

**Exegetical Notes, Matthew 27:57-66**  
**“Death Had Won”**

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**Matthew 27:57-66**

**Verse 57**

*As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus.*

- “As evening approached” marks the end of what had been happening (the crucifixion) and the beginning of what is about to happen (the resurrection). The phrase indicates that something new is about to break on the scene.
- Matthew introduces a new character into the story, Joseph of Arimathea, at this crucial juncture. Joseph, Matthew tells us, is rich and a disciple of Jesus. Luke adds that Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin. We know nothing else about this person from the Bible although great tradition has been built around him by the church.
- Arimathea is a village about 20 miles northwest of Jerusalem.

**Verse 58**

*Going to Pilate, he asked for the Jesus’ body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him.*

- Mark points out that it was a bold act to ask for Jesus’ body. Normally the remains of criminals were left unburied or claimed by some near relative. However, we know from history that it was considered benevolent for wealthy Jews to bury the bodies of persons crucified by Roman authority and was considered an act of rebellion against Rome. Joseph performed this service for Jesus because he was a disciple.

### **Verse 59-60**

***Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.***

- Joseph had had a tomb cut from rock for his own burial. This tomb was awaiting use. It had not been used before. Joseph took Jesus' body and put it in his own tomb wrapped in the grave clothes he had purchased for himself. He sealed the tomb with a large stone and departed without properly preparing Jesus' body for burial. Mark notes that Joseph's haste was due to the Passover's beginning.
- It is important to note that Jesus' body was not placed in an unmarked grave, nor was his body put in a sarcophagus. Jesus' body was put in a rich man's tomb. It was Joseph's expensive, new tomb. The entire community would have known it.
- It is also important to note the trouble to which Joseph went to seal the tomb.

### **Verse 61**

***Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.***

- These women appear a number of times in the story of the resurrection. They serve the purpose of witnessing the significant events. In Jewish law, two witnesses are required to prove any accusation or point. There are always at least two women present to verify the facts. In this case, they witness the placing of Jesus' body in Joseph's tomb. They would have been able to lead others to the place where Jesus' body had been put. They knew the tomb where Jesus' body was placed.

### **Verse 62-64**

***The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priest and the Pharisees went to Pilate. "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first."***

- The Jewish leaders must have seemed very tedious to Pilate, the Roman governor. After having pressed the issue of Jesus' execution, they are now worried about the stealing of his body. They are concerned that someone will steal the body and then tell the people

that Jesus arose from the dead. Pilate must have wondered who would believe such a tale. The Jewish leaders wanted a guard posted at the tomb to prevent this from happening.

- It is interesting to note that they address Pilate as “Kyrie,” Lord, but Jesus they call an “imposter, a fraud, or a deceiver.”

### **Verse 65-66**

***“Take a guard,” Pilate answered. “Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.” So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.***

- In order to make sure that there is no deception worked on the people, the Jewish leaders do two specific things. First they put a seal on the tomb. They would have taken a piece of rope and attached it over the crack between the stone and the outside wall of the tomb with wax. If the stone was moved in any way, this seal would have broken and indicated that the tomb had been entered. Second, they posted a detachment of Roman soldiers at the entrance of the tomb to be certain that no one entered it. In essence, they made sure that no one could steal the body of Jesus from the tomb and so work a deception. Note that it is not Joseph who takes these precautions, nor the disciples of Jesus, but Jesus’ enemies. Jesus’ enemies make sure that no one can steal his body and so deceive the world about his resurrection.
- The tomb is hewn out of solid rock. There was only one entrance and it was blocked by a huge rock and sealed and guarded. Inside are the remains of Jesus, dead and wrapped in only a linen burial cloth. This is the scene as the old order passes and the new day dawns.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Death Had Won*. 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*.)