Raymond M. Johnson, M.DIV., TH.M., PH.D.
Foreword by David S. Dockery

I See Dead People

The Function of the Resurrection
of the Saints in Matthew 27:51–54

"In this perceptive and thoughtful work, Dr. Johnson shows how literary sensitivity can work with theological depth, and how these together support solid historical confidence. There is so much to like here—the methods, the fairness and thoroughness, the careful critique of positions—and we profit from seeing how to work through a challenging text to a satisfying conclusion."
—**C. John ("Jack") Collins**, Professor of Old Testament, Covenant Theological Seminary

"Raymond Johnson provides a careful and compelling treatment of this neglected passage. His careful translation work, biblical theology, and literary analysis are commendable. This volume should help scholars rethink the resurrection narratives and aid pastors in preaching the riches of believing in a risen Savior."
—**Paul R. House**, Professor of Divinity—Old Testament, Beeson Divinity School

"I worked with Raymond on the development of his dissertation for several years. He continually pursued excellence with diligence and care. The final product of his dissertation is evidence of this. Raymond's dissertation is worthy of publication because of the clarity and fairness with which he addresses the long-debated issues of Matthew 27 and because of the contributions he makes to this discussion."
—**Jonathan T. Pennington**, Associate Professor of New Testament Interpretation; Director of Research Doctoral Studies, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"Why alone of the Gospels does Matthew report the resurrection of 'holy ones' [ESV "saints"] at the time of Jesus' death? And what did Matthew intend to teach his readers with this mysterious detail? To answer these questions intelligently and textually, I know no better place to point you than Raymond Johnson's fascinating monograph, *I See Dead People: The Function of the Resurrection of the Saints in Matthew 27:51–54*."
—**Robert L. Plummer**, Professor of New Testament Interpretation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"Matthew 27:51–54 has been the focus of several important debates recently. Yet no evangelical scholar has attempted a book-length discussion of the text that gives proper attention to its precise translation, relationship to Old Testament texts, role in Matthew's Gospel, and significance for Christian theology. Raymond Johnson has finally risen to that important task. His unique and outstanding contribution to the study of Matthew is a great gift to both the academy and the church."
—**Charles L. Quarles**, Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology; Director for Ph.D. Studies, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

"No historical event has been the object of more scrutiny than the death of Jesus Christ. Surely no further crime-scene investigation is possible? Not so, says Raymond Johnson, who cross-examines afresh a fragment of Saint Matthew's testimony, a text that has continued to puzzle preachers and scholars alike, about the dead coming out of their tombs at Jesus' death (Matt. 27:51–54). Johnson finds a clue to the meaning of the whole in this apparently odd episode. This work does justice to Matthew's literary as well as historical and theological intentions, and in so doing helps all readers appreciate the richness, integrity, and coherence of Matthew's Gospel and its singular identification of Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world."
—**Kevin J. Vanhoozer**, Research Professor of Systematic Theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

I See Dead People

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I See Dead People

The Function of the Resurrection of the Saints in Matthew 27:51–54

Raymond M. Johnson

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"The heart of her husband trusts in her."
Proverbs 31:11

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Series Editor

Foreword

In the initial chapters of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is introduced as King of the Jews, heir to David's throne, one who is acclaimed by Gentiles and anointed by God. Jesus is presented as "King of the Jews" (Matt. 27:37), even while he is introduced to Matthew's readers as Teacher in the body of the Gospel, which is the most prominent feature for Matthew.

The Structure of the Gospel of Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew became the most popular of the Gospels in the early church. Its role as the first book in the New Testament canon is unique because of the way in which its opening section and overall structure connect with the Old Testament.

Matthew includes five great discourses (Matt. 5–7; 10; 13; 18; 24–25). Three basic types of material are employed in these discourses: (1) beatitudes, (2) ethical admonitions, and (3) contrasts between Jesus' ethical teaching and prevailing traditions. An introduction (1:1–4:25) and conclusion (26:1–28:20) form bookends around the five teaching sections.

Matthew introduces us to Jesus with a genealogy (Matt. 1:1–17), an account of his miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit and later adoption by Joseph (1:18–25), and his flight to Egypt and return to Galilee (2:1–23). These things establish Jesus to be the

Messiah, the son of David (1:1). Matthew then reveals Jesus to be the obedient Son of God in the accounts of his baptism by John the Baptist (3:17) and his temptation by the devil (4:3–10). He then tells us that Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom (4:23).

Matthew 26:1–28:20, the concluding section, has no teaching situations, but it highlights the account of Jesus' passion, burial, resurrection, and commission to his followers. Throughout Matthew's narrative, the Gospel writer enables readers to begin to identify the Teacher. The bottom-line question that the hearers and contemporary readers must ask is not "What do you think of this teaching?" but "Who is this Teacher?"

The Teacher in Matthew's Gospel

God's purposes were to be accomplished through a descendant of David. The people of God in the Old Testament looked forward expectantly to the coming of the promised King, their Messiah. The plan of God had been revealed through a series of God's covenant promises (Gen. 12:2; 2 Sam. 7:9; Jer. 31). In these covenants, God's intent to establish his kingdom and redeem humankind was progressively revealed. These covenant promises found their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament includes two different lines of teaching about the Messiah: He would be both King and Redeemer. Aspects of each purpose can be observed in the covenant promises and the prophetic portraits, though the details of the completion of these teachings remain somewhat unclear. The New Testament, however, beginning with the Gospel of Matthew, interprets the Old Testament and announces that the promised Messiah had come in Jesus of Nazareth. In identifying Jesus as the Messiah, Matthew affirms an essential connection with the Old Testament.

Matthew indicates that Jesus understood his mission in a way that ran counter to the assumptions and expectations of his

contemporaries: both his followers and his opponents. One thing is sure: Jesus understood his mission as a fulfillment of the Scriptures, as indicated in his teachings and those of his followers, particularly in the Gospel of Matthew.

This Teacher is a worker of miracles (Matt. 4:23–25; 8:16; 14:35–36; 15:30; 19:2), the Son of Man (8:20; 9:6; 13:37; 19:28; 20:28), the son of David (9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30–31; 21:9–15; 22:41–45), the Son of God (2:15; 4:3, 6; 14:33; 16:16; 26:63; 27:40, 43), the Christ/Messiah (Anointed One) (1:1, 16–18; 2:4; 11:2; 16:16–20; 22:42; 26:63–64, 68; 27:17, 22), and the Lord (8:2, 6; 9:28; 28:18). Within this broader context, Raymond Johnson helps us understand one of the most complex and challenging passages in Matthew's Gospel (27:51–54). Particularly, Johnson carefully and insightfully explores the meaning and theological implications of the resurrection of the saints in Matthew 27:52b–53.

The Function of Matthew 27:51–54 in the Gospel of Matthew

Matthew 27:51–54 presents five signs that accompany Jesus' death, in which the curtain of the temple is torn (51a), the earth shakes (51b), the rocks split (51c), the tombs open (52a), and lifeless saints are raised to life (52b–53). In this context Matthew presents Jesus the Messiah as not merely the sacrifice for sin, but its conqueror. Christ the Victor is the key to the future. These verses point to God's new life for his people, the very same life that was seen in the resurrected Christ. No sooner does Matthew speak of the death of Jesus Christ than he brings in the material about new life, which enables readers to understand that a new age is breaking in, similar to what was presented in Matthew 24.

Matthew wants us to understand that the death of Christ is an eschatological event, a foretaste of the end of the world. The Gospel points to the end of the old age of the tyranny of death and evil. The rocks are split. The dead are raised, pointing to the death and

resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:20; Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5). Johnson, after thoroughly addressing the translation issues, the referential issues, and the placement issues related to these verses as discussed by dozens of interpreters such as Hutton, Wenham, Kingsbury, Witherup, Luz, Licona, and Anderson, provides a window for us to see the significance of the "lesser" resurrection of the saints, since it anticipates the public vindication of Jesus before his enemies (Matt. 28:6).

In order to show how this difficult passage functions in Matthew's Gospel, Johnson shows Matthew's dependence on Ezekiel 37:1–14. He then interprets the intentional placement of this text at this location in the first Gospel. Primarily, Johnson brilliantly and insightfully expounds the theological purpose of Matthew's work around the themes of Christology, missiology, and eschatology. Our author notes that the passages under consideration serve as a sign of the work of Christ, whereby Matthew incorporated the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy at the particular point in time with future effects evidenced by a historical and bodily resurrection at the time of Jesus' finished cross work.

Readers of Raymond Johnson's book will join him in wrestling with the meaning of this confounding passage in Matthew 27. The extraordinary signs accompanying Jesus' death portray Jesus as the Son of God and prepare Matthew's readers for the infusion of eschatological resurrection on Easter morning. While this resurrection was temporal and not reflective of the final state of glorification, it was nevertheless representative of the immediate impact of Jesus' death as a reversal of the fall.

Implications of Matthew 27:51–54

God created men and women in his image. Humans chose to sin, resulting in death and alienation from God. As a result of God's grace grounded in the death and resurrection of Christ at his first coming, believers experience salvation from sin and conversion to God.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has fully revealed God to men and women. Having lived a sinless life, Christ died in our place, taking our judgment and conquering sin and death by his resurrection.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the source of the Christian's hope. The resurrection points to the final phase of God's plan that culminates in the coming of God's kingdom, which will be transformed into the new heaven and the new earth. For all eternity, believers will worship the resurrected and exalted Christ supremely without impurity.

