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The Guard at the Tomb of Jesus
Matthew 27:61-66; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55-56
Shabbat on the sixteenth of Nisan

The guard at the tomb of Jesus DIG: What was significant about Psalm 92 being sung on that particular Shabbat? What two extremely unusual things happened that Sabbath? What was the importance of the Roman seal on the tomb of Messiah? What would it cost the Roman guards if Jesus "escaped?" How did the precautions of Annas inadvertently lend more validity to the claims of the apostles that Jesus had risen, than if none had been taken at all?

REFLECT: When has Jesus surprised you? What caught you off your guard? Was it a good surprise or an unpleasant one? What did you learn? Did the lesson stick?



Singing at the Temple: The start and end of **Shabbat** was announced by a trumpet blast from the highest point of the Royal Stoa on the southwest corner of the Temple Mount. **From the Talmund Tractate *thamid* we know exactly which Psalm would have been sung on which day of the week in connection with the daily burnt offering in the Temple.** Fifteen semicircular steps led from the Court of the Women, through the Nicanor Gate and into the Court

of the Gentiles. At the great feasts these magnificent steps served as a podium for the choir and the orchestra. On **the Sabbath** day of rest, they sang **a psalm, a song for Shabbat**.

It is good to give thanks to ADONAI and sing praises to honor Your name, Elyon, Most High, to tell in the morning about your faithfulness, to the music of a ten-stringed [harp] and a lute, with the melody sounding on a lyre. For, ADONAI, what You do makes me happy; I take joy in what Your hands have made. How great are Your deeds, ADONAI! How very deep Your thoughts! Stupid people can't know, fools don't understand, that when the wicked sprout like grass, and all who do evil prosper, it is so that they can be eternally destroyed, while You, ADONAI are exalted forever. For Your enemies, ADONAI, Your enemies will perish; all evildoers will be scattered. But You have given me the strength of a wild bull; You anoint me with fresh olive oil. My eyes have gazed with pleasure on my enemies' ruin, my ears have delighted in the fall of my foes. The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon. Planted in the house of ADONAI, they will flourish in the courtyards of our God. Even in old age they will be victorious, still full of sap, still bearing fruit, proclaiming that ADONAI is upright, my Rock, in whom there is no wrong (Psalm 92:1-15 CJB).[1639]

Stage 31 – The Preparation for the Embalming: **The women** who saw where **the body** of **Jesus was laid**, then prepared the materials for embalming. Remarkably, **Mary Magdalene** remained throughout the whole ordeal, until it was over, the lights were turned off and everyone else had gone home (**to see link click Eg – Mary Magdalene Supported Jesus Out of Her Own Means**). **And the other Mary, the mother of** James the Lesser and **Joseph** was also **sitting there opposite the tomb,** beginning the seven days of mourning that start at the burial of a loved one. **They** had **followed Joseph of Arimathea and saw where He was laid. The** two **women had come with Yeshua from Galilee.** If someone were going to make up this burial account they would not have used **women** in the story because in Jewish culture **women** were not considered reliable witnesses. **Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment (Mattityahu 27:57, 61; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55-56).**

Around the Temple, thousands of lamps were already being lit in anticipation of what was to be a doubly great **Shabbat**. The final sacrifice of the day was almost

finished and men carrying sacrificial lambs seemed to be cascading down the rich marble steps. In an inner room, **Annas** sat in an informal discussion with other **Sadducees** who had seen **Jesus** die.

Annas was old and wise and **he** listened to the ranking Sadducees as **they** told **him** about the horrific actions of **Joseph** and **Nicodemus**. But **the old man** couldn't care less. The heresies of a few members of the Great Sanhedrin were matters that **he** had witnessed again and again over a span of many years. In **his** time, **Annas** had seen new schools of rabbinical teaching become fashionable, fade and die. And **he** had seen the crowds rush to each new religious philosopher, bowing before **him** as though **God Himself** had sent **him**.

He did not believe this was any kind of new movement. **Joseph** and **Nicodemus** would soon come back to **their** senses. **They** would return to the Temple, contrite, or **they** would be challenged in a formal session of the Great Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court of the Land, and charged with promoting heretical doctrine. **They** would acknowledge **their** rebellion and be excommunicated (see **Gt – Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind: Three degrees of excommunication**), or deny it and keep **their** places among **their** honored fellows.

What worried **Annas** was that **the mock Messiah** had said, in **His** teachings . . . that **He** would rise again in three days. Now that **He** was dead, there was one more chore to do. The high priests would have to go to Pontius Pilate in the morning to ask for guards to be posted over the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea so that his scheming followers could not come and steal the body and later claim that **He** had risen from the dead.

So, when **his** son-in-law and the others had concluded their horrifying story of dishonor, **Annas** wet **his** aged lips and advised them to be more concerned with the promise of **the troublemaking Rabbi** to resurrect **Himself** from **the dead**. **The high priests** had not thought of this, and at once **they** began to murmur at the same time trying to think of what to do. But **Annas** held up **his** hand and quieted **them** all, and told **them** to delegate a committee to go **Pilate** at the praetorium and, if possible, have **him** post a Roman guard over the tomb. **Caiaphas** praised **his father-in-law** as **a man** of great wisdom.[1640]



Stage 32 – The Sealing of the Tomb: The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the Sadducees and the Pharisees went to Pilate. It was not only **the Sabbath**, but also a high holy day **(Matthew 27:62)**. Two extremely unusual things happened that day. First, it was highly unusual for Jewish **religious leaders** to meet with a pagan, secular ruler on any Sabbath, let alone on such a high **Sabbath**. Even more amazing **they** seem to have actually gone into **Pilate's** council chambers in the praetorium. The day before, **they** had been careful not to go into the praetorium at all, but rather sent **Jesus** inside to see **Pilate**. In order to speak to **the Jewish religious leaders**, **Pilate** had to come out on the porch. But after **His** death, those **pious leaders** were so desperate to get the encounter with **the pretender** (in **their** minds) over and done with that **they** even violated **the Sabbath**! Since **they** had broken all of **their** own laws (see **Lh – The Laws of the Great Sanhedrin Regarding Trails**), **they** didn't hesitate to violate **the Sabbath** for **their** own wicked purposes. Secondly, **the Sadducees and the Pharisees** were strong theological opponents. The Bible records only one other time that those two groups cooperating, and in both instances their only common motivation was the hated of **the Nazarene**.

