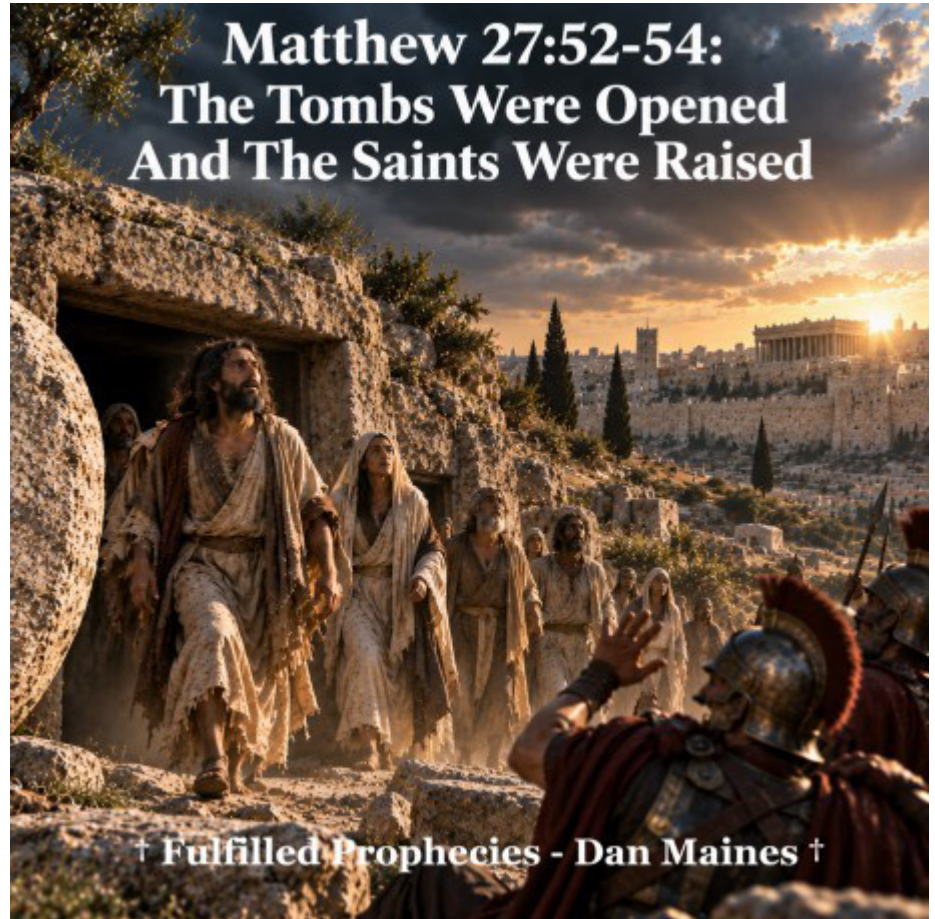


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**Matthew 27:52-54:
The Tombs Were
Opened And The
Saints Were
Raised**



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† Matthew records one of the most remarkable events surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus. The earth shook, rocks split, tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had died were raised.

† This wasn't an insignificant detail added to the crucifixion account. God was showing that the death and resurrection of Christ had broken the power of death and opened the way to

resurrection life. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

† These saints weren't the final resurrection of all the dead. Their appearance was a visible sign pointing forward to the resurrection work that Christ would complete. Jesus was the firstfruits, and those who belonged to Him would follow in their appointed order. (1 Corinthians 15:20-23)

† Matthew also carefully tells us that these saints came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection. Christ remained first in resurrection priority, and everything that followed depended upon His victory.

Matthew 27:52-54

Also the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection, they entered the holy city and appeared to many. Now as for the centurion and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the other things that were happening, they became extremely frightened and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

† Notice the sequence. The tombs were opened, the saints were raised, and they came out after Christ's resurrection. Jesus wasn't following them out of death, they were following Him. (1 Corinthians 15:20)

† These were identified as saints, people who belonged to God and had died before these events. Their appearance in Jerusalem provided visible testimony that something extraordinary had happened through Christ's death and resurrection. (Romans 1:4)

† Matthew doesn't tell us that every dead person was raised. He specifically says many bodies of the saints were raised. This distinguishes this event from the broader resurrection and judgment described elsewhere in Scripture. (John 5:28-29)

† The centurion and those with him saw the earthquake and the events surrounding Jesus' death and confessed, Truly this was the Son of God. Creation itself was testifying that this wasn't an ordinary death. (Matthew 27:54)

Matthew 28:5-7

And the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see Him; behold, I have told you."

