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I SEE DEAD PEOPLE:  
THE FUNCTION OF THE RESURRECTION OF  
THE SAINTS IN MATTHEW 27:51-54

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
The Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
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Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
Raymond Michael Johnson

May 2017

APPROVAL SHEET

I SEE DEAD PEOPLE:  
THE FUNCTION OF THE RESURRECTION OF  
THE SAINTS IN MATTHEW 27:51-54

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For Meghan,

“The heart of her husband trusts in her.”

-Proverbs 31:11

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## LIST OF 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
<i>ATJ</i>	<i>Asbury Theological Journal</i>
BDB	Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, <i>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
BDAG	Walter Bauer, Fredrick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and Wilber Gingrich, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3rd ed.
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CurTM	Currents in Theology and Mission
ETL	Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses
<i>ExpT</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
Georg.	The Georgics
<i>HeyJ</i>	<i>Heythrop Journal</i>



<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HTS</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Studies</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>IBS</i>	<i>Irish Biblical Studies</i>
Ign. Magn.	Ignatius to the Magnesians
Institutes	Institutes of the Christian Religion
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
<i>JPT</i>	<i>Journal of Pentecostal Theology</i>
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
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LBC	London Baptist Confession (1689)
L&N	Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains</i>
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LSJ	Henry G. Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry S. Jones, <i>Greek-English Lexicon</i>
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
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NSD	New Studies in Dogmatics
NTS	New Testament Studies
<i>PT</i>	<i>Poetics Today</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
Rep.	De republica
Rom.	Romulus
<i>SBJT</i>	<i>Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
<i>TC</i>	<i>A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism</i>
<i>TD</i>	<i>Theology Digest</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>

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## 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 homiletics 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, and Dan Mason—my interns—for faithfully serving TJC to provide me time to write. 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. 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.

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May 2017

## CHAPTER 1

### 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 Gospel-narrative.<sup>1</sup> One that has been particularly perplexing is Matthew 27:51-54. At the moment of Jesus' death on the cross, after crying out with a loud voice and yielding up the Spirit (Matt 27:50), several cataclysmic events occurred which Matthew recounts for his readers. His Gospel includes five signs<sup>2</sup> that accompany Jesus' death: (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, who Matthew calls ἀγίωv, are

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<sup>1</sup>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.

<sup>2</sup>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 no longer do again in the future—he will never again crush his Son as 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," a paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society National Conference, New Orleans, November 2009, 1-38.

raised to life (v.52b).<sup>3</sup> 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 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.<sup>4</sup> For this reason further study of the Matthean

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<sup>3</sup>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 a faith-profession from the centurion 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.

<sup>4</sup>Regarding the former, see D. A. Carson, *Matthew 13-28*, in vol. 2 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version*, ed. Frank E. Gaebeline (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 581-82. Regarding the latter, see Michael Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010), 553.



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 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 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 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) as well as the implications of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. By the way he has constructed the narrative Matthew has set the stage in his Gospel storyline 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 (Matt 28:6; cf. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19). For Matthew, the resurrection of the saints creates 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. Jesus' "greater"<sup>5</sup> resurrection is what the religious leaders feared because it would prove 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 he is truly alive and he 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

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<sup>5</sup>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) 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."

has conquered sin, death, and hell. Now he is both 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<sup>6</sup> as well as a consultation of noteworthy works on the resurrection,<sup>7</sup> manifests that a vast interpretive chasm exists between exegetes and homileticians on how the text under consideration, Matthew 27:51-54, functions within Matthew's Gospel-narrative as well as to what this particular pericope means for readers of Matthew's Gospel. In the absence of scholarly consensus interpreters must overcome three problems to exegete this Matthean pericope rightly: mistranslation, mis-referent, and misplacement.

### **Mistranslation**

The first problem 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.<sup>8</sup> The full stop, for these interpreters, conveys a temporal lapse between the time when the tombs opened as

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<sup>6</sup>For example, W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, ICC (New York: T&T Clark, 2004); Craig Evans, *Matthew*, NCBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and David Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

<sup>7</sup>See, for example, Dale Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpretation* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005); Dale Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 452-453; R. Bieringer, V. Koperski, and B. Lataire, eds., *Resurrection in the New Testament*, festschrift in honor of Jan Lambrecht, BETL 165, (Leuven, Belgium: University Press, 2002); N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup>Concerning this thesis, three in particular stand out: J. W. Wenham, "When Were the Saints Raised?" *JTS* 32, no. 1 (1981): 150-52; Carson, *Matthew 13-28*, 581-82; Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 421.

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 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 Gospel-narrative. It implies 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 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 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 the 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 where a period would not suffice. 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 in history.<sup>9</sup> The signs accompanying Jesus' cross-death testify to his divine identity as the Son of God. They underscore the missiological and eschatological foci of 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).

### **Mis-referent**

The second problem this dissertation aims to address is mis-referent 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 were Matthew's sources in the composition of the Matthean *Sondergut*? Senior suggests, "Matthew's theological perspective owed much to Mark"<sup>10</sup> and that "Mark was the only formal source used by Matthew in the passion narrative."<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, when addressing the issue of "origin" in relation to the *Sondergut*, 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

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<sup>9</sup>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: The Gospel according to Matthew, the Gospel according to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1930), 1:236.

<sup>10</sup>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.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 273. Emphasis mine. 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-narrative.

in order to convey his own distinctive message.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore, in Senior’s and Hill’s assessment, a pre-existing body of material informing Matthew’s composition of the *Sondergut* is unlikely. However, it is noteworthy that previously Senior had suggested Matthew 27:51b-53 is solely dependent upon Ezekiel 37, not solely dependent upon Mark’s Gospel-narrative.<sup>14</sup> Further, Dunn notes the presence of the *Sondergut* suggests Matthew’s material was not a single collection or from a single source.<sup>15</sup> This supports the proposal of this dissertation: Ezekiel 37:1-14 is the primary referent for Matthew 27:51-54.<sup>16</sup>

Chapter 3, therefore, will advocate there is textual and interpretive evidence the resurrection vision in Ezekiel 37:1-14 is close in the background of Matthew 27:51-54.<sup>17</sup> Further, chapter 3 will argue the 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 Ezekiel 37:1-14. The Old Testament co-text for Matthew 27:51-54 is in the Ezekielian Old Testament prophetic narrative. Matthew’s depiction of Jesus’ crucifixion and death-resurrection as one evil-defeating, death-defying event in his Gospel-narrative finds its

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<sup>13</sup>David Hill, “Matthew 27:51-53 in the Theology of the Evangelist,” *IBS* 7 (April 1985): 77.

<sup>14</sup>Senior, *The Passion according to Matthew*, 207-23

<sup>15</sup>Matt 27:52-53 is one of several sections of Matthew referred to by Dunn. He is commenting on all the special material in Matthew’s Gospel-narrative. 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.

<sup>16</sup>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-narrative more manifest. Hutton correctly notes that Senior’s conclusions overlook the influence of non-Markan material as well as oral tradition. Delvin Hutton, a book review of *The Passion according to Matthew: A Redactional Study*, by Donald P. Senior, *JBL* 96 (1977): 308-9.

<sup>17</sup>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 (1964-1965): 164.

inspiration in Ezekiel 37:1-14. Contra many scholars, this dissertation will argue 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 extra-biblical, pre-Matthean tradition. Rather, this dissertation will argue that examination of Ezekiel 37:1-14 in its Septuagintal form manifests numerous links to Matthew's Gospel-narrative. 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 upon Ezekiel 37 (LXX) manifests the pericope's theological foci—Christology, missiology, and eschatology.

### **Misplacement**

The third problem this dissertation aims to address is misplacement since 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 27:51), resurrection from the dead (Matt 27:52-53), the metaphorical destruction of 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 Gospel-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 four this dissertation will argue that 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. Through the failure 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), the interpretation of Matthew 27:51-54 has been obscured.

### **Background—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. There is, however, a significant gap 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 periscope will be examined.<sup>18</sup>

### **Delvin D. Hutton**

Hutton's work, "The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (MT 27:51b-53): A Study of the Theology of the Matthean Passion Narrative," is his unpublished dissertation from Harvard in 1970.<sup>19</sup> 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*, to advocate the death of a Hellenistic "divine man," and to advocate cosmic participation in the death of a cosmic deity.<sup>20</sup> He contends these are "hermeneutically inadequate"<sup>21</sup> and seeks to show the pericopal scene has been both reshaped and replaced in the narrative by Matthew for theological purposes. 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?'"<sup>22</sup> 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?"<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>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.

<sup>19</sup>Delvin D. Hutton, "The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53): A Study of the Theology of the Matthean Passion Narrative" (Th.D. diss., Harvard University, 1970).

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 14. His analysis of interpretive history is short. Further, it is not entirely clear the significance of the distinction between his second and third appropriations of the text. 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.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid. Unlike Licona (see below), Hutton is not concerned with questions of historicity in his work on the resurrection.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 16.



He concludes the scene Matthew has crafted in his Gospel is a combination of the Markan material and oral epiphanic traditions.<sup>24</sup> He also contends the placement of the redacted material belonged originally with the scene Matthew portrays in the following chapter, Matthew 28:2-4.<sup>25</sup> He suggests that Matthew's rearrangement of the material is to accentuate a new eschatological reality.<sup>26</sup> More specifically, he contends Matthew has crafted a scene with the resurrection of τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων<sup>27</sup> as he relied on apocalyptic traditions in order to emphasize the eschatological nature of Jesus' death on the cross.<sup>28</sup> The portents surrounding Jesus' cross-death connote 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."<sup>29</sup> 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.

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<sup>24</sup>Hutton, "The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)," 109.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 108.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 117, 119, 126, 172-76.

<sup>27</sup>Hutton speculates to 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.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 145.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 115.

## J. W. Wenham

In 1981 J. W. Wenham<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> He suggested it was inappropriate for translators to translate ἀνεῳχθῆσαν 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 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 the subject is found in the previous verse, Matthew 27:52—πολλὰ σώματα. Consequently, he contends this places the resurrection of the saints with the events that follow instead of the events that precede—namely, he claims the saints are both resurrected *and* come out of the tombs *after* Jesus’ resurrection from the dead.<sup>32</sup> 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

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<sup>30</sup>Though Wenham’s article is short, his contribution is significant because his thesis persuades well-known modern commentator D. A. Carson. See Carson, *Matthew 13-28*, 581-82. See also Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 421. Carson and Blomberg are two of many Wenham has persuaded.

<sup>31</sup>Wenham, “When Were the Saints Raised?” 150-52.

<sup>32</sup>Wenham is concerned with alleviating Matthew from 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.

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.”<sup>33</sup> Therefore, he connects the resurrection of the saints with the resurrection of Jesus to emphasize his “defeating the powers of evil.”<sup>34</sup>

**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: Christological, missiological, and eschatological. Wenham, however, incorrectly assumes the raising of τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων 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 his 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 his fame was heralded for overturning death previously (Matt 9:26), so now Matthew recounts his fame is heralded in τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν and, ultimately, to the ends of the earth (Matt 28:16-20).

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<sup>33</sup>Wenham, “When Were the Saints Raised?” 152.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 151.

## 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 approach 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.<sup>35</sup> Following Chatman, he analyses the final form of Matthew as a unified narrative by arguing the Gospel, like all other narratives, has two parts—the Gospel’s story and the Gospel’s discourse.<sup>36</sup> The story, according to Kingsbury, is the events that comprise 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.<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup> Kingsbury’s narrative-critical reading is further developed in his work, *Gospel Interpretation*, where he contends that discernment of the narrative’s

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<sup>35</sup>Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 2.

<sup>36</sup>*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 explain 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 narrative so that the elements of the story, which are historical, are theologically arranged in this discourse to convey truth. See Chatman, *Story and Discourse*. Jonathan Pennington has recently advocated a literary analysis akin to Chatman’s for Gospel interpretation. See Jonathan Pennington, *Reading the Gospel’s Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 169-82.

<sup>37</sup>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 comprise the story. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 40-41.

<sup>38</sup>Jack D. Kingsbury, ed., *Gospel Interpretation: Narrative-Critical & Social Scientific Approaches* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 1-5.

arrangement is central to interpretation. The ‘arrangement’ of the narrative is intended by the author 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.”<sup>39</sup> In relation to Matthew 27:51-54, Kingsbury contends Matthew used the recounting of 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<sup>40</sup> and (2) to bring the third part of his Gospel story to its initial narrative climax.<sup>41</sup>

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.<sup>42</sup> By means of their hostile actions to Jesus, they

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<sup>39</sup>Kingsbury, *Gospel Interpretation*, 3.

<sup>40</sup>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 is 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 Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 74-77.

<sup>41</sup>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 narrational indicator that the gospel will be taken to the Gentiles (Matt 28:16-20; cf. 27:54).

<sup>42</sup>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.

assume 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 they also fulfill Scriptures that prophesied his redeeming mission.<sup>43</sup> 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 preceding the scene of Matthew 27:51-54 accentuate the tension created by the narrative when the Gentile centurion confesses Jesus to be θεοῦ υἱὸς ἦν οὗτος (Matt 27:54). His confession manifests the cosmic portents are not only Christological, in that they demonstrate Jesus' cross-death is a life-giving death, but they are also missiological as both resurrected Jewish saints and a Roman Gentile testify to his identity as God the Father's Son.<sup>44</sup>

**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-

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<sup>43</sup>Among 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.

<sup>44</sup>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, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 57.

Critical Study of Matthew 27.”<sup>45</sup> His thesis argues, “Matthew 27 is the central and most important section in the passion/resurrection complex which concludes Matthew’s Gospel (26-28).”<sup>46</sup> Further, he contends the events surrounding Jesus’ cross-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.”<sup>47</sup> When commenting on the pericope this study focuses on, he notes it “is the climax of the entire chapter” since it should be read as “portraying the consequences of Jesus’ death.”<sup>48</sup> For Witherup, the silence of the historical scene is broken by means of the divine portents through which God speaks.<sup>49</sup> His final conclusion is the pericope is “displaced” in the Matthean Gospel-narrative. That is, Matthew has a literary proclivity of completing a story line that he interjects into the main thought.<sup>50</sup> 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

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<sup>45</sup>Ronald D. Witherup, “The Cross of Jesus: A Literary-Critical Study of Matthew 27” (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1985).

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., xi.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>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.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 280.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 284.

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 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 interpretations of the passage are divided into five categories, broadly—the salvation-history interpretation, the Christological interpretation, Christ's descent into hell, the allegorical interpretation, and the eschatological interpretation.<sup>51</sup> This is, for Luz, the prolegomena for his own interpretation, which accentuates God's intervention in the narrative scene.<sup>52</sup> Repeatedly, he notes Matthew is laboring to convey the events surrounding Jesus' cross-death are "acts of God" or "supernatural interventions" intended for self-revelatory purposes.<sup>53</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup> Their presence in the narrative is a sign of God's coming judgment on the people of Israel and the city of Jerusalem.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, trans. James E. Crouch, ed. Helmut Koester, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 560-65.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 566-70.

<sup>53</sup>*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.

<sup>54</sup>Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 567.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 568.



Ultimately, though, Luz admits the interpretive difficulty of the passage and suggests it has “multiple levels of meaning.”<sup>56</sup> He accentuates two levels of meaning in particular—the Christological and the salvation-history dimensions of the text. Concerning the former, Luz suggests the events recorded in Matthew 27:51-53 are “victory signs.”<sup>57</sup> 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 upon 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.<sup>58</sup>

**Assessment.** Luz rightly notes that Matthew is communicating multiple truths simultaneously in his Gospel narrative by means of the pericope under discussion. Yet, he fails to note literarily how Matthew has employed the passage broadly in Matthew 27:45-28:15. Further, he admits that he has no satisfactory explanation for the phrase, μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ.<sup>59</sup>

## **R. T. France**

In his commentary, France notes Matthew’s material in Matthew 27:52-53 is “special material”<sup>60</sup> in that it has no parallel in the other Gospel accounts.<sup>61</sup> Further, he contends Matthew’s lack of concern with “explaining” the meaning of the resurrection of

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<sup>56</sup>Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 570.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 571.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 568-69.

<sup>60</sup>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, *The Torn Veil*, 144-52.

<sup>61</sup>R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 1081.

the saints in his Gospel narrative is due to the fact that he is concerned primarily with its symbolic significance.<sup>62</sup> Matthew's placement of the scene within the narrative connects Jesus' death with his resurrection as the "key to new life which is now made available to God's people."<sup>63</sup> Thus, he contends, contrary to J. W. Wenham, Matthew's series of paratactic clauses with aorist verbs should not be broken up in order to interpret the resurrection of the saints as happening after Jesus' resurrection. Rather, like Wenham, he argues they did not come out of their tombs until after Jesus' resurrection because their resurrection was the "consequence" of his resurrection from the dead."<sup>64</sup>

**Assessment.** Though France rightly contends Wenham's reading of the Matthean pericope unnaturally breaks up the paratactic clauses with aorist verbs, he fails to note that Matthew's placement of the pericope in his Gospel is not "out-of-order." Rather, having already been "resurrected" on the day of his death, the saints leave the area of the tombs to enter the holy city after his resurrection.

### **Michael Licona**

Licona's work, *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 historical evidence of Jesus' resurrection is inaccessible to the modern historian.<sup>65</sup> He contends the best evaluation of the evidence, for those who do not engage the evidence with *a priori* commitments to the impossibility of the resurrection,

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<sup>62</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1081.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 1082.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>He responds to two leading well-known advocates who deny Jesus' resurrection from the dead: Bart Ehrman and John Dominic Crossan.

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."<sup>66</sup>

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."<sup>67</sup> 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.<sup>68</sup> Further, considering his adamancy that Jesus' death and resurrection are historical, it is inconsistent when Licona suggests the narrative scene surrounding Jesus' cross-death is "theologically adorned" with conceivably ahistorical 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<sup>69</sup> and connotes eschatological imagery.<sup>70</sup> After surveying both Jewish and Roman literature in relation to resurrection as well as the death of an emperor/king, in his final assessment of the pericope he suggests the following:

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<sup>66</sup>Michael Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010), 553.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, 545, emphasis original.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>69</sup>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." Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 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.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 550.

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.<sup>71</sup>

Thus, Licona contends the phenomena surrounding Jesus' cross-death should be interpreted as "poetic device" and eschatologically flavored "special effects" used by Matthew to communicate to his readers that Jesus died as the Son of God and an impending judgment awaits Israel.<sup>72</sup> Licona adopts this position as a rebuttal to Crossan's metaphorical interpretation of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Licona argues it is the idea of "the harrowing of hell" which "most strongly persuades Crossan to go with a metaphorical understanding of Jesus' resurrection."<sup>73</sup> 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.<sup>74</sup>

**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'

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<sup>71</sup>Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 552.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 553. Though he understands some of the events surrounding his 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."

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 546.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 546-48, 552.

cross-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.<sup>75</sup> Yet, Matthew records historical events.

### **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.”<sup>76</sup> 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.”<sup>77</sup> Further, Anderson argues Matthew’s use of 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

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<sup>75</sup>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,” *AlbertMohler.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 Controversy’ Articles,” *NormanGeisler.net*, accessed February 11, 2014, <http://www.normangeisler.net/articles/Bible/Inspiration-Inerrancy/Licona/default.htm>. Even though Licona adamantly affirms the historicity of both Jesus’ cross-death as well as Jesus’ bodily resurrection from the dead, Mohler’s and Geisler’s concern is with the implication(s) of denying the 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, no.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.

<sup>76</sup>Douglas William Anderson, “The Origin and Purpose of Matthew 27:51b-53” (Ph.D. 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&isAllowed=y>

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, i.

Christian belief that Jesus the Messiah's advent initiated the age of salvation but not the final End."<sup>78</sup> The whole Gospel-narrative, according to Anderson, "reflects the thought of Israel as the covenant people of God."<sup>79</sup> 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 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).<sup>80</sup>

Anderson contends 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."<sup>81</sup>

**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 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.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Anderson, "The Origin and Purpose of Matthew 27:51b-53," 330.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>The concept of "covenant" is central to Anderson's understanding of Matt 27:51-53. See especially, *ibid.*, 312-23.

<sup>82</sup>Anderson, "The Origin and Purpose of Matthew 27:51b-53," 313-14, emphasis added.

Matthew may have used this pericope to accentuate Jesus' initiation of the final eschaton through his cross-death; Matthew may have intended for his readers to see that Jesus' death-resurrection created the new servant people of God—the Church.<sup>83</sup> But, Anderson's covenantal reading of Matthew 27:51-53 wrongly asserts Jesus himself is in covenantal relationship with God.<sup>84</sup> Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant, not a participant of the New Covenant (Heb 8:6). Jesus is the executor of the New Covenant. He inaugurated the New Covenant. 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.<sup>85</sup>

Further, though Anderson acknowledges the existence of textual correspondences between Matthew 27:51b-53 and Matthew 28:1-6,<sup>86</sup> he wrongly excludes Matthew 27:51a from consideration in his thesis. 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.<sup>87</sup> However, Matthew 27:52b-53 is

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<sup>83</sup>Anderson, "The Origin and Purpose of Matthew 27:51b-53," 330.

<sup>84</sup>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.

<sup>85</sup>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.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 159-62.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 313, 320, 324. This dissertation will suggest that focus on the function of the portents in Matt 27:51b-53 rather than the function of the entire pericope within the death-resurrection scene (Matt

not the central portent in the pericope. Rather, it is merely one of five portents in the pericope within the death-resurrection conclusion of Matthew's Gospel-narrative. 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, the thesis propounded in this dissertation is: 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 separating 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. Through the failure 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), the interpretation of Matthew 27:51-54 has been obscured. By a proper understanding of the pericope's translation, the primary Old Testament referent, and the 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 scene of Matthew's Gospel places inordinate

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27:45-28:20) places hermeneutical pressure on the Matthean passage.



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 Gospel narrative and it 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 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 Gospel 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 Gospel narrative’s introduction along with one example from the scenes surrounding Jesus’ birth and death as well as one macro-structural example of the Gospel will suffice to manifest his intentionality in the use of this literary device.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>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, 2010).

Table 1. Literary parallelism in Matthew 27-28

<i>Matthew 27:45-66</i>	<i>Matthew 27:62-28:15</i>
darkness (27:45) σκότος	dawn (28:1) τῇ ἐπιφωσκούσῃ
earth shook (27:51) ἡ γῆ ἐσειέσθη	earthquake (28:2) σεισμός
raised (27:52) ἡγέρθησαν	risen (28:6) ἡγέρθη
tomb (27:52-53) τὰ μνημεῖα...τῶν μνημεῖα	tomb (28:1) τὸν τάφον
the holy city (27:53) <sup>89</sup> εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν	the city (28:11) εἰς τὴν πόλιν
centurion (27:54) – ὀκτακόνταρχος	those guarding (28:4) – οἱ τηροῦντες the guards (28:11) – τῆς κουστωδίας soldiers (28:12) – τοῖς στρατιώταις
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) Μαριάμ 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, Herod the King (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, “rival” rulers do not frustrate his Kingdom. Second, the beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry is literarily paralleled with the beginning of John the Baptist’s

<sup>89</sup>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”—ἐὶ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ—but, Jesus refused (4:6-7). Similarly, the scene prior to the pericope under consideration reads like an anti-baptismal scene—reversing the scene that precedes Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness. Formerly, Jesus had spoken (3:15), the Spirit descended upon 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 the Father testified to Jesus’ identity as the “the Son of God” by means of the cosmological and apocalyptic imagery which dominates this historical scene.

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 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 Jesus’ 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, not only has Matthew employed literary parallelism by contrasting characters and scenes within his Gospel narrative, he has employed this parallelism in the structure of his work as a whole.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>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 ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, which is only used five 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.” Pennington also notes that chap. 13 forms the chiasmic 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 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. 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 Kingdom 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—

Table 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 KOH
			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 KOH
	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

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ἦν γὰρ διδάσκων αὐτοὺς ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων (Matt 7:29). Though referring to the Sermon on the Mount, Pelikan notes that homiletics 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* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), 48.

The question, then, is “*Why* did Matthew employ this intentionality 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 necessitates—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 as does the seed of wheat that also bears much fruit by falling to the earth (John 12:24).<sup>91</sup> 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).

### **Conclusion**

This dissertation suggests that bifurcating the two Matthean resurrection pericopes places undue interpretive stress on each of the five individual portents within Matthew 27:51-54. Interpretive stress 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,

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<sup>91</sup>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).

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-narrative.

## CHAPTER 2

### TRANSLATING MATTHEW 27:51-54

The interpretive dilemma present in the pericope under consideration is obviated by recognizing 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. Through the failure 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), the interpretation of Matthew 27:51-54 has been obscured. Failure to observe the intentional structure of Matthew 27:51-54 as a strategic pericope in the death-resurrection scene of Matthew's Gospel has placed inordinate interpretive stress on the five divine portents—particularly, the resurrection of the sleeping saints (Matt 27:52b-53). Thus, over time, an interpretive dichotomy has evolved which separates the historicity of the act itself and its placement in the Gospel from its theological meaning.

Therefore, it is necessary to address the issue of translation in relation to Matthew 27:51-54.<sup>1</sup> That is, "What is the most natural translation of the Matthean

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<sup>1</sup>I would like to thank Charles Quarles in allowing me to view a pre-published version of his paper presented at the 2014 annual ETS conference in San Diego, CA. See Charles Quarles, "Matthew 27:51-53 as a Scribal Interpretation: Testing a Recent Proposal," a paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society National Conference, San Diego, California, November 19-21, 2014. In this academic address, Quarles skillfully demonstrates that the pericope under consideration in this dissertation is original to the Matthean Gospel narrative. Furthermore, his address, contra Craig Evans, amply demonstrates awareness of this pericope among early church interpreters such as Ignatius of Antioch, Egerton Papyrus 3, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Julius Africanus, and Origen. He concludes that both internal as well as

pericope?” Since there is currently no Matthean pericope more ferociously debated in contemporary evangelicalism than this scene surrounding Jesus’ cross-death, it is necessary to examine the translation of Matthew 27:51-54. This chapter will argue, contra Wenham, 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 the τὸ πνεῦμα (Matt 27:50).<sup>2</sup> This chapter will also argue that a semicolon at the end of Matthew 27:52 suggests a close relationship between the resurrection of the saints and the emergence from their graves where a period would not suffice.<sup>3</sup> A reading that tethers the signs in Matthew 27:51-54 with the events of Good Friday accentuates the three theological foci Matthew is featuring in his Gospel’s

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external evidences testify to the originality of this Matthean pericope, making a theory of interpolation highly doubtful. Therefore, this chapter will assume the originality of the Matthean text and will not discuss external evidence relating to the textual tradition of this pericope.

<sup>2</sup>Blaine Charette contends that Jesus yielding his τὸ πνεῦμα in Matt 27:50-54 is a reference to the Spirit of God, rather than an anthropological indirect reference to Jesus’ life. See Blaine Charette, *Restoring Presence: The Spirit in Matthew’s Gospel*, JPTSup 18 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 92-97. Additionally, Charette connects the τὸ πνεῦμα released by Jesus in Matt 27:50 with the τὸ πνεῦμα that descended upon him at his baptism in Matt 3:16, arguing, “It is important to recall that earlier at the temptation the term [τοῦ πνεύματος] clearly refers to the Spirit of God [i.e. τὸ πνεῦμα] which had come upon Jesus at his baptism. It is therefore at least possible Matthew is now describing the ‘letting go’ of that same Spirit at the moment of Jesus’ death.” See Blaine Charette, “‘Never Has Anything Like This Been Seen in Israel’: The Spirit as Eschatological Sign in Matthew’s Gospel,” *JPT* 8 (1996): 31-51. Interestingly, careful readers will notice the temptation narrative and the signs surrounding the crucifixion scene are further linked by the phrase εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν (Matt 4:5; 27:53). France, however, suggests there is no evidence in the scene for any reference to the Holy Spirit. See R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, NIGTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 655.

<sup>3</sup>The connection between the resurrection of the saints and their entrance εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν (Matt 27:53; cf. 4:5) will be discussed more fully when exploring Ezek 37:12-14 as the primary Old Testament passage Matthew is relying upon in the composition of his Gospel-narrative. Though interpreters point to a number of texts which informed Matthew’s composition of this pericope—2 Sam 22:8; Jer 8:1-3; 15:9; Ezek 37:12-14; Dan 12:2; Amos 8:9; Zech 14:4-5—this dissertation contends Ezek 37 is the primary text informing Matthean Gospel composition. For those proposing numerous influences see the following resources. Charette, *Restoring Presence*, 84-97. Rafael Monasterio, *Exegesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53: *para una teología de la muerte de Jesús en el Evangelio de Mateo* (Vitoria: Eset, 1980). Charles Quarles, “Cei ce și-au părăsit mormintele după învierea lui Isus în Mat. 27:51-53” [“Those Coming out of the Tombs after Jesus’ Resurrection in Matthew 27:51-53”] *Lucruri greu de inteles: Interpretarea unor pasaje dificile din Noul Testament* [Some Things Hard to Understand: Interpreting Difficult Passages in the



conclusion: Christology, missiology, and eschatology. Indeed, for Matthew, the βασιλεία has broken into the present *in* the person of Jesus (Matt 4:17; cf. 3:2; 10:7). Thus, by virtue of his identity (Matt 27:54; cf. 3:17; 16:16; 17:5),<sup>4</sup> his life (as well as his life-giving death) necessitates a mission to the ends of the earth because his death-resurrection has implications for the world.

### 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,” which argued for a full stop punctuation in the middle of Matthew 27:52.<sup>5</sup> He suggested it was inappropriate for translators to translate ἀνεῴχθησαν without punctuation because it wrongly ties the resurrection of τῶν...ἀγίων to events that occurred on Good Friday after Jesus yielded up the τὸ πνεῦμα on the Cross (Matt 27:50). According to Wenham, the resurrection of the saints is an event “which no one could pretend to have witnessed.”<sup>6</sup> For Wenham, it is

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New Testament], ed. Sorin Sabou and Amiel Drimbe (Bucharest: Editura Universitara, 2015), 1-20.

<sup>4</sup>Not only is the narration of Jesus’ divine identity replete throughout the Gospel, it is proclaimed from the lips of both Jewish and pagan characters in Matthew’s Gospel. Careful readers will observe in the Matthean Gospel-narrative of Jesus’ cross-death the profession of Jesus’ divine identity is on the lips of the Gentile-crowd—ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱός (Matt 27:54). Earlier in Matthew’s Gospel, this is the same profession that previously was uttered from the mouths of Jesus’ disciples—ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱός (Matt 14:33). Matthew’s intentionality in placing this profession in the mouths of both Jewish and Gentile audiences in his Gospel-narrative underscores the missiological, salvation-historical significance of Jesus’ cross-work. As Gentiles were grafted into his genealogical line—Rahab and Ruth (Matt 1:5)—so they are grafted into his eschatological kingdom by placing faith in his name (Matt 27:54; 28:16-20; cf. Rom 11:11-24). Ironically, what the high priest questioned—ἡμῖν εἰπὴς εἰ σὺ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ (Matt 26:63)—the centurion affirms (Matt 27:54).

<sup>5</sup>J. W. Wenham, “When Were the Saints Raised?” *JTS* 32, no. 1 (1981): 150-52.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 150.

absurd to conclude Matthew is implying that these resurrected-dead sat invigorated with life, yet dormant in their respective crypts for three days while Jesus lay in his tomb.

To substantiate his thesis, Wenham argues καὶ ἐξελθόντες . . . πολλοῖς forms a partial parenthesis which invades the narrative of Good Friday, but narrates events that took place *after* Jesus' resurrection.<sup>7</sup> The words καὶ ἐξελθόντες . . . πολλοῖς are parenthetical, but they lack a subject within the versification in which they are currently found. Rather, he argues, the subject is found in the previous verse, Matthew 27:52—πολλὰ σώματα, postulating that it makes more linguistic sense for the subject to be tied to the events that follow it instead of the events that precede it.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, he contends this tidily places the resurrection of the saints with the events that follow instead of the events that precede—namely, he claims the saints are both resurrected *and* come out of the tombs on Easter Sunday *after* Jesus' resurrection from the dead.<sup>9</sup> This reading of the Matthean crucifixion narrative alleviates Wenham's interpretive-concern that the saints were resurrected while remaining in or around their respective tombs until Jesus is raised from the dead in his Gospel-narrative (Matt 28:1-10). He writes,

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. Admittedly Matthew would have *expressed himself with greater elegance and lucidity* if he had placed his μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ at the beginning of the sentence. But do we not all from time to time start sentences which *threaten to prove misleading* and then *clumsily* modify them?<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Wenham, "When Were the Saints Raised?" 151.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Wenham, "When Were the Saints Raised?" emphasis mine. Though striving for interpretive clarity is admirable, Wenham's (false) assumption that Matthew would compose his crucifixion scene so carelessly contradicts the idea that the biblical author was exceptionally intentional in crafting his Gospel

According to Wenham's hypothesis, then, the most accurate translation of Matthew 27:51-53 would read as follows: "Behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom 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." According to Wenham's translation of the passage, the cross-death pericope should be pictorially diagrammed as below (see figure 1).

