

## **Introduction**

Over the last few lessons, we have discussed the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. We walked through the details and the significance of the crucifixion, understanding that Matthew leads the readers to conclude for themselves that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ fulfills the Messianic prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Having paid for sins, having all the sins of the world for all time placed upon Himself, and also having died a physical death by yielding up His spirit, Matthew reports three things that happened at that moment indicating the significance of the death of Jesus the Messiah: the veil was torn, an earthquake took place, and a centurion understood the significance of the event exclaiming the true identity of Jesus. The tombs being opened is a result of the resurrection, not the death of Jesus, but still provides evidence of Jesus being the Messiah, Son of God.

## **The Burial of Jesus Christ – Matthew 27:57-66**

Matthew 27:57 – A man that we have not heard of appears on the scene, Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea. There are at least 12, maybe 14, different men named Joseph in the Bible. We all know the famous ones. But this Joseph takes a prominent role in the care of Jesus' body and the fulfillment of prophecy.

This person is only mentioned in one event, being the one who procured Jesus' body and buried Him in his tomb, but he is mentioned in all four accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).

When all four accounts record something, it is regarded as highly prominent in the history of the person of Jesus Christ.

What do we know about Joseph from this passage?

1. Rich man – This word is normally (24 of 28 uses) reserved for financially wealthy people unless the context directly indicates a different object or point (such as mercy or faith).
2. From Arimathea – In the Hebrew Scriptures, this town is called Ramah, a city assigned to the territory of Benjamin about 5 miles from Jerusalem.
3. Became a disciple of Jesus - A disciple is normally thought of as a learner, but in the Gospels, this word means more of a dedicated worker for the mission of Jesus Christ (Matthew 10:37-39).

In the other accounts, we learn a few more things.

Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50-51; John 19:38

Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man who was a member of the Sanhedrin, had become a secret disciple of Jesus. He worked on behalf of the kingdom but did so covertly because he was afraid of the Sanhedrin. This man was at Jesus' trial and the conviction. There is no record or any indication that he came to Jesus' defense; he was afraid. So now, after Jesus' death, he found his courage and went to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus.

Notice also that this was not days later but immediately after Jesus died, Joseph was ready.

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Matthew 27:58-61 – Strangely enough, Matthew, Mark, and Luke leave out an important detail. In John 19:39-41, we see that Nicodemus was also present, who was a Pharisee, but it is unknown if he is part of the Sanhedrin. They work together to prepare Jesus' body and place it in an unused tomb that belonged to Joseph.

It's strange that the New Testament fails to mention that this fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 53:4-9. I would opine that Isaiah was so well known that this fulfillment would have been apparent.

Why would Joseph have to ask Pilate for His body? When Rome executed someone, they further humiliated the dead by placing them in unmarked mass graves in a trash heap. This was an unusual request, and it was unusual that it was granted.

Two factors probably went into this Pilate's decision to grant Joseph's request:

1. Joseph was a rich man; perhaps a bribe was given, or Pilate was hoping for financial benefit at a later time.
2. Joseph was prominent in the Sanhedrin, so Pilate may have intended to have him as an inside man in the most influential group in Israel.

This tomb was a cave hewn out of solid rock. They would usually have a shelf for the body and a place for the head to rest. This was a new tomb and no one else was buried in it with Jesus. The tomb for a rich man would have been ornate, easy to find, and prominent in the area.

After burying Jesus, he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away. The stone was very large, flat on two sides, and rounded on the edges so it could be rolled into place.

The women were also there observing Joseph and Nicodemus.

Matthew 27:62-66 – this is unique to Matthew. The day after Jesus was buried, the Pharisees gathered together and made another request of Pilate. They noted that Jesus had told everybody that He would rise again three days after His death.

They were both observant and shrewd. If the body were to be stolen, then a claim would be made about Jesus being resurrected, and they would have a bigger problem on their hands. To prevent that, they requested that Rome seal the tomb and set a guard.

They wanted Pilate's seal and a Roman guard because that would have been more intimidating than a Jewish guard. Placing a Roman guard at the tomb would place a death sentence on anyone who would violate a tomb or try to steal the body.

Their fear, of course, was that His disciples might come and steal Him away and say to the people, "He has risen from the dead." Why would this make matters worse for them? They believed that Jesus was going to take away their position and power. If the disciples had the same plan, they supposed, then this would make their position very tenuous. If the people rebel against the Sanhedrin, then Pilate would have a problem; so Pilate gives them a guard.

Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how." This was not, "You have your own guard," but rather, "You have a guard granted." The word for *guard* here is

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“κουστωδία koustodia.” This is a transliteration of a Latin term, reaffirming that this was a Roman guard. The next phrase literally is, “Go make secure as you know.”

To secure the tomb, there would have been a seal put on it, as it is explained in the next phrase. This is not a sealant but rather a clay or wax disk with the Roman imperial seal attached to the stone with ropes. Breaking the seal would have been like declaring war upon the empire.

**The Burial of Jesus Christ – Importance**

Why is the account of the burial here?

To account for the resurrection, many began to say that He never really died, that Jesus merely swooned. The burial is vital because we have witnesses that Jesus was indeed dead and that His body was prepared by people whom the initial readers could question. The women were also there, providing further witness that Jesus was indeed dead and placed in the tomb. This point is so important that it becomes part of the Gospel presentation (Acts 2:29-36; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Why is the account of sealing the tomb and placing the guard here?

This was to keep the disciples from stealing His body and claiming that He had been resurrected. The tomb was hewn out of solid rock, sealed with a large stone, sealed with the Roman seal, and guarded by well-trained and well-equipped guards.

The Pharisees’ actions that were intended to prevent the claim that He had been resurrected ended up substantiating it.

The tomb was completely impenetrable. The only valid explanation is that a supernatural God enacted a resurrection that no one could have stopped.