

The Tomb Guards are Bribed to Lie

Here's a full breakdown of **Matthew 28:11–15** ("The Tomb Guards are Bribed to Lie"):



Historical-Cultural Context

- **Roman Guard (κουστωδία, koustōdia):** Likely a detachment of Roman soldiers (though some argue Temple guards). Falling asleep on duty was punishable by death under Roman military law.
- **Chief Priests & Elders:** These were Sadducean leaders of the Sanhedrin. They had both political and religious motives to suppress the resurrection story.
- **Governor (Pilate):** Soldiers would normally face severe consequences if a body disappeared under their watch. Hence, the priests' assurance, "We will keep you out of trouble," shows their political influence.



Narrative Function in Matthew

- Matthew alone records this episode.
- It functions as a **counter-apologetic**: early Jewish claims explained away the empty tomb as grave robbery (cf. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 108).
- Matthew is preemptively addressing that controversy, showing it as the result of bribery and deceit.
- The phrase **"to this day"** (ἄχρι τῆς σήμερον ἡμέρας) suggests Matthew's community was still confronting this rumor decades later.



Greek Word Insights

- **"Large sum of money" (ἀργύρια ἱκανά):** literally "sufficient silver pieces," recalling Judas' thirty silver coins (MT 26:15). Both betrayals are fueled by silver.
- **"Say" (εἶπατε):** a command; emphasizes deliberate fabrication.
- **"We will appease him" (πείσομεν):** persuasion, not legal argument—suggests bribery or political pressure on Pilate.
- **"Spread" (διεφημίσθη):** "noised abroad," highlighting how quickly stories can shape public opinion.



Theological Implications

1. **Truth vs. Falsehood:** Matthew contrasts angelic truth ("He is risen!") with human deception ("They stole the body").
2. **Corruption of Leaders:** The same priests who paid Judas now pay soldiers, showing systemic rejection of Jesus.
3. **Fulfilled Psalm Imagery:** Psalm 2 portrays rulers conspiring against the Lord's Anointed; here, priests conspire against the Risen One.
4. **Empty Tomb Verified:** Ironically, the leaders confirm the tomb was empty—they never denied the missing body, only invented a cover story.
5. **Witness Reliability:** Roman guards—trained and armed—make poor candidates for a grave-robbery excuse. The story exposes its own implausibility.



Parallel Themes

- Judas' betrayal (money + falsehood).
- Sanhedrin's corruption (trial, bribery, suppression).
- Contrast with disciples' truth proclamation (28:16–20).