Wenham's concerns are twofold. First, the temporal lapse between the rocks splitting caused by the earthquake in Matthew 27:51 and the subsequent resurrection of the many sleeping saints neatly places the latter 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).<sup>11</sup> Second, he wants to tie the resurrection of the saints with

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narrative. Currently, there is a broad scholarly consensus, which affirms Matthean intentionality in his Gospel-prose composition. He did not mince words, record useless phrases, or haphazardly piecemeal his Gospel together. For more on the compositional intentionality of this literary Gospel-artist, see Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 35-53; Timothy Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives: Scenes, People, and Theology* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 180-87, 216-28; Peter J. Leithart, *The Four: A Survey of the Gospels* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2010), 117-48; Peter J. Leithart, *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009); Jonathan Pennington, *Reading the Gospel's Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 169-82.

<sup>11</sup>Wenham, "When Were the Saints Raised?" 151. Wenham ties the temporal lapse between the splitting of ἡ γῆ and the opening of τὰ μνημεῖα with the Bible's 'third day' motif because, according to Wenham, this motif highlights the two foci accentuated as Matthew narrates Jesus' saving work in Matt 27-28: the sacrificial death of Jesus and the vindicating resurrection of Jesus. For a recent treatment of the "third day" motif, see Stephen G. Dempster, "From Slight Peg to Corner Stone to Capstone: The Resurrection of Christ on 'The Third Day' According to the Scriptures," *WTJ* 76, no. 2 (2014): 371-409.

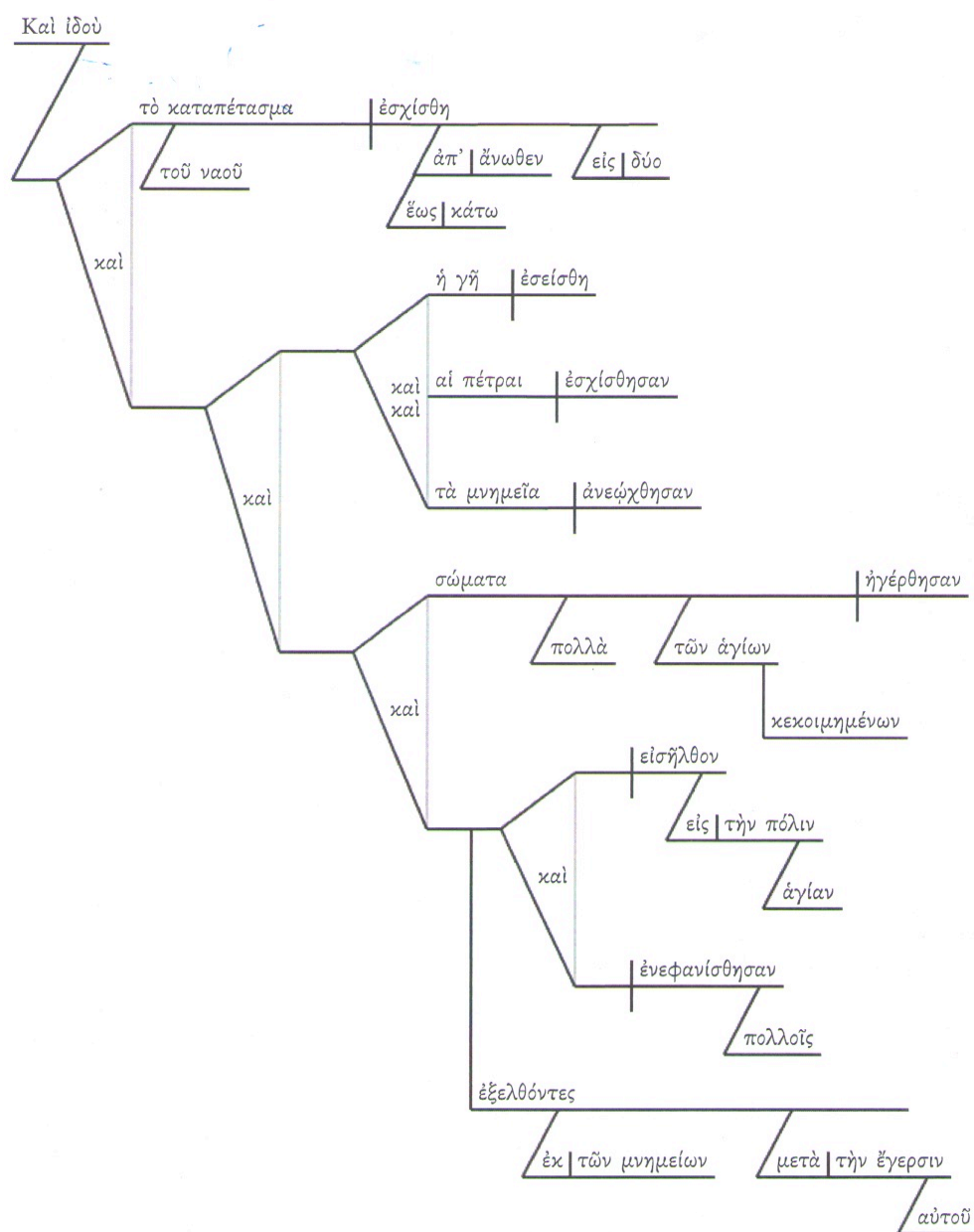


Figure 1. Displacement diagram of Matthew 27:51-54

Jesus' vindicating resurrection from the dead in Matthew 28:1-10. According to 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."<sup>12</sup> Therefore, he connects the resurrection of the saints with the resurrection of Jesus to emphasize his "victory" which is proclaimed and promised to all who die in him.<sup>13</sup>

The impact of Wenham's proposal cannot be overstated. Though his article is short (only 2 pages), his contribution is pervasive in contemporary evangelicalism in relation to the interpretation of Matthew 27:51-54 because his thesis persuades many well-known modern commentators. For example, Carson contends that Wenham has

convincingly argued that a full stop should be placed, not after "split" (v.51), but after "broke open" (v.52) . . . The resurrection of "the holy people" begins a new sentence and is tied up only with Jesus' resurrection. So Matthew does not intend his readers to think that these "holy people" were resurrected when Jesus died and then waited in their tombs till Easter Sunday before showing themselves. The idea is a trifle absurd anyway: there is no more reason to think they were impeded by material substance than was the resurrected Lord, the covering rock of whose grave was removed to let the witnesses in, not to let him out. The "holy people" were raised, came out of the tombs, and were seen by many after Jesus rose from the dead. There is no need to connect the earthquake and the breaking open of the tombs with the rising of "the holy people": the two foci must be differentiated.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Wenham, "When Were the Saints Raised?" 152.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 151. Wenham continues by contending that the climax of Jesus' saving work has two central foci: his cross-death which blots out sin and defeats the renegade powers of evil and his resurrection by which his victory is proclaimed to all and promised to those who die in him. He interprets each of the five signs that occur as a result of Jesus yielding the Spirit in Matt 27:50 as corresponding to one of these two foci: "The rending of the curtain of the Holy of Holies and the opening of the graves corresponds to the first event and the appearance of the resurrected saints to the second."

<sup>14</sup>D. A. Carson, *Matthew 13-28*, in vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 581-82.

Carson, then, in accord with Wenham, assumes the Matthean pericope is displaced within Matthew's Gospel-narrative. That is, the resurrection of the sleeping-saints belongs chronologically in Matthew 28, *after* Jesus' resurrection from the dead. He gives three reasons for advocating for this interpretation: (1) the pericope would be disruptive to the flow of the Gospel-narrative in chapter 28, (2) the pericope's current placement links the Cross and the empty tomb, communicating that Jesus' cross-death is one work, and (3) the pericope, along with the other signs occurring on Good Friday, points to Jesus' future vindicating resurrection in Matthew 28:1-10.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, in accord with Wenham by way of citation, Blomberg states,

The [Matthean] text should probably be punctuated with a period after "tombs broke open." Then the rest of vv. 52b-53 would read, *And the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life, and, having come out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection, they went into the Holy City* [i.e. Jerusalem]. Contra the NIV rendering of v.53, there is no "and" in the Greek nor any reason to pause between "tombs" and "after."<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, Blomberg, when advocating for this translation, is reading Matthew in light of the Pauline corpus, rather than reading Matthew in light of Matthew's Gospel-narrative.<sup>17</sup> He states, "As the NIV [translation] stands, Matthew's account contradicts Paul, inasmuch as the saints actually precede Christ out of the tomb."<sup>18</sup> For Blomberg, the resurrection of the saints in Matthew 27:52-53 is an illustration of Paul's

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<sup>15</sup>Carson, *Matthew 13-28*, 582.

<sup>16</sup>Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 421.

<sup>17</sup>This dissertation proposes a Pauline reading of Matthew's Gospel does not necessarily force the interpretive dilemma Blomberg suggests. An interpretive dilemma is created because interpreters are not reading Matthew closely enough. A good reading *begins* with Matthew's Gospel and *then* reads the Gospel in light of the entire New Testament corpus, not vice versa.

<sup>18</sup>Blomberg, *Matthew*, 421.

teaching in 1 Corinthians 15:20-22. According to him, this confirms that Jesus is “the firstfruits of a new age, guaranteeing the bodily resurrection of all his people.”<sup>19</sup> Carson and Blomberg are two of many Wenham’s thesis has persuaded.

As has been previously noted, 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 Gospel-narrative manifests that Matthew has placed the pericopes parallel to each other in order to make clear the Christological, missiological, and eschatological foci of the passage. Wenham, however, incorrectly assumes that the raising of τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων threatens Jesus’ right as ἀπαρχὴ τῶν κεκοιμημένων (1 Cor 15:20) and occurs when Jesus is raised.<sup>20</sup> Rather, Matthew intends for his readers to interpret the raising of the sleeping saints as Lazarus-like and testimonial. As his 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 (Matt 27:52-53) as a testimony to his identity as the Son of God (Matt 27:54). As his fame was heralded for overturning death previously in the Gospel (Matt

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<sup>19</sup>Blomberg, *Matthew*, 421.

<sup>20</sup>Preceding Wenham and for different reasons, Fuller contended that it was inaccurate to assume the holy dead were raised on Good Friday because their resurrection would conflict with Paul’s teaching in 1 Cor 15:20. In contrast to others, however, Fuller does not take the post-Christ-resurrection of the saints in Matt 27:51-53 to mean they were granted glorified bodies on Easter Sunday. Rather, he contends they had to wait until the Last Day to take possession of those. For him, then, the purpose of the resurrection pericope is to inspire hope in readers of the Matthean Gospel-narrative as they pine for resurrection on the Last Day—“The purpose of the appearance of these bodies was no doubt to show visibly that Christ has raised us from the death of sin and that at the Last Day we shall possess glorified bodies, as Christ did on Easter Sunday.” R. H. Fuller, “The Bodies of the Saints, Mt 27:52-3,” *Scripture* 3 (1948): 86-87.

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).

### **Assessing Bible Translation and Revisiting the Translation of Matthew 27:51-54**

Due to the interpretive confusion caused by this elusive Matthean pericope, and as a consequence of the popularity of a thesis like Wenham's among contemporary evangelical linguistic scholars, Bible translations are manifold in their renderings of this pericope, offering a smorgasbord of interpretive possibilities. This is most clearly visualized in table 3.

Table 3. Parallel of English Bible translations

<i>English Standard Version</i>	<i>King James Version</i>	<i>New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update</i>	<i>The New International Version</i>	<i>The New King James Version</i>	<i>The Revised Standard Version</i>	<i>The Holman Christian Standard Bible</i>
51 And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.	51 And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;	51 And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split.	51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split.	51 Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split,	51 And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split;	51 Suddenly, the curtain of the sanctuary was split in two from top to bottom; the earth quaked and the rocks were split.



Table 3—*Continued*. Parallel of English Bible translations

52 The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised,	52 And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,	52 The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised;	52 The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.	52 and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised;	52 the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised,	52 The tombs also were opened and many bodies of the saints who had gone to their rest were raised.
53 and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.	53 And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.	53 and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.	53 They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.	53 and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.	53 and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.	53 And they came out of the tombs after His resurrection, entered the holy city, and appeared to many.

Table 3—*Continued*. Parallel of English Bible translations

54 When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”	54 Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.	54 Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”	54 When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”	54 So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, “Truly this was the Son of God!”	54 When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe, and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”	54 When the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they were terrified and said, “This man really was God’s Son!”
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On the one hand, the chart reveals that, like Wenham, many recent English modern Bible translations—the ESV, NASB, NIV, and HCSB—punctuate Matthew 27:51-54 similarly. They each place a period, indicating a full stop, after ἐσχίσθησαν at the end of Matthew 27:51. Only the ESV, of these four, divides Matthew 27:52 into two separate sentences by placing a period after ἀνεώχθησαν, which would seem to separate the event of the opening of the tombs from the event of the resurrection of the saints. The ESV

translation is more ambiguous in its interpretative gloss of the Greek text, allowing readers to take the crypts of the righteous-dead opening with the events that precede Good Friday *or* the events that follow on Easter Sunday. The other three translations, however, clearly impose an interpretation that separates the resurrection of the saints from the events of Good Friday and securely locates them on Easter Sunday.

On the other hand, the chart reveals that older English modern Bible translations—the KJV, RSV, and NKJV—also punctuate Matthew 27:51-54 similarly. The KJV and RSV, however, place a semicolon at the end of Matthew 27:51 and connect the events in Matthew 27:52 with a comma. Their main difference is in the suggested sequence of the signs after the yielding of Jesus’ τὸ πνεῦμα by the use of a semicolon and/or comma throughout their respective translations. The KJV places a semicolon after δού ἔσχίσθησαν and ἀνεώχθησαν indicating that the sequence of the signs was the tearing of the veil, the quaking and breaking of the earth, the opening of the sepulchers, and *then* the raising of the saints. Whereas the RSV places a semicolon after δού ἔσχίσθησαν and ἠγέρθησαν which indicates that the sequence of the signs was the tearing of the veil, the quaking and breaking of the earth, and the opening of the sepulchers as coterminous with the raising of the saints. The NKJV differentiates it in that it places a semicolon after δού ἀνεώχθησαν and ἠγέρθησαν indicating that the sequence of the signs was the tearing of the veil, the quaking and breaking of the earth as coterminous with the opening of the sepulchers, and *then* the raising of the saints.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Analysis of these interpretive decisions made by translation committees for each of these respective translations echoes of Moise Silva’s work on translation as a form of interpretive-treason. See Moises Silva, “Are Translators Traitors? Some Personal Reflections,” in *The Challenge of Bible Translation: Communicating God’s Word to the World (Essays in Honor of Ronald F. Youngblood)*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie, Mark L. Strauss, and Steven M. Voth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 37-50.

Moreover, this interpretive translation phenomenon is not relegated merely to English Bible translations. In the German translation, Schlachter 2000, one observes the gloss in figure 2:

51 Und siehe, der Vorhang im Tempel riss von oben bis unten entzwei,[g] und die Erde erbehte, und die Felsen spalteten sich.

52 Und die Gräber öffneten sich, und viele Leiber der entschlafenen Heiligen wurden auferweckt

53 und gingen aus den Gräbern hervor nach seiner Auferstehung und kamen in die heilige Stadt und erschienen vielen.

54 Als aber der Hauptmann und die, welche mit ihm Jesus bewachten, das Erdbeben sahen und was da geschah, fürchteten sie sich sehr und sprachen: Wahrhaftig, dieser war Gottes Sohn!

Figure 2. Schlachter 2000

The Schlachter 2000—like the English ESV, NASB, NIV, and HCSB—punctuates Matthew 27:51-54 with a period, indicating a full stop, after ἐσχίσθησαν at the end of Matthew 27:51. Then, like the NASB, NIV, and HCSB, the Schlachter 2000 clearly imposes an interpretation that separates the resurrection of the saints from the events of Good Friday and firmly locates them on Easter Sunday. The rending of the temple veil and the quaking and breaking of the earth are coterminous while (1) the opening of the tombs, (2) the resurrection of the saints, and (3) their exit from the graveyard is postponed to Easter Sunday. The entirety of the resurrection scene is displaced in the Matthean Gospel-narrative according to the German translation.

In contrast to the translations above, this dissertation suggests that a comma at the end of Matthew 27:51 is more grammatically appropriate, linking the five events that occur as a result of Jesus' death on the cross after the cry of dereliction in Matthew 27:50. Furthermore, a semicolon at the end of Matthew 27:52 suggests a close relationship between the resurrection of the saints and the emergence from their graves where a period would not suffice.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the translation of Matthew 27:51-54 this dissertation is proposing 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!"

According to this translation of the passage, the cross-death pericope should be pictorially diagrammed as below (see figure 3).

This rendering finds an advocate in a dynamic equivalent translation, the NLT.<sup>23</sup> The NLT offers, in a footnote, a rendering similar to the one suggested in this dissertation. The NLT's alternate translation is as follows: "At that moment the curtain of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart, tombs opened, and the bodies of many godly men and women who had died were raised

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<sup>22</sup>When discussing the multiplicity of punctuation possibilities in relation to Matt 27:51-54, Quarles wisely remarks, "Modern readers must remember that the original manuscripts of the New Testament were written in a script called *scriptio continua*. This consisted of one Greek letter after another with no punctuation and no space between paragraphs, sentences, or words. Punctuation decisions must be made by modern editors of the Greek New Testament and modern translators. The decisions of these editors and translators are subject to challenge." See Charles L. Quarles, "Matthew 27:51-53: Meaning, Genre, Intertextuality, Theology, and Reception History," *JETS* 59, no. 2 (2016): 274.

<sup>23</sup>The NLT is not represented in figure 2.

from the dead. After Jesus' resurrection, they left the cemetery, went into the holy city of Jerusalem, and appeared to many people" (NLT).

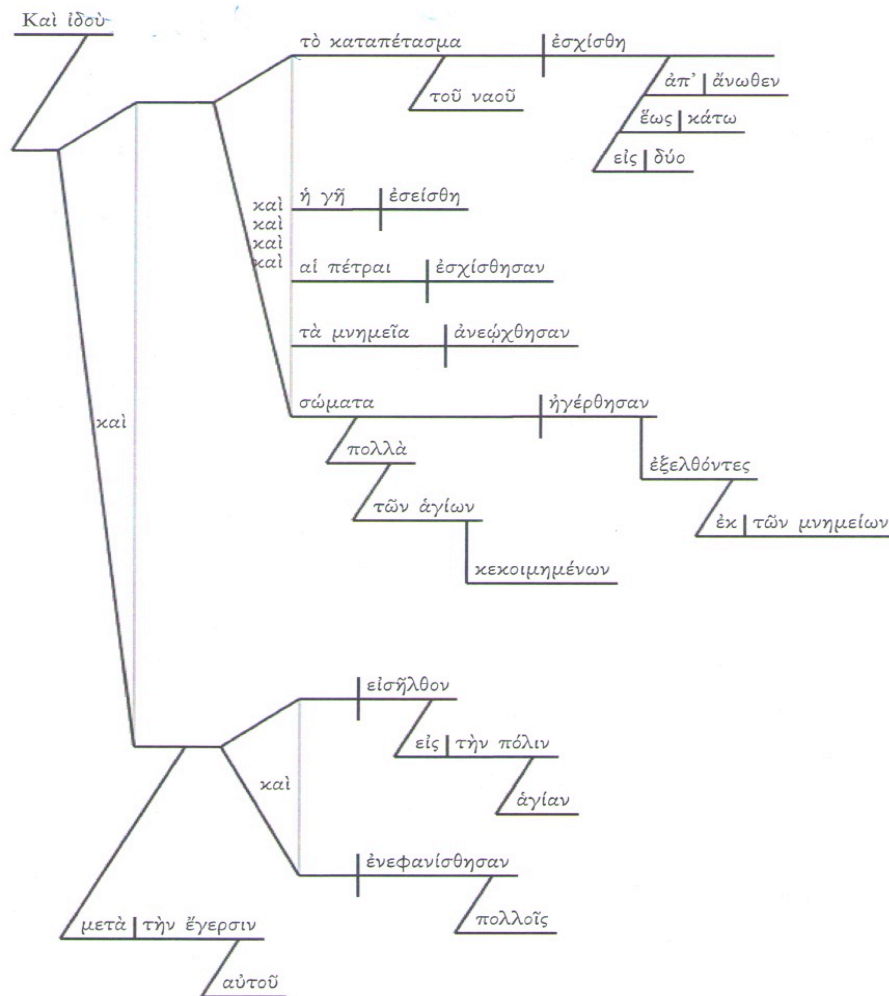


Figure 3. Literary reading diagram of Matthew 27:51-54

Like the ESV, NASB, NIV, and HCSB, the NLT places a period, indicating a full stop, in Matthew 27:51. The NLT, however, places its full-stop after δόο. The NLT's alternative translation suggests that the latter four signs are coterminous—the quaking and breaking of the earth, the opening of the sepulchers, and the raising of the saints. In the NLT's substitute translation, the latter four signs occur on Good Friday rather than Easter Sunday. There is a full-stop punctuation between Matthew 27:52 and Matthew 27:53. The resurrected saints exit their graveyard, enter Jerusalem, and manifest themselves to others on Easter Sunday.<sup>24</sup>

51 Et voici que le voile du temple[e] se déchira en deux depuis le haut jusqu'en bas, la terre trembla, les rochers se fendirent,

52 les tombeaux s'ouvrirent et les corps de plusieurs saints[f] qui étaient morts ressuscitèrent.

53 Etant sortis des tombes, ils entrèrent dans la ville sainte après la résurrection de Jésus et apparurent à un grand nombre de personnes.

54 A la vue du tremblement de terre et de ce qui venait d'arriver, l'officier romain et ceux qui étaient avec lui pour garder Jésus furent saisis d'une grande frayeur et dirent: «Cet homme était vraiment le Fils de Dieu.»

Figure 4. Second 21

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<sup>24</sup>Though he lobbied for a translation that would look more like Wenham's understanding of Matt 27:51-54, I am thankful to Craig Blomberg. In a private correspondence, he kindly took the time to explain to me how the translation committee—Grant Osborne, Craig Blomberg, Donald Hagner, and David Turner—for the NLT went about forming the initial draft of the NLT in 1996. Unfortunately, none of Blomberg's textual translation notes are available as this translation committee did their work in a time before electronic correspondence would have been prevalent.

This interpretive gloss finds support outside of English Bible translations as well. In this French translation one can observe a rendering akin to the NLT's alternative translation. The period, however, is placed after ἡγέρθησαν in Matthew 27:52 indicating that the sequence of the signs was the tearing of the veil, the quaking and breaking of the earth, and the opening of the sepulchers as coterminous with the raising of the saints. In this rendering, then, it is natural for a reader of the French text to understand the five signs as happening on Good Friday right after Jesus died. Moreover, the most natural reading of the grammar in Matthew 27:53 is to understand that they entered the city *after* Jesus' resurrection. Their resurrection at the time of Jesus' cross-death is assumed from the structure of Matthew 27:51-52.<sup>25</sup>

### Summary

Bible translations, English and beyond, offer a variety of glosses of Matthew 27:51-54. Many, this dissertation has argued, fall in accord with Wenham's thesis, which bifurcates the pericope's signs—particularly, the resurrection of the dead saints—from Good Friday and displaces them to Easter Sunday. It has been argued that this is not the most natural rendering of the Greek. Further, it has been argued that this interpretive gloss reads, and translates, Matthew in light of the Pauline corpus rather than reading, and translating, Matthew in light of his Gospel-narrative.

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<sup>25</sup>Rob Plummer, in a private conversation, confirmed the understanding of the French grammar of this Matthean pericope.



## Syntactical and Grammatical Features

As signs surrounded the birth of Jesus, so also, careful readers will notice, signs surrounded the death of Jesus (Matt 1:18-2:23; 27:51-53).<sup>26</sup> The question, then, is *why* did Matthew intentionally employ this imagery in his Gospel-narrative? Syntactical and grammatical analysis of this pericope will manifest that the narrative structure is intended to accentuate Jesus' divine identity—at his birth, wise men are confounded as a star guides them to the Lord of heaven and earth (Matt 2:1-12); at his death, the heavens, which he created, mourn in darkness (Matt 27:45) and the earth, which he created, heaves and breaks (Matt 27:51), giving back the dead as a testimony to his dominion as the Son of God (Matt 28:18). As the Son of God, he saves people from their sins (Matt 1:21); Jewish people (Matt 14:33) and Gentile people (Matt 27:54) who recognize him to be the “Son of God” regardless of where they reside on the planet (Matt 28:18-20). His death-cry (Matt 27:50) is a proclamation from the cross. Like Lazarus, those who hear his voice are restored to life and come forth from their graves (Matt 27:52-53; cf. John 5:25, 28). Further, Matthew's intentionality in his narrative structure is intended to accentuate the mission Jesus' death necessitates—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). Since Jesus is the Son of God and his life is unlike any other life, his death is a life-giving death (Matt 27:52). Since Jesus is the Son of God and his life is unlike any other life, his

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<sup>26</sup>Similarly, Brown highlights that “Matthew did not hesitate to have the moment of Jesus' birth marked by a star in the sky; the moment of his death is even more climactic, marked by signs in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth.” Raymond E. Brown, *A Crucified Christ in Holy Week: Essays on the Four Gospel Passion Narratives* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1984), 44. For a recent analysis studying the affinity between the beginning and ending of Matthew, see Jason Hood, *The Messiah, His Brothers, and the Nations* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 139-56.

death has meaning for the nations when the temple cultus is rendered obsolete (Matt 27:51, 54; 28:16-20).

Despite the theological import of this pericope, however, some consider Matt 27:51-54 an inelegant chronological problem, which exists because of clumsy scribal interpolation.<sup>27</sup> Interpretive-confusion has caused some to overlook the passage's textual features: parataxis, divine passives, and extensive parallelism; as well as its "catchword connexions [*sic*] with the immediate context and repetitive vocabulary" such as: earth (Matt 27:45; 51), torn/split (Matt 27:51a; 51c), many (Matt 27:51; 53), and holy (Matt 27:52; 53) in the pursuit of interpretive-clarity.<sup>28</sup> The aim of this section, therefore, is to

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<sup>27</sup>Craig A. Evans, *Matthew*, NCB (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 466-67. Evans goes on to say that Matt 27:51-54 is a "strange story" resulting from a "clumsy gloss" which has created "chronological awkwardness" in the Matthean Gospel-narrative. Interestingly, he admits, "we possess no textual evidence or witness that suggests vv. 52-53 are a gloss. But one will recall that it was not until older manuscripts were discovered that glosses were recognized." He then likens Matt 27:51-54, without textual or manuscript evidence to support his claim, to the perspiring blood of Jesus and the appearance of the angel in Luke 22:43-44, the angelic agitation of the pool in John 5:3b-4, the longer Gospel ending in Mark 16:9-20, and the story of the adulterous woman brought before Jesus in John 7:58-8:11. Without warrant, Evans predicates the charge of scribal interpolation upon this Matthean pericope.

<sup>28</sup>W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, ICC, vol. 3 (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 628. No major grammar deals with the pericope under consideration, specifically 27:51b-53. See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 803; F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 304; Herbert W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984); Steven E. Runge, *A Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Bible Reference, 2010). Furthermore, Metzger does not even mention this text at all in his textual commentary. See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 59. This does not mean, however, there are no noteworthy text-critical issues surrounding Matt 27:51-53. Quarles has demonstrated there are an increasing number of scholars who wrongly argue that the prepositional phrase μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ is a scribal interpolation. For example, see Willoughby C. Allen, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), 296. Also, see Adalbert Merx, *Die vier kanonischen Evangelien nach ihrem ältesten bekannten Texte: Übersetzung und Erläuterung der syrischen im Sinaikloster gefundenen Palimpsesthandschrift; Zweiter Teil, erste Hälfte, Erläuterung. Matthaeus* (Berlin: Reimer, 1902), 427-29. For a thorough exploration of the issue, see Charles L. Quarles, "META THN ΕΓΕΡΣΙΝ ΑΥΤΟΥ: A Scribal Interpolation in Matthew 27:53?," *TC* 20 (2015): 1-15.

shed interpretive-light into Matthew’s “inelegant chronological problem” by analyzing the syntax and structure of this pericope.

Matthew 27:51 begins with the dramatic καὶ ἰδοῦ, which serves as a connector between the death of Jesus in 27:50 and the extraordinary events that follow in Matthew 27:51-53.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, καὶ ἰδοῦ demarcates what precipitates in Matthew 27:51-54 as the aftermath of Jesus’ death in Matthew 27:50. The apostle strings together five short main clauses with the conjunction καὶ; in each of these five clauses the subject is first and the verb is in the aorist passive.<sup>30</sup> Though the clauses are connected by καὶ and each are associated with the events of Good Friday, they should not be read as sequential in their respective occurrences. Rather, τὸ καταπέτασμα . . . ἐσχισθῇ ἡ γῆ ἐσεισθῇ and αἱ πέτραι ἐσχίσθησαν are coterminous in their occurrence as a result of Jesus’ death-cry from the tree after unleashing τὸ πνεῦμα (Matt 27:50-51); and τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνεώχθησαν is the result of the cosmological portents preceding it which allows the πολλὰ σώματα . . . ἡγέρθησαν to exit their tombs.<sup>31</sup> In the narrative, the tearing of the veil (Matt 27:51) is the first in a

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<sup>29</sup>R. T. France, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 1079; Davies and Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew 19-28*, 630. Concerning καὶ ἰδοῦ, Pearson contends that καὶ ἰδοῦ is an idiom containing special significance as a narrative marker in Matthew’s Gospel by distinguishing the introduction or conclusion of significant gospel-events. She notes that this pericope is one of “the most noticeable areas in the Gospel where this usage occurs.” Brook W. R. Pearson, “New Testament Literary Criticism,” in *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1997), 256.

<sup>30</sup>Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 560. Luz, too, notes that the structure of Matt 27:51-54 demarcates it from the previous section. Further, he notes that the signs in Matt 27:51-52 are lumped together syntactically. Thus, Matt 27:54 is the acclamatory conclusion of the signs preceding it.

<sup>31</sup>Despite the fact the first three signs are simultaneously coterminous and the latter two are simultaneously coterminous in Matt 27:52, all five uses of the *passivum divinum*, however, are eschatological victory signs occurring subsequent to Jesus’ victory cry on the Cross. The former three cosmological signs preceded the latter two resurrection signs after Jesus yielded the Spirit. Hill, likewise, suggests this Matthean pericope is a narrative-vehicle toward a theological and eschatological interpretation of Jesus’ death. Regrettably, Hill claims that concerns about the passage’s historicity “involve a host of pseudo-problems and cause us to lose sight of the true meaning.” David Hill, “Matthew 27:51-53 in the

series of signs that climaxes in the raising of the dead from their open tombs (Matt 27:52) and results in the acclamation of the centurion and those with him (Matt 27:54).<sup>32</sup>

The first of the five clauses, τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ ἐσχίσθη ἅπ' ἄνωθεν ἕως κάτω εἰς δύο, introduces the first divine passive<sup>33</sup> encountered in the pericope, indicating that these events are signs from God rather than the people.<sup>34</sup> This signals the reader to

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Theology of the Evangelist,” *IBS* 7 (1985): 76. Senior suggests the signs in Matt 27:51-54 are the author’s polyvalent interpretation of the death of Jesus. He sees three layers to this Matthean pericope: (1) a Confessional layer—Jesus is vindicated in his claim to be the Son of God (2) a Salvation-historical layer—Jesus’ death is the crucial turning point in the history of salvation and (3) a Soteriological layer—since Jesus’ death triggers the resurrection of the saints in Matthew’s narrative, saving power (i.e., life-giving) is ascribed to his death. See Donald Senior, “The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Mt 27:51-53),” *CBQ* 38 (1976): 325-29 and Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1984), 128. Osborne, too, notes the salvation-historical significance of Jesus’ death in this pericope: “The darkness, the tearing of the curtain, the earthquake, the raising of the saints” all demonstrate the intersection of human history by divine power. Following Wenham, however, Osborne contends that Matt 27:51-54 serves to “unite Jesus’ death and resurrection into a single event in salvation history.” Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 1044.

<sup>32</sup>Contra Sim’s contention that the portents surrounding Jesus’ cross-death were not sufficient for the centurion to make a positive faith-profession. David C. Sim, “The ‘Confession’ of the Soldiers in Matthew 27:54,” *HeyJ* 34 (1993): 416.

<sup>33</sup>There are instances, especially in the Gospels, where the unspecified agent is implied to be God. According to Porter, this is referred to as the ‘divine or theological passive’ or *passivum divinum*. See Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2005), 65-66. Wallace argues that the “passive is used when God is the obvious agent.” Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 437-38. According to this definition in relation to this text, the following five verbs can be classified as divine passives: ἐσχίσθη, ἐσείσθη, ἐσχίσθησαν, ἀνεώχθησαν, and ἠγέρθησαν. Thus, it is none other than God who tore the curtain in two, shook the earth, split the rocks, opened the tombs, and raised the righteous dead who then entered the holy city to testify, along with the Gentile-crowd, that Jesus is the Son of God.