When the resurrected Lord declared his authority to his disciples in Matthew 28:18, they understood because they had seen his authority displayed in his life, ministry, and teaching (Matt. 7:29). The resurrected Christ commanded his followers to disciple, baptize, and teach, assuring them that he would be with them even to the ends of the earth (28:19–20).

The spectacular events described in Matthew 27:51–54, which are the focus of Raymond Johnson's project, point all of us to these wonderful truths concerning the saving significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Whether or not one agrees with all the details of Johnson's impressive study, readers will find Johnson's work to be a well-researched, helpful, and thoughtful guide for the perplexing questions found in this challenging section of Matthew's Gospel.[1]

David S. Dockery, President
Trinity International University

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[1] Portions of this material have been adopted and adapted from David S. Dockery, *Our Christian Hope: Biblical Answers to Questions about the Future* (Nashville: LifeWay, 1998), and David S. Dockery and David E. Earland, *Seeking the Kingdom: The Sermon on the Mount Made Practical for Today* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1992).

Preface

Interest in Matthew 27:51–54 came as I prepared to preach from this text. As I reviewed commentaries and consulted major works on the resurrection, I realized there was a vast interpretive chasm between exegetes and homileticians on how this text functioned within Matthew's Gospel-narrative. There was (and is) no scholarly consensus on the function or the theological meaning of this pericope in the death-resurrection scene because an interpretive dichotomy separated the historicity of the act itself and its placement in the Gospel from its theological meaning. This study focuses on the exegesis of Matthew 27:51–54 and its impact on the theological meaning and systematic reflections drawn from a literary reading of the text.

I want to thank my wife, Meghan, who was always very patient and understanding while I spent countless hours over several years involved in the research contained in these pages. Abigail, Charlotte, Emily, and Michael—our children—for enduring my absence. Pat Johnson, my mother, for being a constant source of encouragement. The congregation I have the privilege to pastor, The Journey Church (TJC), for graciously giving a young minister several writing sabbaticals. Mark Van Teyens, Christa Mast, Dan Mason, and Matthew Burns—my interns—for faithfully serving TJC to provide me time to write. I would like to thank Billy Wilhelm and Adam Tardosky, who painstakingly made the scripture index for this book. Their work

was surely one of supererogation! Terry and Donna Kraus, my (extra) parents, for frequently opening their home so that I could be closer to a theological library. Donna Roof at Westminster Theological seminary for providing me a library carrel at which I could write. Jonathan Pennington, my supervisor, who read my chapters numerous times, always providing helpful exegetical and structural suggestions. Douglas Baker, my dear friend, who read my manuscript with an editor's eye and saved me from many errors. I also need to thank Josh and Jessie Kilpatrick, who gave generously so that I might pursue a PhD. Charles Quarles, for carefully reading my work and encouraging me to pursue publication. John J. Hughes, for the opportunity to publish with P&R's RAD series. My prayer is that through this work one understands the death-resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew better, and thereby sees more clearly the image of the invisible God in the face of the Crucified One—Jesus, Son of God.

Raymond M. Johnson
West Chester, Pennsylvania
May 2017

Abbreviations

ANF	The Ante-Nicene Fathers
AB	Anchor Bible
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*
Ant.	Antiquities of the Jews
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
ATJ	*Asbury Theological Journal*
BDB	Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*
BDAG	Walter Bauer, Fredrick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and Wilber Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed.
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium

BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CurTM	*Currents in Theology and Mission*
ETL	Ephemerides Theological Lovanienses
ExpT	*Expository Times*
Georg.	The Georgics
HeyJ	*Heythrop Journal*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HTS	*Harvard Theological Studies*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IBS	*Irish Biblical Studies*
Ign. Magn.	Ignatius *to the Magnesians*
Institutes	*Institutes of the Christian Religion*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JNSL	*Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
JPT	*Journal of Pentecostal Theology*
JPTSup	Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of New Testament Supplement
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
LBC	London Baptist Confession (1689)
L&N	Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies

LSJ	Henry G. Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry S. Jones, *Greek–English Lexicon*
LXX	Septuagint
NAC	The New American Commentary
Nat.	*Natural History*
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NICNT	The New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	The New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDNTT	New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NSD	New Studies in Dogmatics
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
PT	*Poetics Today*
RB	*Revue biblique*
Rep.	*De republica*
Rom.	*Romulus*
SBJT	*Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
TC	*A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism*
TD	*Theology Digest*

TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*

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The Resurrected Saints:
The Problem with Matthew 27:51–54

State of the *Sondergut*: The Literary Landscape
of the Matthean Special Material

Matthew's passion narrative contains critical texts unique to his Gospel (Matt. 26:1–5, 52–54, 62–66; 27:3–10, 19, 24–25, 51b–53). Scholars have given attention to these pericopal hapaxes while trying to ascertain their significance and meaning in Matthew's narrative.[1] One that has been particularly perplexing is Matthew 27:51–54. At the moment of Jesus' death on the cross, after he cried out with a loud voice and yielded up the Spirit (Matt. 27:50), several cataclysmic events occurred, which Matthew recounts for his readers. His Gospel includes five signs[2] that accompany Jesus' death:

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[1] See, for example, Donald Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew: A Redactional Study*, BETL 39 (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1975), 336–40. Senior suggests the Matthean special material manifests Matthew's literary craftsmanship in the composition of his gospel narrative.

[2] I use "sign" instead of "symbol" since it more clearly connotes a referent that points the reader both backward to the historical event as well as forward to a greater referent—for Matt. 27:51–54 that is the resurrection in 28:1–10. That is, "sign" connotes more than a past historical referent. Like the rainbow in the Noahic covenant, these "signs" function as proclamatory covenantal revelation (Gen. 8:20–22; Matt. 27:51–54) not only of what God has done in the past but of what he will not do in the future—he will never again crush his Son as

(1) The curtain of the temple is torn (v. 51a), (2) the earth shakes (v. 51b), (3) the rocks split (v. 51c), (4) the tombs open (v. 52a), and (5) lifeless people, whom Matthew calls ἁγίων, are raised to life (v. 52b).[3] The most perplexing of these cosmic events has been the resurrection of the dead saints. Their resurrection from the dead has both confounded interpreters and led to many crucial interpretive questions: What kind of bodies did these "holy people" possess? Did they die again? How public was their appearance, and how many people saw them? Were they raised *before* or *after* Jesus' resurrection from the dead? If they were raised prior to his resurrection, what did they do after they were raised but before Jesus was resurrected (i.e., did they just wait in their tombs)? Was their resurrection like that of Lazarus in John 11 or like the resurrection described by the

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a substitute for sinners. Further, it will be argued below that Matthew prepares his readers for the events in 28:1–10 and 28:16–20 by proleptically foreshadowing them through the "signs" in 27:51–54. Additionally, by "signs" I mean cosmic portents that manifest divine approval of Jesus' work as a penal substitute—these are divine portents that testify to the legitimacy of Jesus' claim to be the Son of God. For a recent argument on interpreting the symbolism in Matt. 27:51–54, see Daniel M. Gurtner, "Interpreting Apocalyptic Symbolism in the Gospel of Matthew," paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society National Conference, New Orleans, November 2009, 1–38.

[3] Strauss contends that only four events accompany Jesus' death: (1) the curtain of the temple is torn, (2) an earthquake occurs, (3) the tombs are opened and the "holy ones" are resurrected, and (4) the centurion and those with him exclaim, "Surely he was the Son of God!" See Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 238. Others, however, include the centurion's confession as a sixth sign. However, it seems the centurion's confession is a positive result of the five signs that happen after Jesus yields up the Spirit rather than a result of Jesus' death on the cross. The cosmic signs overcome his Gentile unbelief. This is in contrast to Sim, who contends the events surrounding Jesus' death on the cross were not a sufficient basis for the centurion's profession of faith in Matt. 27:54. See David C. Sim, "The 'Confession' of the Soldiers in Matthew 27:54," *HeyJ* 34 (1993): 416. For a thorough treatment of the tearing of the temple veil, see Daniel M. Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Gurtner argues the rending of the veil is cosmological imagery signifying the rending of the heavens.

apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 (i.e., glorified bodies)? Is it possible these "saints" were taken up to heaven like Enoch (Gen. 5:24)? Was Matthew speaking of a historical event or merely using phenomenological and metaphorical language in his Gospel narrative?

It is not surprising that interpreters across the span of interpretive history have labored to apply this pivotal text in their respective hermeneutical and homiletical endeavors. The interpretive confusion results from a misassumption that the resurrection of the saints is either a glorified resurrection and, therefore, displaced in the Matthean Gospel or is ahistorical and legend.[4] For this reason further study of the Matthean pericope is required. Utilizing the tools of literary analysis, this dissertation aims to assist interpreters in bridging the text's interpretive chasm. Further, this work intends to demonstrate that a literary reading of Matthew 27:51–54 should be adopted. This type of reading will deepen one's understanding of the Matthean passage in question and reveal that its meaning is about more than its canonical relationship with 1 Corinthians 15:20, Colossians 1:18, and Revelation 1:5.

