

Although all four Biblical gospels report Jesus' burial by Joseph of Arimathea (**Matthew 27:57-61; Mark 15:42:47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42**), there are some skeptics and critics, such as the currently prominent agnostic Biblical "scholar" Bart Ehrman, who deny this fact. Experts point out that the more independent witnesses reports of an event that are available, the more likely the complete, composite report is true. Matthew and John were disciples of Jesus at the time of his execution, and its aftermath. So was Peter, who used Mark as his writer of the second Biblical gospel. Luke was familiar with **"eyewitness reports circulating . . . from the early disciples,"** and says, **"having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also decided to write an accurate account"** (**Luke 1:1-3 NLT**). So Luke's gospel was based on accurate eyewitness accounts.



Are the gospel accounts of the death and burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea accurate?

"There came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph"—Matthew 27:57 NIV

“Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders”—John 19:38 NIV

Joseph was a wealthy, secret disciple of Jesus. His wealth allowed him to own a newly-cut tomb, which happened to be available for Jesus' burial after his unexpected death.

“Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the council, a good and upright man, who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea, and he himself was waiting for the kingdom of God”—Luke 23:50,51 NIV

“Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council”—Mark 15:42 NIV

Joseph of Arimathea was **“a prominent member”** of the 71 member Jewish Sanhedrin High Court **“Council”**, but had opposed their condemnation of Jesus. This, and the fact that **“the whole Sanhedrin . . . They all condemned him to death” (Mark 14:55,64 NIV)**, proves that Joseph of Arimathea was not present at the hastily convened, middle of the night, meeting of the Sanhedrin.

“ . . . went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body”—Mark 15:42 NIV

Joseph's bold, courageous action here contrasts sharply with his formerly secret discipleship.

“Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus . . . He was accompanied by Nicodemu, the man who had earlier visited Jesus at night”—John 19:38,39 NIV

Who was Nicodemus?—**“Nicodemus, who was a member of the Jewish ruling council” (John 3:1 NIV)**

“Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus had already died. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the

centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph”—Mark 15:44,45 NIV

Crucifixion victims often survived for days before dying, because the Romans usually let criminals stay on their crosses for two or three days until they died, and then vultures and/or wild animals would eat them, or they would rot. Jesus died on the cross in only 3-6 hours, which was very unusual, and this naturally surprised Pilate.

“With Pilate’s permission, he came and took the body away”—John 19:38 NIV

Without official permission, people could take the bodies of their executed family members/friends before they died, and revive them. A simple burial was more common in Palestine because of Jewish scruples about corpses. Pilate was sensitive to the Jews’ Biblical objections to leaving a dead **“body hanging on [a] pole overnight” (Deuteronomy 21:22,23 NIV)**. What is also interesting is that Pilate, after the centurion in charge of the crucifixion certified Jesus’ death, gave Joseph Jesus’ body without demanding the bribe that families sometimes had to pay to retrieve the bodies of their loved ones. Additionally, the release of the body of someone condemned for high treason, and especially to someone who wasn’t a close relative was very unusual. Joseph’s prominence and influential status may be why he was granted permission by Pilate to give Jesus a proper burial. This also may support what the gospels report about Pilate in the trial scenes as finding Jesus and his followers harmless to Roman rule. Otherwise, he probably wouldn’t have released Jesus’ body to his followers.

“So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb”—Mark 15:46 NIV

“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”—Matthew 27:60 NIV

All four gospel accounts report that Joseph of Arimathea buried Jesus' body. The entry to the tomb was blocked by the **“big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb”**. The next morning, **“the chief priests and Pharisees”** were given permission by Pilate to **“take a guard”** and **“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”** (**Matthew 27:62,65,66 NIV**). The tomb was not disturbed at that point, because these opposers of Jesus would surely have claimed his disciples **“came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep,”** as they bribed **“the guards”** to say the next day, after the stone was rolled away and the tomb empty, while the guards were guarding the tomb (**Matthew 28:11-15 NIV**).

“At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no had ever been laid . . . they laid Jesus there”—John 19:41,42 NIV

John's account additionally reports that Joseph was accompanied by Nicodemus, another member of the Sanhedrin, in burying Jesus' body. However, Bart Ehrman claims **“the whole Sanhedrin”** (**Mark 14:65 NIV**) buried Jesus' body, based primarily on:

“The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus . . . Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb”—Acts 13:27-29 NIV

Ehrman's view is contradicted by the four gospel accounts, and this account in Acts certainly doesn't support his view—unless it is taken out of context, in isolation from the rest of the scriptures. The fact is that two members of the Sanhedrin, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, did bury Jesus' body, so, in a sense, the Sanhedrin did bury Jesus' body in a tomb. Thus, there is no contradiction between **Acts 13:27-29** and the four gospels regarding Jesus' burial.

Jesus' burial by Joseph of Arimathea is not contradicted by any external evidence, and the internal evidence provides sound proof of the Bible's authenticity.