<sup>34</sup>Osborne notes that there “were two veils in the temple, one separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy place and the other separating the sanctuary as a whole from the court.” Additionally, he contends that the “imagery [in Matt 27:51] and in Hebrews 6:19; 9:12-13; 10:19-20 favors the inner curtain, signifying opening up a new entrance to the presence of God” even though he admits that the outer veil fits the text’s imagery of a public sign. Osborne, *Matthew*, 1043. Contra Osborne, Green, however, suggests the outer veil was torn since it would have served as an obvious omen of the temple’s future destruction among the people. See H. Benedict Green, “The Gospel According to Matthew in The Revised Standard Version: Introduction and Commentary,” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 224. Though interpreters often cite Hebrews as definitive textual data to clarify which veil was rent in the Passion narrative, even Hebrews commentators do not affirm a conclusive allusion to the tearing of the veil after Jesus’ death. For example, though Bruce and Hagner suspect an allusion, they admit that it is not certain. See F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 244-49; Donald Hagner, *Hebrews*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 164. For a thorough treatment of the tearing of the temple veil in Matthew’s Gospel-narrative, see Daniel M. Gurtner,

recognize the subsequent uses of the *passivum divinum* in the pericope. The doctrine of the atonement is pictured in God's action of rending the veil after the penetrating divine silence pervading the scene of Jesus' mocking and death (27:32-50).<sup>35</sup> Matthew's directional emphasis in his word order when recounting the rending of the temple veil—ἀπ' ἄνωθεν ἕως κάτω εἰς δύο—connotes a tear from heaven to earth and forcefully inserts God into the narrative as the divine-actor after the death of his Son. Although commentators speculate as to which veil is alluded to in Matthew 27:51, there is broad consensus that the Matthean pericope does not contain specificity in regards to which veil—the inner veil or the outer veil—was torn.<sup>36</sup> Though the imagery in textual data of Hebrews 6:19; 9:12-13; 10:19-20 favors the inner curtain; the textual imagery of Matthew 27:51-54 favors the more public outer veil as a visible sign for the populace. For many, the rending of the inner veil is preferred for its theological import (i.e. a new way to God's presence has been opened up through Jesus' death; now Christians are able to enter the holy place by means of the nail-pierced flesh and shed blood of Jesus). Quarles, however, has convincingly argued, "The rending of any of the temple curtains would have signified the temple was now open and vulnerable to desecration. Its courts

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*The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 97-137.

<sup>35</sup>Following Davies and Allison, Bruner describes the signs in Matt 27:51-54 as an "explosion of the supernatural." Interestingly, he terms this explosion "The Prodigia"; he suggests that Matt 27:55-56 may need to be added to the scene of Matt 27:51-54, although he gives no justification for his suggestion (though, it seems he is adding the women to the list of witnesses). Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Churchbook: Matthew 13-28* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 756. Davies and Allison link the "shower of astounding miracles" in Matt 27:51-54 primarily with Zech 14:4-5. For them, Matt "27.53 narrates the realization of Zechariah's prophecy." See Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 629.

<sup>36</sup>De Jonge contends that not only is the Gospel author uninterested with the question as to which of the two curtains of the temple is meant, but also it should not even be discussed in the exegesis of the text. See M. de Jonge, "Matthew 27:51 in Early Christian Exegesis," *HTR* 79 (1986): 67-68.

were no longer sacrosanct.”<sup>37</sup> The temple’s split veil communicates an end to the temple cultus and the accessibility of salvation for all who profess faith in Christ.<sup>38</sup>

The phrase καὶ αἱ πέτραι ἐσχίσθησαν elaborates on one of the effects of the violent earthquake—καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐσεισθη—recounted in Matthew 27:51. The trembling of the earth and the splitting of rocks should be read as signs coterminous with the splitting of the veil.<sup>39</sup> The mention of καὶ αἱ πέτραι ἐσχίσθησαν completes the only two uses of σχίζω in Matthew’s Gospel-narrative. Both are located in Matthew 27:51: ἐσχίσθη and ἐσχίσθησαν. The former is mentioned in relation to the rending of the temple curtain. The latter in relation to the rending of rocks as the land reeled because of the divine-σεισμός after Jesus yielded the Spirit.<sup>40</sup> The earthquake in Matthew 27:51 alerts readers to the

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<sup>37</sup>Quarles, “Matthew 27:51-53,” 272. Interestingly, Quarles strengthens the tie of Matt 27:51-54 to Ezekiel’s prophecy by postulating that the “ripping of the veil may have even signified the departure of divine glory from the temple (Ezek. 10:18-19).” Following Bruner, Quarles suggests that “the violent ripping of the curtain would thus confirm Jesus’ pronouncement in Matthew 23:38, ‘Behold, your house is left to you desolate.’” Bruner, *The Churchbook*, 759. Bruner connects the rending of the veil with both “the veil that is spread over all nations” in Isa 25:7 and “the dividing wall of hostility” in Eph 2:13-16. Ibid. Spurgeon, however, connected the ripping of the veil with the ripping of Jesus’ flesh to emphasize the atoning aspects of Jesus’ death: “The body of Christ being rent, the veil of the temple was torn in twain from the top to the bottom. Now was there an entrance made into the holiest of all, by the blood of Jesus; and a way of access to God was opened for every sinner who trusted in Christ’s atoning sacrifice.” C. H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon’s Popular Exposition of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 251.

<sup>38</sup>For a helpful survey of the interpretation of the rending of the temple veil among early Christian exegetes, see M. de Jonge, “Two Interesting Interpretations of the Rending of the Temple-Veil in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,” in *Jewish Eschatology, Early Christian Christology and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Collected Essays of Marinus De Jonge*, NovTSup 63 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1991), 220-32.

<sup>39</sup>Though I came to this conclusion independently of Quarles, he also notes, “It is likely that the first three clauses described events that are simultaneous rather than consecutive.” Quarles, “Matthew 27:51-53,” 273.

<sup>40</sup>When surveying the synoptic parallels, one notes that Mark’s Gospel, too, only has two uses of the verb σχίζω. His two uses of σχίζω, however, connect the end with the beginning of his Gospel-narrative. He begins his Gospel with the heavens σχιζομένους followed by the Spirit’s descent (Mark 1:10) and concludes his narrative with the temple curtain being ἐσχίσθη in two (Mark 15:38). Motyer, noting the inclusion between the “splitting” in Mark 1:10; 15:38 contends that the rending of the veil is “a Markan Pentecost, a proleptic bestowal of the Spirit analogous to the proleptic destruction of the temple.” S. Motyer, “The Rending of the Veil: A Markan Pentecost?” NTS 33 (1987): 155-57. Though I do not affirm

divine theophany occurring as a result of Jesus' cross-death. The earthquake is a prelude to the opening of the tombs and resurrection of the saints in Matthew 27:52.<sup>41</sup> The reference to the land—ἡ γῆ (frequently translated “the earth”)—points the reader back to Matthew 27:45. As darkness enveloped *the land* of Israel, so now an earthquake occurs in *the land* of Israel. This localizes the catastrophe, insinuating judgment on Israel.<sup>42</sup>

In Matthew 27:52 one again notices the conjunction καὶ, which closely connects the two signs in this verse with the three signs in Matthew 27:51 as the immediate effect of Jesus' yielding the Spirit (Matt 27:50). The uses of the *passivum divinum* continue to assert that God is the primary actor in the signs as a response to the death of Jesus. The result of the divine-σεισμός is tomb-opening bedrock fissures—τὰ

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Motyer's conclusions of a proleptic Pentecost, this may give insight into Matthew's use of τὸ πνεῦμα in Matt 27:50-54 as a reference to the Spirit of God, rather than an indirect anthropological reference to Jesus' life. Read together, both Gospels communicate that the Spirit is linked with the revelatory signs surrounding the birth and death of Jesus. In Matthew's Gospel, the Spirit conceives the child—Jesus—in Mary's womb (Matt 1:20); the Spirit descends and rests on Jesus at his baptism (Matt 3:16); Jesus yields the Spirit at his death (Matt 27:50). The yielding of the Spirit in Matt 27:50, causes the signs in Matt 27:51-54. In Mark's Gospel, the Spirit tears through the heavens to rest on Jesus after he is baptized (Mark 1:10) and the temple curtain is torn after Jesus yields his Spirit (though Mark does not record this detail) in Mark 15:38. For more on σχίζω in relation to the tearing of the veil in Mark's Gospel, see Harry L. Chronis, “The Torn Veil: Cultus and Christology in Mark 15:37-39,” *JBL* 101, no. 1 (1982): 97-114. For more on Mark's relationship to Matthew, especially Matt 27:51-54, see J. Andrew Doole, *What Was Mark for Matthew? An Examination of Matthew's Relationship and Attitude to his Primary Source*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2 Reihe 344 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 33, 97, 99, 104.

<sup>41</sup>Bauckham states that in “very many Old Testament and intertestamental texts an earthquake accompanies a theophany” (Richard Bauckham, “The Eschatological Earthquake in the Apocalypse of John,” *NovT* 19 [1977]: 224-33). He goes on to note that theophanic tremors are “cosmic quakes” in many of their contexts, accompanying end-time events. *Ibid.*, 224. Similarly, Matthew's death-resurrection scenes are replete with cosmological imagery: darkness, dereliction-cries, earthquakes, and resurrections. Calvary has become another revelatory mount for Matthew. As Sinai trembled and was enveloped in darkness as YHWH revealed his Word to his people (Exod 19:16-20; 20:18-21), so now, on a hill outside of Jerusalem YHWH once again reveals himself through his Word—the eschatological-Word (John 1:1), the Son of David (Matt 1:1-17), the bloodied and crucified Messiah (Matt 27:26-44), the Son of God (Matt 27:54)—as the earth totters in darkness and spews forth its dead (Matt 27:45-53).

<sup>42</sup>Bauckham notes that the shaking of the creation frequently occurs before the coming of God to judge in biblical revelation. See Bauckham, “The Eschatological Earthquake in the Apocalypse of John,” *NovT* 19 (1977): 224. Old Testament texts referring to the quaking of the earth as a sign of God's

μνημεῖα ἀνεώχθησαν—exposing the dead buried within (Matt 27:52). The Matthean Gospel-narrative recounts a peculiar episode as the climatic event in this series of signs surrounding Jesus’ cross-death: καὶ πολλὰ σώματα τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων ἠγέρθησαν. “Sleep”—τῶν κεκοιμημένων—is a euphemism for death in the Matthean narrative. As Jesus raised the sleeping-dead-girl<sup>43</sup> in Matthew 9:25 as a testimony to his divine-identity<sup>44</sup>, so now the sleeping saints are raised at his death as a sign testifying to his divine-identity as the Son of God.<sup>45</sup> Though the resurrection of the sleeping saints is the climactic sign, the crescendo of the revelatory sign-series is the confession of the centurion, and his entourage, that Jesus is the Son of God in Matthew 27:54.<sup>46</sup> The five

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impending judgment are Isa 13:13; 24:18-20; Jer 51:29; Ezek 38:20; Joel 2:10; Nah 1:5.

<sup>43</sup>Matt 9:24 states, “ἀναχωρεῖτε, οὐ γὰρ ἀπέθανεν τὸ κοράσιον ἀλλὰ καθεύδει.”

<sup>44</sup>In Matt 9, Jesus is “the Son of Man” (9:6), the soul-physician (9:12-13), the eschatological bridegroom (9:15), the resurrectionist of the dead (9:25), and the “Son of David” healing the blind (9:30) and casting out demons so the mute can speak (9:33).

<sup>45</sup>Matthew is not concerned with the identity of the resurrected saints. Thus, the text does not specify their identity. Anything beyond that is speculative, at best. Further, it is a misunderstanding to assume those participating in resurrection prior to the resurrection of Jesus participated in glorified/end-time resurrection. Additionally, it is a misunderstanding to assume resurrection scenes prior to the resurrection of Jesus necessarily contradict the teaching that he was the firstborn from the dead (1 Cor 15:20; Col 1:18; Rev 1:5). Both testaments have examples of persons being raised prior to the resurrection of Jesus. In the Old Testament, Elijah raises the widow’s son after stretching himself upon him three times (1 Kgs 17:17-24); a man was raised to life when his body touched the bones of the prophet Elisha (2 Kgs 13:21). Neither of these Old Testament resurrections were glorified/end-time resurrections; both recount the testimonial raising of someone via the prophet who would die again. In the New Testament, previously in Matthew’s Gospel Jesus raised a girl to life; surely she too would die again (Matt 9:25). Similarly, John recounts Jesus raising Lazarus back to life (John 11:43-44), who we assume would die again—How could the Pharisees plot to kill a person raised to everlasting life (John 12:10-11)? Like the author of 1 Kgs, 2 Kgs, and John, Matt records a Lazarus-like resurrection occurring as a result of Jesus’ death on the cross so that the doubting city may believe Jesus to be the Son of God the Father sent into the world to save people from their sins (Matt 1:21; cf. John 11:14-15, 42).

<sup>46</sup>Thus, Senior states, “All of these events are tied together (all are linked by *καὶ*, ‘and . . .’) and lead to the acclamation by the soldiers, a point Matthew explicitly makes by stating that their witness of the ‘earthquake and what took place’ prompted both their ‘fear’ and their confession of Jesus as Son of God (27:54; cf. Mark 15:39).” Donald Senior, *Matthew*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 333. Similarly, Witherup states that the climax of the signs “inevitably leads to v.54, the acclamation by the centurion and his companions.” Ronald D. Witherup, “The Death of Jesus and the Raising of the Saints: Matthew 27:51-54 in Context,” SBLSP 26 (1987): 578-79.



short main clauses, which began in Matthew 27:51 with the subject first and the verb in the aorist passive, end here.

It is crucial to notice, however, that the thought of Matthew 27:51-52 does not conclude until the end of Matthew 27:53. The latter is a longer sentence containing two main verbs introduced by a participle. Rather, it narrates the events of the resurrected saints, who have emerged from their opened crypts: καὶ ἐξελθόντες ἐκ τῶν μνημείων μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὴν ἀγίαν πόλιν καὶ ἐνεφανίσθησαν πολλοῖς. The temporal participle, ἐξελθόντες, does not introduce a new subject, its action is antecedent to the main verbs—εἰσῆλθον and ἐνεφανίσθησαν.<sup>47</sup> The phrase μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ,<sup>48</sup> is the most difficult phrase in the pericope.<sup>49</sup> This phrase is the source of chronological problems for interpreters. It is the cause of the translation smorgasbord in relation to Matthew 27:51-54. Careful analysis, though, shows that had Matthew wanted to make it clear that the resurrection of τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἀγίων occurred only after Jesus' resurrection, the phrase could have preceded the participle ἐξελθόντες.<sup>50</sup> Grammatically,

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<sup>47</sup>Similarly, Luz states, "It does not introduce a new subject. Its greater detail shows that this conclusion—that is, the statements about the dead—is what is most important." Luz, *Matthew*, 560. See also Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 576. Contra Luz, Gundry asserts that it seems as if Matthew is relatively unconcerned with the resurrected saints. Rather, they rise as *one* of five signs testifying to the identity of Jesus.

<sup>48</sup>Schweizer wrongly considers this comment to be a later addition. See Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew*, trans. David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 516. Oddly, Davies and Allison agree with Schweizer even though they admit that it appears in nearly all MSS and versions. Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew 19-28*, 634. Similarly, Evans calls this scribal interpolation. Evans, *Matthew*, 466-67.

<sup>49</sup>Not only does Brown recognize this phrase as the *crux interpretum* of the pericope, he also asserts that "we should reject attempts to remove or neutralize" this phrase. Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave—A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 1127-29.

<sup>50</sup>Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, WBC 33B, vol. 2 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 850. Though France locates the departure of the raised dead from their graves after Jesus' resurrection, he

it is best to read ἐξελθόντες as modifying ἡγέρθησαν. Similarly, Quarles suggests, “The dead were raised and exited the tombs at the time of the crucifixion, but did not enter the city of Jerusalem until after Jesus’ resurrection.”<sup>51</sup> In support of this reading, David Wenham writes, “μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ in verse 53 may be taken as applying primarily to the main verb that follows it rather than as defining the time of the saints’ exit from the tomb; in this case the saints may be supposed to have been raised and to have left their tombs on Good Friday, though they did not appear until after Easter.”<sup>52</sup> Temporally, the sleeping dead were raised and exited their graves on Good Friday, but did not enter εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν until *after* Jesus was resurrected on Easter Sunday.<sup>53</sup> This reading of Matthew 27:53 reinforces the interpretation that Matthew 27:52 is connected to Matthew 27:51 in its occurrence and communicates that the saints were both raised from and exited their respective tombs on Good Friday.<sup>54</sup>

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notes that the Greek word order allows ‘after his resurrection’ to be read either with ἐξελθόντες or with εἰσῆλθον and ἐνεφανίσθησαν. See France, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 1073. According to France, then, contra Wenham, the saints were raised immediately as a result of Jesus’ death on the cross. The difference, then, is they either (1) waited in their tombs until after Jesus was resurrected from the dead and then entered the city, Jerusalem or (2) waited in the surrounding countryside until after Jesus was resurrected from the dead, and then entered the city, Jerusalem.

<sup>51</sup>Quarles notes nothing the grammar of Matt 27:51-54 precludes this punctuation of the passage. Nothing prohibits interpreters from understanding μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ to modify the verbs that follow it rather than the preceding participle. He notes that normal Matthean style suggests that the prepositional phrase modifies the verb that follows it. See Quarles, “Matthew 27:51-53,” 275.

<sup>52</sup>Admittedly, however, Wenham suggests μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ only modifies εἰσῆλθον whereas this dissertation suggests μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ modifies both εἰσῆλθον and ἐνεφανίσθησαν. See David Wenham, “The Resurrection Narratives in Matthew’s Gospel,” *TynBul* 24 (1973): 21-54, esp. 46.

<sup>53</sup>This will be discussed more fully when exploring Matthew’s reliance on Ezek 37:12-14 in the composition of his crucifixion scene.

<sup>54</sup>Again, though I came to these conclusions independent of Quarles, he also notes, “Overall, the best solution to the perceived chronological problem is to punctuate the text in such a way that the phrase ‘after his resurrection’ refers only to the entrance [and appearance] of the saints into the holy city.” Quarles, “Matthew 27:51-53: Meaning, Genre, Intertextuality, Theology, and Reception History,” 275. Their resurrection, and subsequent entrance-appearance in the city of Jerusalem, was a sign pointing to the

As Matthew concludes the pericope, readers are once again pointed to the missiological purpose behind the scene (as well as the entire Gospel): because of his identity, Jesus' death is a life-giving death and has meaning for the nations. Thus, as Gentile magi expressed faith at his birth (Matt 2:1-12); so now Gentile militia profess faith at his death (Matt 27:54).<sup>55</sup> Matthew's mention of τὸν σεισμόν in Matthew 27:54 harkens the reader back to ἐσεισθη in Matthew 27:51 and brings the pericope to a close, but not before the confession of the Roman centurion and his entourage—ἀληθως θεοῦ υἱός<sup>56</sup>—which is the result of the divine-signs testifying to Jesus' divine identity following his cross-death. Their profession of his identity is the reversal of the sarcastic-ridicule Jesus received from his enemies in Matthew 27:40, 43.

### Conclusion

In the prosecution of this dissertation's thesis it was necessary to address the issue of translation in relation of Matthew 27:51-54. This chapter has argued the most natural translation of the Matthean pericope is

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!"

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divine identity of the Crucified One.

<sup>55</sup>Green states, "The representatives of the Gentile world are witnesses of the death of the Son of God and its earth-shattering character, as they were of the signs which accompanied his marvelous birth." Green, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 224. Also, see Bruner, *Matthew*, 764.

<sup>56</sup>Though there is no article with θεοῦ or with υἱός in the Greek text, and even though the phrase can be translated either "the Son of God" or "a Son of God," it is clear from context that "the Son of God" is the correct reading/translation according to Colwell's Rule.

Further, this chapter has argued 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, this chapter has argued that a semicolon at the end of Matthew 27:52 suggests a close relationship between the resurrection of the saints and the emergence from their graves where a period would not suffice. 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 his Gospel's conclusion: Christology, missiology, and eschatology. Because the βασιλεία has broken into the present *in* the person of Jesus (Matt 4:17; cf. 3:2; 10:7), Jesus dies like no other in history. Accompanying his cross-death are signs testifying to his divine identity as the Son of God; they underscore the missiological implications of his death—it has meaning for the nations (Matt 27:54; 28:16-20).<sup>57</sup> Therefore, it has been argued that a proper understanding of the pericope's translation removes the inordinate interpretive stress placed on the five divine portents—particularly, the resurrection of the sleeping saints (Matt 27:52b-53).

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<sup>57</sup>Senior powerfully captures this: “The crucifixion scenes also express Matthew’s view of Jesus’ death as redemptive. Through the death of Jesus, the dead are liberated from their tombs, and the salvific mission of Jesus, implicit in his very name and enacted in his ministry of healing, comes to its most powerful expression.” Senior, *Matthew*, 336.

## CHAPTER 3

### FROM *RIGOR MORTIS* TO RESURRECTION: MATTHEAN DEPENDENCE ON EZEKIEL 37:1-14 IN THE COMPOSITION OF MATTHEW 27:51-54

A proper understanding of Matthew 27:51-54 mandated an examination of the pericope's translation. The suggested translation—

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!”

—in chapter 2 helps interpreters 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. Further, the translation suggests the five signs recounted in Matthew 27:51-53 occur as a result of Jesus' death on the cross after he unleashes the Spirit (τὸ πνεῦμα) in Matthew 27:50. Literarily, the events of Good Friday are tethered closely with the events occurring on Easter Sunday in Matthew 28:1-15.

Matthew brings the pericopes together because Jesus' death-resurrection is viewed as one evil-defeating, death-defying event in his Gospel-narrative as they inaugurate a new age.

The looming question, however, is, “From where did Matthew draw his literary inspiration in the composition of this Matthean pericope?” Therefore, a proper understanding of the pericope under consideration also requires consideration of the primary Old Testament referent utilized in Matthew 27:51-54. Failure to observe

Matthew's purposeful narrative strategy informing the composition of Matthew 27:51-54 has obscured the interpretation of the pericope. This failure has placed inordinate interpretive stress on the five divine portents, particularly the resurrection of the sleeping saints (Matt 27:52b-53).

Though Matthew's use of the Old Testament has been much debated, this chapter will argue the pericope, laced with divine signs testifying to Jesus' divine identity as the Son of God (i.e., Matt 27:51-54), finds its principal origins in Ezekiel 37:1-14. Childs, though referring specifically to Matthew's formula citations within his Gospel-narrative, helps elucidate the theological context the Old Testament provides in the Matthean Gospel-narrative as well as the homiletical interests behind its deployment in the Gospel when he states,

First, the Old Testament citations provide a theological context with the divine economy of God with Israel by which to understand and interpret the significance of Jesus' life and ministry. The entire Old Testament is viewed as a prophetic revelation of God's purpose pointing to the future which has now been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, God's promised Messiah. The term 'reflexion citation' is helpful in emphasizing the role of the citation in evoking an activity of reflection, meditation, and interpretation on the part of the reader in striving to grasp the relationship between Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfillment. The New Testament technique of citing a passage is badly misunderstood if one concludes that Matthew's interests are narrowly construed or largely apologetic. Rather, the specific text functions as a transparency into the larger prophetic dimension represented by the entire Old Testament. Secondly, the formula citations are a form of Christian proclamation. The gospel [*sic*] writer bears witness from the context of Israel's prior experience of God to the realization of the divine will, now through the Messiah. On the one hand, Matthew reads the Old Testament from the perspective of the gospel, and testifies to the unity of the one plan of God within the scheme of prophecy and fulfillment. On the other hand, the very meaning of the gospel to which he bears witness receives its definition from the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>I agree with his conclusions and would apply his conclusions to instances where Scripture is both explicitly identified and implicitly alluded to within Matthew's Gospel, whether cognizantly referred to or incognizantly echoed in the Matthean narrative. See Brevard S. Childs, *The New Testament As Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 70-71. Similarly, Quarles states, "Matthew

As he was in the beginning of his Gospel-narrative, Matthew is concerned with anchoring Jesus' life in Old Testament co-text<sup>2</sup> for "everything written about [Jesus] in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44).<sup>3</sup> This chapter

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regards the Scriptures, the Word of God, as the message about Jesus. Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament message." Charles Quarles, *A Theology of Matthew: Jesus Revealed as Deliverer, King, and Incarnate Creator*, Explorations in Biblical Theology, ed. Robert Patterson (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), 28. This chapter, then, will contend the prophetic revelation portended in Ezek 37:1-14 (especially 37:11-14) was fulfilled, at least partially, in Jesus Christ.

<sup>2</sup>To comprehend the context of the Matthean pericope, interpreters must not merely situate it within Matt 27 or the conclusion to Matthew's Gospel or within the entirety of Matthew, but also within the canonical context, the theological context of resurrection, and the homiletical context of textual application. The "co-text," then, of Matt 27:51-54 is the series of expanding interpretive frameworks providing layers of interpretive meaning. See Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 206. According to Cotterell, the co-text is "the total text . . . within which we may expect to locate the clues which might serve to resolve our inescapable exegetical uncertainties." Peter Cotterell, "Hermeneutics: Some Linguistic Considerations," *Evangel* 13, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 78-83. Admittedly, Cotterell is combating postmodernist deconstructionist hermeneutics that dissects meaning at the level of the sentence rather than at the level of the utterance. But, his article helps us to see the multiple interpretive frameworks working together to produce context and meaning.

<sup>3</sup>France has compellingly argued that Matthew was cognizant of differing levels of sensibility to discern allusions to the Old Testament among his hearer-ship/readership. See R. T. France, "The Formula-Quotations of Matthew 2 and the Problem of Communication," *New Testament Studies: An International Journal* 27 (1981): 233-51. This dissertation suggests, though, that even without an explicit fulfillment formula quotation in Matt 27:51-54, the Gospel writer directs our attention to Ezekiel's prophecy. Matthew created a plain meaning in the construction of this pericope by including signs that identify Jesus as the eschatological Son of God (Matt 27:54; cf. 3:16; 16:16; 17:5) and embedded a deeper meaning by connecting the events of Jesus' life-giving cross-death to Ezek 37:1-14—the Davidic Servant (Matt 1:1), Jesus, leads the resurrected-dead into the land to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet. Because Matthew begins his Gospel by echoing to both the Genesis narrative as well as the life of David—Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαυὶδ υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ (Matt 1:1) and, because, he carefully weaves fulfillment quotations throughout his Gospel-narrative (Matt 1:22; 2:5, 15, 17, 23, 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:56; 27:9) his readers are granted hermeneutical "license" to look to the Old Testament for how the life (and death and resurrection and ascension) of Jesus fulfill the Scripture we are told is written about him (Luke 24:44). Similarly, Leithart, using John's Gospel as an example, states, "I read John 1:1 and I hear echoes of Genesis 1:1, and I begin to suspect that John wants to teach that the gospel story is a story of new creation." Peter J. Leithart, *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 132. The "license" is given to readers by virtue of explicit Old Testament quotations in the Gospel-narrative. The more familiar readers are with the biblical narrative, the more adept will be their sensibility to discern intertextual connections between the New Testament and Old Testament, even when they are not explicitly identified.

will endeavor to identify the location of these Matthean motifs in the Ezekielian Old Testament prophetic narrative.

### **The Genesis of Matthew 27:51-54**

Scholars have debated the origins of Matthew 27:51-54; their pontifications have not been scarce.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, some suggest the Matthean pericope finds its background in a mixture of a plethora of Old Testament passages with some of the more prominent allusions being Isaiah 26:19, “Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise,” and Daniel 12:2, “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”<sup>5</sup> While other less conspicuous Old Testament influences include Psalm 77:19; Psalm 104:30; Jeremiah 15:9; Joel 2:10; Amos 8:9; Nahum 1:5-6; Haggai 2:6; and Zechariah 14:4-5.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Three examples from reputable scholars will suffice to illustrate this point. Senior suggests Matt 27:51b-53 is solely dependent upon Ezek 37, in Donald P. Senior, *The Passion according to Matthew: A Redactional Study*, BETL 39 (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1975), 207-23. Allison, taking issue with Senior’s claim that Matt 27:51b-53 is based solely on Ezek 37, contends Zech 14:4-5, at least in part, directly informs the composition of Matt 27:51-54 in Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The End of the Ages Has Come: An Early Interpretation of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 40-46. Throughout his exposition of the Matthean pericope, Brown supports a mixture of scriptural passages—some of the more prominent being Isa 26; Ezek 37, Zech 14—informing the composition of Matt 27:51-54 in Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave—A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 2:1118-33.

<sup>5</sup>Riesenfeld suggests that passages such as Isa 26:19 and Dan 12:2 manifest the idea of bodily resurrection was not foreign to the religious beliefs of the Jewish people six centuries prior to Christ. Harald Riesenfeld, *The Resurrection in Ezekiel XXXVII and In the Dura-Europos Paintings* (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1948), 3. For a recent discussion on a biblical theology of resurrection in the Old Testament see Mitchell Lloyd Chase, “Resurrection Hope in Daniel 12:2: An Exercise in Biblical Theology” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013). Nickelsburg contends that Dan 12:1-3 is the earliest datable reference to a resurrection from the dead in the Hebrew Bible in which eschatological resurrection is expressed. See George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism and Early Christianity*, HTS 56 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 23.

<sup>6</sup>Beale and Carson suggest the following textual concoction shaping Matt 27:45-54—Exod 10:22; 26:31-35; Ps 69:21; Ezek 37:12; Dan 12: 2; Joel 2:10; Amos 8:9; Zech 14:4-5 in G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker,



On the other hand, however, others suggest Matthew's pericopal-*hapax* finds its roots in an extra-biblical, pre-Matthean tradition. The trembling of the celestial Watchers in response to the great quaking of the earth at the revelation of God in 1 Enoch 1:3-8 is suggested as one of the more prominent influences:

The Great Holy One will come forth from his dwelling, and the eternal God will tread from thence upon Mount Sinai. He will appear with his army, he will appear with his mighty host from the heaven of heavens. All the watchers will fear and <quake>, and those who are hiding in all the ends of the earth will sing. All the ends of the earth will be shaken, and trembling and great fear will seize them (the watchers) unto the ends of the earth. The high mountains will be shaken and fall and break apart, and the high hills will be made low and melt like wax before the fire. The earth will be wholly rent asunder, and everything on the earth will perish, and there will be judgment on all. With the righteous he will make peace, and over the chosen there will be protection, and upon them mercy.<sup>7</sup>

Fourth Ezra 7:32 is also noted for its conspicuous resurrection imagery: "And the earth shall give back those who are asleep in it, and the dust those who rest in it and the treasures shall give up the souls which have been committed to them."<sup>8</sup> Less evident extra-biblical, pre-Matthean influences include the Gospel of Peter, the Test. Levi 3:9,<sup>9</sup> and 4 Ezra. In 4 Ezra 4:35-42, the souls of the righteous are pining for release from

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2007), 98.

<sup>7</sup>George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch: A New Translation Based on the Hermeneia Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 19-20.

<sup>8</sup>The translation from 4 Ezra was taken from Michael E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990). I was made aware of the connection between the Matthean Gospel-narrative and 4 Ezra 7:32 by Weren. See Wim J. C. Weren, *Studies in Matthew's Gospel: Literary Design, Intertextuality, and Social Setting* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2014), 210-21. He contends that Matthew's Gospel and 4 Ezra are linked by eschatology. The resurrection of the saints in Matt 27:51-54, then, manifests that "Jesus' death and resurrection form the beginning of the age to come." He differs, however, in that he suggests the "text chain" informing Matt 27:51-54 is a combination of Isa 26:9, Dan 12:3, Ezek 37:1-14 along with other extra-biblical texts like Pseudo Ezekiel, etc.

<sup>9</sup>I was made aware of the connections between Matt 27:51-54 and both 4 Ezra and T. Levi 3:9 in Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1122, 1127.

Sheol; their confinement—which is likened to a child in the womb of a woman—cannot persist beyond a predetermined allotted time. Likewise, neither can Sheol prevent the righteous from their impending resurrection-release.

Scrutiny of these various suggestions, however, reveals that verbal and thematic connections between certain Old Testament and/or extra-biblical influences and the Matthean narrative are weak. Rather, examination of Ezekiel 37:1-14 in its Septuagintal form manifests numerous links to Matthew's Gospel-narrative. The aim of this section of the chapter will be to (1) situate Ezekiel 37:1-14 within the entirety of its Ezekielian context and (2) examine Ezekiel 37:1-14 (LXX) as the primary text upon which Matthew is relying in the composition of Matthew 27:51-53.<sup>10</sup> There is plenty of evidence contending that Matthew read and made use of the Greek Old Testament in the composition of his Gospel-narrative.<sup>11</sup> This chapter will suggest that the connection

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<sup>10</sup>Matthew relied heavily upon the Old Testament in the composition of his Gospel-narrative. The intent of this chapter, then, is not to suggest that Matthew is *solely* dependent upon Ezek 37:12-14 in the composition of Matt 27:51-53, for Allison has convincingly argued that Matt 27:51-54 is at least partially reliant upon Zech 14:4-5 (LXX). He gives four reasons for this assertion: in both Matthew and Zechariah there is (1) a resurrection that occurs immediately outside of Jerusalem, (2) an earthquake, (3) the verb *σχιζω* used in the passive, (4) the resurrected-dead identified as *οἱ ἄγιοι*. See Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The End of the Ages Has Come: An Early Interpretation of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 44. Rather, it is the aim of this chapter to suggest that Matthew has Ezek 37:12-14 (LXX) as his *primary* Old Testament referent when composing this resurrection pericope. The importance of this claim will soon become evident.