Though the aforementioned questions highlight the difficulty in ascertaining the meaning of this text, it is clear that this Matthean pericope actually informs both the way one understands the conclusion of the Gospel according to Matthew, particularly the scenes surrounding these events (Matt. 27:32–50; 27:55–28:20), and the implications of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. By the way he has constructed the narrative, Matthew has set the stage in his Gospel story line by means of the "lesser" resurrection of the saints since it anticipates the public vindication of Jesus before his enemies—he is not dead; he rose just as he said he would (Matt. 28:6; cf. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19). For Matthew, the resurrection of the saints creates

[4] Regarding the former, see D. A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version*, vol. 2, *Matthew 13–28*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 581–82. Regarding the latter, see Michael Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 553.

anticipation through literary parallelism. Jesus dies and some other unidentified dead are made alive, and the vindicating resurrection of Jesus brings the plot of Matthew's Gospel to its literary resolution. The religious leaders fear Jesus' "greater"[5] resurrection because it proves that they were wrong about him. They propagate a lie and further prove themselves to be evil (Matt. 28:12–15). His "greater" resurrection proves to Jesus' doubting disciples that he is truly alive and does indeed have "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). Jesus' "greater" resurrection gives hope to all of his followers that the Lord is the resurrected Christ. He has conquered sin, death, and hell. Now he is God with his people as they go about proclaiming and offering a gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins (Matt. 28:20; cf. 1:23), and he is God in his people, empowering them by the Holy Spirit he and the Father have sent to them (John 20:19–23; Acts 1:8; 2:4; 1 Cor. 6:19; Eph. 1:13–14).

Statement of the Problem

A perusal of commentaries on Matthew[6] as well as a consultation of noteworthy works on the resurrection[7] manifests that a

[5] For reasons specified below, this dissertation argues Matthew structured this section of his Gospel with a "lesser" resurrection (that of the "saints") and a "greater" resurrection (that of Jesus) in order to (1) accentuate christological, missiological, and eschatological motifs and (2) to climactically bring his Gospel plotline to resolution. Additionally, it is crucial to note that by "'lesser' resurrection" this dissertation means "not glorified" and by "'greater' resurrection" this dissertation means "glorified."

[6] See, for example, W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, ICC, vol. 3, *Matthew 19–28* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004); Craig Evans, *Matthew*, NCBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and David Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

[7] See, for example, Dale Allison Jr., *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpretation* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005); Dale Allison Jr., *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 452–53; R. Bieringer, V. Koperski, and B. Lataire,

vast interpretive chasm exists between exegetes and homileticians on how the text under consideration, Matthew 27:51–54, functions within Matthew's narrative and what this particular pericope means for readers of his Gospel. In the absence of scholarly consensus, interpreters must overcome three problems to exegete this Matthean pericope rightly: mistranslation, misreferent, and misplacement.

Mistranslation

The first problem that this dissertation aims to address is mistranslation. Recent Matthean interpreters have largely relied on a translation of the Matthean pericope that has argued for a full-stop punctuation in the middle of Matthew 27:52.[8] The full stop, for these interpreters, conveys a temporal lapse between the time when the tombs opened as a result of the earthquake in Matthew 27:51 and the subsequent resurrection of the sleeping saints in Matthew 27:52–53. Further, this temporal gap enables them to reconcile Matthew's pericope with the subsequent teaching in the Pauline and Johannine epistles that Jesus is the firstborn from the dead—ἀπαρχὴ τῶν κεκοιμημένων (1 Cor. 15:20; cf. Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5). This interpretation has been helpful in dealing with a "pesky" Matthean text, but it is too convenient. This reading is more concerned with understanding the conclusion to Matthew's Gospel in light of the New Testament epistles rather than in light of the Matthean narrative. It implies that Matthew's crafting of the conclusion to his Gospel was haphazard in that he "misplaced" a resurrection account within the passion narrative. Consequently, this interpretation forces

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eds., *Resurrection in the New Testament*, BETL 165 (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2002); and N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

[8] Concerning this thesis, three in particular stand out: J. W. Wenham, "When Were the Saints Raised?," *JTS* 32, 1 (1981): 150–52; Carson, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 2:581–82; and Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 421.

a reading of the pericope in Matthew 27:45–28:20 that is foreign to Matthew's literary intentions.

This dissertation, therefore, will address the issue of translation in relation to Matthew 27:51–54. Chapter 2 will argue that the most natural translation of the Matthean pericope is as follows:

> Behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, and the rocks split, the tombs, also, were opened and the bodies of many saints who had died were raised to life; coming out of the tombs, they went into the holy city after his resurrection, appearing to many people. When the centurion and those guarding Jesus with him saw the earthquake and the things that took place they were terrified and said, "This really was the Son of God!"

Further, chapter 2 will argue that a comma at the end of Matthew 27:51 is more grammatically appropriate because it links the five signs that occur as a result of Jesus' death on the cross after he yields τὸ πνεῦμα (Matt. 27:50). Additionally, chapter 2 will argue that a semicolon at the end of Matthew 27:52 suggests a close relationship between the resurrection of the saints and their emergence from the graves that a period would not sufficiently indicate. This dissertation will contend that this reading tethers the signs in Matthew 27:51–54 with the events of Good Friday and accentuates the three theological foci Matthew is featuring in this pericope: Christology, missiology, and eschatology. It is because the βασιλεία has broken into the present *in* the person of Jesus (Matt. 4:17; cf. 3:2; 10:7) that Jesus dies like no other person in history.[9] The signs accompanying Jesus' death on the cross testify to his divine identity as the Son of God. They underscore the missiological and eschatological foci of

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[9] Robertson notes that such manifestations of God's power are connected with both the birth and death of Jesus, God's Son, in Matthew's Gospel. See A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*, vol. 1, *The Gospel according to Matthew, the Gospel according to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1930), 236.

his death—his death has meaning for the nations because there has been a rending of the veil, signifying the end of separation between God and the people (Matt. 27:51, 54; 28:16–20).

Misreferent

The second problem this dissertation aims to address is misreference, because consideration of the Matthean special material in Matthew 27 raises the issue of origin (Matt. 27:3–10, 19, 24–25, 51b–53). From where did Matthew receive the material in his arrangement of Matthew 26–28? What sources were used in the composition of the Matthean *Sondergut*? Donald Senior suggests that "Matthew's theological perspective owed much to Mark" and that "Mark was the only formal source used by Matthew in the passion narrative."[10] Further, he contends that "the most compelling explanation was Matthew's direct dependence on the Gospel of Mark *and no other as his source*" in the formation of the Matthean passion narrative.[11] Similarly, when addressing the issue of "origin" in relation to the *Sondergut*, David Hill states, "Little or nothing is gained by the hypothesis of an already existing apocalyptic fragment edited by Matthew: it is as likely, if not more so, that the evangelist himself brought together a number of well-known apocalyptic images in order to convey his own distinctive message."[12] Therefore, in Senior's and Hill's assessment, a preexisting body of material informing Matthew's composition of the *Sondergut* is unlikely. However, it is noteworthy that previously Senior had suggested that Matthew 27:51b–53 is solely dependent on Ezekiel 37, not solely

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[10] Donald P. Senior, "Matthew's Special Material in the Passion Story: Implications for the Evangelist's Redactional Technique and Theological Perspective," *ETL* 63 (1987): 273, 274.

[11] Ibid., 273 (my emphasis). Senior states his conclusions are based on Matthew's use of Old Testament and Jewish theological traditions as well as his exploration of cues in Mark's Gospel.

[12] David Hill, "Matthew 27:51–53 in the Theology of the Evangelist," *IBS* 7 (April 1985): 77.

dependent on Mark's Gospel.[13] Further, James Dunn notes that the presence of the *Sondergut* suggests that Matthew's material was not a single collection or from a single source.[14] This supports the proposal of this dissertation: Ezekiel 37:1–14 is the primary referent for Matthew 27:51–54.[15]

Chapter 3, therefore, will advocate that there is textual and interpretive evidence that the resurrection vision in Ezekiel 37:1–14 is close in the background of Matthew 27:51–54.[16] This chapter will further argue that Matthew's pericope, laced with divine signs testifying to Jesus' divine identity as the Son of God (i.e., Matt. 27:51–54), finds its primary origins in the Ezekielian Old Testament prophetic narrative. Contra many scholars, this dissertation will argue that the Matthean pericope under consideration does not find its background in a mixture of myriad Old Testament passages. Moreover, this dissertation will reject the suggestion that Matthew's pericopal hapax finds its primary roots in an extrabiblical, pre-Matthean tradition. Rather, this dissertation will argue that an examination of Ezekiel 37:1–14 in its Septuagintal form manifests

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[13] Senior, *Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 207–23.

[14] Matt. 27:52–53 is one of several sections of Matthew referenced by Dunn. He is commenting on all the special material in Matthew's Gospel. See James D. G. Dunn, "How Did Matthew Go about Composing His Gospel?," in *Jesus, Matthew's Gospel and Early Christianity: Studies in Memory of Graham N. Stanton*, ed. Daniel Gurtner, Joel Willitts, and Richard A. Burridge, LNTS (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 43–44.

