sanhedrin** was comprised of a number of **Sadducees**...ones who didn't believe in a resurrection.

The heart that is hardened to God will not be persuaded by any miracle or by any amount of evidence...no matter how compelling. So it was imperative that the priests come up with an explanation to counter the truth of the events that had just become obvious.

Consulted together...a formal phrase used for official decisions (Matthew 12:14; 22:15; 27:1, 7). After a time of deliberation, the **chief priests** and the **elders** came up with **a three point plan:**

- They would **give the soldiers a bribe...a large sum of money.**
- They came up with a story that would **lie about the body being stolen.**
- They said that they would **protect the soldiers from possible reprisal by Pilate.**

II. THE PLAN: (vs. 12b-13)

They gave a large sum of money to the soldiers (vs. 12b)...

Large sum...because they had so much at stake, the **Sanhedrin** didn't hesitate to pay a high price for the lie to be spread. This was probably silver from the Temple treasury...just as they had paid **Judas**.

Money...Gk. *argurion*, literally means *silver*...and is the same word used to describe the bribe given to **Judas** to betray Jesus.

And said, "You are saying, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep'." (vs. 13)...

The fabricated lie that they came up with was that the body was stolen by **His disciples while they were asleep**. Such a report would not have been well received by the **Roman** officials since a soldier who fell asleep on guard duty would be put to death (**Acts 12:19**). The Jewish leaders realized this as well, but promised to make things right with their superiors.

This story also raises several issues that need explanation:

- *How would someone asleep know what had happened?*
- *It would it be very unlikely that all the soldiers would have been asleep at the same time?*
- *Why would Roman soldiers risk incriminating themselves even for a large bribe?*
- *The probability that the noise from moving the stone would have at least awakened one of the soldiers.*

The story was self-contradictory.

III. **THE PROMISE:** (vs. 14-15)

And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble (vs. 14)...

When this was brought to the attention of the governor, they promised to win him over and keep the soldiers out of trouble.

By threatening to make an unfavorable report to **Caesar**, the Jewish religious leaders had usually managed to have their way with **Pilate**. They knew that he wouldn't risk trouble with **Caesar** over the disappearance of a Jewish corpse.

And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day (vs. 15)...

The soldiers gladly **took the money** offered by the Jewish leaders and **did as they had been instructed**. They were elated...not only would they not face punishment...they were even being rewarded.

As a result, **this story was widely** circulated **among the Jews** and many believed that the disciples had really stolen Jesus' body.

The logic of this explanation doesn't hold up...

- *The Jewish leaders could have easily have found the stolen body.* They had the resources.

- *The simplest way to have disproved the resurrection was to locate the body and put it on display for all the world to see.*
- *The disciples' hadn't understood or believed Jesus previous predictions of His resurrection (Matthew 16:21; 17:9, 22-23; 20:18-19).* They weren't anticipating His resurrection. They had scattered when Jesus was arrested. Now that He had been crucified, they were hopelessly dejected.
- *The disciples' were afraid...*their courage during this period wasn't sufficient to carry out such a plot...they were hiding.
- *To execute this kind of plot was beyond their ability and resources.* They hadn't made any preparations for such a plan.
- *These men later were willing to die for this Gospel...*the Gospel of Truth that proclaims the resurrection. People will die for something that they believe to be true...but men will not die for what they know to be false...a lie.

The truth is often harder for a person to believe than a lie...so many of the Jews continued to swallow this lie.

"...He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days."

~Acts 1:3

To this day...**Matthew** wrote his gospel around **63 A.D.**...some **thirty years** following the crucifixion of Jesus. **To this day** means that this story was still being told years later. As a matter of fact, the **Sanhedrin's** lie was still common among the Jews in the 2nd Century.

LESSONS WE CAN LEARN:

- **The resurrection is a reality.** No other historical event has been so thoroughly attested to by such sound evidence as is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The truth of the resurrection is so absolute that even a lie against it helps prove it.
- **Salvation results from belief in the resurrection.**
"If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."

~Romans 10:9-10

Salvation is equal to *eternal life*...to *deliverance from sin*...and to *godly hope*. Salvation determines a person's eternal destiny in the presence of God in the glories of heaven forever. And salvation belongs only to those who believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and who confess Him as Savior and Lord...and thereby identify themselves with Him.