

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Matthew: Jesus As Israel's Messiah And His Kingdom

Part XXXIX: Christ As Israel's Messiah Seen In His Foes' Explanation Of His Body's Disappearance (Matthew 28:11-15)

I. Introduction

- A. Matthew's Gospel was written to explain to Jews how Jesus was Israel's Old Testament Biblical Messiah even if He did not establish His Messianic Kingdom in His first advent, Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, p. 1337.
- B. A part of that explanation is seen in His foes' explanation of the disappearance of His body after Jesus' death and burial, and we view that explanation in its setting for insight and edification (as follows):

II. Christ As Israel's Messiah Seen In His Foes' Explanation Of His Body's Disappearance, Matt. 28:11-15.

- A. While the women who had been to Jesus' empty tomb went to tell His disciples the angels' news of His resurrection, the guard that had kept the tomb came into the city to tell the chief priests all that had occurred at the tomb, Matt. 28:8-10, 11. They stood to be executed if word that the body was gone was given directly to the governor, so they went to the chief priests who had sealed the tomb to try to restrict the body from ever disappearing, hoping that the chief priests would help them, Matt. 27:62-66; Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 93.
- B. The chief priests met with the elders and decided to present the narrative to the world that the disciples had stolen the body, trying to make sure they gave no room for men to think Jesus had risen. Accordingly, they gave a large sum of money to the guard to claim the disciples had come by night and stolen Jesus' body while they had slept, and that if this narrative reached the governor's ears, the religious leaders would likely pay him to persuade him to accept and promote the same narrative and not execute the soldiers, Matthew 27:12-14.
- C. The soldiers took the money and did as the religious leaders said, Matt. 27:15a. Matthew adds in Matthew 27:15b that when he wrote his gospel, the Jews still gave this narrative of what had happened to Jesus' body.
- D. However, that such a narrative was still being promoted by the Jews argues strongly for Christ's resurrection:
 - 1. First, if the soldiers were asleep when the disciples took the body, they would not know who took it, *Ibid*.
 - 2. Second, the guards would not publicly **admit** to sleeping on duty if it was punishable by death unless something so unusual had occurred to the body that their superiors were willing to shield them, *Ibid*.
 - 3. Third, the disciples' courage at the time of Christ's death and burial was not "sufficient" to equip them to steal Jesus' body from a tomb sealed with Roman authority, *Ibid*. All the disciples forsook Jesus and fled at His arrest (Matt. 26:56b), and after Christ arose, the disciples still met in private for fear, John 20:18-19.
 - 4. Fourth, the disciples would not steal the body of a dead "messiah," for such a "messiah" was not held to be a true, Biblical Messiah as seen in the remarks of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Luke 24:18-21a.
 - 5. Fifth, since Israel's religious leaders at Jesus' burial sealed His tomb lest the disciples might steal the body and claim He had risen in line with His promise to do so the third day (Matt. 27:62-66), and since these same leaders reversed course to promote that story of grave robbery, something must have occurred to explain the body's disappearance that was far worse in their view, and that could only be the resurrection!
 - 6. Sixth, if the religious leaders indeed believed that the disciples had stolen Jesus' body, and if they had been so concerned that the disciples not be able to do so that they had sealed the tomb and set a watch (Matt. 27:62-66), they then could persecute the disciples to produce the body and end the claim He arose!
 - 7. Seventh, the fact that Matthew would add that at the time he wrote his Gospel, the religious leaders were still spreading the illogical narrative that the disciples had stolen Jesus' body to claim He was risen (Matt. 28:15b), Matthew would thus leave his claims about Christ's identity as the Messiah open for testing by any Jew who visited Jerusalem three times a year for feasts who could then question these leaders on their narrative of the body's disappearance! The fact that Matthew's Gospel survived the first generation of the Church as credible means the religious leaders **did** spread this illogical narrative, evidence that Christ rose!

Lesson: *The soldiers' narrative that Jesus' disciples stole His body when the soldiers slept was commonly reported by Israel's religious leaders, an illogical story on multiple levels, revealing that what actually occurred was the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ as He Himself had said would occur.*

Application: *(1) May we believe in Christ's resurrection based on even the story by His foes. (2) May we trust in Him for salvation (John 3:16) and hold to the bodily resurrection of Christ, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. (3) May we respect the credibility of Matthew's Gospel who left himself vulnerable to being tested by his readers on his claim of the illogical narrative that Israel's religious leaders still then promoted on the disappearance of Jesus' body.*