[15] When reviewing Senior's dissertation in book form, Hutton notes that Senior fails to treat Matt. 26:62–66 in his study of the *Sondergut*. Analysis of Matt. 26:62–66 in his treatment of the Matthean special material would make the parallels to an independent tradition outside of Mark's Gospel more manifest. Hutton correctly notes that Senior's conclusions overlook the influence of non-Marcan material as well as oral tradition. Delvin Hutton, review of *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew: A Redactional Study*, by Donald P. Senior, *JBL* 96 (1977): 308–9.

[16] Grassi, too, makes this connection. Thus, he states, "The early Christian tradition described the death and resurrection of Jesus in terms of Ezekiel's resurrection of the dry bones." J. A. Grassi, "Ezekiel 37, 1–14 and the New Testament," *NTS* 11 (1964–65): 164.

numerous links to Matthew's Gospel. Thus, Matthew has Ezekiel 37:12–14 (LXX) as his *primary* Old Testament referent when composing this resurrection pericope in Matthew 27:51–54. Awareness of Matthean dependence on Ezekiel 37 (LXX) manifests the pericope's theological foci—Christology, missiology, and eschatology.

Misplacement

The third problem this dissertation aims to address is misplacement; interpreters have been unable to agree about whether the pericope under consideration should be understood as historical and, therefore, displaced in the Matthean Gospel or as ahistorical and legend. On the one hand, those who propose Matthew 27:51–54 is ahistorical hold this interpretation because the imagery in the pericope has apocalyptic overtones—darkness over the land (Matt. 27:45), a revelatory earthquake (Matt. 25:51), resurrection from the dead (Matt. 27:52–53), the metaphorical destruction of the temple (Matt. 27:51). Though the passage definitely has apocalyptic connotations and cosmic significance, it is not ahistorical or legend. The pericope occurs within a historical scene—the crucifixion and murder of Jesus. Therefore, these interpretations are hermeneutically and homiletically unsatisfying.

On the other hand, others contend for the historicity of the pericope while suggesting its historical resurrection is displaced within the Matthean narrative. These interpreters make this suggestion because they fail to observe Matthew's purposeful narrative strategy informing the literary parallelism of Matthew 27:51–54 alongside 28:1–10 as well as the intentional placement of Matthew 27:51–54 within the death-resurrection scene (Matt. 27:45–28:20). Therefore, these interpretations are hermeneutically and homiletically unsatisfying when one considers the compositional intentionality of Matthew throughout the entirety of his Gospel's narrative.

Interpretive misunderstanding is manifest in the absence of consensus concerning the placement of Matthew 27:51–54 within the death-resurrection scene. Therefore, in chapter 4 this dissertation

will argue that reading Matthew 27:51–54 in light of the entirety of the crucifixion scene and observing Matthew's purposeful narrative strategy and intentional placement of the pericope renders a proper interpretation of the passage.

Recent History of Research

Matthew 27:51–54 in Biblical Studies

The world of biblical studies has produced massive tomes on resurrection in the New Testament as well as major exegetical works on Matthew's Gospel. As a result, the pericope under consideration has received attention in well-known scholarly works. Yet a significant gap exists in the amount of attention given especially to the literary aspects of the pericope as they relate to Matthew 28 as well as the pericope's christological, missiological, and eschatological significance when contending for a historical, Lazarus-like resurrection. Noteworthy scholars who have postulated translation issues, apocalyptic resurrection theses, narrative interpretations, and varying historical claims in their appropriation of this Matthean pericope will be examined.[17]

Delvin D. Hutton

Hutton's "The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b–53): A Study of the Theology of the Matthean Passion Narrative" is his unpublished dissertation from Harvard in 1970.[18] His work is a redaction-critical analysis of the Matthean pericope that begins by briefly summarizing three ways Matthew 27:51–54 has been appropriated hermeneutically—to advocate *descensus Christi ad infernos*,

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[17] This survey of the Matthean literature focuses on recent contributions to this pericope rather than those spanning the history of reception. Additional analysis of reception history will be relegated to the dissertation proper.

[18] Delvin D. Hutton, "The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b–53): A Study of the Theology of the Matthean Passion Narrative" (ThD diss., Harvard University, 1970).

to advocate the death of a Hellenistic "divine man," and to advocate cosmic participation in the death of a cosmic deity.[19] He contends that these are "hermeneutically inadequate" and seeks to show that Matthew's narrative has both reshaped and replaced the pericopal scene for theological purposes.[20] Further, he clearly states, "It will be noted at no time does the writer concern himself with the question, 'Did it really happen; is it empirically verifiable?'"[21] Rather, the question he concerned himself with throughout his thesis is, "What was the meaning of the tradition expressed in Mt 27:51b-53 for the individual evangelist and for the community in which and for whom he composed his Gospel?"[22]

He concludes that the scene Matthew has crafted in his Gospel is a combination of the Markan material and oral epiphanic traditions.[23] He also contends that the placement of the redacted material belonged originally with the scene Matthew portrays in the following chapter, Matthew 28:2–4.[24] He suggests that Matthew's rearrangement of the material is to accentuate a new eschatological reality.[25] More specifically, he contends that Matthew has crafted a scene with the resurrection of τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων[26] as he relied on apocalyptic traditions in order to emphasize the eschatological nature

[19] Ibid., 14. His analysis of interpretive history is short. Further, the significance of the distinction between his second and third appropriations of the text is not entirely clear. I would argue the divinely caused cosmic portents testify to the "deity" of Jesus. Thus, there appears to be (1) categorical overlap and (2) other interpretive appropriations of the text to explore.

[20] Ibid., 15.

[21] Ibid. Unlike Licona (see below), Hutton is not concerned with questions of historicity in his work on the resurrection.

[22] Ibid., 16.

[23] Ibid., 109.

[24] Ibid., 108.

[25] Ibid., 117, 119, 126, 172–76.

[26] Hutton speculates on the identity of τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων in his work. He suggests they are "the patriarchs, prophets, and martyrs, who, having joined their brethren in the sleep of death were set apart for vindication and blessing in the resurrection." Ibid., 142, 137–43.

of Jesus' death on the cross.[27] The portents surrounding Jesus' death connote that something decisive in salvation history has occurred in the death of Jesus.

Assessment. Hutton's work rightly notes that the pericope under consideration is eschatologically oriented and is marked with apocalyptic imagery. Further, his work rightly notes that Matthew's work is "theologically arranged."[28] Yet his redaction-critical work ultimately, and wrongly, places the resurrection of τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων after Jesus' resurrection from the dead and misreads the literary intentionality manifest in the scene.

J. W. Wenham

In 1981 J. W. Wenham published his article "When Were the Saints Raised? A Note on the Punctuation of Matthew xxvii. 51–53," arguing for a full-stop punctuation in the middle of Matthew 27:52.[29] He suggested that it was inappropriate for translators to translate ἀνεῴχθησαν without punctuation because it wrongly ties the resurrection of τῶν . . . ἁγίων to events that occurred on Good Friday after Jesus yielded up his spirit on the cross (Matt. 27:50). To substantiate his thesis, he argues that καὶ ἐξελθόντες . . . πολλοῖς forms a partial parenthesis. That is, the words καὶ ἐξελθόντες . . . πολλοῖς are parenthetical, but they lack a subject within the versification in which they are currently found. Rather, Wenham argues that the subject is found in the previous verse (πολλὰ σώματα; Matt. 27:52). Consequently, he contends that this places the resurrection of the saints with the events that follow instead of the events that precede—namely, he claims that the saints are both resurrected

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[27] Ibid., 145.

[28] Ibid., 115.

[29] Wenham, "When Were the Saints Raised?," 150–52. Though Wenham's article is short, his contribution is significant because his thesis persuades well-known modern commentator D. A. Carson. See Carson, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 2:581–82. See also Blomberg, *Matthew*, 421. Carson and Blomberg are two of many Wenham has persuaded.

and come out of the tombs *after* Jesus' resurrection from the dead.[30] According to Wenham, then, the translation of Matthew 27:51–53 would read as follows: "And the earth quaked, and the rocks split, and the tombs were opened. And, many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised and came out of the tombs after [Jesus'] resurrection and they went into the holy city and appeared to many."

Wenham's concerns are twofold. First, the temporal lapse between the opening of the tombs caused by the earthquake in Matthew 27:51 and the subsequent resurrection of the many sleeping saints neatly places the events *after* Jesus' resurrection and maintains his title as the firstborn from the dead—ἀπαρχὴ τῶν κεκοιμημένων (1 Cor. 15:20; cf. Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5). Second, he wants to tie the resurrection of the saints with Jesus' vindicating resurrection from the dead in Matthew 28:1–10. For Wenham, their resurrection is caused by Jesus' resurrection. This causal relationship accentuates the power of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, a resurrecting power accessible to "all who fall asleep in Jesus."[31] Therefore, he connects the resurrection of the saints with the resurrection of Jesus to emphasize his "defeating the powers of evil."[32]

Assessment. Wenham's interpretive instinct to connect the resurrection of τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων (Matt. 27:52–53) with Jesus' resurrection (Matt. 28:6) is correct. Close examination of the narrative manifests that Matthew has placed the pericopes parallel to each other in order to emphasize the theological foci of the passage: Christology, missiology, and eschatology. Wenham, however, incorrectly assumes the raising of τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων

[30] Wenham is concerned with alleviating Matthew of the erroneous assumption that the saints were resurrected for three days while remaining around the tombs until Jesus is raised from the dead in Matt. 28:1–10: "Then the succession of events on Good Friday is clearly delineated, and the whole episode of the resurrected saints is placed after the resurrection of Jesus, thus absolving the evangelist from the charge of depicting living saints cooped up for days in tombs around the city" (ibid., 151).