† Everything begins with Christ's own resurrection. The empty tomb declared that death couldn't hold Him. (Acts 2:24)

† Matthew 27 specifically places the saints' emergence from their tombs after His resurrection. Christ's victory came first, then came the visible evidence of resurrection power.

† Jesus had repeatedly told His disciples that He would be killed and raised. His resurrection proved that His words concerning the resurrection of others could also be trusted. (Matthew 16:21)

1 Corinthians 15:20-23

But the fact is, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man death came, by a Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming,

† Paul gives us the order. Christ is the firstfruits. Resurrection doesn't begin independently of Him, it flows from Him.

† The saints appearing in Jerusalem didn't replace the resurrection that was still ahead when Paul wrote Corinthians. Paul still said those who belonged to Christ would be made alive at His coming. (1 Corinthians 15:23)

† This is important because Matthew 27 and 1 Corinthians 15 don't contradict each other. Matthew records a miraculous resurrection sign following Christ's resurrection, while Paul describes the larger resurrection hope that was approaching for God's people. (Romans 13:11-12)

† Firstfruits also carries the idea of a harvest that follows. Christ's resurrection guaranteed the harvest. The opened tombs

in Matthew dramatically showed that His victory over death had already begun to produce results. (James 1:18)

Daniel 12:1-2

Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.

† Daniel connected resurrection with an unparalleled time of trouble involving his people. Jesus used this same language when describing the coming judgment upon that first-century generation. (Matthew 24:21, 34)

† Daniel wasn't shown a resurrection disconnected from Israel's covenant history. Resurrection, deliverance, judgment, and the time of unparalleled trouble appear together.

† Matthew 27 occurred at the beginning of the period in which Christ's death and resurrection established the victory that would reach its covenantal completion in the judgment of that generation. (Matthew 24:34)

† The saints raised in Matthew 27 therefore fit within the developing resurrection story, but Matthew never says that their appearance was the complete fulfillment of Daniel 12.

John 5:25-29

Truly, truly, I say to you, a time is coming and even now has arrived, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this; for a time is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come out: those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the bad deeds to a resurrection of

judgment.

† Before the cross Jesus had already announced that resurrection life was centered in Him. The dead would hear the voice of the Son of God and live.

† Jesus connected resurrection with His authority to judge. Resurrection and judgment weren't unrelated doctrines, they were parts of the same redemptive work. (John 5:27-29)

† Matthew's opened tombs gave a dramatic physical demonstration that Jesus truly possessed authority over death. Death didn't have the final word, Christ did.

† Jesus spoke of an hour that was coming. The New Testament writers later described the completion of their salvation as drawing near, not thousands of years away from them. (Romans 13:11-12; Hebrews 10:37)

Revelation 20:12-14

And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them; and they were judged, each one of them according to their deeds. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

† Revelation brings the resurrection story to its judgment setting. Death and Hades surrender their dead, judgment takes place, and death and Hades are removed.

† Matthew 27 showed tombs opening. Revelation shows death and Hades themselves losing their claim over the dead. The first event was a sign of Christ's resurrection power, while Revelation portrays the completed victory. (Revelation 1:18)

† Jesus said Revelation concerned things that must shortly come to pass and that the time was near. Its resurrection and judgment language must be read within those inspired time statements. (Revelation 1:1-3; 22:6, 10)

† The story isn't about Christians still waiting for Jesus to defeat

death. Christ accomplished the victory through His death, resurrection, reign, and completed redemptive work. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

Historical References

† Josephus described extraordinary signs surrounding Jerusalem before its destruction in AD 70, including disturbances, heavenly signs, and a voice associated with departure from the Temple. His account provides historical background for the generation Jesus said would experience Jerusalem's judgment. (Josephus, Wars of the Jews 6.5.3)