<sup>11</sup>Text-type in relation to the Matthean formula-quotations as well as Matthean textual allusions throughout his Gospel have been vehemently debated. France contends the LXX is not “Matthew’s Bible” and “to speak of ‘the Hebrew’ and ‘the LXX’ as the main or only textual resources available to Matthew is at least an oversimplification.” Rather, it seems that Matthew made use of Hebrew, LXX, and “his own creative paraphrasing” as his scriptural reflections enabled him to insert quotations that would best suit the contexts into which he placed them. See R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1989), 172-76. Similarly, Soares Prabhu suggests that Matthew’s text-type is a combination of LXX, Hebrew, and Matthean redaction. See G. M. Soares Prabhu, *The Formula Quotations in the Infancy Narrative of Matthew* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976), 73-77. This dissertation, then, does not claim Matthew made use of only the LXX, but that he made use of the LXX, broadly defined as Greek versions of the Old Testament, while composing his Gospel-narrative. Again, it is France who argues that it is not unreasonable to suggest that the Gospel writers generally refer to the LXX when making use of the OT, especially “where the LXX was a fair translation of the version quoted by Jesus, [since] it would be natural for the Greek translator to use the LXX words familiar both to

between Matthew 27:51-54 and Ezekiel 37:1-14 (LXX) is another example of Matthew making use of a Greek Old Testament in his Gospel.

### **Ezekiel 37:1-14 in Prophetic Context**

Ezekiel, a prophet heralding in exile, speaks of restoration in Ezekiel 36:16-37:14 from the land of Israel's judgment—Babylon. In the latter portion of his prophecy, a return from exile is promised in Ezekiel 36:24: "I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land" (cf. Ezek 11:17; 20:42; 37:12, 21). Before the people can enter "their own land" (Ezek 36:24), they must be cleansed. Israel is contaminated and unclean as a consequence of their defiling-deeds, idol worship, and exile in a foreign land (Ezek 36:17-20). As God rakes the castaways in from the various countries to which they have been scattered, the people are washed by water: "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you" (Ezek 36:25).<sup>12</sup> The water cleansing is not perfunctory. It is essential because of the impurity of the people. The prophet does not just promise cleansing; he prophesies a new heart for God's people

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himself and to his readers." R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1998), 25. Like Gundry, though he is discussing Matthew's use of the Old Testament, I aim to manifest that a discernable thought-connection exists between Matt 27:51-54 and Ezek 37:12-14. See Robert H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel: With Special Reference to the Messianic Hope* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1967), 1-5.

<sup>12</sup>The "sprinkling" foretold in Ezek 36:25 is redemptive-washing; atonement and forgiveness of sins. Isaiah tells us this cleansing is for the nations, not just the rejected house of Israel: "Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted . . . so shall he sprinkle many nations" (Isa 52:13-15). Those who were put to shame in exile for forsaking "the Lord, the fountain of living water" (Jer 17:13), will replenish their thirsty spiritual-palates by believing in God's Messiah as the Scripture has said (John 7:38) since the Davidic Servant will be wounded for their transgressions (Isa 53:5) so they may receive the new hearts Ezekiel promises to those who are cleansed: "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek 36:26).

(Ezek 36:26).<sup>13</sup> The new heart will come when there's a new eschatological shepherd in the land—the Davidic Servant—who will replace the false shepherds of Israel (Ezek 34:1-10; 37:24-25).<sup>14</sup> A new heart, according to Ezekiel, enables the people to be covenantally faithful to God by means of obedience to his Word—"I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them" (Ezek 11:19-20).<sup>15</sup> Like the resurrection in Ezekiel 37:1-14, the creation of a new heart is the result of divine initiative (Ezek 36:26; cf. 18:31). Speaking of the messianic theme in Ezekiel, Dempster writes,

Even the divided kingdom of exiles is reunited under a new leader, who is said to be 'my servant David' (Ezek. 37:24-25; cf. 34:23-24). But he is also described as one who will come to power through relative obscurity. In a remarkable allegorical

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<sup>13</sup>Commenting on Ezek 36-37, Gentry and Wellum state, "There will be a new covenant to renew the relationship with God and his people, a covenant that will deal effectively with hearts stubbornly bent on sin (36:24-32)." Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 472-73. Likewise, Hamilton, while commenting on Ezek 37:24, argues that a new heart will be given when the new David reigns and Yahweh has delivered his people from the judgment of exile. See James M. Hamilton, Jr. *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 229. For a Reformed and Baptist understanding of the New Covenant, see Pascal Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology: A Comparison between Seventeenth Century Particular Baptist and Paedobaptist Federalism* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2013), 35-154. Denault demonstrates that Reformed Baptists have insisted that the covenant of grace never had an outward administration that included unbelievers under the Old Covenant, but that it was the promise of the New Covenant to save God's elect people, which was progressively revealed under the Old Covenant and formally actualized with the death of Jesus in the New Covenant. The covenant of grace is God's promise, which was extended immediately after the fall in Gen 3:15, to save his elect people because of Jesus' work in the covenant of redemption, in which he kept the law Adam failed to keep in the covenant of works.

<sup>14</sup>House contends, "Creating the remnant, then, is a task the Lord must perform." His initiative will place the people under Davidic leadership. The new leadership will result in a new covenant, which will result in permanent, new protection for God's people. As in Jeremiah's prophecy, the presence of God's Davidic servant is the catalyst for new, permanent covenant (Jer 31:31-34; Jer 33:14-26; Ezek 37:24-28). See Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998), 341.

<sup>15</sup>As in Matt 27:45-54, the presence of the Spirit is prevalent in the passage. The new heart comes to the exilic people by the agency of God's Spirit in Ezek 36. The role of the Spirit is prominent in the vision of dry bones—the Spirit creates people from nothing when not even a stone-heart exists! The Spirit who enlivens the people and enables obedience (Ezek 36:26-27) is the same Spirit who anoints Ezek to preach (Ezek 37:1), gives life to the dead (Ezek 37:4-10), empowers Israel to return to the land (Ezek 37:11-14), and creates a new humanity cleansed from idolatry (Ezek 37:15-23). See House, *Old Testament Theology*, 342.

passage, a Davidic descendant is compared to a tender shoot plucked from a tall tree, taken to Mount Zion and planted there to grow into a huge tree, bearing fruit and providing shade for all the birds of the forest (17:22-24). Thus all the trees of the forest (peoples of the word) will know that ‘I the Lord lower the tall tree and raise the low tree. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish’ (17:24). Later, this ‘David’ who will come to power is remembered for his humble origins as a shepherd (34:23); he will provide true leadership, as opposed to past leaders, who are symbolized as corrupt and destructive shepherds. Both these motifs of Davidic rule (a tender shoot and a shepherd) echo Jeremiah’s prediction of a ‘plant growth’ from the line of David, which will bring good shepherds—justice for the nation (Jer 23:1-8). Ezekiel states that it is during this period of future Davidic leadership that a covenant of shalom will bring a flourishing prosperity and fertility to the land (34:23-31), which will be a new Eden (36:35).<sup>16</sup>

The prophecy of Israel’s future is hopeful. But, lest the people be confused, the restorative cleaning is for the exaltation of the Yahweh’s name, not because of Israel’s inherent worth (Ezek 36:32). Because the reputation of Yahweh is at stake, three times in Ezekiel 36:21-23 the prophet asserts that redemption and restoration are for God’s name alone:

*But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came. “Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned about the nations to which you*

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<sup>16</sup>Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15, ed. D. A. Carson, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 170-71. Additionally, Dempster notes the spiritual plight of the people requires nothing less than restorative-resurrection. The vision, then, of resurrection inspired by the Spirit is one of a new humanity placed in the new Eden (Gen 2:7; Ezek 37:7-10; John 20:19-23). Not only are the aforementioned passages linked conceptually, they are linked linguistically. The same verb, ἐμφυσάω, is used in the LXX in Gen 2:7 and Ezek 37:9 as well as in John 20. In all three biblical texts the verb is accompanied by either an accusative or dative auxiliary structure, which should encourage translators to understand that something is being breathed into, toward, or on. In Gen 2 in the LXX, God ἐνεφύσησεν into Adam’s face; the accusative substantive, εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πνοὴν ζωῆς, is the auxiliary structure. Thus, the structure is verb plus preposition plus accusative substantive. In Ezek 37 in the LXX, the prophet ἐμφύσησον to the wind; the auxiliary structure in this prophetic passage is εἰς τοὺς νεκροὺς τούτους. Thus, the structure is verb plus preposition plus accusative substantive. And, in John 20 Jesus ἐνεφύσησεν onto the disciples. The auxiliary structure is αὐτοῖς; the form of the structure is verb plus dative object. Thus, αὐτοῖς seems to be playing double-duty for both the verb ἐνεφύσησεν and the verb λέγει in 20:22—it functions as the indirect object of both verbs. For more on ἐμφυσάω, consult BDAG (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “ἐμφυσάω.” Compare with L&N, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Ronald B. Smith and Karen A. Munson (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), s.v. “ἐμφυσάω.” Consult also, LSJ, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Henry S. Jones and Roderick McKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), s.v. “ἐμφυσάω.”

came. And I will vindicate the holiness of *my great name*, which has been profaned among them.

The end result of cleansing and restoration is that the people will know that Yahweh is God: “The nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes . . . Then they will know that I am the Lord” (Ezek 36:23, 38).<sup>17</sup>

The narrative context of Ezekiel’s dry bones vision is one of new covenant-promise amid exilic-despair. Throughout Ezekiel, the revelation of God’s salvation comes to God’s people by means of “the word of the Lord,” as it does throughout the entirety of the biblical narrative.<sup>18</sup> As God formerly revealed himself at Sinai through his word (Exod 19:16-20; 20:18-21)—and as God would, in the future, reveal himself on a hill outside of Jerusalem through the eschatological-Word (Matt 27:54; cf. John 1:1)—so, too, in Ezekiel the prophesied new heart comes by means of God’s Word: “Then he said to me, ‘Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.’” (Ezek 37:4; cf. Rom 10:17).<sup>19</sup> For Ezekiel, resurrection from the dead is likened

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<sup>17</sup>The refrain “they will know that I am the Lord” is repeated 19 times throughout Ezekiel (LXX): 6:14; 24:27; 25:11, 17; 26:6; 28:23, 26; 29:9, 16, 21; 30:8, 19, 26; 32:15; 33:29; 35:15; 36:38; 38:23.

<sup>18</sup>In LXX of Ezekiel, “word of the Lord” occurs 59 times—Ezek 1:3; 3:16; 6:1, 3; 7:1; 11:14; 12:1, 8, 17, 21, 26; 13:1; 14:2, 12; 15:1; 16:1, 35; 17:1, 11; 18:1; 20:2; 21:1, 3, 6, 13, 23; 22:1, 17, 23; 23:1; 24:1, 15, 20; 25:1, 3; 26:1; 27:1; 28:1, 11, 20; 29:1, 17; 30:1, 20; 31:1, 32:1, 17; 33:1, 23; 34:1, 7; 35:1; 36:1, 4; 36:4, 16; 37:4, 15; 38:1.

<sup>19</sup>Leithart also contends the prophecy of Ezek 36:24-29 will come to fruition when Jesus, the Messianic Davidic Servant, comes. The vision in Ezek 37, then, like the prophecy in Ezek 36, is “first of all about a resurrection from the death of exile.” Peter J. Leithart, *A House for My Name: A Survey of the Old Testament* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2000), 218-19. Additionally, Leithart connects the blessings foretold with nations outside of Israel. He notes the messages to the seven Gentile nations in Ezek 25-32 indicate that, once again, “Yahweh provokes Judah to jealousy by sending His word to the Gentiles.”

to a return from exile (Ezek 37:12-14).<sup>20</sup> The vision of dry bones signifies rebirth of the entire people “in a way which radically transcends the hope of Jeremiah.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Ezekiel 37:1-14 (LXX)**

Probably no portion of Ezekiel’s prophecy is as well known as “The Valley of Dry Bones.” Throughout the pericope, despondence threatens the existence of the people of Israel. Israel is, the Scripture says, both hopeless in their faith and oppressed in their exile, καὶ αὐτοὶ λέγουσιν Ξηρὰ γέγονεν τὰ ὅστᾳ ἡμῶν, ἀπόλωλεν ἡ ἐλπίς ἡμῶν, διαπεφωνήκαμεν (Ezek 37:11 LXX). Yet, despite their despair, the prophetic vision recounted in Ezekiel 37:1-14 is an oracle of hope for their future salvation, their return from exile.<sup>22</sup> Yahweh, via the prophet, upends their pessimistic-premise and proclaims a new salvation-syllogism:

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<sup>20</sup>Interestingly, Hamilton links the revelatory vision of Ezek 37 with the book of Revelation—“The sequence of events in Rev. 20-22 matches the sequence of events in Ezek. 37-48 as follows: resurrection of God’s people (Ezek. 37:1-14; Rev. 20:4-6); Christ’s reign over the land restored from war (Ezek. 37:24; 38:8, 11; Rev 20:4-6); satanic attack by Gog and Magog (Ezek. 38:1-4, 8, 11; Rev 20:7-8); defeat of God and Satan (Ezek. 38:16-39:24; Rev. 20:9-10); new heaven and new earth presented as a cosmic temple (Ezek. 40-48; Rev. 21-22).” James M. Hamilton Jr., *With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology*, NSBT 32 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 219. Though this dissertation will not labor to connect Ezekiel with John’s apocalypse, it is worthwhile to note the eschatological overtones Hamilton notices within Ezekiel’s vision. This, then, gives further credence to the eschatological foci this dissertation’s thesis argues is central in the Matthean pericope under consideration.

<sup>21</sup>Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 178. Childs notes, “Ezekiel can also make use of the Davidic hope, the one true shepherd (34.23) and of an everlasting covenant which calls forth a new heart (11.19; 18.31; 36.26; 39:29)” (ibid.). Additionally, House highlights that Ezekiel’s employment of the Spirit links the king and servant images found in Isaiah and Jeremiah, “as well as those prophets’ teachings about the everlasting and new covenants.” House, *Old Testament Theology*, 342.

<sup>22</sup>Allen argues that the notion of “hope” can even be seen in the compositional intentionality of the prophetic vision. He contends that “structurally there is a double movement in the vision account from a negative orientation [vv. 1-3] to a positive one [vv. 4-8]; this is matched by a single movement in the accompanying oracle of salvation [vv.8-10]. In terms of tradition history this movement echoes the metaphorical creedal statement that Yahweh both kills and makes alive, in order to affirm his positive purpose to restore his exiled people [vv.11-14].” Leslie C. Allen, “Structure, Tradition and Redaction in Ezekiel’s Death Valley Vision,” in *Among the Prophets: Language, Image and Structure in the Prophetic Writings*, ed. Philip R. Davis and David J. A. Clines, JSTOTSUP 144 (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of

Table 4. A divine Ezekielian enthymeme

<i>Israel</i>	<i>God</i>
Dry bones <i>cannot</i> live (37:3)	Dry bones <i>can</i> live (37:1-10)
Israel is dry bones (37:11a)	Israel is dry bones (37:12a)
Therefore Israel cannot live (37:11b)	Therefore Israel can live (37:12b-14)

As in Matthew 27:51-54, table 4<sup>23</sup> above illustrates that the compositional parallelism of the passage delivers a rhetorical “punch” to Ezekiel’s (re)readers.<sup>24</sup> The persuasive force of the Ezekielian passage does not reside, then, in its rational argumentation—though, as the chart manifests, the prophecy is not devoid of rational argumentation. Rather, the persuasive force of the pericope resides in the dramatic images it conjures to arrest the prophet’s (re)readers through its enthymematic structure. This section will endeavor, then, to (1) exegete the passage, (2) show the internal logic of the prophetic-argument coursing throughout the oracle, and (3) crystallize the oracle’s thought-connections to Matthew 27:51-54.

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the Old Testament Press, 1993), 127-42.

<sup>23</sup>Table 4 is an adapted version of that found in Michael V. Fox, “The Rhetoric of Ezekiel’s Vision of the Valley of Dry Bones,” *HUCA* 51 (1980): 1-15. Fox observes that auditors could not appreciate the complex rhetorical structure devices. So, he labors to accentuate rhetorical devices more readily observable to auditors beyond the level of structure: in the vision Ezekiel is not merely a prophetic messenger, but a prophetic spectator; unstated absurdity of corporeal resurrection persists throughout the pericope; the death is so complete that it takes two steps to complete the process of resurrection. But, contra Fox, Ezek 37 is a literary text that permits reading, and rereading. So, the persuasive force of the prophecy’s structure is enhanced when placed on the examination table of the reader/interpreter.

<sup>24</sup>For Petersen, this is one of the main premises for not delaying the resurrection of the sleeping-dead in Matt 27 to after Jesus’ resurrection: “The resurrection—and, therefore, the appearance—of the resurrected persons is placed here, at the death of Jesus on the cross, as one of the natural wonders which accompanied Jesus’ death, and which signified its gravity. To delay their appearance until ‘after his resurrection’ defeats the entire purpose of place the report at this point in the [Matthean] narrative.” William L. Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron,” *NTS* 29 (1983): 500.



## Interpreting Ezekiel 37:1-14

A close reading of the Septuagintal version of Ezekiel 37:1-14 will manifest that repetition is a literary device utilized by the prophet to underscore and emphasize the vision's theological import in this well-known fourteen-verse pericope. First, "live" is used six times throughout the fourteen verses in Ezekiel 37:3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 14.<sup>25</sup> Second, the passage underscores its pneumatological overtones through the use of πνεῦμα cognates.<sup>26</sup> "Spirit" or "breath" is used nine times throughout the pericope in Ezekiel 37:1, 5, 6, 8, 9a, 9b, 9c, 10, 14 (cf. Ezek 36:26-27).<sup>27</sup> Like its Hebrew counterpart—רוח—πνεῦμα is multivalent and, therefore, has a range of meaning and "can mean 'breath, wind, spirit', both human and divine."<sup>28</sup> The divine activity of "the Spirit" is conspicuous as he enlivens the people and enables obedience (Ezek 36:26-27) and anoints Ezekiel to preach (Ezek 37:1) and gives life to the dead (Ezek 37:4-10) and

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<sup>25</sup>The passage employs various Greek conjugations which are translated "live": ζήσεται, ζώῃς, ζήσασθε, ζησάτωσαν, ἔζησαν, ζήσασθε.

<sup>26</sup>Homing in on the pneumatological theme coursing throughout the passage, Allen, commenting on the MT, argues the Ezekielian pericope "functions as an elaboration of the gift of Yahweh's spirit promised in 36.27a." Thus, he states, "[Ezek 37:1-14's] ninefold occurrence of רוח 'breath/spirit' [is] an illustration of the restoring power of God in 36.27a. It intends to focus particularly on the reference to the giving of the רוח in v.6." Allen, "Structure, Tradition and Redaction in Ezekiel's Death Valley Vision," 141-42. Olley, commenting on the LXX, remarks on the pneumatology of the pericope. He, however, notices how the pericope's placement, along with the repetition of "Spirit/breath," after Ezek 36 underscores this theological theme: "In the traditional position following ch. 36 [Ezek 37:1-14] vividly promises the spiritual and physical renewal of the nation through the Lord's Spirit." John W. Olley, *Ezekiel*, Septuagint Commentary Series (Boston: Brill, 2009), 488.

<sup>27</sup>The passage employs the following pneuma words: πνεύματι (1x), πνεῦμα (3x), τὸ πνεῦμα (3x), τῷ πνεύματι (1x), πνεύματων (1x).

<sup>28</sup>BDB is inconclusive as to whether the references in 37:6, 8, 9, 9, 9, 10, 14 should be "breath" or "spirit"; and they fail to even suggest "Spirit" as an option. They do, however, lump these seven references into a broad category—"symbol of life." Interestingly, BDB does not even mention the two occurrences in 37:1, 5. F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), s.v. "רוח." In Ezek 37:6,14, Olley suggests the phrases containing πνεῦμα should be translated "my Spirit." See Olley, *Ezekiel*, 488.

empowers Israel to return to the land (Ezek 37:11-14) and creates a new humanity cleansed from idolatry (Ezek 37:15-23). Third, the Ezekielian phrase, “you shall know that I am the Lord” is used three times throughout the fourteen verses of the pericopal unit in Ezekiel 37:6, 13, 14.<sup>29</sup> Fourth, the passage is bracketed by references to *τίθημι* and the “Spirit” (Ezek 37:1, 14). Together, the references to *ἐθηκεν* in Ezekiel 37:1 and *θήσομαι* in Ezekiel 37:14 form an inclusio; the same Spirit that sets Ezekiel in the valley also functions as the catalyst for resettling the resurrected in their *ἐπὶ τῇ γῇ ὑμῶν* (Ezek 37:14). Further, a close reading of Ezekiel 37:1-14 manifests that the pericope can be divided into two larger sections with a transition verse connecting the two sections (see table 5).<sup>30</sup>

Table 5. Structure of Ezekiel 37:1-14

The Vision of Dry Bones	1-10
Interpretive comments referring to 37:1-10 and to 37:12-14	11
Divine Explication of the Vision	12-14

<sup>29</sup>*καὶ γνώσεσθε ὅτι εἰμι κύριος* is used twice; *καὶ γνώσεσθε ὅτι ἐγὼ κύριος* is used once. Like “word of the Lord” in Ezekiel, this is a refrain that is used repeatedly throughout his prophecy. It occurs 23 times in the LXX of Ezekiel—Ezek 6:7, 13; 11:10, 12; 12:20; 13:9, 14, 21, 23; 14:8; 16:62; 17:21; 20:42, 44; 22:16, 22; 23:49; 35:4, 12; 36:36; 37:6, 13, 14.

<sup>30</sup>The intent of table 5 is not to suggest a chiastic arrangement to Ezekiel 37:1-14. Rather, it is merely to accentuate the transitional importance of Ezek 37:11 as it refers backward to Ezek 37:1-10 and foreword to Ezek 37:12-14. Fishbane, however, commenting on the Hebrew text, argues for a chiastic structure that likewise confirms the crucial interpretive role of Ezek 37:11 in the prophetic pericope. For him, Ezek 37:11, chiastically placed in its “broader structural perspective,” is “preparatory to the more forceful repetition of the meaning of the vision in vv. 12-14.” Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 451-52.

In the first section, Ezekiel 37:1-10, the prophetic address to the dead house of Israel begins with divine activity leading the reader to expect a dramatic series of events. Though the *χεῖρ κυρίου* guided Ezekiel early in the prophetic narrative (Ezek 1:3; 3:14, 22; 8:1), its relative absence is striking throughout the majority of the prophecy. The phrase reappears when Jerusalem was struck down in her exile (Ezek 33:22).<sup>31</sup> The question is, “What is the Lord about to do?” Formerly, Ezekiel had been transported by the “hand of the Lord” (*χεῖρ κυρίου*) to witness the atrocities occurring within the Jerusalem temple (Ezek 37:1; cf. Ezek 8-11); the last time he had been led to “the valley” (*πεδίου*), he was confronted with the vision of Yahweh’s glory (Ezek 3:22-23; cf. Ezek 37:1-2; 8:4). Now, the prophet is led “in the Spirit” (*ἐν πνεύματι*) to an Israeli boneyard (Ezek 37:1). The grisly scene confronting Ezekiel is appalling as an avalanche of skeletal remains unearthed in a field overtakes his vista—*καὶ τοῦτο ἦν μεστὸν ὀστέων* (Ezek 37:1). The priest cannot merely glance at the cadaverous remains of his people and be on his merry way. Rather, he has to peruse the bones scattered throughout the countryside as the hand of God leads him along—*περιήγαγέν με ἐπ’ αὐτὰ κυκλόθην κύκλῳ* (Ezek 37:2).<sup>32</sup> The remains of this bone-hoard were *ξηρὰ σφόδρα*, implying that their sun-bleached bones have been exposed for a lengthy amount of time. Reflecting on the horror of the scene in the battlefield turned graveyard, Wright states, “These bones, then, are not just evidence of death, but of death under curse. These bones proclaim that their

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<sup>31</sup>*χεῖρ κυρίου* will appear once more in the LXX of Ezekiel, Ezek 40:1.

<sup>32</sup>The scene is even more shocking when read in light of the law for Levitical priests mentioned in Ezek 44:25—“They shall not defile themselves by going near to a dead person” (cf. Lev 21:1).

‘owners’ had been the victims not only of battle, but also of divine judgment.”<sup>33</sup> The vision intentionally exaggerates the consequence of the people of Israel’s unrepentant sinful folly.

While standing in the midst of the deadest bones imaginable, the prophet is asked an incomprehensible question—εἰ ζήσεται τὰ ὀστᾶ ταῦτα (Ezek 37:3).<sup>34</sup> What follows the incomprehensible question, then, is an absurd command—Προφήτευσον ἐπὶ τὰ ὀστᾶ ταῦτα καὶ ἐρεῖς αὐτοῖς Τὰ ὀστᾶ τᾶ ξηρά, ἀκούσατε λόγον κυρίου . . . καὶ ζήσεσθε (Ezek 37:4-6). Despite the detail that ears have bones, but bones do not have ears, Ezekiel is given a preaching exercise more preposterous than preaching to the deaf and blind (Ezek 37:4-10; cf. Isa 42:18).<sup>35</sup> Though Ezekiel has his doubts, the text is clear, God is not halted by death. Battling unbelief, Ezekiel obeys the command by speaking the unadulterated “word of the Lord”—καὶ ἐπροφήτευσα καθὼς ἐνετείλατό μοι (Ezek 37:7). Following the compliant prophetic pronouncement, there is a σεισμός (Ezek 37:7) and the undoing of death as the bones became skeletons and the skeletons became cadavers—καὶ προσήγαγε τὰ ὀστᾶ ἐκάτερον πρὸς τὴν ἁρμονίαν αὐτοῦ. καὶ εἶδον καὶ

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<sup>33</sup>Wright asserts this is the destiny of the truly accursed. See Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), 304. Many of the observations made below from Ezek 37:1-14 are dependent upon Wright’s contribution.

<sup>34</sup>Ezekiel, a prophet and priest, surely would have known Deut 32:39, “See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.” Interestingly, Wright suggests Ezekiel would have recalled the other rare Old Testament resurrection stories: “the resuscitation of the dead through the powerful prayer of Elijah and Elisha, and the startling revival of a corpse upon contact with the bones of Elisha.” Ibid, 305. It seems plausible, then, to propose that as the resurrection-vision would have conjured Old Testament resurrection appearances for Ezekiel, so reflection upon the resurrection-sign at Jesus’ cross-death would have conjured the most dramatic picture of resurrection in the Old Testament for Matthew, Ezek 37:1-14.

<sup>35</sup>Wright drew my attention to the contrast between Isaiah’s preaching ministry and Ezekiel’s preaching ministry. See Wright, *The Message of Ezekiel*, 306.

ἰδοὺ ἐπ’ αὐτὰ νεῦρα καὶ σάρκες ἐφύονται, καὶ ἀνέβαινεν ἐπ’ αὐτὰ δέρμα ἐπάνω (Ezek 37:7-8). Despite the stunning vision of death-reversal, Ezekiel is quick to note that the hoard still remains a heap of lifeless corpses—καὶ πνεῦμα οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς (Ezek 37:8). The observation is followed by a second absurd command: καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς με Προφήτευσον . . . καὶ ζησάτωσαν (Ezek 37:9). With brevity, Ezekiel narrates his obedience—καὶ ἐπροφήευσα καθότι ἐνετείλατό μοι (Ezek 37:10). The result of Ezekiel’s obedience to the divine voice is breathtaking, καὶ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς αὐτοὺς τὸ πνεῦμα, καὶ ἔζησαν (Ezek 37:10). The vitality associated with the Lord is bequeathed to the dead; it is imparted by proclamation and animated by the Spirit. What was πολλὰ σφόδρα (Ezek 37:2) has become, through the Spirit-filled proclamation of Ezekiel, a συναγωγὴ πολλή σφόδρα (Ezek 37:10).<sup>36</sup>

In the second section of the prophecy, as the divine voice speaks to Ezekiel for the fourth time<sup>37</sup> in the pericope, interpretive comments are given in the first part of Ezekiel 37:11 that identify who the skeletal remains figuratively referred to—τὰ ὅστ᾽ αὐτὰ πᾶς οἶκος Ἰσραὴλ ἐστίν. In the second part of Ezekiel 37:11, divine interpretive comments continue by narrating the despondent exilic situation the people of Israel find themselves in—Ἐνθα γέγονεν τὰ ὅστ᾽ αὐτῶν, ἀπόλωλεν ἡ ἐλπὶς αὐτῶν, διαπεφωνήκαμεν.<sup>38</sup> It is these comments by the prophet to his (re)readers that lead them

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<sup>36</sup>Olley observes an intentional decision by the LXX translator to avoid militaristic language in Ezek 37:14. He proposes the translator avoids δυνάμεις or ἰσχύς, the normal LXX matches for the Hebrew כֹּחַ, to mitigate militaristic overtones leading readers of Ezek 37:1-14 to assume the pericope is primarily about Israel’s “rise” to military prominence over the surrounding nations. See Olley, *Ezekiel*, 490.

<sup>37</sup>καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς με in Ezek 37:3, 4, 9 (LXX) and καὶ ἐλάλησεν κύριος πρὸς με in Ezek 37:11 (LXX).

<sup>38</sup>This is the only reference to διαφωνεω in Ezekiel (LXX). It appears to have a sense not only of being “cut off” but of spiritually “lost.” See LSJ, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Henry S. Jones and Roderick McKenzie

to the optimistic comments located in Ezekiel 37:12-14. In Ezekiel 37:12, the visionary panorama rapidly shifts from the boneyard to the graveyard and one learns that the previous vision was both metaphorical and symbolic. Ezekiel will preach not to the literally dead, but the living-dead house of Israel in exile.<sup>39</sup> Yet, even though the banished people are διαπεφωνήκαμεν (Ezek 37:11) and despite the anticipation of burial in tombs located in a foreign land (Ezek 37:12),<sup>40</sup> hope is portended of a day when God will burst open their sepulchers and raise them to life—Ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀνοίγω ὑμῶν τὰ μνήματα καὶ ἀνάξω ὑμᾶς ἐκ τῶν μνημάτων ὑμῶν (Ezek 37:12). Even though the presence of hope is deferred to a future day, the magnitude of the promise is not diminished. God does not simply promise them life, but life in their homeland—καὶ εἰσάξω ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν γῆν τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ (Ezek 37:12). Their exile will go from bad to worse—Israel will certainly die in exile—but, God promises resurrection to Israel; resurrection that will confirm his identify among the people of his possession: καὶ γνώσεσθε ὅτι ἐγὼ κύριος ἐν τῷ ἀνοίξαί με τοὺς τάφους ὑμῶν τοῦ ἀναγαγεῖν με ἐκ τῶν τάφων τὸν λαὸν μου (Ezek 37:13). As the people can be certain that the sun will rise after the dark of night or that gravity will exert its force on any who attempt to defy it, so

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(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), s.v. “διαφωνεω.” This further underscores the metaphorical and symbolic overtones of the prophetic pericope.

<sup>39</sup>In some LXX manuscripts, according to Lust, Ezek 37 follows Ezek 38-39. This placement, however, mitigates the theological interests that informed the placement of Ezek 37:1-14 prior to prophecy against Gog. The traditional placement accentuates Israel’s morally dead, spiritual dead state. See J. Lust, “Major Divergences between LXX and MT in Ezekiel,” in *Messianisms and the Septuagint: Collected Essays*, ed. K. Hauspie (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2004), 207-8.

<sup>40</sup>τὰ μνήματα in Ezek 37:12; τοὺς τάφους in Ezek 37:13. Olley suggests that the mention of “graves/tombs” can imply individual resurrection rather than eschatological, glorified resurrection. See Olley, *Ezekiel*, 488.

they should be confident that the Lord's promise of resurrection will come to pass:

λελάληκα καὶ ποιήσω, λέγει κύριος (Ezek 37:14).<sup>41</sup>

### **Ezekielian Thought-Connections to Matthew 27:51-54**

Working to establish Matthean dependence upon Ezekiel 37:1-14 (LXX) in the composition of Matthew 27:51-54, it is imperative to note there are numerous hermeneutical thought-connections existing between the two pericopes. A careful perusal of the Matthean Passion narrative alongside Ezekiel's oracle manifests a conclusive parallelism used by the Gospel author. This parallelism can be visualized in the chart below (see table 6).

Though many interpreters lament literary readings connecting Old Testament and New Testament pericopes that overextend themselves hermeneutically, Matthew's intentionality in connecting his Passion narrative to Ezekiel's prophetic narrative is manifest.<sup>42</sup> As he has done at other points within his Gospel, Matthew utilizes parallelism to import theological truth as well as to concretize Jesus' identity.<sup>43</sup> In

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<sup>41</sup>Fensham notes that the dry bones becoming living beings manifests that the curse of death is translated into a blessing in the Ezekielian prophetic vision; death is translated into life. See F. C. Fensham, "The Curse of the Dry Bones in Ezekiel 37:1-14 Changed to a Blessing of Resurrection," *JNSL* 13 (1987): 59-60.

<sup>42</sup>While discussing the over-interpretation of texts, Eco helps one to see the question is not "By what criterion do we decide that a given textual interpretation is an instance of over-interpretation?" Rather, he postulates that readers who have postured themselves to pay careful attention to the details of the text are able to discern "which [readings] are 'bad.'" Sensitive readers, then, are able to ascertain what is being "evoked [even unconsciously] by the text." Thus, for Eco, sensitive readings do "not contradict other explicit aspects of the text." See Umberto Eco and Stefan Collini, eds., *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 52, 62. This dissertation, therefore, suggests that Matthew's compositional intentionality makes the best sense of all the relevant facts with which this difficult pericope is concerned. Namely, it makes best interpretive sense of the relationship existing between Matt 27:51-54 and Matt 28:1-10 as well as the relationship existing between Matt 27:51-54 and Ezek 37:1-14.