[31] Wenham, "When Were the Saints Raised?," 152.

[32] Ibid., 151.

threatens Jesus' right as ἀπαρχὴ τῶν κεκοιμημένων (1 Cor. 15:20). Rather, Matthew intends for his readers to interpret the raising of the sleeping saints as Lazarus-like and testimonial. As Jesus' power was demonstrated and naysayers' mocking comments were overturned when he restored the life of the sleeping-dead girl (Matt. 9:24–25), so now through the cosmic portents once again his divine power is on display as the dead are raised to life as a testimony (Matt. 27:52–53). As Jesus' fame was heralded for overturning death previously (Matt. 9:26), so now Matthew recounts that his fame is heralded in τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν and, ultimately, to the ends of the earth (Matt. 28:16–20).

Jack Dean Kingsbury

Kingsbury has been a proponent of reading the Bible literarily by means of the tools of narrative criticism. In his work *Matthew as Story*, he describes his interpretive method as a literary-critical approach to reading the Gospel narrative. His project consciously moves away from "the historical-biographical, the form-critical, and the redaction-critical" approaches to the interpretation of Matthew's Gospel.[33] Following Seymour Chatman, he analyzes the final form of Matthew as a unified narrative by arguing that the Gospel, like all other narratives, has two parts—the Gospel's story and the Gospel's discourse.[34] The story, according to Kingsbury, is the events that

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[33] Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 2.

[34] Ibid., 3. Chatman's work is a structural analysis of narratology. He defines "story" as "the what of narrative" and "discourse" as "the way of narrative" (Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978], 9–42). Further, he seeks to explicate the elements of storytelling and their connection with the structure of narrative. That is, he seeks to provide a comprehensive approach to the general theory of interpreting narrative. His work *Story and Discourse*, though not a theological work, can aid the interpreter who rightly understands the care with which Matthew as an *author* has crafted his Gospel so that the elements of the story, which are historical, are theologically arranged in this discourse to

make up Jesus' life from his birth to his death-defying resurrection. The discourse, then, is the medium by which this story is told to Matthew's readers.[35] Throughout this work, he accentuates literary elements—arrangement and development of theological themes in the narrative, irony, contrast, and character development—in his reading of the divine story that Matthew recounts.[36] Kingsbury's narrative-critical reading is further developed in his work *Gospel Interpretation*, in which he contends that discernment of the narrative's arrangement is central to interpretation. The author intends for the "arrangement" of the narrative to solicit a desired response from the readers; discernment of the "arrangement" of events or time or place or topic gives meaning to the plot of the story. Discerning the plot, for Kingsbury, enables the exegete to interpret the "positioning of each episode within the story and the literary role this episode plays within the story as a whole."[37] In relation to Matthew 27:51–54, Kingsbury contends that Matthew recounted the supernatural portents in his narrative to (1) substantiate Jesus' claim to be the Son of God by "the counter-assertion, elicited by God himself" through the cosmic events surrounding Jesus' death[38] and

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convey truth. Jonathan Pennington has recently advocated a literary analysis akin to Chatman's for Gospel interpretation. See Jonathan Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 169–82.

[35] Thus, "story-time" reflects the chronological order in which all the events cited in the Gospel's narrative occur. "Discourse-time," however, is the order in which the readers of the Gospel are told about the events that constitute the story. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 40–41.

[36] Jack D. Kingsbury, ed., *Gospel Interpretation: Narrative-Critical & Social Scientific Approaches* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 1–5.

[37] Kingsbury, *Gospel Interpretation*, 3.

[38] Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 89. Earlier in his academic career, in *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, Kingsbury contended the climax of Matthew's Gospel is intended primarily to convey Jesus as the Son of God. As Jesus' resisting of Satan's temptations proved he was the Son of God (Matt. 4:3, 6), so now staying on the cross and resisting the temptation of the Pharisaic naysayers to come down from it proves he is indeed the Son of God. See

(2) to bring the third part of his Gospel story to its initial narrative climax.[39]

Additionally, another of Kingsbury's contributions in *Matthew as Story* is utilizing his literary-critical approach to interpret the actions of the antagonists in Matthew's narrative. For Kingsbury, next to the Gospel's protagonist, Jesus, no group represented in the story influences the events narrated in Matthew's Gospel more than the antagonists, the religious leaders.[40] By means of their hostile actions to Jesus, they assume that they are protecting the Jewish people from a pseudo-messiah. The narrative, however, describes their actions as positively moving the Gospel's story toward its resolution. Further, their actions not only repeatedly fulfill Jesus' mission and positively move the narrative forward but also fulfill Scriptures that prophesied his redeeming mission.[41] Kingsbury's analysis enables one to see more clearly how the actions of Jesus' antagonists achieve salvation for the world (Matt. 28:16–20; cf. 27:54). Their God-rejecting actions that precede the scene of Matthew 27:51–54 accentuate the tension created by the narrative when the Gentile

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Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 74–77.

[39] Kingsbury adds a third (for him it is the second of the three) significance of the portents surrounding Jesus' death. He contends the centurion's confession calls attention to this fact: the cross signifies the end of Jesus' earthly ministry and the end of the temple cult as the "place" of salvation. See Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 89–90. Though Jesus' death on the cross does indicate the end of his earthly life, it seems more accurate to argue the tearing of the veil, not the confession of the centurion, marks the end of the temple as the mediator of salvation's blessings. Thus, the centurion's confession is a result of the portents and a proleptic narratival indicator that the gospel will be taken to the Gentiles (Matt. 28:16–20; cf. 27:54).

[40] Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 115, 126. From the beginning of his Gospel, Matthew has indicated that "evil" characterizes the religious γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν (Matt. 3:7). Thus, Kingsbury argues that conflict is a central motif throughout the plot of Matthew's story.

[41] Some of the more explicit fulfillment texts scattered throughout the Gospel narrative include Matt. 1:23; 2:6, 18; 3:1; 4:14; 12:18–21; 13:14–15, 35; 15:8–9; 21:5, 16, 42; 26:56.

centurion confesses Jesus to be θεοῦ υἱὸς ἦν οὗτος (Matt. 27:54). His confession manifests that the cosmic portents are not only christological, in that they demonstrate Jesus' death on the cross is a life-giving death, but are also missiological as both resurrected Jewish saints and a Roman Gentile testify to his identity as God the Father's Son.[42]

Assessment. Kingsbury's narratological emphasis enables readers to more keenly discern theologically arranged literary structure, through which the Gospel writers obviously intended to communicate truth. In relation to Matthew 27:51–54, Kingsbury's analysis fails to note the intentional literary parallelism as well as the connection between Jesus' divine identity and gospel mission, both of which are conveyed in Matthew 27:51–54 and 28:1–10.

Ronald D. Witherup

Under the tutelage of Kingsbury, Ronald D. Witherup wrote his dissertation on the Gospel of Matthew, specifically on Matthew 27—"The Cross of Jesus: A Literary-Critical Study of Matthew 27."[43] His thesis argues, "Matthew 27 is the central and most important section in the passion/resurrection complex which concludes Matthew's Gospel (26–28)."[44] Further, he contends that the events surrounding Jesus' death in Matthew 27 bring together four central themes that are prominent in Matthew's Gospel: "salvation-history, prophecy and fulfillment, discipleship, and most importantly, the theme of Jesus' identity as the royal, obedient and faithful Son of God."[45] When commenting on the pericope that this study focuses

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[42] Kingsbury contends the presence of these two groups together in the narrative is a prefiguration of the post-Easter church. See Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew*, Proclamation Commentaries, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 57.

[43] Ronald D. Witherup, "The Cross of Jesus: A Literary-Critical Study of Matthew 27" (PhD diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1985).

[44] Ibid., xi.

[45] Ibid.

on, he notes that it "is the climax of the entire chapter" since it should be read as "portraying the consequences of Jesus' death."[46] According to Witherup, the silence of the historical scene is broken by means of the divine portents through which God speaks.[47] His final conclusion is that the pericope is "displaced" in the Matthean narrative. That is, Matthew has a literary tendency of completing a story line that he interjects into the main thought.[48] For Witherup, this solves the interpretive conundrum created by the phrase μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ (Matt. 27:53). Their resurrection further accentuates Jesus' resurrection as a climactic event. Matthew's intention in recording it in Matthew 27:52–53 is to proleptically prepare the reader for the events of Matthew 28:1–10.

Assessment. Though his literary interpretation of Matthew 27 accentuates the care with which Matthew crafted the passion narrative concluding his Gospel, Witherup's reading falls short by displacing a historical event from the historical scene in which it occurs. If Matthew intended for the resurrection of the saints to be read as a result of Jesus' resurrection, it seems odd that his placement of it is interjected into the midst of other cosmic portents that narrate events occurring as a result of his death, not his resurrection.

