

Matthew 27:52

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,

Analysis

And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose. This extraordinary sign accompanied Jesus's death. 'The graves were opened' (τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνεώχθησαν/ta mnēmeia aneōchthēsan)—tombs split open in the earthquake. But more remarkably, 'many bodies of the saints which slept arose' (πολλὰ σώματα τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων ἠγέρθησαν/polla sōmata tōn kekoimēmenōn hagiōn ēgerthēsan).

'Saints which slept' (τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων/tōn kekoimēmenōn hagiōn)—'sleep' is biblical terminology for death for believers (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14). These were OT believers who had died trusting God's promises. Their resurrection demonstrated that Christ's death conquered death not only for the future but retroactively for all who trust Him.

They arose when Christ died but appeared after His resurrection (Matthew 27:53), showing Christ as 'firstfruits' (1 Corinthians 15:20). His resurrection caused theirs; His victory over death liberated them from death's hold. This anticipated the final resurrection when all saints will rise in glorified bodies.

Historical Context

This supernatural event at Christ's death testified to His redemptive work's cosmic significance. Death's power was broken; the grave could not hold God's people.

Early church fathers (Ignatius, Origen) referenced this as proof of resurrection's reality.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does the resurrection of OT saints at Christ's death demonstrate that His atoning work has retroactive power for all believers throughout history?
2. What does it mean that death is described as 'sleep' for believers—how should this shape our view of Christian death?
3. How should the reality of bodily resurrection (demonstrated by these saints rising) affect our hope and how we view our physical bodies?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	τῶν	μνημεῖα	ἀνεώχθησαν	καὶ	πολλὰ	σώματα	τῶν
And	which	the graves	were opened	And	many	bodies	which
G2532	G3588	G3419	G455	G2532	G4183	G4983	G3588
κεκοιμημένων	ἁγίων	ἠγέρθη,					
slept	of the saints	arose					
G2837	G40	G1453					

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 26:19 (Parallel theme): Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.

1 Corinthians 15:20 (Parallel theme): But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

1 Thessalonians 4:14 (Parallel theme): For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

Daniel 12:2 (Parallel theme): And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Isaiah 25:8 (Parallel theme): He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.

1 Thessalonians 5:10 (Parallel theme): Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

1 Corinthians 15:51 (Parallel theme): Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

Hosea 13:14 (Parallel theme): I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.

1 Corinthians 11:30 (Parallel theme): For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.