<sup>43</sup>For more on Matthew's use of parallelism within his Gospel narrative, see my comments in chap. 1, where I illustrate his literary intentionality with two character examples from the Gospel-

Table 6. Thought-connection parallelism between  
Matthew 27:51-54 and Ezekiel 37:1-14

<i>Matthew 27:50-54</i>	<i>Ezekiel 37:1-14</i>
the Spirit (27:50) τὸ πνεῦμα	my Spirit (37:1) – ἐν πνεύματι my Spirit (37:6) – πνεῦμά μου my Spirit (37:14) – τὸ πνεῦμά μου <sup>44</sup>
many bodies (27:52) πολλὰ σώματα	many corpses (37:2) πολλὰ σφόδρα <sup>45</sup>
Behold . . . the earth quaked . . . earthquake (27:52, 54) Καὶ ἰδοὺ . . . ἐσείσθη . . . σεισμόν	Behold, an earthquake (37:7) καὶ ἰδοὺ σεισμός <sup>46</sup>
the tombs, also, were opened (27:52) καὶ τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνεῳχθησαν they went into the holy city after his resurrection (27:53) μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν	Behold, I will open your graves (37:12) Ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀνοίγω ὑμῶν τὰ μνήματα <sup>47</sup>  and [I will] raise you from your graves and lead you into the land of Israel (37:12) καὶ ἀνάξω ὑμᾶς ἐκ τῶν μνημάτων ὑμῶν καὶ εἰσάξω ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν γῆν τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ <sup>48</sup>

narrative's introduction along with one example from the scenes surrounding Jesus' birth and death as well as one macro-structural example of the Gospel. These manifest his intentionality in the use of parallelism as a literary device. Further, they manifest that meaning, for Matthew, is often embedded in the presentation of his Gospel-narrative.

<sup>44</sup>Though the pericope employs 9 pneumatic words, it is contextually clear that the references in Ezek 37:1, 6, 14 are references to the divine Spirit, the Lord's Spirit.

<sup>45</sup>Quarles suggests the difference between Matt 27:52 and Ezek 37:2 (LXX) is accounted for since the adjective πολλὰ refers to the ὁστέων in Ezek 37:1. Thus, translators should translate πολλὰ σφόδρα as "many corpses." Charles Quarles, "Matthew 27:51-53 As a Scribal Interpolation: Testing a Recent Proposal," paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society National Conference, San Diego, California, November 18-20, 2014.

<sup>46</sup>Rabbinic commentator Rabbi Eliezer interpreted σεισμός as "earthquake" not "shaking." Rabbi Eliezer, *Pirke de Rabbi Êlizer*, trans. G. Friedlander (New York: Hermon Press, 1970), 248-51.

<sup>47</sup>This is the only reference to the opening of tombs/graves in the entirety of the Old Testament narrative.

<sup>48</sup>In Ezek 37:13 (LXX) there is a shift from τὰ μνήματα and ἐκ τῶν μνημάτων το τοὺς τάφους for "graves/tombs." This creates another thought-connection between the two resurrection pericopes since τὸν τάφον is used in Matt 28:1.



Matthew's Gospel-narrative, then, there is a multi-layered context. At one level, meaning is present in the narrative proper. At another level, meaning is present in the Matthean presentation, or structure, of his Gospel-narrative. In the case of our pericope, this is evident in the parallelism existing between Matthew 27:51-54 and Matthew 28:1-10 as well as the parallelism existing between Matthew 27:51-54 and Ezekiel 37:1-14. Awareness of Matthew's presentation enables readers to see that the Gospel's author is primarily evoking Ezekiel 37, not 1 Corinthians 15:20, Colossians 1:18, Revelation 1:5, Isaiah 26:9, Daniel 12:1-3, or Zechariah 14:4-5, by placing the resurrection of the sleeping-saints on the day of Jesus' cross-death.

Scrutiny of the two Greek texts manifests that a σεισμός preceded the resurrection of those in the Ezekielian boneyard as well as πολλὰ σώματα τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων in the Judean countryside (Ezek 37:7; Matt 27:51-52).<sup>49</sup> The use of σεισμός in Ezekiel 37:7 (LXX), according to Olley, insinuates a fiercer "shaking" than its Hebrew counterpart רעש.<sup>50</sup> Further, σεισμός was utilized in Ezekiel (LXX) previously and associated with the earlier prophetic theophanies (Ezek 3:12, 13). For Olley, the revelatory nature of these verses make it "probable that these verses . . . have influenced the enigmatic Mt 27:52-53."<sup>51</sup> As God was not halted by the long-term deaths of the skeletal hoard in Ezekiel 37:1-10, so Jesus' resurrection power over mortality was not

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<sup>49</sup>Ezek 37:7 (LXX) employs the noun σεισμός while Matt 27:51 employs the aorist passive ἐσεισθη. In both Ezekiel (LXX) and Matthew, σεισμός is used 4 times—Ezek 3:12, 13; 37:7; 38:19 and Matt 8:24; 24:7; 27:54; 28:2. In Matthew's Gospel, σεισμός is rendered "earthquake" in the latter three instances. In Matt 8:24, however, it is typically glossed as "storm" when referring to the tumultuous waters upon which Jesus slept before he rebuked the tempest (Matt 8:25-27).

<sup>50</sup>Olley, *Ezekiel*, 490.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 491.

halted by the deaths of those embedded in the Judean countryside and raised at his cross-death (Matt 27:51-54). As the miracle of resurrection is performed through prophetic mediation in Ezekiel in 37:7-10, so resurrection is facilitated through the One mediator between God and man in Matthew 27:51-54—the eschatological prophet, Jesus. The ground of Ezekiel’s proclamation of the resurrection of the bodies, even after they have been utterly decomposed under the sun, is the revelation of Yahweh in Israel; so, in Matthew’s Gospel narrative, the revelation of Yahweh in the incarnate Jesus is tantamount. One of the events revealing Jesus to be Yahweh’s Christ is the death-release caused by his cross-death which results in the centurion’s Christological confession of Jesus to be θεοῦ υἱός (Matt 27:54).<sup>52</sup> As in Ezekiel 37 (LXX) the Spirit infuses life into a heap of corpses (Ezek 37:10), so in Matthew 27 the Spirit is the divine catalyst unleashed by Jesus from the cross resulting in the five divine signs (Matt 27:50).<sup>53</sup> Finally, as in Ezekiel 37 reception of Spirit-animated life leads to life in the land (Ezek 37:14; cf. 36:27-30), so in Matthew 27:52-53 Spirit-animated life leads to entrance into the land.

Other interpreters have noted Matthean dependence upon Ezekiel 37:1-14 in the composition of his death-resurrection pericope in Matthew 27:51-54. Block, commenting on “into the land” (Ezek 37:12) and “your own land” (Ezek 37:14), states, “The description of the resurrection scene after the death of Jesus in Matt. 27:51-54

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<sup>52</sup>Robert Martin-Archard, *From Death to Life: A Study of the Doctrine of the Resurrection in the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1960), 102.

<sup>53</sup>Commenting on Ezek 37:7-10, Martin-Archard states, “The [Spirit] of God alone makes a living man out of the dead.” Ibid., 96. Martin-Archard goes on to connect Ezekiel’s image of the Spirit animating life with Gen 2:7. As the divine breath made Adam a living being, so it transformed the lifeless into an exceedingly great multitude. John, too, utilizes the image of Spirit-animated life in John 20:22. For more on John 20:19-23, see Raymond Johnson, “The Church’s Mission: John 20:19-23 Reconsidered,” *CurTM* 43, no. 4 (October 2016): 22-28.

suggests that this event may have been interpreted in the light of Ezek. 37:1-14.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, entrance “into the holy city” in Matthew 27:53 was Matthew’s (re)interpretation of the Ezekielian resurrected dead reentering the land (cf. Ezek 37:12-14).

Additionally, in his detailed exegetical study, Monasterio contends that Ezekiel 37 constitutes the fundamental biblical background for Matthew 27:51b-53.<sup>55</sup> One reason he argues for Matthean dependence upon Ezekiel 37 is that in both Matthew 27:51-54 and Ezekiel 37:1-14 the Spirit is the active agent of resurrection:

In Ezekiel 37 the Spirit of God is the one who produces life and brings about the resurrection of the dead: "I will put my Spirit within you and you will live" (Ezekiel 37, 14. Also v. 5. 6. 9. 10). In Matthew we find something similar: "[And Jesus cried out] again with a great voice and surrendered the Spirit. And, behold, the veil of temple was torn . . . and many bodies of the dead saints were resurrected"(Mt. 27, 50 ff.).<sup>56</sup>

Further, when discussing “los numerosos puntos de contacto entre el texto de Ezequiel 37 y la pericopa objeto de nuestro estudio,”<sup>57</sup> he puts forward six reasons contending that Matthew was conscious of the Ezekelian contextual background as he appropriated this text in his Gospel-narrative (see table 7).

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<sup>54</sup>Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 389. Further, Block implies that YHWH leading the raised corpses in Ezek 37:1-14 into the land directly influenced Matthew’s assertion that Jesus’ resurrection preceded the entrance of resurrected-dead into the holy city. Thus, he states, “The Lord himself goes before a band of folk who have risen from their tombs into the holy city.”

<sup>55</sup>Rafael A. Monasterio, *Exegesis de Mateo, 27.51b-53: para una teologia de la muerte de Jesus en el evangelio de Mateo* (Vitoria, Brazil: Eset, 1980), 26.

<sup>56</sup>“En Ez. 37 el Espiritu de Dios es quien produce la vida y provoca la resurreccion de los muertos: ‘Infundire mi espiritu en vosotros y vivireis (*dsesthe*)’ (Ez. 37, 14. Tambien v.v. 5. 6. 9. 10). En Mateo encontramos la misma relacion: “Diciendo una gran voz entrego el espiritu. Y he aqui que el velo del templo se rasgo . . . y muchos cuerpos de los santos que habian muerto resucitaron (*egerthesan*)’ (Mt. 27, 50 ss.).” Ibid., 184.

<sup>57</sup>His six points of contact can be found in Monasterio, *Exegesis de Mateo, 27.51b-53*, 75-76. Monasterio, when noting the lexical thought-connections linking the two pericopes also makes use of the LXX. Further, he observes that eschatology is a dominant theological theme present in the Matthean periscope.

Monasterio concludes that there is a “clear allusion in Mt 27:51b-53 to Ezekiel’s prophetic vision.”<sup>58</sup> The allusion manifests that Matthew understood Jesus’ cross-death as a type of messianic salvation of God’s eschatological in-breaking. The allusion, then, portrays Jesus’ death-resurrection as the central moment in salvation-history.

Table 7. Matthew’s conscious use of Ezekiel

<i>Matthew’s Conscious Use of Ezekiel</i>	
<i>The spirit of God is the one who triggers the process that culminates in the resurrection of the dead.</i>	Matt 27’s five portents occur as a direct result of Jesus’ cross-death. The presence of the τὸ πνεῦμα in Matthew and Ezekiel connects the pericopes lexically.
<i>God’s intervention will be accompanied by an earthquake, a biblical sign of the eschatological action of God.</i>	The Matthean portents manifest both divine intervention and the fulfillment of the Ezekielian prophecy.
<i>The divine action culminates in the tombs being opened and those who were inside getting out (in the case of Ezekiel, speaking in a vision, the people; in the case of Matthew, many bodies of the saints that were dead).</i>	Lexical cues signify Matthew’s desire for interpreters to read the resurrection pericopes together, in light of each other.
<i>Ezekiel’s resuscitated village (restored) is led to the land of Israel. In Matthew, the resurrected saints enter the Holy City (Jerusalem, the center of Israel).</i>	The pericopes are not merely connected lexically; they are connected theologically by the theme of resurrection.
<i>This divine action has a revelatory character.</i>	The portents reveal the theological significance(s) of Jesus’ cross-death. The theological foci are Christology, missiology, and eschatology.
<i>The sign of the resurrection is coupled with a new, more perfect sanctuary.</i>	The rending of the temple veil signifies the end of the temple cultus.

<sup>58</sup>Rafael A. Monasterio, “Cross and Kingdom in Matthew’s Theology,” *TD* 29, no. 2 (1981): 149. Further, Monasterio notes that as Ezek 37 twice refers to the prophetic vision’s revelatory nature in Ezek 37:12-14, so the centurion’s profession emphasizes the revelatory nature of Jesus’ death in Matt

Finally, the depiction of the resurrection in the Ezekiel cycle of the synagogue of Dura Europos notices thought-connections between the two pericopes.<sup>59</sup> First, the fissure in the rocks—αἱ πέτραι ἐσχίσθησαν (Matt 27:51)—is illustrated by the cloven Mount of Olives. Second, the quaking of the earth—ἡ γῆ ἐσεισθη (Matt 27:51)—is depicted as a house hurled over a mountain slope. Third, the appearance of the resurrected saints in the city—καὶ πολλὰ σώματα τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων ἠγέρθησαν καὶ ἐξελθόντες ἐκ τῶν μνημείων μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν καὶ ἐνεφανίσθησαν πολλοῖς (Matt 27:52-53)—corresponds to the white clad figures in the painting. The Ezekiel panel, then, connects the death-resurrection of Jesus with the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy. As in Matthew’s Gospel, the revelatory earthquake and the raising of the dead in the paintings are proofs of Jesus’ Christological identity—he is the Son of God.

### **Narrative Strategy—Using Ezekiel**

After situating Ezekiel 37:1-14 in its Ezekielian context, the examination of Ezekiel 37:1-14 in its Septuagintal form has manifested a myriad of exegetical thought-connection links to Matthew’s Gospel-narrative. These linguistic thought-connections with Ezekiel 37:1-14 (LXX) reveal that the dry-bone, resurrection-vision in Ezekiel 37:1-14 is nearby in the compositional background of Matthew 27:51-54. This chapter, therefore, has suggested that Ezekiel 37:1-14 (LXX) is the primary text upon which Matthew is relying in the composition of Matthew 27:51-54. It has been argued Matthew

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27:54.

<sup>59</sup>The content in this paragraph is reliant on Riesenfeld’s work in Riesenfeld, *The Resurrection in Ezekiel XXXVII*, 34-37. Riesenfeld notes that Ezek 37 had a liturgical use for the Jewish people during Passover. For him, this further links the pericopes since Jesus’ crucifixion occurs during Jewish Passover.

27:51-54 finds its principal origins in Ezekiel 37:1-14 (LXX). Cognizance of Matthean dependence upon Ezekiel 37 (LXX), it has been suggested, crystalizes the theological foci of the Matthean pericopal-hapax: Christology, missiology, and eschatology.

The sequential question, logically, to Matthew's deployment of Ezekiel in his Gospel-narrative is, "*Why* did Matthew make use of Ezekiel 37:1-14?" The prophet Ezekiel is narrating Israel's story. And, at that time, disunity (Ezek 9:9), disobedience (Ezek 2:3), corrupt national leadership (Ezek 13:1-14:11; 34:1-10), and polytheism characterized the nation's existence (Ezek 6:4-7). As this was true of Israel's story when Ezekiel was prophesying, so this was true when Matthew was composing his Gospel-narrative. After the kingdom-fissure between the North and the South (1 Kgs 12), the people never reunited and regained their identity as the one people of God. Though "law-abiding" Pharisees and Sadducees roamed the land, law breaking and law circumvention abounded. In sharp contrast, Ezekiel 36:16-37:28 portends a day in which God repopulates the land, reunifies the people, induces heart-change by the Spirit, and causes resurrection.<sup>60</sup> Thus, Stuart contends that "land, leadership, and people go together in the book of Ezekiel."<sup>61</sup> They go together because no nation can exist in an orderly manner without both a leader and a place to live.<sup>62</sup> Matthew employs the Ezekielian narrative knowing that evoking one portion actually evokes the entirety of the section. Evoking

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<sup>60</sup>Stuart divides Ezek 36:16-37:28 into three sections, rather than four. He suggests the division is (1) Israel renewed as a people for God's holy name (36:16-38), (2) Israel revived as a people by God's Word and Spirit (37:1-14), (3) Israel reunited as a people under the messianic king (37:15-28). See Douglas Stuart, *Ezekiel*, The Communicator's Commentary, vol. 18 (Dallas: Word Books Publisher, 1989), 334-50.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 334.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

Ezekiel 37:12-14 in Matthew 27:51-53 evoked all of Ezekiel 36:16-37:28. The new leader, the new David, has come in the person of Jesus (Matt 1:17; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30; 21:9). The new land that the new people of God populate is the “ends of the earth” (Matt 28:18).

In Matthew’s Gospel-narrative, the people’s disunity is overturned as the new people of God are united *sola fide* in Christ (Matt 4:17; 9:2); their disobedience is overturned as they come *sola gratia* to the one who has fulfilled the law (Matt 5:17); they disavow their corrupt national leadership by following the new David, God’s Son, Jesus (Matt 21:15; 27:54; 28:18-20),<sup>63</sup> and their polytheism is abandoned for Trinitarianism (Matt 28:19). What Ezekiel’s audience heard of, and read about, is provided through Jesus’ cross-death in the Matthean Gospel-narrative. “Only in Him could the people of God be truly unified and obedient, and only His leadership was the sort that could” redirect their misplaced affections as they learn to worship the God who is one, yet three.<sup>64</sup>

Additionally, Matthew evokes the Ezekielian context because the themes scattered throughout the entirety of Isaiah and Jeremiah’s prophecies—the repopulation of the land, the reunification of the people, Spirit-induced heart-change, and resurrection—are all in *one* place within Ezekiel’s prophetic-narrative, Ezekiel 36:16-37:28. What is chronicled in Matthew over the course of multiple chapters in Ezekiel is

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<sup>63</sup>It is worth noting that as the beginning and end of Ezekiel are concerned with the new David (Ezek 4:6; 37:24), so the beginning and end of Matthew’s Gospel-narrative, too, are concerned with the new David (Matt 1:1; 22:41-45).

<sup>64</sup>Stuart, *Ezekiel*, 350.

compressed into and evoked by one four-verse Matthean scene.<sup>65</sup> Matthew's literary details have didactic resonance; his Gospel-narrative communicates didactically. Matthew's premises are laden within his narrative's imagery and structure.<sup>66</sup> Matthew 27:51-54 refers to the entirety of Ezekiel 36-37 by way of the imagery populating the scene of Jesus' cross-death. The scenarios are nearly identical. It is Matthew's deliberate compositional artistry that calls the careful reader's attention to the Ezekielian prophetic narrative. It is the Gospel author's theological purposes, according to Alter, that inspired Matthew's compositional intentionality.<sup>67</sup>

Telling the story backwards from the perspective of the divine events realized in the person of Jesus, Matthew locates Jesus as the apex of God's revelation and promises foreshadowed in the Ezekielian prophetic narrative. Further, Matthew's evocation of Ezekiel is informed by his understanding of what the Scripture reveals about God in the Old Testament. God's saving purposes have come to their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus, the Son of God (Matt 27:54). As Matthew interprets these events in light of God's saving purposes through Jesus' cross-death, his homiletical intent is manifested: Jesus is the Christ (Matt 27:54); Jesus' cross-death necessitates a mission for those who

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<sup>65</sup>I am indebted to Paul R. House for this observation.

<sup>66</sup>Like many, Sternberg contends the Bible is not purely a propositional or didactic document. It is a literary document with narrative features. Its interpretation often requires a literary approach. For example, though not dealing formerly with Matthew in his work, one can see that Matt 27 makes use of an "analogical design" in the parallelism existing between Matt 27:51-54 and 28:1-10; Matt 27 makes use of poetic features with its reference to Ezekiel's dry-bones scene via descriptive resurrection imagery. See Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 38-39, 41-57.

<sup>67</sup>Though I do not affirm all of his conclusions, and though he is focused on the Hebrew Bible rather than the Greek NT, Alter highlights the intentionality of employed narrative techniques by the biblical authors in their conveyance of truth. The Gospel authors, too, were pioneers in using intentionally crafted prose as a medium for truth. See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 155.



respond to him by faith (Matt 27:54; 28:18-20); Jesus' cross-death inaugurates the end of the temple cultus and the beginning of Spirit-filled life for mankind through Jesus (Matt 27:51).<sup>68</sup> Discussing the "why" of Matthew's deployment of Ezekiel in his Gospel-narrative has poised us to now examine Matthean compositional intentionality and narrative strategy in chapter four of this dissertation.<sup>69</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued 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.<sup>70</sup> Further, this chapter has argued that the 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 Ezekiel 37:1-14. As he was in the beginning of his Gospel-narrative, Matthew is concerned with anchoring Jesus' life in Old Testament co-text. The Old Testament co-text for Matthew 27:51-54 is in the Ezekielian Old Testament prophetic narrative.

Matthew depicts Jesus' crucifixion and death-resurrection as one evil-defeating, death-defying event in his Gospel-narrative. His literary inspiration for this

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<sup>68</sup>Hahn, though dealing with the Kingdom of God as it is revealed in 1-2 Chronicles, helps readers here by enabling them to see that Matthew, like the Chronicler, has a strategy in his composition. Theology informs not only the composition of the Matthean narrative, but Matthew's interpretation of the Old Testament. Matthew's Gospel-narrative typologically-interpreted history is theologically presented to accentuate Jesus' identity as the Christ, the mission his death necessitates, and eschatological overtones of his cross-death. See Scott W. Hahn, *The Kingdom of God as Liturgical Empire: A Theological Commentary on 1-2 Chronicles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 11-13.

<sup>69</sup>"Narrative strategy" will be discussed and defined in chap. 4.

<sup>70</sup>Grassi also connects the two pericopes by observing the thought-connections between the Dura Europos paintings and Matt 27 as well as noting the numerous indirect references between Ezek 37 (LXX) and Matt 27:51-54. 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 (1964-1965): 164.

Matthean pericope is Ezekiel 37:1-14. Contra many scholars, this dissertation is arguing the Matthean pericope does not find its background in a plethora of Old Testament passages. This dissertation rejects the suggestion that Matthew's pericopal-hapax finds its primary roots in an extra-biblical, pre-Matthean tradition. Rather, this dissertation argues that examination of Ezekiel 37:1-14 in its Septuagintal form manifests numerous links to Matthew's Gospel-narrative. Awareness of Matthean dependence upon Ezekiel 37 (LXX) crystalizes Matthew 27:51-54's theological foci—Christology, missiology, and eschatology. A proper understanding of the pericope's translation and primary Old Testament referent enables interpreters to ascertain: (1) how Matthew 27:51-54 is functioning in the death-resurrection scene and (2) the theological meaning of the pericope. Thus, Matthew has Ezekiel 37:12-14 (LXX) as his *primary* Old Testament referent when composing this resurrection pericope in Matthew 27:51-54.

## CHAPTER 4

### MATTHEAN NARRATIVE STRATEGY: COMPOSITIONAL INTENTIONALITY IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL NARRATIVE

#### **Misunderstanding Matthew**

This dissertation has argued an interpretive chasm exists between exegetes and homiletics on both the precise function of Matthew 27:51-54 within the death-resurrection scene of Matthew's Gospel-narrative and the theological foci of this particular pericope—Christology, missiology, and eschatology. To bridge the apparent interpretive chasm, this dissertation has sought to demonstrate that interpreters must overcome three problems— mistranslation, mis-referent, and misplacement—in the absence of interpretive consensus leading to an interpretive dichotomy that separates the historicity of the act itself and its placement in the Gospel from its theological meaning.

Therefore, chapter two argued a proper understanding of Matthew 27:51-54 mandated an examination of the pericope's translation. The suggested translation—

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!"

—enables interpreters to ascertain: (1) how Matthew 27:51-54 is functioning in the death-resurrection scene and (2) the three theological foci of the pericope.

To continue bridging Matthew 27:51-54's interpretive chasm, this dissertation addressed the problem of mis-referent. Chapter three suggested the failure to observe the abundance of Matthew 27:51-54's linguistic thought-connections with Ezekiel 37:1-14 (LXX) obscured interpretation of the Matthean pericope. Examination of the LXX's textual evidence reveals the dry-bone, resurrection-vision in Ezekiel 37:1-14 is nearby in the compositional background of Matthew 27:51-54. Thus, this dissertation contends that Matthew 27:51-54 finds its primary origins in Ezekiel 37:1-14 (LXX).<sup>1</sup> Cognizance of Matthean dependence upon Ezekiel 37 (LXX) crystalizes the theological foci embedded into Matthew 27:51-54. For, it is Jesus, the Christ,<sup>2</sup> who executes the New Covenant.<sup>3</sup> The New Covenant has significance for the nations, as the Gentile centurion's confession makes evident (Matt 27:54).<sup>4</sup> The arrival of the New Covenant coincides with the termination of the temple cultus (Matt 27:51).<sup>5</sup> As he was in the beginning of his Gospel-

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<sup>1</sup>Contra Stanton, who rejects Matthew employed the LXX in the composition of his Gospel-narrative. Stanton argues Matthew's allegiance is to the quotations as depicted in his sources and when the references were Septuagintal in his sources, they appeared as such in his formula quotations. See Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel of a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 353-58.

<sup>2</sup>Χριστός, or its cognates, are used as a descriptor of Jesus no fewer than ten times in Matthew's Gospel-narrative. See Matt 1:1, 16, 18; 11:2; 16:16, 20; 26:63; 26:68; 27:17; 27:22. Christology is at the core of the Matthean Gospel-narrative.

<sup>3</sup>The promise of the New Covenant is the immediate context of Ezek 37. Thus, Ezekiel writes, "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules" (Ezek 36:26-27; cf. Jer 31:31-34; Heb 8:8-12). Jesus executes the New Covenant through his death-resurrection (Matt 26-28).

<sup>4</sup>This dissertation, therefore, has proposed the confession in Matt 27:54 is the result of the centurion's conversion. It was the result of regeneration. For, the Gospel-narrative says, ἰδόντες τὸν σεισμόν καὶ τὰ γενόμενα ἐφοβήθησαν σφόδρα (Matt 27:54). In positive response, then, to the signs surrounding Jesus' cross-death, there is a salvific-confession that Jesus truly was the Son of God; that Jesus' death has meaning for the nations (cf. Matt 28:16-20). Likewise, Turner views the confession of the soldier and those with him as a positive response. See David Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 671.

<sup>5</sup>Contra Turner, who suggests it is "debatable that Matthew is thinking in terms of an absolute

narrative, so at the end of his Gospel-narrative Matthew is concerned with anchoring Jesus' life in its Old Testament co-text because "everything written about [Jesus] in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44; cf. Matt 5:17).

Awareness of Matthew's dependence upon Ezekiel segues to our third interpretive problem: misplacement. Chapter three argued that the sequential question, logically, to Matthew's deployment of Ezekiel in his Gospel-narrative is, "*Why* did Matthew make use of Ezekiel 37:1-14?" Discussing the "*why*" of Matthew's deployment of Ezekiel in his Gospel-narrative poises interpreters to examine Matthew's compositional intentionality and placement of Matthew 27:51-54 in his passion narrative. The failure 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), has impoverished the interpretation of Matthew 27:51-54. The interpretive dichotomy separating the historicity of the act itself and its placement in the Gospel from its theological meaning is the result of the interpretive failure to observe the intentional structure of Matthew 27:51-54 as a strategic pericope in the death-resurrection scene of Matthew's Gospel.

Therefore, this dissertation suggests that a literary reading of Matthew 27:51-54 incorporates the entire scope of the death-resurrection narrative so that it is properly

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end of the temple" because Jesus stated he came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets, not abolish them (cf. Matt 5:17-20; 24:2; 27:51). Turner, *Matthew*, 670. Rather, the symbolism of the pericope manifests the rending of the veil is as a divine judgment from God. Thus, the hands of heaven tear the veil downward—καὶ ἰδοὺ τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ ἐσχίσθη ἀπ' ἄνωθεν ἕως κάτω εἰς δύο (Matt 27:51).

interpreted in light of the entire death-resurrection scene rather than isolated as a singular phenomenological occurrence. Recognition of Matthean compositional intentionality informing the structure and placement of Matthew 27:51-54 in the death-resurrection scene leads to interpretive clarity. Matthew's compositional intentionality manifests a deliberate narrative strategy employed by the Gospel's author in the attempt to convey theological meaning.

### **Matthean Narrative Strategy—A Methodology**

A literary reading of the passion narrative reveals that, for Matthew, the events of Good Friday are conjoined closely with the events occurring on Easter (cf. Matt 28:1-15). This proposition is not novel. However, the intimate connection between Matthew 27:51-54 and Matthew 28:1-15 can only be observed when one both rejects its displacement in the Matthean passion narrative while simultaneously affirming its historicity.<sup>6</sup> Regarding displacement, Albright and Mann locate the signs surrounding Jesus' cross-death on Good Friday in their translation of the pericope when they translate the passage as follows: "Then the curtain of the Most Holy Place was torn in two, from top to bottom, the earth shook, rocks were shattered, the tombs were opened as well, and many bodies of the saints who had died were raised, and coming out of the tombs at the time of his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Contra Allison, who suggests Matt 27:51-54 is "theological fancy" and one among many texts "composed to teach theological lessons, not record historical facts." Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Historical Christ and the Theological Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 71-72.

<sup>7</sup>Contrary to the translation this thesis proposes, however, the translation of Albright and Mann seems to suggest the resurrected-dead remained in their former tombs until the time of Jesus' resurrection on Easter morning. Yet, Albright and Mann, too, connect the pericope under consideration with Ezek 37 by way of the pneumatological imagery in the Matthean Gospel-narrative's context (cf. 27:50) when Jesus unleashes τὸ πνεῦμα from the cross. See W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew: Introduction*,

Further, Turner writes, regarding historicity in his exegesis of the pericope, “The opening of the tombs (Ezek. 37:13) is associated with Jesus’s death, but the appearance of the saints (Zech. 14:15; Ezek. 37:1-14) in the holy city apparently will not occur until after Jesus’s resurrection (27:53) . . . it is not helpful to take [this pericope] as a nonhistorical literary-theological creation.”<sup>8</sup> Bringing the two pericopes in intimate narrative proximity enables readers to see that it is Matthew’s compositional intentionality that puts Jesus’ death-resurrection on display so that interpreters can see Jesus’ death-resurrection as one evil-defeating, death-defying event in his Gospel-narrative at the inauguration of the new age.

Thus, to the question, “Does Matthew have a narrative strategy coursing throughout the entirety of his Gospel-narrative?” The answer being proposed is most certainly, “Yes.” Therefore, there are two questions this dissertation must answer. The first question is, “What is meant by narrative strategy?” or “How is narrative strategy defined?” Though it is not a proper term or phrase to be defined formally, this dissertation suggests that narrative strategy should be understood to convey the intentional use of authorial conventions employed in composition which, in turn, guides an audience’s interpretation(s) of a text. Carter articulates a similar definition when defining authorial conventions, though, admittedly, he does not use the phrase “narrative strategy.”

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*Translation, and Notes*, AB, vol. 26 (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 349-51.

<sup>8</sup>Moreover, Turner notes the pericope’s syntax is ambiguous in Matt 27:53. Thus, he too suggests that μετά τήν ἔγερσιν does not necessarily modify ἐξελθόντες. Rather, according to Turner, it is reasonable to suggest that it modifies εἰσῆλθον. See Turner, *Matthew*, 670. As the diagram in chap. two indicates, this dissertation suggests that μετά τήν ἔγερσιν modifies both εἰσῆλθον and ἐνεφανίσθησαν.

These conventions are “rules” or “practices” or “literary devices” that facilitate communication between author and audience and signal important dimensions of the text. They enable the audience to notice and attribute significance to important aspects of the text and to recognize a hierarchy of details and events . . . The author assumes the audience has adequate skills to make appropriate use of these conventions.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, because this dissertation suggests Matthew does, indeed, have a narrative strategy, it will be argued that Matthew assumes the structure of his Gospel-narrative as well as the content contained within individual pericopes intentionally situated throughout his Gospel-narrative denotes interpretive significance. Recognition of Matthean narrative strategy is imperative for interpretation because written texts are unable to generate all of their meaning at one time. For literary texts like Matthew’s Gospel, the meaning embedded in the structure of the Matthean Gospel material is grasped successively as the narrative progresses. Thus, the ordering and distribution of the Matthean Gospel material exercises significant influence over its interpretation(s).<sup>10</sup> “Fundamental to reading the narrative well is the relationship between Matthean structure and Matthean interpretation.”<sup>11</sup> The arrangement of particular elements of the text material is, according to Perry, determined by an author’s “rhetorical or reader-oriented motivations.”<sup>12</sup> Perry lumps the various motivations an author may have for the final order of their respective narrative composition into two camps. On the one hand, his “‘model’-oriented motivations” suggest that “the ordering of a group of textual elements is justified by regarding the text as adhering to some order familiar to the reader.”<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, his “rhetorical or reader-oriented motivations” suggest that “the structure

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<sup>9</sup>Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 93. As was stated above, to my knowledge, “narrative strategy” is not a proper term/phrase to be defined. The phrase occurred to me while in a conversation with Paul House at ETS 2015 in Atlanta, GA.



of the text-continuum . . . is supposed to be experienced. The sequence is justified through its effect on the reader. Its function is to control the reading process and to channel it in directions ‘desirable’ for the text.”<sup>14</sup>

Matthew’s Gospel falls into the latter category. Careful Gospel readers will observe that Matthew assumes the presentation order of the pericopes throughout his Gospel denotes interpretive significance. In relation to presentation order, Perry has discussed what he calls the “primacy effect.” That is, material situated at the beginning of the Gospel informs a reader’s understanding of the whole Gospel. The organization of information determines how interpreters digest the material and justify meaning(s).<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Carter discusses what he calls the “latency effect.” For Carter, the latency effect regards “the impact of the Gospel’s ending as the last thing that the audience encounters.”<sup>16</sup> It is important to note the literary import of these two effects is often

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<sup>10</sup>I would like to thank my supervisor, Jonathan Pennington, for allowing me to view a pre-published version of his forthcoming book. Pennington contends that meaning is frequently embedded in the structure of Matthew’s Gospel-narrative. Thus, he states, “Paying attention to how the whole and the parts are structured is essential for good reading of Matthew.” Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, forthcoming).

