

And when they were assembled with the elders

by William MacDonald

Transcript

“And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. “(Matt. 28:12, 13)

The Lord Jesus had no sooner risen from the dead when His enemies began to fabricate an alibi to explain away the miracle. The best falsehood that they could concoct at that time was that the disciples came by night and stole the body. (The swoon theory, suggesting that Jesus did not really die but only swooned, didn't surface till centuries later.) Unfortunately for the theft theory, as for all the other theories, it raises more questions than it answers. For example:

Why didn't the chief priests and elders question the original report of the guards concerning the empty tomb? They accepted it as true and hastened to devise an explanation as to how it had happened.

Why were the soldiers sleeping when they should have been on watch? The Roman penalty for sleeping on duty was death. Yet they were promised immunity from punishment. Why?

How could all the soldiers have fallen asleep at the same time? It taxes credulity to think they would all have risked death for a time of sleep.

How could the disciples have rolled the stone without waking the guards? The stone was large and could not be moved noiselessly.

How could the disciples have moved the stone at all? In a typical Herodian-style tomb, the stone was rolled till it fell down into a lower slot. It was easier to seal such a tomb than it was to open it. Besides, the tomb had been made as “sure” as the Roman authorities were able to make it.

Is it likely that the disciples, recently so fearful that they fled for their lives, would have the courage to face the Roman guards and rob the sepulcher? They would know that such an offense was punishable by a severe sentence.

If the soldiers were all asleep, how did they know that the disciples had stolen the body?

If the disciples stole the body, why did they take time to remove the graveclothes and fold the napkin? (Luke 24:12; John 20:6, 7). Why would the disciples want to steal the body?

There was no reason. Actually they were surprised and incredulous when they learned He had risen.

Finally, would the disciples, honorable men that they were, go forth and preach the resurrection at great personal risk if they knew it was a lie? Paul Little said, "Men do not die for what they know is a lie." They sincerely believed that Jesus has risen. The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed!

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