

The Burial

Three Days

The Jews broke many laws during the trials and crucifixion of Jesus but chose to hold to the burial laws, not wanting to defile the land during the time of a feast. They wanted the dead buried before sundown. When Jesus died, it was already evening, and the sun would set soon. The reason for their haste is in Deuteronomy 21:22-23. *"If a man has committed a sin worthy of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance."*

Pilate and Herod found no guilt in Jesus but condemned Him to death to satisfy the Jewish mob. The Jews knew that if the body was left on the cross overnight, it would defile the land, make them all unclean, and they would be unable to participate in the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This eight-day feast began with Passover and continued for the next seven days. The Romans would only accommodate proper burial for a Roman citizen, therefore Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for Jesus' body. *"Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away"* (Matthew 27:58-60).

Jesus had openly said that He would rise the third day (Matthew 16:21, 17:23; Luke 18:31-33). The Jews asked Pilate to, *"Give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first."* (Matthew 27:64). Pilate gave his permission, *"Go, make it as secure as you know how"* (Matthew 27:65-66). Securing an entrance usually meant placing ropes across the door or opening and securing the rope's ends with cement. A seal, image, was pressed into the wet cement, and any movement would break the seal. They also placed a guard on duty to watch for any intruders.

The burial provided several assurances to statements in the gospel. First and most important, burial guaranteed the death of the one to be buried. In this case, Pilate wanted to be sure Jesus was dead before he gave the body to Joseph (Mark 15:44-45). In like manner, to be buried in the water of baptism means death has taken place. To turn away from sin, to be separated from the guilt of sin, is dying to sin. Jesus died when He yielded to the people who crucified Him, and He separated His spirit from His earthly body. We die to sin when we turn from sin and yield to the one burying us in baptism (Romans 6:3-11).

God, through the prophet, said, *"I will **sprinkle** clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols"* (Ezekiel 36:25). In both the Old and New Testaments, the term sprinkle refers to the act of sanctification, setting apart, or separating for the purpose of making the one or thing separated holy. The Hebrew writer says, *"Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts **sprinkled clean** from an evil conscience and our **bodies washed** with pure water"* (Hebrews 10:22). The sprinkling and washing is the baptism John spoke of in Mark 1:8 and Matthew 3:14. Paul calls it *"a baptism into the death of Christ Jesus"* (Romans 6:3). Paul further says that the removal of the guilt of sin, the cutting off, of sin from a person occurs in the death and burial of baptism (Colossians 2:11-12).

Some today refuse baptism, saying it is a work, and works can save no one. They quote Ephesians 2:8-9, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."* But, how much work did Christ do to place Himself on the cross or into the tomb? **None!** He submitted to those who performed the work. It is the same in baptism. The one being baptized submits to Jesus, who commands it and to the one doing the baptizing. Outside of ensuring the physical safety of the one being baptized, it is God who does the work by removing the guilt of sins from the individual. God gave His Son to die, God gave the Holy Spirit to teach us, and God does the work. To us, he freely gives the gift of life. Jesus taught His disciples, *"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it"* (Luke 9:23-24).

Have you died to sin that you may live for Christ?