<sup>11</sup>Iser would say, “Central to the reading of every literary work is the interaction between its structure and its recipient.” Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 20.

<sup>12</sup>Menakhem Perry, “Literary Dynamics: How the Order of a Text Creates Its Meaning [With an Analysis of Faulkner’s ‘A Rose for Emily’],” *PT* 1, nos. 1-2 (1979): 40-41.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>15</sup>According to Perry, “A perceiver does not wait for the end of a message in order to determine its understanding.” *Ibid.*, 53-55. For example, in Matthew’s Gospel-narrative it is the uniqueness of how Jesus’ life begins—a virgin birth (1:18-25) and prophetic fulfillment (2:1-23)—that determines how readers interpret the meaning(s) and significance(s) of events related to his life recounted throughout the rest of Matthew’s Gospel.

<sup>16</sup>Unfortunately, when discussing Matthew’s Gospel, Carter incorporates only Matt 28 rather

indiscernible or not fully grasped in the initial reading, the first reading. However, Perry notes how the two effects may very well work together in the initial reading:

Material appearing early in the text may determine “shades of meaning” to be activated in later material which is to be assimilated to it, accentuating certain aspects and weakening others; anticipating one bit of information about a character and delaying another, of a different nature entirely, may “prejudice” the reader in advance in favor (or against) the character, building up the “reservoir” of sympathy (or reservation) that will be hard to renounce and will condition details of a contrary nature later on in the text; the systematic repetition of a particular element in a typical position in the text-continuum (e.g. the final position in a line of verse; ends of chapters) will bring into prominence in the semantic hierarchy of the text.<sup>17</sup>

Recognizing the presence of Matthean narrative strategy enables readers to observe the structure of his Gospel-narrative as well as the content contained within individual pericopes intentionally situated throughout his Gospel-narrative. Both structure and content denote interpretive significance.

The second question this dissertation must answer is, “*How* does Matthew 27:51-54 fit within Matthew’s whole Gospel-narrative strategy?” It is to this question this dissertation now turns. To substantiate the reality of a narrative strategy within the Gospel of Matthew’s passion narrative this dissertation will argue that Matthew employs an intentional narrative strategy not only in his composition of Matthew 27:51-54 but also in his compositional placement of Matthew 27:51-54 within Matthew 26-28.

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than the entire death-resurrection conclusion, Matt 27:45-28:20. See Carter, *Matthew*, 93. Regarding the latency effect, readers of Matthew’s Gospel-narrative observe that Jesus not only enters the world unlike any other man—he is born of a virgin (1:18-25) and fulfills prophecy in his infancy (2:1-23)—but he also dies unlike any other man—darkness canopies the landscape as his life wanes (27:45), he yields his own life after a dereliction cry (27:50), observable portents ensue his death (27:51-54).

<sup>17</sup>Perry, “Literary Dynamics,” 41.

## Intentional Composition

A careful reading of the Matthean passion narrative manifests intentional composition. As Table 1. Literary parallelism in Matthew 27-28 in chapter 1 demonstrated, this is apparent in the deliberate literary parallelism used by the Gospel's author. Table 1. Literary parallelism in Matthew 27-28 is reproduced for convenience:

Table 8. Literary parallelism in Matthew 27-28

<i>Matthew 27:45-66</i>	<i>Matthew 27:62-28:15</i>
darkness (27:45) σκότος	dawn (28:1) τῇ ἐπιφωσκούσῃ
earth shook (27:51) ἡ γῆ ἐσειέσθη	earthquake (28:2) σεισμός
raised (27:52) ἡγέρθησαν	risen (28:6) ἡγέρθη
tomb (27:52-53) τὰ μνημεῖα...τῶν μνημείων	tomb (28:1) τὸν τάφον
the holy city (27:53) εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν	the city (28:11) εἰς τὴν πόλιν
centurion (27:54) – ὀκτατόνταρχος	those guarding (28:4) – οἱ τηροῦντες the guards (28:11) – τῆς κουστωδίας soldiers (28:12) – τοῖς στρατιώταις
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) Μαριάμ 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)

The chart enables readers to observe the intentional compositional correspondences between the two pericopes. Both Matthew 27:45-66 and Matthew 28:1-15 are tightly structured. Both pericopes evoke each other. It is not by compositional accident that readers encounter the dualistic imagery of “darkness” and “dawn” at the apex of the Matthean Gospel-narrative in the precise moment when Jesus overthrows the dominion of darkness by means of his cross-death (Matt 27:45; 28:1; cf. Col 1:13-14; 2:15).<sup>18</sup> It is not without intention that readers find the only pairs of earthquakes and resurrections recorded in the four New Testament passion narratives here at the end of Matthew’s Gospel (Matt 27:51, 2; 28:2, 6).<sup>19</sup> Compositional forethought is on display in Matthew’s narrative when one observes the triad of cries in the dark (Matt 27:46, 50, 54),<sup>20</sup> the

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<sup>18</sup>In Matt 27:45 τῇ γῇ should be understood to refer to the land of Israel rather than the entire earth. The cosmological imagery is localized. The imagery connotes God’s judgment upon those who have rejected his Son. Garland notes that first-century readers would have understood the darkness covering the land to be a cosmic portent that commonly attended the death of kings. See David Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 264. This phenomenon can be observed in Philo, *On Providence* 2:50; Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 56.29.3; Josephus, *Antiquities* 17:167.

<sup>19</sup>Similarly, Wenham notes that the earthquakes in Matt 27:51 and Matt 28:2 are parallel to each other in the conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel-narrative. See David Wenham, “The Resurrection Narratives in Matthew’s Gospel,” *TynBul* 24 (1973): 21-54, esp. 42. However, there is an important distinction to make between the two. In Matt 27, the earthquake was caused by Jesus’ release of the Spirit in Matt 27:50, the earthquake itself in Matt 27:51 is the *reason* for the additional three signs that follow it in Matt 27:51-3. In Matt 28, however, the earthquake is not the cause of the resurrection. Rather, it is a side effect of the angel’s activity (Matt 28:2).

<sup>20</sup>The triad of cries in the dark is not represented in the chart above because all three “cries” occur in Matt 27. Careful readers will observe a pair of dereliction cries by Jesus while suspended between heaven and earth in Matt 27:46, 50 and a cry of repentant faith by the centurion in response to the signs accompanying Jesus’ death in Matt 27:54. In reference to the centurion’s “cry,” Versepunt notes the affirmation—“This truly was the Son of God!”—comes not only from the centurion but also those guarding Jesus with him. This observation, therefore, raises the declaration to the level of a consensus testimony in response to the five portents. Though, he incorrectly suggests the affirmation is a “confession as witness to the vindication of God” rather than “the conversion of the Gentiles.” Donald J. Versepunt, “The Role and Meaning of the ‘Son of God’ Title in Matthew’s Gospel,” *NTS* 33 (1987): 532-56, esp. 48, 56. Menken suggests that Jesus dying as “the Son of God!” in Matthew is a theme derived from his reliance upon Mark but expanded upon in his Gospel-narrative. Maarten J. J. Menken, *Matthew’s Bible: The Old Testament Text of the Evangelist*, BETL 173 (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2004), 235.

conquering of fear in the repentant (Matt 27:54)<sup>21</sup> and the provocation of fear among the unbelieving (Matt 28:4), the competing testimonies about the meaning of Jesus' cross-work in the city of Jerusalem (Matt 27:53; 28:11-15), the worship of the crucified (Matt

Table 9. Uses of σείω and σεισμός in Matthew 27:45-28:15

σειώ (ἐσειέσθη)	27:51
σεισμός (σεισμὸν)	27:54
σεισμός (σεισμὸς)	28:2
σειώ (ἐσειέσθησαν)	28:4

27:54) and risen Christ (Matt 28:9) by Gentiles (Matt 27:54) and Jews (Matt 28:9), the presence of the Marys—Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James—both at Jesus' death (Matt 27:56) as well as his resurrection (Matt 28:1),<sup>22</sup> and cognates of σείω and

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<sup>21</sup>In Matt 27:54, the semantic range of ἐφοβήθησαν allows it to be rendered "they were filled with awe" instead of "they were fearful" or "they were terrified." The semantic range helps us see this as a "fear" leading to worship or praise. See *TDNT*, 9:208-12; *NIDNTT* 4:609-14. Allison suggests that ἐφοβήθησαν σφόδρα is intended to refer the reader back to Matt 17:6, its only other occurrence within the Gospel. According to Allison, "Common vocabulary encourages informed listeners to contemplate one scene in the light of another." Dale C. Allison, Jr., "Anticipating the Passion: The Literary Reach of Matthew 26:47-27:56," *CBQ* 56 (1994): 701-14, esp. 707-10. Matthew, then, wants his readers to interpret Matt 27:51-54 in light of Matt 17:1-8. Likewise, Garland states, "In [Matt 17], Jesus is confessed as the Son of God by a divine voice; in the second, by his executioners, Roman soldiers (27:54)." Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 185-86.

<sup>22</sup>This dissertation has noted that not all, however, affirm the historicity of these Matthean events. Therefore, assuming the symbolic significance of Matt 27:51-54, Wüthrich suggests that even the women are included in both pericopes because, as mothers, they are watching for a symbolic "bringing forth" or "birth" of the one who will be called, "the first-born from the dead." According to Wüthrich, the "figures" are a "figurative expression of childbirth." Serge Wüthrich, "Naître de mourir: la mort de Jésus dans l'Évangile de Matthieu (Matt 27.51- 56)," *NTS* 56 (2010): 313-25. For a defense of Matt 27:51-54's historicity, see Wenham, "The Resurrection Narratives in Matthew's Gospel," 43.

σεισμός linking Matthew 28:1-15 to 27:45-66 (see table 9).<sup>23</sup> For careful readers, then, the correspondences between Matthew 27 and Matthew 28 are manifest.

Correspondences are not merely discernable. Rather, the correspondences are also intentionally situated. Matthew was not haphazard in choice or placement of details in his Gospel-narrative. Attention to Matthean narrative strategy enables readers to observe the structure of his Gospel-narrative as well as the content contained within the individual pericopes intentionally situated throughout his Gospel. Both structure and content denote interpretive significance.

Moreover, attention to Matthean narrative strategy enables careful readers to observe both pericopes introduce their respective series of events with καὶ ἰδοὺ (Matt 27:50; 28:2) and then proceed with a similar sequence of events throughout the pericope (see table 10). The quaking of the earth,<sup>24</sup> the opening of the sepulcher(s), the fear of the guards, and the presence of women give compositional structure to each of the resurrection pericopes at the end of the Matthean Gospel-narrative.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Though table 9 bears the resemblance of a chiasm, I do not detect any intentional chiasm by Matthew in his use of σείω and σεισμός. The arrangement of the chart is intended to distinguish the verbal forms of σείω from the noun forms of σεισμός and suggest it is not by accident that both forms are found in both pericopes.

<sup>24</sup>Quarles notes this is a “localized catastrophe.” In Matthew’s Gospel-narrative ἡ γῆ refers to the land of Israel rather than the entire earth (cf. Matt 2:6, 20, 21; 9:26; 23:35; 24:30). See Charles Quarles, “Matthew 27:51-53: Meaning, Genre, Intertextuality, Theology, and Reception History,” *JETS* 59, no. 2 (2016): 273. Similarly, Carter suggests the resurrection of the saints is “localized in Jerusalem” since it is not referring to “the general judgment and resurrection.” Additionally, he notes this “is not the first time people have been raised in association with Jesus’ ministry (9:18-19, 23-26; 10:8; 11:5).” See Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-Political and Religious Reading*, JSNTSup 204 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 536.

<sup>25</sup>I owe this observation to David Anderson. See Anderson, “The Origin and Purpose of Matthew 27:51b-53,” 159. However, it is important to note that the conclusions in figures 1 and 3 are my own. See Raymond Johnson, “Matthew 27:51-54 Revisited: A Narratological Re-Appropriation,” *SBJT* 18, no. 4 (2014): 31-50. I came upon Anderson’s work after forming these conclusions independently and after the article’s publication. Further, his analysis of the two pericopes is limited to Matt 27:51b-3; 28:1-6.

Table 10. Parallel sequence of events in Matthew 27:45-66 and 28:1-15

<i>Matthew 27</i>	<i>Matthew 28</i>
καὶ ἰδοὺ (27:50) <sup>26</sup>	καὶ ἰδοὺ (28:2)
ἡ γῆ ἐσείσθη (27:51)	σεισμὸς (28:2)
τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνεώχθησαν (27:52)	ἀπεκύλισεν τὸν λίθον (28:2)
ἐφοβήθησαν σφόδρα (27:54)	τοῦ φόβου...οἱ τηροῦντες (28:4)
γυναῖκες πολλαὶ (27:55)	ταῖς γυναιξίν (28:5)

Furthermore, there is not only an observable compositional intentionality in the manifest parallelism between Matthew 27-28 and the compositional intentionality in the structuring of each respective pericope, but there is also a compositional intentionality in the *dramatis personae* of the Matthean passion narrative.<sup>27</sup> Every reference to specific

<sup>26</sup>Anderson puts too much interpretive weight on the καὶ ἰδοὺ in Matt 27:50. According to him, the presence of καὶ ἰδοὺ indicates the end of the darkness referred to in 27:45. This is especially odd when one considers his suggestion that “both darkness (cf. 27:45) and earthquake (27:51b) may be understood to belong together as cosmic apocalyptic events.” See Douglas Anderson, “The Origin and Purpose of Matthew 27:51b-53” (PhD diss., University of Otago, 2014), 165. The Gospel of Peter, too, suggests that the darkness of Matt 27:45 persisted through the scene, through the cosmic portents recorded in Matt 27:51-54. See Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše, *The Other Gospels: Accounts of Jesus from Outside the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 198.

<sup>27</sup>In reference to the pericope’s characters, Herzer, following Gnllka, advocates for what he calls an “intra-textual” reading of Matt 27 when laboring to identify the sleeping saints in Matt 27:53. He connects Matt 27:52 with Matt 23:29 lexically. According to Herzer, the two pericopes are connected by the reference to τὰ μνημεῖα in Matt 23:29; 27:52 respectively. Further, he suggests the resurrected-dead in Matt 27:53 are τῶν προφητῶν and τῶν δικαίων mentioned in Matt 23:39, “who suffered and were killed, but now have been released from death by the death of Jesus and bear witness to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.” Jens Herzer, “The Riddle of the Holy Ones in Matthew 27:51b-53: A New Proposal for a *Crux Interpretum*,” in “What Does the Scripture Say?” *Studies in the Function of Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity*, LNTS, ed. Craig Evans and H. Daniel Zacharias, vol. 1 (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 142-57, esp. 152. Cf. Joachim Gnllka, *Das Matthäusevangelium. Zweiter Teil: Kommentar zu Kapitel 14, 1-28, 20 und Einleitungsfragen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1988), 477. Admirably, Herzer wants exegetes to interpret Matt 27:51-54 based upon what has been revealed by Matthew in the Gospel’s narrative. However, I find Herzer’s exegetical conclusions unsatisfying and speculative. The catchword connection “tombs” (cf. Matt 23:29; 27:52) is not a strong enough foundation to uphold his claims in reference to a group unidentified in the Gospel-narrative.

characters functions as a compositional bridge between the two pericopes for Matthew. For example, Anderson notes that the “women are to be understood as a bridge linking the story of Jesus’ crucifixion to the story of Jesus’ burial and the Easter story. Since they were witnesses of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection there is no possibility of mistake as to the reality of the death of the one who subsequently rose from the dead.”<sup>28</sup>

While it is possible to recall a plethora of proposed literary readings that have, in many ways, overextended themselves hermeneutically, Matthew’s compositional intentionality in the parallelism within the conclusion of his Gospel narrative is discernable from the grammar. The observations made above concerning the pericopes in the Matthean passion narrative manifest a discernable level of compositional intentionality that makes Matthew 27:51-54 an integral pericope at the end of his Gospel-narrative. That Matthew directly connects the events of Good Friday with the events of Easter Sunday in his Gospel-narrative, for the careful reader, is indisputable. Intentionally placed details forge a link between the two resurrection pericopes. Thus, Riebl rightly states, “These [are] carefully placed [details] in relationship to one another, thereby making a direct connection between the events of Jesus’ death and resurrection.”<sup>29</sup> Further, as this thesis will argue, Matthew’s compositional intentionality reveals theological truth about the meaning of Jesus’ death while aiding our understanding of Jesus identity.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Oddly, he either fails to observe the presence of the guards in both pericopal units or fails to comment on the significance of their presence. Yet, their presence also connects the two Matthean pericopes. See Anderson, “The Origin and Purpose of Matthew 27:51b-53,” 162.

<sup>29</sup>Maria Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu in der Stunde seines Todes? Zur Botschaft von Mt 27, 51b-53* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1978), 66-67.

<sup>30</sup>At a macro-Gospel level, compositional intentionality is observed in the parallelism existing



## Intentional Placement

In chapter 1, Table 2: Macro-chiastic structure of Matthew's Gospel suggested that Matthew employed a macro-structural compositional intentionality within his work as a whole.<sup>31</sup> Table 2: Macro-chiastic structure of Matthew's Gospel is reproduced here for convenience (see table 11).<sup>32</sup>

Table 11 enables readers to observe the intentional compositional placement of each of the sermonic-discourses as well as each of the narrative-discourses throughout the entirety of Matthew's Gospel-narrative.<sup>33</sup> The whole Gospel of Matthew is tightly structured.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, as there is an observable compositional intentionality in the

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between the scenes surrounding Jesus' birth and the scenes surrounding Jesus' death. One example will suffice: When Jesus was born, children were slaughtered (Matt 2:16); when Jesus died, the dead were raised to life (Matt 27:52).

<sup>31</sup>For a treatment of the Matthean sermonic-discourses as catechesis, see David P. Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew: Jesus Teaches the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 9-32, 395-408. Scaer suggests each of the five discourses builds on the foundation of the previous ones to culminate in the narrative of Jesus' death-resurrection. Further, he suggests Matthew's Gospel-narrative was structured as a catechesis of what Christians were taught before being admitted by Baptism into the full Eucharistic membership of the church. Though I do not affirm Scaer's thesis, he does help readers see the discourses as integral to the Matthean Gospel-narrative. Similarly, Barr suggests the discourses connect the narrative sections (i.e., Matt 1-4, 8-9, 11-12, 14-17, 19-22, 26-28) of Matthew's Gospel. See David Barr, "The Drama of Matthew's Gospel: A Reconsideration of Its Structure and Purpose," *TD* 24, no. 4 (1976): 349-59.

<sup>32</sup>Similarly, Weren affirms the chiastic arrangement of the sermonic-discourses throughout Matthew's Gospel-narrative. Further, he contends the discourses are "chiastically arranged in relation to one another" in Matthew's narrative. Therefore, he suggests the "programme" discourse at the beginning, the Sermon on the Mount, has a counterpart in the Eschatological Discourse; the Missionary Discourse and the Community Discourse discuss the disciples' mission and their mutual relationships; the Parable Discourse has a central position and explains why the secrets of the kingdom are accessible to the disciples, whilst they are a mystery to outsiders. Wim J. C. Weren, *Studies in Matthew's Gospel: Literary Design, Intertextuality, and Social Setting* (Boston: Brill, 2014), 32. See also J. C. Fenton, "Inclusio and Chiasmus in Matthew," in *Studia Evangelica: Papers Presented to the International Congress on "The Four Gospels in 1957,"* ed. Kurt Aland and F. L. Cross (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1959), 174-79, esp. 179.

<sup>33</sup>Contra Smith who argues for a five-book, narrative-then-discourse literary structure to Matthew's Gospel. See Christopher R. Smith, "Literary Evidences of a Fivefold Structure in the Gospel of Matthew," *NTS* 43 (1997): 540-51. Following Pennington, this dissertation suggests the teaching blocks (Matt 5-7, 10, 13, 18, 23-25) begin and end the body of the Matthean Gospel-narrative. The prologue (Matt 1-4)—Birth and Beginnings—and the epilogue (Matt 26-28)—Death and Ending—are placed around the first and fifth sermonic-discourses. Similarly, see Philippe Roland, "From Genesis to the End of the World:

Table 11. 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 KOH
			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 KOH
	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

manifest parallelism between Matthew 27:51-54 and Matthew 28:1-10 evident in the structuring of each of the resurrection pericopes and the placement of the *dramatis personae* within each of the resurrection pericopes in the Matthean passion narrative, so there is also a compositional intentionality in the placement of individual pericopes

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The Plan of Matthew's Gospel," *BTB* 2 (1972): 155-76.

<sup>34</sup>That Matthew's Gospel is highly structured is widely agreed upon, though there is significant disagreement in regards to how the Gospel's narrative is structured. Competing structures have been posited. Stanton questions if Matthew intended to provide "a broad overall structure . . . as a way of underlining his main purpose." Graham Stanton, "The Origin and Purpose of Matthew's Gospel: Matthean Scholarship from 1945-1980," *ANRW* 2, no. 25 (1985): 1905. Yet, even Stanton recognizes the five discourses to be "obvious examples" of intentional composition. For a recent treatment of the macro-syntactical structure of Matthew's Gospel, see Weren, *Studies in Matthew's Gospel*, 22-41.

throughout the entirety of Matthew's Gospel-narrative. Thus, it is not by compositional accident that readers encounter the Matthean pericopal-hapax in the passion narrative after Jesus releases the Spirit (Matt 27:50). Matthew does not simply begin with an account of Jesus' birth (Matt 1:18-24) and end with an account of his death-resurrection (Matt 27:45-28:20) merely because the former are the first events while the latter are the last events chronologically. Jesus' birth is chronologically antecedent to subsequent events in his life. However, Matthew's Gospel does more than recount sequential chronological facts. Matera rightly notes that Matthew's Gospel-narrative is more than an accumulation of individual episodes.<sup>35</sup> Matthew is telling a theological story in his Gospel-narrative.<sup>36</sup> Readers must be careful to observe *how* Matthew communicates the significance(s) of Jesus' life by means of the way he narrates the events which comprised his life on earth. Determining "how events are arranged [in Matthew's Gospel] is crucial for interpreting narrative logic."<sup>37</sup> Matthew is carefully telling the story of Jesus by means of his compositional intentionality.<sup>38</sup> The placement of the discourses as well as

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<sup>35</sup>Matera analyzes "Matthew's Gospel in terms of plot as understood by literary critics" and contends that close attention to plot yields interpretive insight into the meaning(s) of the biblical data revealed within the Matthean Gospel-narrative. The Matthean Gospel-narrative can be read as a story. Frank J. Matera, "The Plot of Matthew's Gospel," *CBQ* 49 (1987): 233-53. For an adapted version of Matera's thesis, see Warren Carter, "Kernels and Narrative Blocks: The Structure of Matthew's Gospel," *CBQ* 54 (1992): 463-81. Aware that some contend literary analysis is subjective, Carter suggests, "The use of literary theory offers the possibility of an informed consideration of the plot and structure which is marked by some precision and control in the literary analysis." For an example of how literary analysis aids interpretation, see Peter J. Leithart, *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 109-71.

<sup>36</sup>A theological reading of Scripture requires attention to be given to the final form of the Matthean Gospel-narrative. Observation must be given to *how* the author communicates *what* the point of the text is by means of its structure. See Garland, "Reading Matthew," 5-8.

<sup>37</sup>Matera, "The Plot of Matthew's Gospel," 239.

<sup>38</sup>Failure to observe compositional intentionality inhibits interpretation of the Matthean narrative and leads interpreters like Watters to posit that Matt 27:51-54 is a "flash forward to the apocalyptic future." Kenneth L. Watters, "Matthew 28:1-6 as Temporally Conflated Text: Temporal-

individual pericopes throughout the Gospel of Matthew “control” the way Matthew’s story is interpreted. As no discourse is inserted simply because it is “next” chronologically, so also no pericope is inserted merely because it is “next” sequentially.

Therefore, assuming intentionality in pericopal placement, this dissertation suggests the location of Matthew 27:51-54 bears interpretive weight in our understanding of Jesus’ death-resurrection. The very *placement* of Matthew 27:51-54 is intentional; Matthew 27:51-54 is intentionally located to help tell the story of Jesus. The structural placement of Matthew 27:51-54 aids interpretation(s) of the details intricately woven into the fabric of the Gospel-narrative’s death-resurrection conclusion.

### **Matthew 27:51-54 as a Hinge Text**

Literary analysis encourages recognition of the narrative quality of Matthew’s Gospel. Recognition of the narrative quality of the Matthean Gospel-narrative encourages “recognition of the intricate network of supplemental structural devices” operating within the Gospel’s storyline to highlight key theological concepts.<sup>39</sup> In the case of Matthew 27:51-54, the narrative parallelism between Matthew 27:51-54 and Matthew 28:1-15 highlights the interconnectedness of the two resurrection pericopes situated at the climax of the Gospel’s storyline in the death-resurrection scene.<sup>40</sup>

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Spatial Collapse in the Gospel of Matthew,” *ExpT* 116 (2005): 295-301. Failure to observe the Gospel-narrative’s literary parallelism in Matt 27:45-28:15 and narrative logic in the death-resurrection scene leads Waters to conclude that “the apocalyptic future is retracted into the literary past and wedged between two events on Good Friday, namely, the earthquake and the centurion’s confession.” His exegetical conclusions fail to reckon with scriptural data in Matthew’s Gospel-narrative. His conclusions are not convincing.

<sup>39</sup>Carter, “Kernels and Narrative Blocks,” 481.

<sup>40</sup>Contra Giblin, who separates the two resurrection pericopes by contending the scene of Jesus’ death (Matt 27:45-56) is disjointed from the scene of his burial (27:57-66) and resurrection (28:1-10). Giblin argues for a burial-resurrection scene with Matt 28:1-10 as the central passage rather than a

Therefore, this dissertation proposes that Matthew 27:51-54 is functioning as a “hinge text”<sup>41</sup> at the redemptive-historical “turning point” of history in the Matthean narrative as the Gospel’s storyline climaxes.<sup>42</sup> A schematic of the death-resurrection scene matures this proposal:

Table 12. Matthew 27:51-54 as a hinge text within 27:45-28:20

Death of Jesus	<i>Hinge</i>	Burial of Jesus	<i>Hinge</i>	Resurrection of Jesus	<i>Hinge</i>	Mission of Jesus
27:45-50	27:51-54	27:55-61	27:62-66	28:1-10	28:11-15	28:16-20

Table 12 manifests how the significances of Jesus’ death on display in the portents (Matt 27:51-54) aid readers by causing them to interpret the significances of Jesus’ subsequent resurrection (Matt 28:1-10) in light of his antecedent death (Matt 27:45-50).<sup>43</sup> In

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death-resurrection scene with narrative parallelism. See Charles H. Giblin, “Structural and Thematic Correlations in the Matthean Burial-Resurrection Narrative (Matt. XXVII.57-XXVIII.20),” *NTS* 21 (1974-75): 406-20. Similarly, Brown understands Matt 27:62-28:20 to be a textual unit. See Raymond E. Brown, “The Resurrection in Matthew (27:62-28:20),” *Worship* 64 (March 1990): 157-70.

<sup>41</sup>Weren notes the presence of “hinge texts” in Matthew’s Gospel. Hinge texts, according to Weren, bring about a “turning point” in the Matthean Gospel-narrative that is fleshed out in both the preceding *and* subsequent pericopes. Matthean hinge texts weigh more heavily in the determination of the Gospel’s plot. See Weren, *Studies in Matthew’s Gospel*, 28, 30-31. I am borrowing language from Weren in my treatment of Matt 27:51-54; 28:1-15. I am not, however, suggesting an amendment to Weren’s macro-structural treatment of Matthew’s Gospel. Unlike Weren, I am not analyzing the macro-syntactical function of Matt 27:51-54 in the context of the entirety of the Gospel. Rather, borrowing from Weren, I am suggesting Matt 27:45-54 functions as a “hinge text” in the finale of the Matthean Gospel-narrative between 27:45-50 and 28:1-20. This approach will be explained more fully below.

<sup>42</sup>Harrington notes that Jesus’ death functions as the turning point on which history pivots. Jesus’ death “makes possible the resurrection of other human beings” (cf. Matt 27:52-53). See Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina Series 1 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 401.

<sup>43</sup>Following Davies and Allison, Weren suggests, “The strange story about the raising of the

Matthew's Gospel the role of Jesus in salvation history is on display in the death-resurrection scene. The hinge texts in the death-resurrection scene—Matthew 27:51-54, 27:62-66; 28:11-15—carry the storyline forward as the Gospel-narrative moves toward its missiological conclusion (Matt 28:16-20). The hinge texts cause readers to interpret the missiological emphasis (Matt 28:16-20) in light of Jesus' death-resurrection. Jesus' life has cosmic significance(s) through his death (Matt 27:51-54) to his resurrection (Matt 28:1-10) for the nations (Matt 28:16-20).<sup>44</sup> Matthew stresses the theological import of Jesus' death by means of the discernable attention given to the portents surrounding Jesus's cross-death. This observation manifests the meaning of Jesus' death, not the resurrection of the saints, which is emphasized in the Gospel-narrative during the death-resurrection scene.

The unity of the death-resurrection scene is observable in Matthew's compositional intentionality in the placement of time adjuncts throughout the death-resurrection conclusion of the Gospel-narrative. Four time adjuncts manifest that Matthew 27:45-28:20 is an undivided narrative unit:

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dead saints functions as a preparation for the story in 28:1-10 about Jesus' resurrection." See Weren, *Studies in Matthew's Gospel*, 81. Cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, 640-41.

<sup>44</sup>The portents signal the role of Jesus in the salvation history of Israel. See Brown, "The Resurrection in Matthew (27:62-28:20)," 162.

Table 13. Time adjuncts in Matthew 27:45-28:1-20

27:45, 46 -	ἀπὸ δὲ ἑκτῆς ὥρας...περὶ δὲ τὴν ἐνάτην ὥραν <sup>45</sup>
27:57 -	ὀψίας δὲ γενομένης
27:62 -	τῇ δὲ ἑπαύριον
28:1 -	ὁψὲ δὲ σαββάτων

The noticeable time adjuncts evidence Matthew's intention for the death (Matt 27:45-54), burial (Matt 27:55-66), and resurrection (Matt 28:1-15) scenes to be interpreted together as he prepares his readers for Jesus' proclamatory commission to the nations (Matt 28:16-20).<sup>46</sup> The Christological, missiological, and eschatological theological foci of the Matthean Gospel-narrative are embedded in the structure of the Gospel's story: the discernable parallelism between Matthew 27:45-54 and Matthew 28:1-15, the apparent structuring of each of the resurrection pericopes (27:51-54; 28:1-10), the intentional placement of the *dramatis personae* within each of the resurrection pericopes, the death-resurrection hinge texts, and the placement of time adjuncts throughout the conclusion of the Matthean passion narrative.

However, the analysis above does not exhaust the dynamic interconnectedness of the conclusion to the Matthean Gospel-narrative. The narrative structure in Matthew

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<sup>45</sup>The ἑκτῆς ὥρας and the ἐνάτην ὥραν are taken together because they refer to the same temporal period of Jesus' death-resurrection.

<sup>46</sup>In his treatment of the Gospel-narrative's conclusion Weren, following Giblin and Brown, takes the burial and resurrection of Jesus as one unit in Matthew's Gospel, though he does analyze Matt 27:51-54 while discussing corporeal resurrection. See Weren, *Studies in Matthew's Gospel*, 72, 74, 80-83; cf. Giblin, "Structural and Thematic Correlations in the Matthean Burial-Resurrection Narrative (Matt. XXVII.57-XXVIII.20)," 406-20; and Brown, "The Resurrection in Matthew (27:62-28:20)," 157-70. Therefore, Weren detects the presence of only three of the four time adjuncts—Matt 27:57, 62; 28:1.

27:45-28:20 is comprised of four scenes and three hinge texts<sup>47</sup> in the finale of Matthew's Gospel.<sup>48</sup>

Table 14. Scene, hinge text structure of Matthew 27:45-28:20

Scene 1	27:45-50	Jesus consciously fulfills Ps 22 while suspended between heaven and earth on a cross. During his suffering and damnation he cries out to his Heavenly Father. He dies on Good Friday after shouting triumphantly and releasing the Spirit.
<i>Hinge</i>	27:51-54	Sensory overload incited by the cosmological imagery and divine portents lead to a positive profession of faith as well as recognition of Jesus' identity as God's Son in the wake of his cross-death. Jesus' death is interpreted by the portents as the narrative is advanced to his burial.
Scene 2	27:55-61	On Good Friday the Marys witness Jesus' cross-death as well as his burial by Joseph of Arimathea. After Pilate approves, Jesus' body is wrapped and placed in a new tomb. The tomb is sealed with a great stone.
<i>Hinge</i>	27:62-66	The following day the Pharisees conspire before Pilate, arranging the presence of a guard detail at the tomb of Jesus for fear of his body being stolen away. In the wake of his cross-death narrative tension is ratcheted up as Easter morning approaches.
Scene 3	28:1-10	On the third day Jesus is resurrected bodily. The corporeality of Jesus' resurrection on Easter is manifest in the worship of him by the Marys after an angel of the Lord and Jesus appears to them. The Marys are twice commissioned to tell Jesus' disciples to meet him in Galilee.