Ulrich Luz

In his Matthean commentary, after a redaction-critical analysis of the structure of Matthew 27:51–54 along with the sources utilized by Matthew to compose the passage, Luz offers an overview of the pericope's reception history and notes that interpretations of the passage are divided into five broad categories—the redemptive history interpretation, the christological interpretation, Christ's descent into hell, the allegorical interpretation, and the eschatological

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[46] Witherup is inconsistent in this argumentation, though. He later contends the resurrection of the sleeping saints was caused by the resurrection of Jesus. Ibid., 277, 285.

[47] Ibid., 280.

[48] Ibid., 284.

interpretation.[49] This is, for Luz, the prolegomena for his own interpretation, which accentuates God's intervention in the narrative scene.[50] Repeatedly, he notes that Matthew is laboring to convey that the events surrounding Jesus' death are "acts of God" or "supernatural interventions" intended for self-revelatory purposes.[51] When it comes to the resurrection of the saints, he contends that though their resurrection does not belong to the general eschatological resurrection, the "saints" could have been any of the "righteous" throughout redemptive history.[52] Their presence in the narrative is a sign of God's coming judgment on the people of Israel and the city of Jerusalem.[53]

Ultimately, though, Luz admits the interpretive difficulty of the passage and suggests that it has "multiple levels of meaning."[54] He accentuates two levels of meaning in particular—the christological and the redemptive history dimensions of the text. Concerning the former, Luz suggests that the events recorded in Matthew 27:51–53 are "victory signs."[55] The self-revelation of God reaches its climax through these victory signs in the resurrection of the saints. Regarding the latter category, Luz accentuates God's revelation of the impending judgment on Jerusalem. The temple is rendered obsolete and the future faith of the redeemed will no longer be geographically or ethnically confined; rather, it will go with Jesus and those who place their faith in him.[56]

Assessment. Luz rightly notes that Matthew is communicating

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[49] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, trans. James E. Crouch, ed. Helmut Koester, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 560–65.

[50] Ibid., 566–70.

[51] Ibid., 566. Later, he connects the self-revelatory events with the centurion's profession. Based on God's revelation of Jesus' identity, the centurion confesses Jesus to be the Son of God as the disciples had done previously.

[52] Ibid., 567.

[53] Ibid., 568.

[54] Ibid., 570.

[55] Ibid., 571.

[56] Ibid.

multiple truths simultaneously in his Gospel by means of the peri-
cope under discussion. Yet he fails to note literarily how Matthew
has employed the passage broadly in Matthew 27:45–28:15. Fur-
ther, he admits that he has no satisfactory explanation for the phrase
μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτου.[57]

R. T. France

In his commentary, France notes that Matthew's material in
Matthew 27:52–53 is "special material"[58] in that it has no parallel in
the other Gospel accounts.[59] Further, he contends that Matthew's
lack of concern with "explaining" the meaning of the resurrection
of the saints in his Gospel is due to the fact that he is concerned
primarily with its symbolic significance.[60] Matthew's placement of
the scene within the narrative connects Jesus' death with his res-
urrection as the "key to new life which is now made available to
God's people."[61] Thus, he contends, contrary to J. W. Wenham, that
Matthew's series of paratactic clauses with aorist verbs should not be
broken up in order to interpret the resurrection of the saints as hap-
pening after Jesus' resurrection. Rather, like Wenham, he argues that
they did not come out of their tombs until after Jesus' resurrection,
because their resurrection was the "consequence" of his resurrection
from the dead."[62]

Assessment. Though France rightly contends that Wenham's
reading of the Matthean pericope unnaturally breaks up the paratac-
tic clauses with aorist verbs, he fails to note that Matthew's place-
ment of the pericope in his Gospel is not "out of order." Rather,

[57] Ibid., 568–69.

[58] France is one among many scholars who refer to Matt. 27:51b–53 as
Matthew's "special material" since several of these portents are unique to his
Gospel. See also Gurtner, *Torn Veil*, 144–52.

[59] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,
2007), 1081.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid., 1082.

[62] Ibid.

having already been "resurrected" on the day of Jesus' death, the saints leave the area of the tombs to enter the holy city after his resurrection.

Michael Licona

Licona's *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* is a defense of the historicity of Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead. He challenges the presuppositional claims of post-Enlightenment biblical interpreters who contend that historical evidence of Jesus' resurrection is inaccessible to the modern historian.[63] He contends that the best evaluation of the evidence, for those who do not engage the evidence with a priori commitments to the impossibility of the resurrection, commends belief in Jesus' bodily, historical resurrection from the dead. In fact, he asserts, "There is no indication that the early Christians interpreted Jesus' resurrection in a metaphorical or poetic sense to the exclusion of it being a literal event that had occurred to his corpse. Indeed, that a bodily resurrection was the primary intended interpretation seems clear."[64]

Licona does not merely assert the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus; he also states that "the canonical Evangelists and Paul intended their statements regarding Jesus' *death* by crucifixion to be interpreted literally."[65] It is unexpected, therefore, when Licona writes that "the data surrounding what happened to Jesus is fragmentary and could possibly be mixed with legend" in reference to the scene of the resurrected saints in Matthew 27:51–54.[66] Further, considering his adamancy that Jesus' death and resurrection are historical, it is inconsistent when Licona suggests that the narrative scene surrounding Jesus' death is "theologically adorned" with conceivably ahistorical

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[63] He responds to two leading well-known advocates who deny Jesus' resurrection from the dead: Bart Ehrman and John Dominic Crossan.

[64] Michael Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 553.

[65] Ibid., 545, emphasis original.

[66] Ibid., 185.

events—such as the darkness (Matt. 27:45), the tearing of the veil (Matt. 27:51), and the resurrection of the saints (Matt. 27:52–53). The latter, he suggests, is metaphorical[67] and connotes eschatological imagery.[68] After surveying both Jewish and Roman literature in relation to resurrection as well as to the death of an emperor/king, in his final assessment of the pericope he suggests the following:

> Given the presence of phenomenological language in a symbolic manner in both Jewish and Roman literature related to a major event such as the death of an emperor or the end of a reigning king or even a kingdom, the presence of ambiguity in the relevant text of Ignatius, and that so very little can be known about Thallus' comment on the darkness (including whether he was even referring to the darkness at the time of Jesus' crucifixion or, if so, if he was merely speculating pertaining to a natural cause of the darkness claimed by early Christians), it seems to me that an understanding of the language in Matthew 27:52–53 as "special effects" with eschatological Jewish texts and thought in mind is most plausible. There is further support for this interpretation. If the tombs opened and the saints being raised upon Jesus' death was not strange enough, Matthew adds that they did not come out of their tombs until after Jesus' resurrection.[69]

Thus, Licona contends that the phenomena surrounding Jesus' death should be interpreted as "poetic device" and eschatologically

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[67] Licona refers to Matt. 27:52–53 as "that strange little text in Matthew 27:52–53, where upon Jesus' death the dead saints are raised and walk into the city of Jerusalem," ibid., 545–46. Further, he notes Mark and Luke record some of the phenomena surrounding Jesus' death—the darkness covering the land and the rending of the temple's inner veil—but it is Matthew alone who records the earthquake, the rocks splitting, the tombs opening, the raising of the dead saints, and their subsequent entrance into Jerusalem.

[68] Ibid., 550.

[69] Ibid., 552.

flavored "special effects" used by Matthew to communicate to his readers that Jesus died as the Son of God and that an impending judgment awaits Israel.[70] Licona adopts this position as a rebuttal to Crossan's metaphorical interpretation of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Licona argues that it is the idea of "the harrowing of hell" that "most strongly persuades Crossan to go with a metaphorical understanding of Jesus' resurrection."[71] It is because he rejects the way this text has been appropriated to argue for the harrowing of hell and against Jesus' bodily, historical resurrection that Licona finds himself denying the historicity of these cosmic portents.[72]

Assessment. Licona's work is magisterial in the breadth of its analysis. Unfortunately, in relation to Matthew 27:51–54, he is unable to reconcile how Matthew's work is both historical *and* eschatologically flavored. The events surrounding Jesus' death have an apocalyptic "feel" as they accentuate the cosmic impact of the occasion and manifest the end of the temple as the mediator of God's soteriological blessings to the Jewish people and the foreign nations.[73] Yet Matthew records historical events.

[70] Ibid., 553. Though he understands some of the events surrounding Jesus' death to be poetic device, he contends that "interpreting the phenomena at Jesus' death as poetry does not lend support to interpreting Jesus' bodily resurrection as nothing more than a poetic or symbolic device."

[71] Ibid., 546.

[72] Ibid., 546–48, 552.