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 talmidim 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 (Matthew 27:63-64).** The implication was the **Jesus'** claim to kingship would then be verified in the eyes of the gullible people and, though dead, **He** would become an even **worse** threat to Rome than before. **They** were saying, in effect, "If the masses hailed **Him** as their **Messiah** and **King** on **His** entry into Yerushalayim just a few days ago, think how much more they will acclaim **Him** as their **King** if they are led to believe **He** has

conquered death and **risen from the dead**. Even though the idea is preposterous, if they really believe **He** is alive, they will also believe Rome has no power over **Him** and that **He** is invincible. Then you will really have an uprising on your hands."[1641]

It seems pretty ironic that those opposed to **Yeshua** believed more strongly in **His** possible resurrection that were **His** own **apostles**. While **the Sadducees and Pharisees** didn't personally believe in that **Jesus** was **the Messiah**, they nevertheless were fearful that somehow **His** words would come true.

It is intriguing that in some later passages of the Talmud, Yeshua, or as they call Him there, Ben Stada, later identified as Ben Pandira (Jesus) is accused of deceiving Isra'el through some magic that He supposedly **learned in Egypt (Tractate Shabbat XI.15; Shabbat 13d). The Talmud actually confirms that Yeshua worked miracles in Isra'el (and that His family visited Egypt at one point) but merely attributes those miracles not to ADONAI to the Adversary (Babylonian Talmud: Sanhedrin 67).** With the same kind of logic, those first-century religious leaders in Isra'el speculated that some of **Yeshua's talmidim [might] come and steal the body** as **their** ultimate **deception**. They couldn't take the chance in the Jewish community and **Pilate** certainly didn't want any more problems with the Jews.[1642]

Pilate said to them, "Take a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how." And, no doubt pleased with **themselves** for once again making the powerful Roman **governor** bow to **their** demands, **they went and made the tomb secure. They took along a** Roman **guard** (temporarily in the service of the Jewish religious leaders) **and set** the Roman **seal** pressed into wax **on the stone (Mattityahu 27:65-66). The seal** was probably furnished by **Pilate** and gave the warning that **the tomb** was under Roman law, and to break the **seal** was punishable by death. That should have been the end of it. **The renegade Rabbi** was **dead**. The Great Sanhedrin and Rome could rest easy. The Nazarene's **talmidim** had seemingly scattered to the four corners of the earth. **They** had proven **themselves** timid and useless.

Pilate was also relieved. **He** could go back to Caesarea to govern in peace without the constant meddling from **the Sanhedrin** and **the Jews**. **He** was sick of **their** problems.

Jerusalem must have had a wide range of emotions that **Shabbat** of the Passover

week. There certainly was incredible joy on the part of the hundreds of thousands of Jewish pilgrims who filled the City of David for that most holy week. The Seder was celebrated with family and friends, in addition to the delightful services at the Holy Temple. Some were aware of the controversial arrest and crucifixion of **the maverick Rabbi from Galilee**. But most were ignorant or unconcerned because they had their own spiritual responsibilities to be concerned with. The tranquil spirit of **Shabbat on the sixteenth of Nisan** saturated Yerushalayim, and, appropriately, **Messiah's** body rested **in the tomb** on that day of rest.

Kefa, however, tells us that between **Jesus'** death on the cross and **His** resurrection, our **Lord** was **put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit. He** was spiritually **alive**, but physically dead. Sometime during those three days **He went and preached to the spirits in prison (First Peter 3:18-19)**, those **He had kept in gloomy dungeons lower than sh'ol** in *tartarus* (see my commentary on **Jude Ak – The Angels Did Not Keep Their Positions of Authority**).

Rabbi Sha'ul mentions the same thing when **Messiah descended into the low, earthly regions of sh'ol (Ephesians 4:9).** The TaNaKh refers to the place of **the dead** as **sh'ol (Deuteronomy 32:22; Job 26:6; Psalm 16:10)**. One part of **sh'ol** was a place of torment and agony, occupied by **the** unrighteous **dead** and by the demons **who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built (First Peter 3:20a).** However, another part of **sh'ol** was a place of contentment and rest, inhabited by **the righteous dead** who had put **their** faith in **God**. **Abraham's side** (Luke 16:22) was a common name for sh'ol at the time of **Messiah**. **They** resided there until **Yeshua** had paid for their sins on the cross. Then, after declaring victory over those very **demons, the Lord of Life** liberated the godly captives and led them to heaven **when He ascended on high (Ephesians 4:8).** Among those who went with **Him** were Adam, Eve, Abel, Seth, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah and all **the righteous of the TaNaKh** before the cross, including those mentioned in the hall of faith in the book of **Hebrews** (see my commentary on **Hebrews Cl – The Hall of Faith**).

Little did the world know that even those extreme measures by **Pilate** and the Great Sanhedrin would not be able to prevent the events of the third day that was quickly approaching. In fact, those precautions would actually lend more validity to the claims of the apostles that **He** had risen, than if none had been taken at all. The stage was set for **Yeshua** to conquer our greatest enemy – **death** itself.[1643]