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<sup>47</sup>A possible critique of this proposal is the presence of time adjuncts in only three of the four scenes comprising the Matthean death-resurrection conclusion. Τῇ δὲ ἐπαύριον (27:62) is located in a hinge text; there is no explicit time adjunct in the final scene (28:16-20). However, there is an implied time adjunct in the final scene. Travel time from Jerusalem to Galilee is presupposed in the Gospel's narrative.

<sup>48</sup>Though he does not include 27:45-54 in his analysis, Heil also observes an intimate connection between the death, burial, and resurrection scenes in Matthew's Gospel-narrative. See John P. Heil, "The Narrative Structure of Matthew 27:55-28:20," *JBL* 110 (1991): 419-38.



Table 14—*Continued*. Scene, hinge text structure of Matthew 27:45-28:20

<i>Hinge</i>	28:11-15	The chief priests and elders will not believe the things they have seen (27:45-54) or heard (28:1-10). A sufficient sum of money procures the silence of the failed temple guards and buys their lie about the reality of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. The denial of his resurrection advances the narrative to his public appearance in Galilee.
Scene 4	28:16-20	The resurrected Jesus meets with the disciples corporeally in Galilee. By means of his authority and because of a promise of immanence, Jesus commissions his disciples to the nations to teach all he has commanded.

The schematic above reveals the interlocking network of literary relationships existing between the resurrection pericopes in the Matthean death-resurrection scene. This representation of Matthew's death-resurrection conclusion is influenced by Weren but with three important modifications. First, this dissertation contends the conclusion of Matthew's Gospel-narrative (Matt 27:45-28:20) consists of four scenes, rather than Weren's suggestion of five.<sup>49</sup> Second, this dissertation argues the first scene in the Gospel-narrative's conclusion is Matthew 27:45-50, rather than Weren's suggestion of Matthew 27:55-61.<sup>50</sup> Third, this dissertation proposes the Gospel's finale begins with the death of Jesus in Matthew 27:45, rather than Weren's suggestion of the burial of Jesus in Matthew 27:55.<sup>51</sup> Bifurcating the death of Jesus (Matt 27:45-50) from the resurrection of Jesus (Matt 28:1-10) by beginning the finale with the burial of Jesus (Matt 27:55-61)

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<sup>49</sup>Weren, *Studies in Matthew's Gospel*, 74. This dissertation consciously moves away from the burial-resurrection analysis of Weren, Giblin, and Brown to a death-resurrection analysis of the Gospel-narrative's conclusion.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

disrupts the narrative logic of Matthew's storyline. The three textual units—Matthew 27:51-54, 55-61, 62-66—are interconnected and flow together to carry along the death-resurrection plot in Matthew's Gospel-narrative. The narrative's references to the guards (Matt 27:51-54, cf. 27:65), the onlookers (Matt 27:55-56), the undertaker (Matt 27:57-61), and the clergy (Matt 27:62-66) carry the storyline forward in the wake of the Gospel's (anti)climax—Jesus' death (Matt 27:45-50). The burial scene (Matt 27:55-61) is interwoven into the death-resurrection conclusion (Matt 27:45-28:20) to connect the preceding events (Matt 27:45-54) to the following events (Matt 28:1-20) in the Matthean Gospel-narrative.

### **The Purpose of Matthew 27:51-54**

The logical question is “*Why* did Matthew employ this intentionality in his placement of Matthew 27:51-54 within Matthew 27:45-28:20?” First, this dissertation suggests the narrative's composition is intended to accentuate Jesus' identity—the earth he created mourns in darkness (Matt 27:45) and breaks (Matt 27:51) at his death, giving back the dead (Matt 27:52) as a testimony to his dominion as the Son of God (Matt 28:18). These historical details teach readers something about Jesus' identity as the Son of God (Matt 27:54).<sup>52</sup> Second, Matthew's intentionality in his literary structure is

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<sup>51</sup>Weren, *Studies in Matthew's Gospel*, 73.

<sup>52</sup>Schnackenburg acknowledges the symbolism of the Matthean pericope but incorrectly denies its historicity. He contends, “The text is to be understood only as a theological concept portrayed as an event . . . The entire passage . . . is not to be analyzed historically . . . Matthew *imagines* the centurion and his men saw the earthquake and these happenings.” Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 288-91, emphasis added. For a rejection of ahistorical symbolism as well as a defense of the pericope's historicity, see Charles Quarles, “A Roundtable Discussion with Michael Licona on the Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach,” *Southeastern Theological Review* 3, no. 1 (2012): 71-98, esp. 75-76; Quarles, review of *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*, by Michael R. Licona, *JETS* 54 (2011): 839-44.

intended to accentuate the mission that Jesus' death necessitates—Jesus' death is life-giving (Matt 27:52) and ultimately salvific for persons from every nation who profess faith in his name (Matt 28:16-20; cf. 2:11; 14:33; 27:54; Rev 7:9-12). From his birth (Matt 1:18-24) through his death (Matt 27:51-54) Matthew has communicated the soteriological significances of Jesus' life.<sup>53</sup> Contrary to the belief of the Sadducees and Pharisees (Matt 27:41-43), Jesus bears much fruit by dying and being buried in a tomb—as the seed of wheat bears much fruit by falling to the earth (cf. John 12:24).<sup>54</sup> 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 28:18-20).<sup>55</sup> Third, Matthew's narrative composition is intended to accentuate the eschatological in-breaking of the Kingdom of Heaven as the temple cultus is rendered obsolete (Matt 27:51). The torn veil signified the temple was no longer sacrosanct. The “temple was now open and vulnerable to desecration.”<sup>56</sup> The cosmological imagery—darkness (Matt 27:45)—and the earthquake signified God's wrath and judgment (cf. 2 Sam 22:8; Isa 13:13; Joel 2:10; Amos 8:9). The New Covenant supersedes the Old Covenant in the death of the Messiah,

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<sup>53</sup>Jesus' name connotes the soteriological significance of his life—*γάρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν* (1:21). Matthew reveals that Jesus' lifeblood is poured out for the salvation of others—*τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν τὸ αἶμά μου τῆς διαθήκης τὸ περὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυννόμενον εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν* (26:28). See also Matt 9:2; 16:21-23; 17:22-23; 20:17-19.

<sup>54</sup>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); for those who repent at the call of the kingdom (Matt 3:2; 4:17; 10:7).

<sup>55</sup>Matthew begins and ends his Gospel-narrative with a reference to Jesus' presence with his people. As Immanuel, he is God with us (Matt 1:23). As the resurrected-authority, he is God with us (Matt 28:16, 20; cf. Gen 28:15 LXX). He will never leave us. The Gospel's *inclusio* manifests the missiological implications of Jesus' Incarnation (cf. Matt 1:21; John 20:19-23; Acts 1:8) and his cross-death (cf. Matt 27:54; 28:18-20).

<sup>56</sup>Quarles posits the rending of the temple veil may also have “signified the departure of the divine glory from the temple.” If correct, this further connects Matt 27:51-54 with Ezekiel's prophecy (cf. Ezek 10:18-19). See Quarles, “Matthew 27:51-53 as a Scribal Interpretation,” 272.

Jesus. The law will be written on the hearts of those who respond to Jesus in faith (Matt 27:54; cf. Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:26-27).

Further, without downplaying the physical or emotional sufferings of Jesus, Matthew stresses the theological import of Jesus' death by means of the minute attention given to the physical pain Jesus experienced during his crucifixion.<sup>57</sup> Prior to the crucifixion Matthew goes to great lengths to describe the mental and physical sufferings of Jesus. Jesus is betrayed (Matt 27:48), spat upon (Matt 26:67; cf. 27:30), slapped (Matt 26:67), scourged (Matt 27:26), stripped (Matt 27:28), mocked (Matt 27:29), and beaten with reeds while wearing the thorn-crown (Matt 27:30; cf. 2:2; 27:11, 37). Prior to the crucifixion scene the gruesome features of Jesus' suffering are described in pronounced detail in the Gospel's narrative. While suspended between heaven and earth on the cross, however, the physical sufferings of Jesus are taken for granted in the Matthean Gospel-narrative. At Golgotha, Jesus is crucified (Matt 27:35), derided (Matt 27:39), and mocked (Matt 27:41) before he cries aloud into the silent darkness (Matt 27:46, 50).<sup>58</sup> True to form in the Matthean Gospel-narrative, those present with the Crucified misinterpret the significance of his screams from the cross (Matt 27:47; cf. 9:3; 12:24;

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<sup>57</sup>Hill notes the allusions to the Old Testament, specifically Ps 22, in the death-resurrection scene of the Matthean Gospel-narrative. See David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (London: Oliphants, 1972), 354.

<sup>58</sup>Harrington notes that some understand Jesus' "cries in the dark" to be his personal "breaking point" in the Matthean Gospel-narrative. They assume Jesus was no longer in control of his own destiny and could no longer take the torture of the cross. Those advocating the "breaking point" of Jesus conclude the dereliction cries in the dark reveal that Jesus gave up on God. See Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 402. This proposal is highly speculative. The Scripture does not say Jesus gave up on God. Rather, in Matthew's Gospel-narrative, it speaks to how Jesus consciously fulfilled Ps 22 in his cross-death. Jesus endured infinite suffering on the cross because of his infinite love for the elect (Matt 22:14). In the midst of his pain Jesus held onto the fulfillment of Ps 22 while enduring infinite suffering and the damnation of God for the elect as a substitute for sinners (cf. Isa 53:4-6).

26:65).<sup>59</sup> Jesus does not plead for sympathy by acknowledging his suffering, “My pain! My pain!” He does not wallow in his abject loneliness by calling for his comrades, “My friends! My friends!” Rather, he speaks to his Father—*ἡλι ἡλι* (Matt 27:46; cf. Mark 14:36)—fully confident he would not despise the suffering of his chosen one (Ps 22:1, 14; cf. Matt 12:18-21). Jesus’ second cry is not a whimper; it is a declaration of triumph—“It is finished” (Matt 27:50; cf. John 19:30). The misunderstanding of those present manifests

the failure of the Jews to recognize who Jesus really is, and, more importantly, it reveals a sad inability to grasp what is happening. Confronted with the most sacred of all moments—the Son of Man shedding his blood as atonement for his followers—the crowds faithlessly conclude that Jesus has lapsed into demented fantasy as he asks for deliverance not from God but from a long dead prophet who has become fictionalized in the people’s imagination. They cannot see that the crucified one is by this act saving them: “He will save his people from their sins” (1:21).<sup>60</sup>

Those present are unable to interpret his ignominious death (Matt 27:36-50) until the subsequent Spirit-incited portents testify to his identity as God’s Son (Matt 27:50, 54).

Failure to observe the literary purpose of Matthew 27:51-54 as a hinge text within the death-resurrection conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel places unnecessary interpretive stress on each of the passage’s five divine portents individually – and in regards to this dissertation, the resurrection of the sleeping saints (Matt 27:52b-53), specifically. Consequently, readers are often perplexed by “unanswerable” interpretive questions arising from the pericope. Thus, Scaer states, “Determining a meaning for the final scene of Matthew’s sequence of events—the resurrection of the saints—may be the

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<sup>59</sup>*ἀνεβόησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς φωνῇ . . . κράζας φωνῇ μεγάλῃ* (Matt 27:46, 50).

<sup>60</sup>Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew*, 406, cf. 398. Scaer’s treatment of the death-resurrection scene has much to commend. He rightly connects the events of Matt 27 with the events of Matt 28. However,

most problematic. It raises questions that may not be answered to the satisfaction of all.”<sup>61</sup> Observation of Matthean compositional intentionality manifests the function of the pericopal-hapax is not primarily about the identification of the resurrected-dead (Matt 27:52-53). Rather, the pericope functions as one of the three hinge texts in the death-resurrection scene.<sup>62</sup> Collectively, they accentuate the three theological foci this dissertation argues form the bedrock of the Matthean Gospel-narrative’s conclusion.<sup>63</sup>

Table 15. Theological foci accentuated in the death-resurrection scene

Christology	Eschatology	Missiology
27:45-54	28:1-10	28:16-20

The intricate narrative structure emphasizes the theological meaning latent in the text. The apocalyptic signs which accompanied Jesus’ death (cf. Matt 27:51-53) portray Jesus as Messiah (Matt 27:54) and prepare readers for the in-breaking of eschatological

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following Waters, his interpretation locates the resurrection of the saints in the apocalyptic future.

<sup>61</sup>For example, see Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew*, 408. Similarly, outside of a pronouncement of judgment and anticipation of the events in Matt 28, Chamblin is unable to give a reason for the pericope’s inclusion. See Knox Chamblin, *Matthew*, A Mentor Commentary, vol. 2 (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publication, 2010), 1427-31. Likewise, following many others, Ridderbos interprets the Matthean pericope in light of Paul’s teaching in the Corinthian correspondence. See Herman Ridderbos, *Matthew*, trans. Ray Togtman, Bible Student’s Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 536-37.

<sup>62</sup>Observation of textual arrangement and structure has hermeneutical value. It is vital in interpreting narrative logic. Good reading requires interpreters to develop what Leithart calls “a good sense of textual humor” to discern the multiple melodies and complex rhythms of texts. See Leithart, *Deep Exegesis*, 143-53.

<sup>63</sup>These theological themes are not confined to the pericopal breakdowns above. There is significant overlap throughout the death-resurrection scene. However, it will be argued that each theme is located in the pericope under consideration and is represented uniquely in the divisions above.

resurrection on Easter morning (Matt 28:1-10). Matthew accentuates the death of Jesus as life-giving—the dead rise at the cross of Christ—to make his identity apparent, “This truly was the Son of God!” The mocking of the pharisaic naysayers (Matt 27:40, 43) is overruled when Jesus’ divine Sonship (Matt 27:54) is established by means of the portents (Matt 27:51-53) accompanying his horrific cross-death. The “lesser” resurrection of the saints proleptically anticipates the “greater” resurrection of Jesus (Matt 28:1-10) in his Gospel-narrative’s death-resurrection scene. It visibly manifests Jesus’ identity as the Son of God (Matt 27:45). Further, the “lesser” resurrection of the saints proleptically anticipates the gospel mission to the ends of the earth (Matt 27:54; 28:16-20).

### **Conclusion**

Failure 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 compositional placement of Matthew 27:51-54 within the death-resurrection scene (Matt 27:45-28:20) as a hinge text inhibits interpretive understanding of Matthew 27:51-54. Therefore, this chapter has argued that careful attention must be given to the compositional structure(s) of the death-resurrection scene (Matt 27:45-28:20) and the placement of Matthew 27:51-54 within the Matthean Gospel-narrative’s conclusion. Structural attention manifests a deliberate narrative strategy in Matthew’s Gospel conclusion. 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.

Matthew's reader-oriented motivations informed his arrangement of the Gospel material. For Matthew, there is an assumed contract between himself and his readers specifying that interpretive meaning is laden within the very structure(s) and presentation of his Gospel-narrative, not merely the content contained within a series of randomly placed pericopes throughout his Gospel. As readers of a highly structured narrative, prioritization of Matthean structure is essential to ascertaining the author's meaning(s) of the death-resurrection scene. Awareness of Matthean narrative strategy enables interpreters to successfully receive the meaning embedded in the structural presentation of his Gospel material.

The death-resurrection conclusion to the Matthean Gospel-narrative is laden with interpretive structural significance because of Matthew's compositional intentionality. Matthew has joined the four scenes—Matthew 27:45-50, 27:55-61; 28:1-10, 28:16-10—by employing three hinge texts—Matthew 27:51-54, 27:62-66; 28:11-15. The hinge texts dispersed throughout the death-resurrection conclusion advance the Gospel-narrative to the next respective scene *and* aid readers by leading them to interpret the significances of Jesus' resurrection (Matt 28:1-10) in light of his antecedent death (Matt 27:45-50), and vice versa.

Iser was right to contend that "reading is the essential precondition for all processes of literary interpretation."<sup>64</sup> That process includes the observation of the text's

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<sup>64</sup>Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 20. Powell is concerned with what real readers are supposed to notice while reading. He argues, "One reason, then, real readers arrive at unexpected interpretations is that they fail to notice or remember information provided within the narrative." See Mark A. Powell, "Expected and Unexpected Readings of Matthew: What the Reader Knows," *The ATJ* 48, no. 2 (1993): 31-51. This dissertation is arguing that failure to observe the compositional intentionality of Matthew's narrative strategy is akin to what Powell would call "under-observance." For a study of what a model reader *does* in the reading/interpretive process, see Leroy A. Huizenga, *The New Isaac: Tradition and Intertextuality in the Gospel of Matthew*, NovTSup 131 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 21-74.



structure which itself contains some of the text's meaning(s). Careful reading of the Matthean material utilizes "rules of notice" as well as "rules of signification." The former rules refer to details of the Gospel-narrative that contain more prominence than others, while the latter rules enable readers to derive significance from the details the first set of rules have brought to their attention.<sup>65</sup> In relation to this dissertation, the two sets of rules work together as readers seek to derive meaning(s) from Matthew 27:51-54. The literary parallels between Matthew 27:51-54 and Matthew 28:1-10 made by the Gospel's author not only suggests intentionality in craft, but also parallel meanings.<sup>66</sup> Thus, the resurrection accompanying Jesus' death is one of five portents Matthew employs to communicate Jesus' identity as the Son of God (Matt 27:54; cf. 4:3, 6; 8:29; 14:33; 26:63; 27:40, 43; Luke 3:38). The resurrection of Jesus himself (Matt 28:1-10; cf. John 10:17-18) manifests his divine power as the eternal Son of God (Matt 24:30; 26:64).<sup>67</sup> He saves his people from their sins (Matt 1:21; cf. 16:25; 27:40, 42, 49) by his death-

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<sup>65</sup>Rabinowitz actually discusses four general "rules" or conventions: those of notice, signification, configuration, and coherence. See Peter J. Rabinowitz, *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 47-109.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 46. Minear's thesis, primarily, is that Matthew crafted his Gospel-narrative in such a way to "teach" his readers about Jesus. See Paul S. Minear, *Matthew: The Teacher's Gospel* (New York: The Pilgrim's Press, 1982), 3, 10, 12. Though I disagree with Minear's claim that Matthew primarily had teachers of local churches in mind when composing his Gospel-narrative, I agree that Matthew intentionally arranged his material to "teach" about Jesus.

<sup>67</sup>Patte notes, "The power of God is manifested without ambiguity in the striking events surrounding [Jesus'] death-resurrection." Throughout the crucifixion of Jesus God has been eerily silent. The narrative's silence underscores the absence of God's intervention *until* divine activity dominates the scene after Jesus' death in Matt 27:51-53. See Daniel Patte, *The Gospel According to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew's Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 388. Unfortunately, in his treatment of Matt 27-28, Patte bifurcates the death scene from the burial-resurrection scene. See also John P. Heil, *The Death and Resurrection of Jesus: A Narrative-Critical Reading of Matthew 26-28* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 84-89. Bauer takes the two resurrection pericopes together in his treatment of Matthew's Gospel, but he views the resurrection of the saints as displaced within the Matthean Gospel-narrative. See David R. Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, JSNTSup 31 (Decatur, GA: The Almond Press, 1988) 103.

resurrection (Matt 27:45-50; 28:1-10; Rom 4:25). The literary parallelism between the resurrection pericopes and the compositional structural intentionality of the death-resurrection scene leads readers to interpret these two portions of Matthew's Gospel *together*. Bifurcating the two resurrection pericopes places undue interpretive stress on the individual portents. Interpretive stress has guided interpreters to separate the historicity of the act itself and its placement in the Gospel from its theological meaning or to focus on minor speculative questions related to Matthew 27:52b-53—Who were the resurrected dead? Where did they go as they strolled the streets of the holy city? To whom did they speak in Jerusalem?—rather than the death-resurrection of Jesus. A narrative reading of the death-resurrection scene obviates interpretive stress. What interpreters often take to be the central event (Matt 27:52b-53) is merely one of five portents in a hinge text within the death-resurrection conclusion of Matthew's Gospel-narrative.

This thesis proposes that recognition of Matthean literary parallelism between Matthew 27:51-54 and Matthew 28:1-10 as well as compositional structural intentionality in the death-resurrection scene (Matt 27:45-28:20) will yield interpretive clarity in relation to Matthew's *crux interpretum*. A proper understanding of the pericope's translation, the primary Old Testament referent, and the compositional structure and placement enables interpreters 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.

## CHAPTER 5

### THEOLOGICAL MEANING: THE THEOLOGICAL FOCI OF MATTHEW 27:51-54—CHRISTOLOGY, MISSIOLOGY, AND ESCHATOLOGY

#### **Theological Import**

The thesis propounded in this dissertation: 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 separating 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. Through the failure 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), the interpretation of Matthew 27:51-54 has been obscured. By a proper understanding of the pericope's translation (see chap. 2), the primary Old Testament referent (see chap. 3), and the compositional structure and placement (see chap. 4), 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 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).

This dissertation has argued that Matthean research has thus far achieved no consensus of opinion on either the broad structure of Matthew's death-resurrection scene (Matt 27:45-28:20) or on Matthew's intended meaning in relation to the five divine portents included in Matthew 27:51-54. Little attention has been given to the problem of discerning how these two issues relate to each other. This general situation has produced two negative interpretive results. First, only a handful of commentators in recent decades have attempted to ascertain the interpretive significance of Matthew 27:51-54 from the structure of the death-resurrection scene.<sup>1</sup> Second, there have been fewer interpreters who have endeavored to let the structure of the Gospel's death-resurrection scene (Matt 27:45-28:20) be their guide when interpreting the theological foci accentuated by the portents in the pericope under consideration—Matthew 27:51-54. The objective of this chapter is to delineate the intended theological meaning of Matthew 27:51-54 in such a way that the structure of the Gospel's death-resurrection scene manifests a viable interpretation of the pericopal-hapax. This chapter will highlight the significance of three theological foci woven into the fabric of Matthew 27:51-54: Christology, missiology, and eschatology.

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<sup>1</sup>For example, see Wim J. C. Weren, *Studies in Matthew's Gospel: Literary Design, Intertextuality, and Social Setting* (Boston: Brill, 2014), 22-41, 72, 74, 80-83. David R. Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, JSNTSup 31 (Decatur, GA: The Almond Press, 1988). Daniel Patte, *The Gospel According to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew's Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

## The Theological Meaning of Matthew 27:51-54

### Three Theological Foci

The intentional placement of Matthew 27:51-54 within the death-resurrection scene emphasizes the theological meaning latent in this Matthean pericope—Christology, missiology, and eschatology. The extraordinary signs accompanying Jesus' death (cf. Matt 27:51-53) portray Jesus as the Son of God (Matt 27:54) and prepare Matthew's readers for the intrusion of eschatological resurrection on Easter morning (Matt 28:1-10).<sup>2</sup> Matthew accentuates the death of Jesus as life-giving—the dead rise at the cross of Christ (Matt 27:52b-53)—to make his divine identity apparent, “This really was the Son of God!”<sup>3</sup> The mocking of the pharisaic naysayers (Matt 27:40, 43) and robbers (Matt 27:44) is invalidated when Jesus' divine Sonship (Matt 27:54) is established by means of the portents (Matt 27:51-53) accompanying his death. The “lesser” resurrection of the saints proleptically anticipates the “greater” resurrection of Jesus (Matt 28:1-10) in the Matthean Gospel-narrative. The faith-profession of the guard proleptically anticipates the gospel mission to the ends of the earth (Matt 27:54; 28:16-20). In each instance, three

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<sup>2</sup>Brown notes similar phenomena were reported at the deaths of Romulus and Julius Caesar. His examples include Plutarch (*Rom.* 27.6; *Caes.* 69:4), Ovid (*Fast.* 2.493), Cicero (*Rep.* 6:22), Virgil (*Georg.* 1.466-488), Josephus (*Ant.* 14.12.3; 309), and Pliny (*Nat.* 2.30; 97). See Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave—A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 1114, 1120-27. Similarly, Licona notes the occurrence of similar phenomena at the death of Claudius, the enslavement of Egypt by Caesar, and the destruction of the temple. His examples come from Dio Cassius (*Roman History* 57.17.4-5; 60.35.1) and Josephus (*Wars* 6.288-309). See Michael Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010), 448-50.

<sup>3</sup>Careful readers will recognize resonances from two Old Testament stories of resurrection found in 1 Kgs 17:17-24 and 2 Kgs 4:32-37. As the Lord heard the cries of Elijah for the boy, so the Lord heard the cries of Jesus from the cross. As the resurrection of the boy confirmed Elijah's identity as a man of God speaking the words of the Lord, so the resurrection of the sleeping saints—along with the other portents—confirmed Jesus' divine identity as God's Son. Similarly, Elisha's identity as a man of God is confirmed by his raising of the Shunammite's son. Like the centurion cohort, the Shunammite's response to resurrection is worship (2 Kgs 4:37; cf. Matt 27:54).

critical theological planks serve as interpretive guides further supporting a literary reading of the text as definitive for a correct understanding of both the pericope itself and its accompanying theological foci employed by Matthew.

### **Christology**

The crucifixion opens the introductory scene of the Matthean death-resurrection conclusion (Matt 27:38-54). The significance(s) of Jesus' execution dominates this portion of the Gospel. Thus, Senior notes the uniqueness of Matthew's rendition of the Passion narrative. He asserts that a "heightened christological portrait" pervades the conclusion of the Matthean Gospel-narrative.<sup>4</sup> The location of the series of events taking place on the cross is purposeful to Matthew's understanding of Christology as revealed in the death-resurrection scene. That they occur at the beginning of the narrative in this successive order is the literary vehicle whereby the Christological significance(s) become clear.

Matthew attaches importance in this section to Christology as is evident from the three explicit references to "Son of God" in the Matthean Gospel-narrative (Matt 27:40, 43, 54). First, Jesus is condemned to death by the religious leaders twice specifically as "the Son of God" (Matt 27:40, 43).<sup>5</sup> This double earthly condemnation stands in marked contrast to the Father's double heavenly affirmation of Jesus' sonship in the Matthean Gospel-narrative. The celestial voice thundered divine approval at his

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<sup>4</sup>He argues this is evident by the "use of christological titles such as King of the Jews, Christ, Son of God" in the death-resurrection scene. Collectively, these titles enhance the Christological portrait found in Matthew's Gospel. Donald Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew: A Redactional Study*, BETL 39 (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1975), 337.

<sup>5</sup>There are two references on the lips of Jesus' murderers in the pericope. The first is a question—*εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ* (27:40)—and the second is a statement—*θεοῦ εἰμι υἱός* (27:43).

baptism (Matt 3:17) and at his transfiguration (Matt 17:5). Second, Jesus is confessed to be “the Son of God” by the centurion and his comrades (Matt 27:54). This places the confession of Jesus’ sonship on the lips of both Jews and Gentiles in Matthew’s Gospel (cf. Matt 16:6; 27:54). In both instances, the confession of his divine sonship is the product of divine revelation not human intuition or testimony. Therefore, Jesus said the heavenly Father—σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα οὐκ—revealed his sonship to Peter (Matt 16:17). Similarly, the soldiers respond to heavenly portents—τὸν σεισμόν καὶ τὰ γινόμενα—not the accusations of the religious elite (Matt 27:54; cf. 27:40, 43). Jesus’ sonship becomes the place where Jew and Gentile agree in the Matthean Gospel-narrative.

Acknowledging the centrality of Christology in the death-resurrection conclusion, Kingsbury suggests these three “Son of God” references form an outline to this section of Matthew’s Gospel-narrative.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, the outline can be devised as follows: First, Matthew 27:38 introduces the scene where Jesus is blasphemed in Matthew 27:39-40 as the “Son of God.” Second, Matthew 27:41-43 introduces the scene where Jesus is mocked as both the “King of Israel” and the “Son of God.”<sup>7</sup> Third, Matthew 27:51-53 introduces the divinely initiated supernatural portents attesting to Jesus’ deity as the “Son of God.”<sup>8</sup> These portents are understood as God the Father’s

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<sup>6</sup>The observation of this outline is dependent upon Kingsbury’s contribution. See Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 74-77.

<sup>7</sup>Though there is not an explicit reference in Matt 27:44, the narrative notes that Jesus was ridiculed in the same way—τὸ δ’ αὐτὸ—by the robbers who were crucified with him. During the crucifixion scene, then, three groups disparage Jesus: the crowds (27:39), the chief priests (27:41), and the robbers (27:44).

<sup>8</sup>Readers will note the uses of the *passivum divinum*—ἐσχίσθη, ἐσείσθη, ἐσχίσθησαν, ἀνεώχθησαν, ἠγέρθησαν—in this section of the death-resurrection conclusion. God is the obvious agent of action. Their presence indicates God caused these events in response to Jesus’ cross-death. God tore the curtain in two, shook the earth, split the rocks, opened the tombs, and resurrected the sleeping saints who subsequently entered the holy city *after* Jesus’ resurrection to testify, along with the Gentilic-crowd, that

divine declaration of Jesus' divine sonship following his divine work on the cross to actualize the forgiveness of sins. This understanding of the portents is subsequently confirmed by the response of the centurion and his companions. Their response to the Matthean epiphany—"the earthquake and the things that took place" (Matt 27:54)—emphasizes one of the collective meanings of the portents: Christological import. Jesus is blasphemed, mocked, and heralded as the Son of God in the death-resurrection scene in order to accentuate his identity as God's Son.<sup>9</sup> Jesus' divine sonship is on display in the Matthean death-resurrection conclusion.<sup>10</sup> This section of Matthew's Gospel-narrative pivots on Christological import.

Therefore, the logical interpretive question is—"Why?" Why is Matthew concerned to emphasize the fact that Jesus hangs upon the cross and dies specifically as the θεοῦ υἱός in the death-resurrection conclusion of his Gospel-narrative? It is evident that Matthew's emphasis is to convey Jesus's divine sonship. It is intended to accentuate Jesus' identity—he *is* the Son of God. The child born of the virgin Mary is the Son of God (Matt 1:18, 20; cf. 27:54).<sup>11</sup> In the death-resurrection scene, the child become man

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Jesus is the Son of God.

<sup>9</sup>Kingsbury proposes that θεέ μου "may be regarded as testimony on the part of Jesus himself that he is the Son of God." For, he suggests that Matthew's use of θεέ μου is a Matthean idiom derived from passages like Ps 89:26. Therefore, he states there is a definite observable pattern here in the Matthean Gospel-narrative: "three times Jesus is rejected as the Son of God (vss. 38-44), and three times he is attested to as the Son of God (vss. 45-54)." Kingsbury, *Matthew*, 75.

<sup>10</sup>Thus, de Jonge notes "Matthew [27:39-54] emphasizes that the essential question is that of Jesus' divine sonship." See M. de Jonge, "THE USE OF O CRISTOS IN THE PASSION NARRATIVES," in *Jewish Eschatology, Early Christian Christology and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Collected Essays of Marinus De Jonge*, NovTSup 63 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1991), 77-78.

<sup>11</sup>ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου (Matt 1:18). Luke, in his Gospel-narrative, explicitly connects Jesus' sonship to his conception by means of the Holy Spirit, "πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ καὶ δύναμις ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι διὸ καὶ τὸ γεννώμενον ἅγιον κληθήσεται υἱὸς θεοῦ" (Luke 1:35). Through Mary, the Son of God was begotten of the seed of David—the son of man (cf. Matt 1:1). Reflecting on the



is the Christ of God lifted upon a Roman cross (John 3:14-15). The dignity of the title—“Son of God”—would not have been conferred upon him at his death unless he was the only-begotten Son of God. Therefore, Calvin states, “[He] is believed to be the Son of God because the Word begotten of the Father before all ages took human nature in a hypostatic union.”<sup>12</sup> Jesus is called “Son of God” by virtue of his deity and eternal essence.<sup>13</sup>

Matthew’s Christological portrait features two specific aspects of Christology designed to emphasize both the person and work of Jesus simultaneously. Interpreters must ascertain the particular aspects of divine sonship Matthew most wanted accentuated in his death-resurrection conclusion. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus is referenced as both “Son of Man” and “Son of God.”<sup>14</sup> The former title is attributed to him thirty times in

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wonder of the God-man’s hypostatic union Charnock states, “What a wonder is it, that two natures infinitely distant, should be more intimately united than anything in the world; and yet without any confusion! That the same person should have both a glory and a grief; an infinite joy in the Deity, and an inexpressible sorrow in the humanity! That a God upon a throne should be an infant in a cradle; the thundering Creator be a weeping babe and a suffering man, are such expressions of mighty power, as well as condescending love, that they astonish men upon earth, and angels in heaven.” Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 2:64.

<sup>12</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes* 2.14.5. Similarly, when writing of the centrality of the Son of God’s incarnation, Bavinck states, “If . . . Christ is the incarnate Word, then the incarnation is the central fact of the entire history of the world; then, too, it must have been prepared before the ages and have its effects throughout eternity.” See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatic: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, trans. John Vriend, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 274.

<sup>13</sup>Bavinck notes that Scripture repeatedly attributes to Christ’s personal eternal preexistence (John 1:1; 8:58; 17:5; Rom 8:3; 2 Cor 8:9; Gal 4:4; Phil 2:6) and divine sonship in a supernatural sense (Matt 3:17; 11:27; 28:19; John 1:14; 5:18; Rom 8:32). See Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatic*, 283.