† Tacitus also recorded reports of unusual signs surrounding Jerusalem and the Temple before the Roman destruction. Although he interpreted them as a Roman historian, his testimony independently confirms that extraordinary signs were associated with that period. (Tacitus, Histories 5.13)

† Eusebius later recorded that the believers in Jerusalem left the city before the war and went to Pella. This fits Jesus' warning that His disciples were to flee when they saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies. (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.5; Luke 21:20-22)

† These historical writers don't prove the resurrection of the saints in Matthew 27, and they weren't eyewitness explanations of that event. Matthew is our biblical witness for those raised saints. The historical writers help document the later first-century judgment setting surrounding Jerusalem.

How It Applies To Us Today

† Matthew 27 gives us a reason for confidence, not fear. Jesus entered death and came out victorious. The opened tombs declared that death couldn't stop what God was accomplishing through His Son. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

† We aren't living before the cross waiting for redemption to begin. We live after Christ's finished work, His resurrection, and the fulfillment of the covenantal age that was passing away in the first century. (Hebrews 8:13)

† Our hope is Christ Himself. He is the resurrection and the life,

and whoever believes in Him has eternal life. (John 11:25-26)
† We don't need to look at cemeteries wondering whether Jesus has enough power to defeat death someday. Matthew showed tombs opening immediately in connection with His victory. Revelation showed death and Hades defeated. Christ holds the keys of death and Hades. (Revelation 1:18)
† Because we belong to Christ, physical death doesn't separate us from Him. Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. (Romans 14:8)

Q & A Appendix

Q: Were the saints raised in Matthew 27 the complete resurrection of the dead?

A: No. Matthew says many bodies of the saints were raised, not all the dead. Paul later still spoke of the resurrection of those belonging to Christ at His coming. (1 Corinthians 15:20-23)

Q: Did the saints come out of their tombs before Jesus was raised?

A: Matthew specifically says they came out of the tombs after His resurrection. Christ therefore maintains His position as the firstfruits of those who had died. (1 Corinthians 15:20)

Q: Why did these saints appear in Jerusalem?

A: Their appearance provided a visible testimony in the very city where Jesus had been crucified that His death and resurrection had brought resurrection power into history. (Matthew 27:52-54)

Q: Does Matthew tell us who these saints were?

A: No. Matthew calls them saints but doesn't give their names. We shouldn't add names that Scripture doesn't provide.

Q: Does Matthew tell us what eventually happened to these saints?

A: No. Matthew tells us they were raised, entered the holy city, and appeared to many. Scripture doesn't tell us what happened

to them afterward, so we shouldn't build doctrine on details God didn't reveal.

Q: What was the greater message behind the opened tombs?

A: Jesus had authority over death. His resurrection was the firstfruits and guarantee that death wouldn't prevent God from completing the resurrection and redemption He had promised. (1 Corinthians 15:20-23)

Q: What does this mean for believers today?

A: Our life is in Christ. We don't live waiting for Jesus to become victorious. We live because He is victorious, and nothing, including death, can separate us from Him. (Romans 8:38-39)

Q: Did the saints raised in Matthew 27 physically die again before the later resurrection was fulfilled?

A: Scripture doesn't tell us what physically happened to these saints afterward. Matthew tells us they were raised, entered the holy city, and appeared to many, but he says nothing about them ascending to heaven or remaining physically alive. Since Paul later still described the resurrection as something awaiting fulfillment, Matthew 27 shouldn't be treated as the completed resurrection. We shouldn't go beyond what Scripture actually says. (Matthew 27:52-53; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23)

Q: If these saints were physically raised, why wasn't this the resurrection Paul later described?

A: Because Paul wrote after Christ's resurrection and still said, "then they that are Christ's, at his coming." The raising of the saints in Matthew 27 was a real sign of Christ's victory over death, but the resurrection Paul described was still ahead when he wrote 1 Corinthians. (1 Corinthians 15:20-23, 51-52)

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

Source Index

† Matthew 27:52-54; Matthew 28:5-7; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23; Daniel 12:1-2; John 5:25-29; Revelation 20:12-14

† Josephus, Wars of the Jews 6.5.3; Tacitus, Histories 5.13; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.5

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