

Exegetical Notes, Matthew 28:11-15
“The Plan to Hide the Truth”

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Matthew 28:11-15

Verse 11

While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened.

- The women were on their way to accomplish the commission that Jesus had given them; to go and tell the disciples that he was risen and that he would meet them in Galilee. See Matthew 28:10.
- When the women first came to the tomb they found the guards rendered helpless by fear. See Matthew 28:4. These guards had been given a specific mission. They were to guard the tomb of Jesus so as to keep his followers from stealing the body and faking the resurrection. They had failed in this mission. This failure could have resulted in their death. So some of the soldiers, in order to cover themselves and point to others for the group’s failure, reported about the happenings to the chief priests.

Verse 12-13

When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.”

- The chief priests quickly consulted after they heard the report of the guards and devised a damage control plan:
 - + First, they agreed to bribe the guards with a large financial reward.
 - + Second, the guards were to take blame for the failure by claiming that they had fallen asleep while on duty.
 - + Third, the story that the guards were to tell was to ignore the actual circumstances of the resurrection and to report that Jesus’ disciples had come at night, crept past the sleeping guards, noiselessly rolled

- back the huge stone that sealed the entrance to the tomb, and stolen the body of Jesus.
- The chief priests promised to take care of any issues related to the soldiers' failure while on duty, a crime punishable by death, if the governor heard about it and wanted to act against the derelict soldiers. This was what the soldiers hoped to gain by going to the chief priests in the first place.

Verse 15

So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

- The soldiers had nothing to lose and everything to gain by cooperating with the chief priests. Not only were they saved from potential execution for dereliction of duty but they were rewarded financially for cooperating with the priests.
- To this very day, as recently as Sunday, March 4, 2007, this tale is still told, usually for the same reasons, financial gain and/or self-protection. In the case of the soldiers, both of these reasons were operative. The chief priests lied about the circumstances and circulated this false report to protect themselves. If Jesus rose from the dead, he was Israel's Messiah and the chief priests had led the case for his crucifixion.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *The Plan to Hide the Truth*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)