[73] Though his work is highly acclaimed, Licona's interpretation of this Matthean pericope resulted in interpretive-evangelical tumult from two leading figures in particular—Norman L. Geisler and R. Albert Mohler, Jr. Mohler's assessment of Licona's work can be found here: R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "The Devil Is in the Details: Biblical Inerrancy and the Licona Controversy," *Albert-Mohler.com*, September 14, 2011, accessed September 14, 2011, http://www .albertmohler.com/2011/09/14/the-devil-is-in-the-details-biblical-inerrancy -and-the-licona-controversy/. Geisler's numerous interactions with Licona and his work can be accessed here: Norman L. Geisler, "Licona Controvery' Articles," *NormanGeisler.net*, accessed February 11, 2014, http://normangeisler .com/licona-articles/. Even though Licona adamantly affirms the historicity of both Jesus' death on the cross as well as his bodily resurrection from the dead, Mohler's and Geisler's concern is with the implication(s) of denying the

Douglas W. Anderson

With the guidance of Paul Trebilco and Ivor Davidson, Douglas W. Anderson wrote his dissertation on the Gospel of Matthew, specifically on Matthew 27:51–53—"The Origin and Purpose of Matthew 27:51b–53."[74] His thesis "argues that Matt 27:51b-53 is not a Matthean literary creation but rather is a fragment of a very early Jewish Christian passion tradition, a tradition closely related to some Jewish expectations of what the Messiah's coming would achieve."[75] Further, Anderson argues that Matthew 27:51b–53 is an attempt to "reconcile two contradictory positions: (i) a Jewish belief that the Messiah's coming would initiate the final End, and (ii) the Christian belief that Jesus the Messiah's advent initiated the age of salvation but not the final End."[76] The whole Gospel narrative, according to Anderson, "reflects the thought of Israel as the covenant people of God."[77] Therefore, Anderson suggests the following:

> Matthew has used Matt 27:51b-53 to express, and highlight, the basic message of his narrative: that as the loyal

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historicity of events occurring within a scene that is historical—namely, Matt. 27:45–54. Since the aftermath of this interpretive argument was so public, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary devoted an entire journal to the assessment of the theme of resurrection, Licona's work, and the implications of Licona's arguments. That assessment can be found here: Heath Thomas, ed., *Southeastern Theological Review* 3, 1 (Summer 2012): 55–98. Since the thesis of this paper affirms the historicity of these portents and is not an analysis of the relationship between interpretation and inerrancy, I do not explicate these arguments here.

[74] Douglas William Anderson, "The Origin and Purpose of Matthew 27:51b–53" (PhD diss., University of Otago Seminary, 2014). Anderson's work can be accessed digitally here: https://ourarchive.otago.ac.nz/bitstream /handle/10523/4962/AndersonDouglasW2014PhD.pdf?sequence=1&is Allowed=y.

[75] Ibid., i.

[76] Anderson, "Origin and Purpose of Matthew 27:51b–53," 330.

[77] Ibid.

and obedient vassal of the Lord God, Jesus, the Messiah, has through his death defeated Satan, initiated the final Eschaton, and created a whole new people of God—the Church. This new people consists of saints from both OT times as well as from the NT era. Further, and significantly, it includes Gentiles as well as Jews (Matt 27:54).[78]

Anderson contends that Matthew 27:51–53 is to be interpreted in the context of covenant—that is, "Matthew's Gospel is a document reflecting the establishing in OT times of the covenant people, Israel."[79]

Assessment. Anderson's work must be applauded for its breadth and scope. With thoroughness appropriate only to doctoral dissertations, he carefully navigates the works of major interpreters weighing in on one's understanding of Matthew 27:51–53. However, Anderson's covenantal reading has some interpretive problems. He writes,

Thus, according to Matthew, not just the nation of Israel, *but Jesus himself was in a covenantal relationship with God*, his heavenly Father. Being in this covenantal relationship Jesus was at all times obedient to his Father's will (contrast the disobedient Israel). According to Matthew, Jesus' obedience eventually resulted in his death on the cross. From Matthew's point of view Jesus' death was not only a miscarriage of justice—it was also the supreme moment of his life of obedience. Accordingly, this thesis suggests that to express the significance and accomplishments of Jesus' supreme act of covenantal obedience, Matthew made use of Matt 27:51b-53.[80]

[78] Ibid.
[79] The concept of "covenant" is central to Anderson's understanding of Matt. 27:51–53. See especially ibid., 312–23.
[80] Ibid., 313–14 (emphasis added).

Matthew may have used this pericope to accentuate Jesus' initiation of the final eschaton through his death on the cross; he may have intended for his readers to see that Jesus' death and resurrection created the new servant people of God—the church.[81] But Anderson's covenantal reading of Matthew 27:51–53 wrongly asserts that Jesus himself is in covenantal relationship with God.[82] Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant, not a participant in it (Heb. 8:6). He inaugurated the new covenant and is its executor. But he is in no way in "covenant relationship" with the Father (Heb. 7:22–28; 8:1–13; 9:11–28; 10:1–18). Anderson's reading falls short by focusing primarily on the (debatable) covenantal aspects of this Matthean pericope to the neglect of the christological, missiological, and eschatological foci overflowing from Matthew 27:51–54.[83]

Further, though Anderson acknowledges the existence of textual correspondences between Matthew 27:51b–53 and Matthew 28:1–6, he wrongly excludes Matthew 27:51a from consideration in his thesis.[84] This exclusion contributes to the placement of excessive interpretive stress on each of the individual portents in Matthew 27:51–54. Thus, Anderson's thesis inadvertently focuses on one portent in particular, to the exclusion of the others contained within the pericope.[85] But Matthew 27:52b–53 is not the central portent

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[81] Ibid., 330.

[82] When speaking of Jesus' covenantal relationship with God, Anderson suggests, "Matthew presents Jesus as being under *divine obligation* to lay his life as a ransom for others" (ibid., 69 [emphasis added]). However, the Gospel of John explicitly presents Jesus as having absolute control of his destiny in relation to the salvation of sinners; he is under no obligation (see John 10:11, 17–18). Rather, without compulsion, Jesus willingly offers his life for the elect.

[83] Though he may not affirm my critique, Anderson acknowledges the limitations of his thesis when he writes, "I also readily acknowledge that this contention reflects my own background and subjective presuppositions. While using various aspects of the historical-critical method to study Matt 27:51b-53, I do not claim to be completely disinterested, or to have achieved anything like objective truth" (ibid., 325).

[84] Ibid., 159–62.

[85] Ibid., 313, 320, 324. This dissertation will suggest that focus on the

in the pericope. Rather, it is merely one of five portents within the death-resurrection conclusion of Matthew's Gospel. This dissertation's suggestion of a literary reading of the death-resurrection scene mitigates this interpretive stress.

Thesis

In light of the interpretive problems surrounding Matthew 27:51–54 as well as its recent history of research, this dissertation's thesis propounds that both Matthean resurrection pericopes (Matt. 27:51–54 and 28:1–10) must be fused and read together in order to understand the theological significance of Matthew 27:51–54. Over time, an interpretive dichotomy evolved that separated the historicity of the act itself and its placement in the Gospel from its theological meaning. A literary reading of Matthew 27:51–54 incorporates the entire scope of the death-resurrection narrative so that it is properly interpreted in light of the entire death-resurrection scene rather than isolated as a singular phenomenological occurrence. By failing to observe Matthew's purposeful narrative strategy that informs the literary parallelism of Matthew 27:51–54 alongside 28:1–10, as well as the intentional placement of Matthew 27:51–54 within the death-resurrection scene (Matt. 27:45–28:20), the interpretation of Matthew 27:51–54 has been obscured. By properly understanding the pericope's translation, its primary Old Testament referent, and its compositional structure and placement, interpreters will be able to ascertain (1) how Matthew 27:51–54 is functioning in the death-resurrection scene and (2) the three theological foci of the pericope—Christology, missiology, and eschatology. Failure to observe the intentional structure of Matthew 27:51–54 as a strategic pericope in the death-resurrection

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function of the portents in Matt. 27:51b–53 rather than the function of the entire pericope within the death-resurrection scene (Matt. 27:45–28:20) places hermeneutical pressure on the Matthean passage.

scene of Matthew's Gospel places inordinate interpretive stress on the five divine portents, particularly the resurrection of the sleeping saints (Matt. 27:52b–53).

Regarding the theological significance of Matthew 27:51–54, some of the missiological implications are manifested in how the pharisaic naysayers challenged Jesus' divine sonship (Matt. 27:40, 43), and it is precisely the signs surrounding his horrific death that testify so loudly that even the Gentiles believe (Matt. 27:54). Thus, the "lesser" resurrection of the saints proleptically anticipates the "greater" resurrection of Jesus in the Matthean narrative and visibly manifests Jesus' identity as the Son of God. The "lesser" resurrection of the saints proleptically anticipates the gospel mission to the ends of the earth (Matt. 28:16–20).

Further, a thorough perusal of the Matthean passion narrative manifests the intentional literary parallelism used by the Gospel author to accentuate three theological foci—namely, the christological impact of the scene, a missiological agenda for the world, and eschatological implications as the temple cultus is rendered obsolete. This can be seen in table 1.1 below.

While many interpreters may be able to recall a plethora of proposed literary readings that have, in many ways, overextended themselves hermeneutically, Matthew's literary intentionality in the conclusion of his narrative is manifest. As he has at other points within his Gospel, Matthew utilizes literary parallelism to emphasize theological truth as well as Jesus' identity. Two character examples from the narrative's introduction, along with an example from the scenes surrounding Jesus' birth and death and one macro-structural example of the Gospel, will suffice to manifest his intentionality in the use of this literary device.[86]

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[86] For more on narrative design as well as literary intentionality in the Gospels, see Timothy Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives: Scenes, People, and Theology* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2010).

