

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

On July 28, 2013, we received the following comment and inquiry:

“Do you have a thought on Matthew 27:52 and 53? As a Witness I never saw this.”

To the author, thank you for your email. It is not our intention to answer every question one may have about the Bible. We like to focus our ministry on matters of sonship with God, the brotherhood of man, and the heavenly hope. However, the scriptures you refer to have a bearing on things heavenly so we will provide our thoughts.

Let's look at the scriptures you refer to in context. Here is what they state:

“Again Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and yielded up [his] spirit. And, look! the curtain of the sanctuary was rent in two, from top to bottom, and the earth quaked, and the rock-masses were split. And the memorial tombs were opened and many bodies of the holy ones that had fallen asleep were raised up, (and persons, coming out from among the memorial tombs after his being raised up, entered into the holy city,) and they became visible to many people. But the army officer and those with him watching over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things happening, grew very much afraid, saying: “Certainly this was God’s Son.”
Matthew 27:50-54

We can see how these verses raise many perplexing questions. They seem to indicate that immediately after Jesus’ death, there was a physical resurrection of people who walked out of the grave sites and into Jerusalem, and that many people saw these walking resurrected ones. But taking this in context with the rest of the Christian writings, we know that is not what is being conveyed.

First, we can assume that the resurrections referred to occurred, not at the time and location of Jesus’ death, but at the memorial tombs because they could not occur until after Jesus had been resurrected.

“[T]hat the Christ was to suffer and, **as the first to be resurrected from the dead**, he was going to publish light both to this people and to the nations.” – ***Acts 26:23***

Second, the resurrection of the dead is a raising to spiritual life.

“So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised up in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised up in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised up in power. **It is sown a physical body, it is raised up a spiritual body.** If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual one.” – ***1 Corinthians 15:42-44***

And third, we know Jerusalem was not considered to be a ‘holy city.’

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, **the killer of the prophets and stoner of those sent forth to her**,—how often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks together under her wings! But you people did not want it. Look! **Your house is abandoned to you.**” – *Matthew 23:37-38*

Based on these conclusions, we will share with you what we believe the verses are conveying.

It appears that the writer is giving some information and then supplementing that information with other events that are used to explain the impact of the original event. Specifically, the writer is speaking about Jesus’ death and explains that an earthquake occurred shortly after he expired. The writer then adds some supplemental information when he explains the **later-discovered impact** the earthquake had, i.e., it caused some memorial tombs to split open. This event is then used as part of the writer’s evidence confirming that a mass resurrection took place. Then the writer returns to his original event, the death of Jesus, when he describes how the army officer, standing near Jesus at his death, reacted to the earthquake.

Hence, we believe the writer is telling us that Jesus’ **resurrection** was followed by a resurrection of those who were sleeping in death up until that time, possible as far back as the days of Adam. When the verse says “they became visible,” it reminds us of the body Jesus had when he was resurrected – the body was invisible, but it could become visible at will. Then those who were resurrected eventually entered into the ‘holy city’ **in heaven**, New Jerusalem (*Revelation 21:2*), though, of course, that part was conveyed to the writer in some manner other than by sight, since human eyes could not have seen this event. It is much like what Paul wrote when he said ‘Christ entered into a holy place to appear before the person of God.’ (*Hebrews 9:24*) Paul did not witness this event, but it was made known to him in some other manner. And finally, before the resurrected ones ascended to heaven, many people were granted a glimpse of this mass resurrection as a witness that such a resurrection had occurred. Matthew made a written record of it.

We want to emphasize that this is how we understand these verses. There may be other ways to understand them and, if they are consistent with the rest of the Christian writings, would be just as much a possibility, and equally as valid, as is our understanding. Whatever its true and actual meaning, this is an interesting scriptural reference that will likely give rise to much conversation and conjecture until the matters are further revealed to mankind either during our earthly sojourn or when we attain to our places in heaven.

“Elaia Luchnia”
