



Christian Questions

TALK RADIO WITH A PURPOSE

You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. Jeremiah 29:13

Dear Denston,

Thank you for writing us at Christian Questions Radio. You wanted to know the meaning of Matthew 27:52-53. "And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints [holy ones] which slept arose, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." (KJV)

In the preceding verse, Matthew 27:51, we learn that Jesus' death was coincident with an earthquake of significant magnitude. Verse 52 explains the results as it impacted the tombs near the city. "The graves were opened; and many bodies of the holy ones which slept arose." If we stop right here, there is no problem. The word "arose" does not mean these people came back to life. In fact, when describing the resurrection of persons that Jesus brought back from the dead -- the son of the widow of Nain, or Lazarus, or later Tabitha by Peter -- it never says their "body" arose.

Luke 7:15 -- "He that was dead sat up."

John 11:44 -- "And he that was dead came forth."

Acts 9:41 -- "He ... lifted her up, and ... presented her alive."

But in the case of Matthew 27:51, there was no resurrection. Not "they came forth," not "they rose," but simply "many bodies of the saints ... arose." For the word "arose," the Kingdom Interlinear says, "were raised up." The Wilson Diaglott says, "were raised." The New American Standard says, "were raised." The text does not say "arose" -- as the King James Version does. It is not as though the dead ones decided to stand up. It was not voluntary. It is something that happened to the bodies. They were raised up by the force of the earthquake.

It is the next verse that is problematic. "And came out of the graves after his resurrection, into the holy city, and appeared unto many." (The King James "they went" is not in the original.) So who or what "came out of the graves after [Jesus'] resurrection"? The bodies? Something is wrong with the text as it stands. If it referred to an actual re-enlivening, as with Lazarus, then why did they linger there in the graveyard until the

third day when Jesus was raised? If they were truly raised to life, they would not have stayed in the graves for parts of three days.

Probably what Matthew penned in Hebrew was that on Sunday morning, after the Sabbath was over, passers-by who travelled





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through the area into the city to resume normal business, observed the bodies having been thrown up from the broken tombs, went into the city, and explained to many what they had seen.

The ones raised are called saints, "holy ones." But notice that not all of these "holy ones" were raised up. ("Many bodies" -- but not all of them) That would be natural for an earthquake that disrupted the tombs to affect many of them, but not necessarily all of them -- whereas if it were a miracle to benefit these "holy ones," it would seem unexplained why all the holy ones were not chosen for this favor. It is interesting to note that the dead ones raised are probably called "holy ones" because they were buried near the city, and, traditionally, it was a mark of piety to endeavor to have a burial place as near as possible to the city.

Therefore, a better translation of Matthew 27:52 would be, "Tombs were shook open; many bodies of those buried there were tossed upright. In this posture they projected from the graves and were seen by many who passed by the place on the way back to the city."

In other words, this was not any type of resuscitation or resurrection. It was just a disturbance of the graves caused by the earthquake in Verse 51. The bodies did not appear to many on their way to the city...it was the other way around. People on the way into the city observed the disturbed graves.

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Sincerely,

Christian Questions Radio