Table 1.1. Literary Parallelism in Matthew 27–28

Matthew 27:45–66	Matthew 27:62–28:15
darkness (27:45) σκότος	dawn (28:1) τῇ ἐπιφωσκούσῃ
earth shook (27:51) ἡ γῆ ἐσείσθη	earthquake (28:2) σεισμὸς
raised (27:52) ἠγέρθησαν	risen (28:6) ἠγέρθη
tomb (27:52–53) τὰ μνημεῖα . . . τῶν μνημεῖα	tomb (28:1) τὸν τάφον
the holy city (27:53)[87] εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν	the city (28:11) εἰς τὴν πόλιν
centurion (27:54)—ὁ ἑκατόνταρχος	those guarding (28:4)— οἱ τηροῦντες the guards (28:11)— τῆς κουστωδίας soldiers (28:12)— τοῖς στρατιώταις

[87] Note the *inclusio* with Matt. 4:5—εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν. Previously, after the baptismal scene in which God the Father identifies Jesus as the beloved Son with whom he is pleased (3:17), Satan challenged Jesus, attempting to incite him to take the initiative to identify himself as "the Son of God"—εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ—but Jesus refused (4:6–7). Similarly, the scene prior to the pericope under consideration reads like an antibaptismal scene—reversing the scene that precedes Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Formerly, Jesus had spoken (3:15), the Spirit descended on him (3:16), and the Father audibly testified from heaven to his identify (3:17); now, after crying out with a loud voice twice (27:46, 50) an unnerving silence pervades the scene before Jesus yields the Spirit and dies (27:50). It is only after Jesus' death that Matthew notes how

fear (27:54) ἐφοβήθησαν	fear (28:4, 5, 8, 10) φόβου … φοβεῖσθε … φόβου … φοβεῖσθε
genuine profession (27:54)	false profession (28:13–15)
Mary Magdalene and Mary (27:56) Μαριά ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ καὶ Μαρία	Mary Magdalene … Mary (28:1) Μαριὰμ ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ … Μαρία
Joseph of Arimathea before Pilate (27:57)	the chief priests before Pilate (27:62)
great stone (27:60) λίθον μέγαν	the stone (28:2) τὸν λίθον
attempt to guard the tomb (27:62–66)	inability to guard the tomb (28:4)

First, King Herod (Matt. 2:1) is literarily paralleled with Jesus, the newborn King of the Jews (Matt. 2:2). The archetype of the longed-for Davidic king has arrived in Jesus; unlike Herod's reign, Christ's kingdom is not frustrated by "rival" rulers. Second, the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry is literarily paralleled with the beginning of John the Baptist's earthly ministry—both have wilderness experiences (Matt. 3:1; 4:1) and both begin their homiletical endeavors by heralding the same message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). The prophet like Moses has come *in* the person of Jesus (Deut. 18:15–22; John 6:14). He is greater than John. He leads righteously through the wilderness

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the Father testified to Jesus' identity as the "the Son of God" by means of the cosmological and apocalyptic imagery that dominates this historical scene.

without succumbing to temptation as did Adam and Moses (Gen. 3:6; Num. 20:10–13).

Third, scenes surrounding Jesus' birth are literarily paralleled with scenes surrounding his death. Thus, when Jesus was born, children were slaughtered (Matt. 2:16); when Jesus died, the dead were raised to life (Matt. 27:52). Fourth, Matthew has employed literary parallelism by contrasting characters and scenes not only within his narrative but also in the structure of his work as a whole.[88]

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[88] Lohr argues for a similar structure of Matthew's Gospel. See Charles H. Lohr, "Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew," *CBQ* 23 (1961): 427. He, too, places Matt. 23 in the eschatological sermonic discourse. For a critique of Lohr's position, see Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "The Structure of Matthew XIV–XVIII," *RB* 82 (1975): 369–71. Murphy-O'Connor's strongest contention is that placing Matt. 23 with Matt. 19–22 accentuates the correspondence between the first sermonic discourse, Matt. 5–7, and the last sermonic-discourse, Matt. 24–25. In this case, both sermonic discourses would be addressed to Jesus' disciples; his disciples would be, according to Murphy-O'Connor, distinguished from the crowds within Matthew's Gospel. Additionally, Murphy-O'Connor contends that this makes obvious the deliberate intention of Matthew to make the five sermonic discourses one of the major components of his Gospel. Murphy-O'Connor argues that this is indisputable by the phrase καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, which is used only fives times throughout the Gospel. However, for a defense of Lohr's position, see Jason Hood, "Matthew 23–25: The Extent of Jesus' Fifth Discourse," *JBL* 3 (2009): 527–43. Contra Murphy-O'Connor, Hood suggests that the inclusion of Matt. 23 in the eschatological sermonic discourse "encourages investigation of the oft-ignored close correlations of chap. 5 and chap. 23 (particularly the 'blessings and curses' and their contexts) and the important correlation of the first and fifth discourses in their entirety." Jonathan Pennington also notes that chap. 13 forms the chiastic center of Matthew. For Pennington, this accentuates "the centrality of the message of the coming of the Kingdom of God." Jonathan T. Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 280–81. Further, via Pennington, table 1.2 manifests a "sermon" then "narrative" structure throughout the Gospel rather than "narrative" then "sermon." Though preceding interpreters have noted that the discourses were either sermons or material collected from several of Jesus' sermons, the phrase "sermonic discourse" is original to this dissertation's author. The phrase is used intentionally to emphasize the homiletical nature of the Matthean discourses.

Table 1.2. Macro-Chiastic Structure of Matthew's Gospel

					1–4	Introduction: Birth and Beginnings of Jesus' Earthly Ministry
				5–7		Sermonic Discourse: Sermon on the Mount / Entering the Kingdom of Heaven
			8–9			Narrative Discourse: The Authority of Jesus to Heal
		10				Sermonic Discourse: Missiological Sermon to the Community
	11–12					Narrative Discourse: Rejection of Jesus as the Christ by This Generation
13						Sermonic Discourse: Parabolic Sermon on the Kingdom of Heaven
	14–17					Narrative Discourse: Recognition of Jesus as the Christ by the Disciples
		18				Sermonic Discourse: Ecclesiological Sermon to the Community
			19–22			Narrative Discourse: The Authority of Jesus Challenged
				23–25		Sermonic Discourse: Eschatological Discourse/Coming of the KOH
					26–28	Conclusion: Death and End of Jesus' Earthly Ministry

The question, then, is *why* Matthew employed this intention-ality in Matthew 27:45–28:15. It seems his literary parallelism is intended to accentuate Jesus' identity as the Son of God—the earth he created mourns (Matt. 27:45) and breaks (Matt. 27:51) at his death, giving back the dead as a testimony to his dominion as the Son of God (Matt. 28:18). Further, Matthew's intentionality in literary parallelism is intended to accentuate the mission his death neces-sitates—his death is life-giving and ultimately salvific for persons from every nation who profess faith in his name (Matt. 28:16–20; cf. 27:54). By dying and being buried in a tomb, Jesus bears much fruit, just as the seed of wheat does by falling to the earth (John 12:24).[89] The eschatological significance(s) embedded in the rending of the temple veil have missiological import. Thus, Matthew concludes his Gospel with an *inclusio* that has missiological implications, for Jesus "bears fruit" through the disciples he promises to be with until the end of the age as they are on mission for the renown of the triune name (Matt. 28:20; cf. 1:23).

This is significant both for our interpretation of the discourse (they are sermons/sermonic) as well as for our proclamation of the text—Matthew's Gospel was intended to model one aspect of *how* to preach about the king-dom of heaven now that it has been πληρῶσαι in Christ (Matt. 5:17). It seems, then, that the homiletical goals of Matthew informed his composition of the sermonic discourse in that he crafted his Gospel (1) to solicit a certain type of response to the kingdom of heaven and (2) to model for his readers how to preach authoritatively, like Jesus, about the kingdom of heaven—ἦν γὰρ διδάσκων αὐτοὺς ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων (Matt. 7:29). Though refer-ring to the Sermon on the Mount, Pelikan notes that homileticians can take their sermonic cues from the great Rhetor, Jesus Christ, who perfectly wed form with content. This model is seen in the sermonic discourses crafted by Matthew in his Gospel. See Jaroslav Pelikan. *Divine Rhetoric: The Sermon on the Mount as Message and Model in Augustine, Chrysostom, and Luther* (Crest-wood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), 48.

[89] Matthew is clear, though, that it is only a life-giving death for those who love God instead of mammon (Matt. 28:11–15; cf. 6:24).

Conclusion

This dissertation suggests that bifurcating the Matthean resurrection pericopes places undue interpretive stress on each of the five individual portents within Matthew 27:51–54, which has led to a separation of the historicity of the act itself and its placement in the Gospel from its theological meaning. Moreover, interpretive stress has guided interpreters to focus on minor speculative questions related to Matthew 27:52b–53 (What kind of bodies did the resurrected dead possess? Who were they? How many people saw them?) rather than how Matthew 27:51–54 is functioning in the death-resurrection scene and the three theological foci of the pericope—Christology, missiology, and eschatology. A literary reading of the death-resurrection scene mitigates this interpretive stress. For what many interpreters have often taken to be the central portent (Matt. 27:52b–53) is merely one of five portents within the death-resurrection conclusion of Matthew's Gospel.