<sup>14</sup>Calvin suggests the two titles distinguish between his two natures—man and God. As the posterity of Adam he is the Son of Man; as the eternal second person of the Trinity he is Son of God. Therefore, Jesus is called Son of Man in reference to his human nature and Son of God in reference to his divine nature. The man Jesus who descended from the Jews according to the flesh is God. Calvin, *Instit.* 2.14.6.

Matthew's Gospel.<sup>15</sup> The latter title, however, is attributed to him only eight times in the Matthean Gospel-narrative.<sup>16</sup> It is notable that Jesus is referred to only as the "Son of God" in the death-resurrection conclusion—Matthew 27:45-28:20. Clearly, therefore, particular Christological aspects are on display in the Matthean narrative.<sup>17</sup>

First, divine sonship is associated with humble obedience. This is evident by Matthew's use of the clause—*ἐὶ υἱὸς ἐὶ τοῦ θεοῦ*—in Matthew 27:40. The clause is a direct quotation of Satan's words spoken to Jesus during his wilderness temptation (Matt 4:3, 6).<sup>18</sup> As Satan did in the Temptation scene, so now the religious leaders are tempting Jesus while he hangs on the cross (Matt 27:40, 42). Yet, he does not capitulate to their

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<sup>15</sup>Matt 8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 11:19; 12:8, 32, 40; 13:37, 41; 16:13, 27, 28; 17:9, 12, 22; 19:28; 20:18, 28; 24:27, 30 (2x), 37, 39, 44; 25:31; 26:2, 24 (2x), 45, 64.

<sup>16</sup>Matt 4:3, 6; 8:29; 14:33; 26:63; 27:40, 43, 54.

<sup>17</sup>According to Hays, an integral part of what it means for Jesus to be "God with us" in Matthew's Gospel-narrative is "the story of Jesus' own suffering, culminating in the cross." Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 170. Further, concerning Christological import in the Matthean Gospel-narrative, Hays states, "Christian interpreters lulled by familiarity with Matthew's Gospel may not fully appreciate the immense scope of the Christological assertions made at every turn by Matthew. But there can be no doubt that the word spoken by Jesus . . . can be true only if it really is "the word of our God," only if the speaker who says "my words will not pass away" is in fact the God of Israel, God with us." See Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 47.

<sup>18</sup>Kingsbury suggests the connection to the Temptation account explains the reason Jesus did not come down from the cross like the religious leaders and the crowds demanded. As he did in Matthew 4:1-11, so now Jesus resists temptation in order to do the will of God. See Kingsbury, *Matthew*, 76. The intratextual connections between the beginning and ending of Matthew's Gospel encourage his readers to exercise their interpretive imagination as those informed by his Gospel, especially its beginning. For more on the intratextual connections between the beginning and ending of Matthew's Gospel-narrative, see Jason B. Hood, *The Messiah, His Brothers, and the Nations* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 137-56. Matthew utilizes literary parallelism between the beginning and ending of his Gospel-narrative to accentuate theological truth in the death-resurrection scene, in this instance Christological import. Thus, as Herod the King (Matt 2:1) is literarily paralleled with Jesus, the newborn King of the Jews (Matt 2:2); as the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry is literarily paralleled with the beginning of John the Baptist's earthly ministry (Matt 3:1; 4:1 & 3:2; 4:17); as the scenes surrounding Jesus' birth are literarily paralleled with scenes surrounding Jesus' death (Matt 2:16; 27:52) so now temptations spoken by Satan are literarily paralleled with those hurled by Jesus' accusers (Matt 4:3, 6; 27:40) to emphasize Jesus' identity in the death-resurrection scene—he *is* the Son of God (Matt 27:54).

prodding or meet their demands.<sup>19</sup> Rather, he chooses to do the will of God. The Son of God was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:8; cf. Heb 5:8). As a true servant, the Son of God chose to obey at the cost his life.<sup>20</sup> Throughout the death-resurrection scene, “Jesus declares that even though God should deliver him up to death, he makes no forfeiture of his sonship but remains obedient to the Father’s will and continues to rely upon him completely.”<sup>21</sup> The immediate impact of the crucifixion of the Son of God upon those who surrounded his cross-death is directly connected to the divine portents resulting from his obedience (cf. Matt 27:54). Thus, Matthew underscores and accentuates Christological obedience in the death-resurrection conclusion to his Gospel. Why? Because “only one who relies totally upon God and renders to him perfect obedience can atone for sin, and this person, in turn, can be none other than Jesus Son of God, ideal Israelite” in Matthew’s Gospel-narrative.<sup>22</sup>

Second, divine sonship is directly associated with the forgiveness of sins. The Son of God took on flesh that he might be the redeemer of God’s elect people. Three examples throughout Matthew’s Gospel make this obvious. First, Jesus’ name has redemptive significance and indicates the salvific implications of his incarnation (Matt

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<sup>19</sup>The silence of Jesus in the face of false accusations by his murderers throughout the end of Matthew’s Gospel-narrative is deafening (Matt 26:63; 27:14).

<sup>20</sup>None of Jesus’ Roman murderers could have been subjected to such a cruel and merciless death. All of his Jewish murderers would have understood his cross-death as a sign their victim was cursed by God (Gal 3:13; cf. Deut 21:22-23). Richard R. Melick, *Philippians-Colossians-Philemon*, NAC, vol. 32 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 105.

<sup>21</sup>Kingsbury, *Matthew*, 76.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*

1:21; cf. Acts 4:12).<sup>23</sup> Second, though God, Jesus took on flesh with the intention of giving his life as a ransom for God's chosen people (Matt 20:28).<sup>24</sup> Third, the sacrifice of the Son of God actualized the atonement (Matt 26:28).<sup>25</sup> In Matthew's Gospel-narrative, Jesus came to save his people from their sins as he gave his life as a ransom for their sins. In the Matthean Gospel-narrative, the cross is the place where the Son of God sheds his blood to actualize the redemption of God's elect (Matt 27:22-26). The crucifixion of Jesus is the culmination of the sole purpose of Christ's incarnation—redemption.<sup>26</sup> The “only reason given in Scripture that the Son of God willed to take our flesh, and accepted this commandment from the Father, is that he would be a sacrifice to appease the Father on our behalf.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Concerning Jesus' name, Calvin writes, “The name ‘Jesus’ was bestowed upon him not without reason or by chance, or by the decision of men, but it was brought from heaven by an angel, the proclaimer of the supreme decree. The reason for it is added: he was sent to ‘save the people from their sins.’” Calvin, *Instit.* 2.16.1.

<sup>24</sup>Contemplating the significance(s) of Jesus' cross-death requires consideration of his incarnation. Pondering the incarnation forces interpreters to ask, “Why did God send God?” The redemptive mission of the Son of God is foundational to understanding his name as well as his assumption of humanity. Therefore, Sanders states, “The Son's termination point in divine nature is his eternal deity; his termination point in the human nature is his assumption of humanity in the finite and temporal world of the events of salvation history.” Fred Sanders, *The Triune God*, NSD, ed. Michael Allen and Scott Swain (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 121-26. The redemptive mission of the Son of God reveals the God willing to suffer on behalf of his elect people. Bates argues the Son of God's cross-work manifests new layers of depth when interpreting the significance(s) of his mission. See Matthew W. Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and Spirit in the New Testament & Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 115-35.

<sup>25</sup>The cross is an actuality, not an opportunity. Therefore, concerning the question as to whom the benefits of Christ's death-resurrection appertained, Woolsey notes that Ursinus answered unequivocally: “As often as the Gospel extendeth the fruit of Christ's merits and benefits unto all, it must be understood of *the whole number of the faithful and elect*.’ . . . Christ died for all who believe.” Andrew A. Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study of the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 420.

<sup>26</sup>Calvin, *Instit.* 2.12.4.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.12.4.

The portents in Matthew 27:51-54 emphasize Matthew's Christological portrait in the death-resurrection scene of the Matthean Gospel-narrative. The portents are God the Father's response to God the Son's substitutionary cross-work to atone for the sins of his elect people. The accusations leveled by the religious leaders against the Son of God (Matt 26:61), the blasphemies hurled by the crowds towards the Son of God (Matt 27:40), the rending of the temple curtain from top to bottom in the wake of the Son of God's death (Matt 27:51) signify something redemptive-historical in scope occurred that first Good Friday—atonement, actualized by the Son of God himself—Jesus, the Christ of God.<sup>28</sup> These particular aspects of Christology are brought to the fore in Matthean death-resurrection conclusion. By means of his obedience he actualized the redemption of God's people through his death on the cross. Reflecting on the redemptive work of the Son of God, Warfield states, "We see [the Son of God] everywhere offering to men His life for the salvation of their souls: and when, at last, the forces of evil gathered thick around Him, walking, alike, without display and without dismay, the path of suffering appointed for Him, and giving His life at Calvary that through His death the world might live."<sup>29</sup> Christians are "sons of God because the Son of God has died for their sins and been raised."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>The three Matthean references manifest the centrality of the destruction of the temple in the crucifixion scene: "This man said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days . . . You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! . . . Behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." Jesus' cross-work can only be interpreted, then, "in terms of the destruction of the temple." See Kingsbury, *Matthew*, 76.

<sup>29</sup>Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1950), 564.

<sup>30</sup>Kingsbury, *Matthew*, 77.

Matthew's purposeful narrative strategy informing the compositional structure of the death-resurrection scene (Matt 27:45-28:20) and the intentional placement of Matthew 27:51-54 within the death-resurrection scene puts Christological emphasis in prominence. Therefore, Senior states, "The natural climax of the Passion is the death of Jesus. This, obviously, is the end toward which each scene of the narrative is directed . . . the death scene is charged with christology."<sup>31</sup> The Christological portrait of Jesus as the Son of God is enhanced by the portents surrounding his death recounted in Matthew 27:51-54.

### **Missiology**

The Matthean Passion Narrative climaxes in Matthew 27:54 when the centurion and those guarding Jesus herald him as the Son of God.<sup>32</sup> The prodigies at his death confirm Jesus' divine sonship and manifest his death as missiological in its scope and significance. This is evidenced by the response of the Gentiles who were eyewitnesses of his crucifixion (Matt 27:50-54).<sup>33</sup> The faith-confession of the guard is a response to the phenomena accompanying Jesus' cross-death (Matt 27:51-53, 54).<sup>34</sup> Jesus died as no other person in history. His death demanded a response. Their confession comes as a result of something more than Christological awareness. The confession reveals a missiological result as both resurrected Jewish saints and Roman Gentiles testify to Jesus' identity as God the Father's Son in the Matthean Gospel-narrative (Matt 27:53-54; cf. 3:17; 14:33; 17:5). Thus, Kingsbury states, "In the

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<sup>31</sup>Senior notes the significance of Matt 27:51-54 as a strategic pericope heightening the Christological portrait of Jesus in the death-resurrection scene. Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 337.

Matthean reference to both Jewish saints, who come forth from the tombs, and confessing Roman soldiers, one finds a prefigurement of the post-Easter church of people of Jewish and gentile origin (27:52-53, 54).”<sup>35</sup>

The compositional structure of the entire death-resurrection scene (Matt 27:45-28:20) coupled with Matthew 27:51-54’s intentional placement within the death-resurrection scene places prominence on the missiological emphasis. It accentuates the mission his death necessitates—his death is life-giving (Matt 27:54) and ultimately

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<sup>32</sup>Brown describes the conversion of the Roman guards as a “moment of opportunity for the Gentiles.” Raymond E. Brown, *A Crucified Christ in a Holy Week: Essays on the Four Gospel Passion Narratives* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1986), 44. The Gentile eyewitnesses rightly identify Jesus as God’s Son by rightly interpreting the observable phenomena accompanying his cross-death (Matt 27:54; cf. 4:15-16).

<sup>33</sup>Contra Allison, who contends faulty observation or misinterpretation by “prescientific Christians, more pious than thoughtful” obscures the historicity of what really occurred on the first Good Friday and the first Easter Sunday. The answer to his question—“[A]re not the fiction-creating capacities of the early Christians on display in Matt. 27:51-53, in the tall tale about the tombs being opened and the bodies of saints exiting to promenade around Jerusalem?”—is, “No.” Dale C. Allison Jr., *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpreters* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 201-4, 307. The Gospels belong to a genre of ancient biography (*bios*). See Richard Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). Since they were composed within living memory of the events they recount, they draw on eyewitness testimony for their sources. For an argument contending the Gospels contain reliable eyewitness testimony, see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 43, 62. Regarding the phenomena in Matt 27:51-53, the eyewitnesses are anonymous (Matt 27:54). However, anonymity does not negate reliability. For an understanding of the Gospels as oral history and eyewitness testimony, see Samuel Byrskog, *Story as History, History as Story: The Gospels in the Context of Ancient Oral History* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2002). For a discussion of how the oral Jesus tradition might have been persevered by the early church—that is, how the oral traditions became the written Gospels—see Michael Bird, *The Gospel of the Lord: How the Early Church Wrote the Story of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 1-73.

<sup>34</sup>Reeves notes the resurrection of the saints occurs as a response to the cross. This is true of the other four signs as well. However, Reeves wrongly separates the witness of the resurrected dead from the events of Good Friday when he writes, “[T]he resurrected saints, enter the city to show themselves as evidence of Jesus’ resurrection.” Contra Reeves, Matthew’s death-resurrection presentation appears to indicate the saints are witnesses of the life-giving nature of Jesus’ cross-death that actualized the forgiveness of sins. See Keith Howard Reeves, *The Resurrection Narrative in Matthew: A Literary-Critical Examination* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 1993), 10, 63. Brown contends the signs in Matt 27:51-54 manifest God the Father has not forsaken God the Son, Jesus. See Brown, *A Crucified Christ in a Holy Week*, 44.

<sup>35</sup>Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew*, Proclamation Commentaries (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 57.

salvific for persons from every nation who profess faith in Jesus' name (Matt 28:16-20). The mission of the Son of God (Matt 28:16-20) is revealed proleptically on the hillside outside of Jerusalem in the conversion of the soldiers (Matt 27:54). The central purpose of Jesus' mission is revealed in his passion: the Son of God was crucified to save his people from their sins (Matt 1:21; cf. Luke 4:47; Acts 5:31; Rev 1:5). The Son of God shed his blood for the forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:28). The people dwelling in darkness (Matt 27:45) have seen the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ *in* the cross-death of Jesus, Son of God (Matt 27:50; 2 Cor 4:4). The conversion of the Gentiles in Matthew's Gospel-narrative (Matt 27:54; cf. 1:5; 2:1) is the fulfillment of Jesus' prophetic proclamation earlier in Matthew's Gospel (Matt 4:15-16).<sup>36</sup> Light shone in their darkness in the face of the Crucified—Jesus, Son of God (2 Cor 4:6). When the darkness of death shrouded the heavens (Matt 27:45), a light dawned on a hill called Calvary.

The question: "How does Jesus' Christological identity relate to the missiological implications of his cross-death?" Kingsbury elucidates this relationship when he writes,

Placed on the cross, Jesus dies as the perfectly obedient and trusting Son of God (27:38-54). By his death, he brings to completion the mission for which he had been born and for which God had chosen and empowered him: he atones for sins, so that through him people have forgiveness (26:28), and thus he accomplishes salvation (1:21; 3:16-17) . . . . The confession of the Roman soldiers to the effect that he truly was the Son of God (27:54) serves at once to call attention to the

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<sup>36</sup>Hill suggests, "Matthew intended the Roman centurion's words to be a confession of Jesus' divinity." Further, he contends readers of Matthew's Gospel would have intuitively understood the exclamation as a confession of Christian faith on the lips of Gentiles. See David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 356.



circumstances that his earthly ministry is now at an end and to vindicate the claim to divine Sonship he had raised at his trial.<sup>37</sup>

Missiological self-sacrifice brought Jesus into the world (Matt 1:21; Phil 2:8; Rev 1:5).

Therefore, Matthew concludes his Gospel with an *inclusio* that connects the end of his Gospel-narrative with the beginning (Matt 28:20; cf. 1:23). The Son of God is “God with us.” The One conceived of the Spirit will send his Spirit to remain with the disciples while they are on mission for the renown of the Triune name (Matt 28:20). For Matthew, the conversion of the guards (Matt 27:54) is the proleptic fulfillment of the Gospel’s concluding pericope—the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20.<sup>38</sup> This mission, however, is not only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt 10:6). It is to the ends of the earth. His death by crucifixion to actualize the forgiveness of sins (Matt 1:21; Rev 1:5) was for all of the elect (Matt 24:31), both Jew and Gentile (Matt 28:19). His commission to make disciples requires faithful proclamation, not silence (Matt 12:16; 16:20; 17:9), to all peoples. Jesus’ commission to the ends of the earth is accompanied by a promise to be with his doubting disciples until the consummation of all things, the end of the age.<sup>39</sup>

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus’ commission to the ends of the earth (Matt 28:16-20) is set in the context of the Matthean resurrection stories (Matt 27:52b-53; 28:1-10)

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<sup>37</sup>Kingsbury suggest the disciples see Jesus in a new perspective. The resurrected one bears the marks of the crucified one. Kingsbury, *Matthew*, 56-57.

<sup>38</sup>The faith-profession of the guards “becomes the place in Matthew’s plot where Jesus is, for the first time [in the Matthean Gospel-narrative], both correctly and publicly affirmed by humans to be the Son of God.” According to Kingsbury, the consequence of the soldiers’ faith-profession is the way, in principle, now open for gospel mission to the ends of the earth. See J. D. Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 87-90.

<sup>39</sup>Previously Jesus’ presence was promised to the church as they practiced his ordinance of church discipline (Matt 18:20). Now, his presence is promised to the church as they evangelize persons from all nations (Matt 28:19). Jesus’ presence is with the local church. See Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 362.

because the scenes of Jesus' death-resurrection manifest his accomplishment of the forgiveness of sins (Matt 1:21; 9:6; 26:28). This accomplishment requires that "news of it must spread from the One (Jesus) to the many (all humankind), from the center (Jerusalem) to the ends of the earth, and from the middle of history (in the events of the cross and resurrection) to the consummation of history (at the return of Jesus)."<sup>40</sup> Vested with authority (Matt 27:18),<sup>41</sup> the One who conquered death (Matt 27:52b-53; 28:5-6), Jesus Son of God, commissioned the disciples (Matt 28:19).<sup>42</sup> The disciples are commissioned to make disciples by proclaiming the forgiveness of sins to all nations (Acts 10:43; 13:38; 26:18; Col 1:14).<sup>43</sup> However, the Great Commission is not merely the process by which the Son of God's accomplishment is made known. Rather, "*mission itself is one of God's mighty deeds*, the culminating divine activity whereby all the

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<sup>40</sup>Michael W. Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 173-74. In the New Testament, Acts 1:8 is programmatic for the geographical spread of the gospel recounted in Matthew's Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20; cf. Luke 24:44-49). News of Jesus' cross-work and resurrection was not to be confined to Jerusalem (Luke 24:47). Rather, it was to advance to the ends of the earth (Matt 28:19). In Jesus a light for the nations has dawned (Matt 4:15-16; 24:14; 28:19). See also Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan*, NSBT, vol. 27 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 45, 103-8.

<sup>41</sup>Wright suggests readers should recognize the overthrow of evil in the Matthean Gospel-narrative's conclusion. Matthew's Gospel tells the story of how the satanic forces that marshaled against Jesus have been decisively defeated through Jesus' death-resurrection. He writes, "Directly linked to this [claim to authority] is the claim of the satan [*sic*] to possess all authority over the kingdoms of the world, implicit in Matthew 4:9 and explicit in Luke 4:6, and then explicitly reversed in Matthew 28:18, where all authority in heaven and on earth is claimed by Jesus himself. *Something has happened to dethrone the satan [sic] and to enthrone Jesus in its place.* The story the gospels [*sic*] think they are telling is the story of how that happened." According to Wright, the death of Jesus launched a revolution. However, Wright is unclear on *how* the death of Jesus actualized the forgiveness of sins through his mediatorial work on the cross. See N. T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus' Crucifixion* (San Francisco: Harper One, 2016), 207; cf. 82, 83, 115, emphasis original.

<sup>42</sup>Commenting on Matt 28:16-20, Bunyan states, "Jesus Christ by His death and resurrection did not only purchase grace and remission of sins for His elect, with their eternal glory, but He also obtained from the Father to be both Lord and Head over all things, whether they are things in Heaven or things under the earth." John Bunyan, *Resurrection* (n.p.: Sovereign Grace Publishers, n.d.), 40.

<sup>43</sup>Two of the synoptic Gospels as well as John's Gospel conclude with Jesus' missional commissioning: Matt 28:16-20; Luke 24:44-49; John 20:19-23.

preceding mighty acts are disclosed and people are incorporated into them.”<sup>44</sup> After accomplishing his work of atonement through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, God equips his people with the promised power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; cf. Matt 10:20; John 20:22-23). Those who respond to Jesus’ cross-work by faith are commissioned as a light for the nations so that news of his salvation may reach the end of the earth (Isa 49:6; cf. Isa 11:9; Hab 2:14; Matt 28:19).

### **Eschatology**

Following Hutton, Reeves contends the Gospel’s author mentioned the prodigies in Matthew 27:51-53 in order to emphasize the eschatological significance(s) of Jesus’ death on the cross. The portents surrounding Jesus’ cross-death connote something eschatologically decisive in salvation-history occurred in the death of Jesus.<sup>45</sup> Regarding Matthew 27:51-54, the immediate effects of the death of Jesus are most clearly seen in two events which bear eschatological significance. The first event is the rending

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<sup>44</sup>Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 174, emphasis original. Following Scobie and Rowley, Goheen describes the ingathering of the nations through gospel-mission as an eschatological event. See Charles Scobie, “Israel and the Nations: An Essay in Biblical Theology,” *TynBul* 43, no. 2 (1992): 291-92; and H. H. Rowley, *The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* (London: Carey Press, 1944), 36-41. This observation further substantiates the claim that Christology, missiology, and eschatology are featured theological foci in the pericope under consideration—Matt 27:51-54.

<sup>45</sup>Reeves, *The Resurrection Narrative in Matthew*, 10. Goheen notes the transformation of God’s people from a centripetal to a centrifugal movement indicates an observable eschatological shift has occurred. See Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 115. Hurtado illuminates this shift by identifying Christianity as a “bookish” religion that had Jewish origins for its theological commitments, though these commitments no longer identified with Jewish ethnicity. Further, Christianity was a religion that rejected the pagan gods of Rome. Christianity was so different many Roman-era people accused its adherents of atheism. Hurtado argues Christianity’s religious distinguishableness eventually made appeal to people translocally as a transethnic movement. See Larry W. Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 38, 77-104.

of the temple veil (*velum scissum*) from top to bottom (Matt 27:51a).<sup>46</sup> The second event is the bodily resurrection of the dead (Matt 27:52b-53).<sup>47</sup>

### ***Velum Scissum* (Matt 27:51a)**

The temple of God was constructed with clear and detailed instructions as to its design for the purpose of the regulated worship of God.<sup>48</sup> The dimensions and furnishings established a visible response and expression predicated on a revealed word from God.<sup>49</sup> Over time, the temple took on greater significance as a nationalistic entity ultimately condemned by Jesus as a place of business and commerce (Matt 21:12-13).

The veil was critical to the construction of the temple because it separated priests from the direct presence of God (Exod 26:31-35).<sup>50</sup> Traditional interpretation of

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<sup>46</sup>καὶ ἰδοὺ τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ ἐσχίσθη ἀπ' ἄνωθεν ἕως κάτω εἰς δύο (Matt 27:51a). The καὶ ἰδοὺ serves as a connector between the death of Jesus in Matt 27:50 and the phenomena that follow in Matt 27:51-53. God is inserted into the narrative in response to the death of the Son of God. Matthew's directional emphasis when recounting the *velum scissum* connotes a rending from heaven to earth (cf. Mark 15:38).

<sup>47</sup>καὶ πολλὰ σώματα τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων ἠγέρθησαν (Matt 27:52b).

<sup>48</sup>Worship not an invention of man, but a directive of God to man. The lengthy exposition given in Exod 25:10-31:18 and 35:1-40:33 manifests that God regulates his worship. Worship is prescribed and commanded, and the elements of his worship are revealed (see Col 3:16; Eph 5:19).

<sup>49</sup>God has chosen to reveal to man in his word that which is pleasing to him in worship. Worship is limited by revelation only to what is instituted or prescribed by God himself in the Scriptures. Thus, the WCF and the LBC (1689) state God "may not be worshipped according to the imaginations, and devices of men" (WCF 21:1; LBC 22:1). For a treatment of the regulative principle of worship, see Fred A. Malone, *The Baptism of Disciples Alone: A Covenantal Argument for Credobaptism Verses Paedobaptism* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2007), 35-39.

<sup>50</sup>The *velum scissum* recounted in Matt 27:51a was briefly discussed in chap. 2nn 37-39. For helpful surveys, see M. de Jonge, "Matthew 27:51 in Early Christian Exegesis," *HTR* 79 (1986): 67-68; de Jonge, "Two Interesting Interpretations of the Rending of the Temple-Veil in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," in *Jewish Eschatology, Early Christian Christology and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Collected Essays of Marinus De Jonge*, NovTSup 63 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1991), 220-32. Exodus reveals the veil separating the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place was made from blue, purple, and scarlet dyed yarns woven with fine twined linen and embroidered with cherubim. It hung on four golden pillars. The innermost veil's design prevented physical and visible accessibility to God. τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ refers to the innermost veil separating the Most Holy Place from the rest of the

Old Testament passages find acceptance in the New Testament Gospels as the location of worship and communion with God in accordance with the mediatorial sacrifices required to approach and be admitted into the holy presence of God.<sup>51</sup> It was all but impossible for a human being to tear (ἑσχίσθη) the elaborately woven fabric (72 plaits of 24 threads each) from the top (a height of more than 60 feet) of the temple to the bottom into two (εἰς δύο).<sup>52</sup> Only God could design the temple and only God could destroy the temple. In Matthew 27:51a, it pleased God to do this. Therefore, Beale states, “Irony is neatly woven throughout this passage. Jesus is mocked because he said that he would tear down the temple and rebuild it in three days, and at virtually the same time Matthew tells us that Jesus actually was in the process of destroying the temple when he died.”<sup>53</sup> When the καταπέτασμα is torn, the significance of the act symbolized a transition from Old

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temple. See Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 848-49. In case there be any confusion as to the extent of the damage done to the innermost veil, Matthew notes it was torn into two (εἰς δύο). This irreparable damage manifests the termination of its function. For a detailed examination of the implications of the cessation of the temple’s function, see Daniel M. Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew’s Exposition of the Death of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 187-94.

<sup>51</sup>Gurtner elucidates this when he notes physical accessibility was only granted on the Day of Atonement if the intruder had high priestly status (cf. Heb 9:2-7). Otherwise, the intruder would die. Further, he states, “the raising of the saints (27:52-53) and the profession of the soldiers (27:54) connote *life* in various senses, rather than death.” Gurtner, *The Torn Veil*, 189.

<sup>52</sup>These are the dimensions of the veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (Heb 6:19; 9:13; 10:20; cf. Exod 26:31-35; 2 Chr 3:14), not the curtain over the entrance to the Holy Place (Exod 26:37; Num 3:26). See Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 904-5. Josephus gives a detailed description of the temple curtains in *Antiquities* 3.6.4.

<sup>53</sup>The *velum scissum* symbolically represented the destruction of the temple. However, Beale goes further when he states, “When . . . it is remembered from the Old Testament and early Judaism that on the veil was embroidery of the starry heavens, its tearing would be an apt symbol of the beginning destruction, not only of the temple (which itself even as a whole symbolized the cosmos) but of the very cosmos itself.” The *velum scissum* (Matt 27:51a) and the resurrection of the dead (Matt 27:52b-53), therefore, are signs of the inauguration of the new creation. See G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 17 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 188-92. However, Beale wrongly displaces the resurrection of the many saints (Matt 27:52b-53) in the Matthean Gospel-narrative. He incorrectly locates their resurrection on Easter Sunday.

Covenant requirements to New Covenant realities—all of which were contingent on the death of Jesus (Heb 9:11-10:22). The temple itself, therefore, was no longer sacrosanct.

The tearing of the veil signals the end of the temple as a means of acceptance and communion with God. There would now be a new way through the New Covenant established through the flesh of Jesus (Heb 10:20). The satisfaction of divine justice rendered the Old Covenant obsolete.<sup>54</sup> The fulfillment of the Law's demands whereby the law would now be written on the heart (Jer 31:33; cf. Ezek 36:26-27; 37:14)<sup>55</sup> became effectual because of the death of Jesus. Communion with God is now made possible in this life through a new and living way inaugurated through his flesh.<sup>56</sup> The death of Jesus, therefore, removed the visible symbol of the Old Covenant and commenced the beginning of a new age. Thus, Gurtner states, "The *velum scissum* reveals, in part, the eschatological nature of Jesus' death."<sup>57</sup> The new interim brought about by Jesus' death

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<sup>54</sup>Hence Heb 8:13, ἐν τῷ λέγειν καινὴν πεπαλαίωκεν τὴν πρώτην· τὸ δὲ παλαιούμενον καὶ γηράσκον ἐγγὺς ἀφανισμοῦ.

<sup>55</sup>Jer 31 and Ezek 36-37 reveal the "newness" of the New Covenant. What changed? Malone explains when he writes, "New Covenant membership is defined in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and the NT explanation (Hebrews 8-10) as those who receive the law (the Ten Words in historical context) written upon the heart (regeneration), the forgiveness of sins (justification), and the personal knowledge of God (reconciliation). This separates the New Covenant fulfillment of the promised Covenant of Grace from the Abrahamic Covenant which included the organic seed of Abraham who mostly were unregenerate . . . this means that each New Covenant member is born again by the Holy Spirit into the New Covenant kingdom of God (John 1:12-13, 3:3, 5), that each New Covenant member is justified by faith alone unto the forgiveness of sins (Romans 5:1-2), and that each New Covenant member is effectually reconciled to God as an adopted child of God forever (Galatians 4:4-6)." Fred A. Malone, "Biblical Hermeneutics & Covenant Theology," in *Covenant Theology: A Baptist Distinctive*, ed. Earl M. Blackburn (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2013), 80-81.

<sup>56</sup>Access to God is gained through the flesh, i.e., through the death of Jesus (Matt 27:50-54). Jesus' death actualized the forgiveness of sins and grants access to God (Matt 1:21; 5:8; 26:28). This is made explicit in Heb 10:20. Grammatically, τοῦ καταπετάσματος is in apposition to σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ. Thus, Schreiner states, access to God "is granted through the torn and bloody and dead flesh of Jesus (cf. John 6:50-58). 'Jesus secured access to God's presence 'by means of' his flesh.'" Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 315-17.

<sup>57</sup>Gurtner contends Matthew's presentation of Jesus' cross-death manifests that his death

renders Old Covenant worship obsolete (Heb 8:13) and institutes New Covenant worship in the interim between now and the second coming of Jesus (Rev 19:11-16), the result being access to and communion with God is contingent on the merits of Jesus applied by the Holy Spirit at the command of the Father for all the people of God (Heb 10:19, 21-22).

### **A Resurrection of Holy Ones (Matt 27:52b-53)**

The other event bearing substantial eschatological significance<sup>58</sup> is the bodily resurrection of the dead (Matt 27:52b-53).<sup>59</sup> The tombs of saints were opened as a result of the death of Jesus signifying an immediate reversal of the fall (Matt 27:50, 52; cf. Gen 2:17).<sup>60</sup> The bodies and souls of these saints were temporarily reunited. Their appearance to people who would recognize (Matt 27:53) them is an eschatological foreshadowing when the resurrection of the body would take place (Ezek 37:12-14; cf.

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inaugurates a salvation-historical turning-point as it is depicted in Ezek 37. Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 183. Similarly, Hagner states, "The events themselves are apocalyptic in character and point to the decisive importance of the death of Jesus not only for that generation but for all of subsequent history. There is an air of both judgment and of eschatology in this material." Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 848.

<sup>58</sup>Allison suggests the pericope preserves a primitive Christian eschatology. He states, "Properly interpreted within the Matthean passion, the resurrection of the holy ones and the accompanying signs highlight the redactors theology, for Matthew thought of the end of Jesus as an 'eschatological' event." See Dale C. Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come: An Early Interpretation of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 41-46

<sup>59</sup>The secular historian Thallus reports on the darkness recounted in Matt 27:45. His report supports the historicity of the phenomena recounted in Matt 27:51-53. See Thallus, "The Extant Fragments of the Five Books of Chronography of Julius Africanus" (18:1), in ANF 6, Logos Libronix ECF 1.6.2.1.3.25. Licona made me aware of this source. See also Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 551.

<sup>60</sup>In Matt 27:52 the conjunction καὶ closely connects the two signs in this verse with the three signs in Matt 27:51 as the immediate effect of Jesus yielding the Spirit (Matt 27:50). The result of the divine-σεισμός is tomb-opening bedrock fissures—τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνεώχθησαν—exposing the dead buried within (Matt 27:52).

Dan 12:2; 1 Cor 15:20-23).<sup>61</sup> The new age has begun in the death-resurrection of Jesus.<sup>62</sup>

However, since “this was not the consummate end of the world and the final new creation, the saints who did come out of their tombs (vv.52-53) presumably, like Lazarus, died again at some subsequent point, only to be raised again at the very end of history.”<sup>63</sup>

The question, then, is, “*Who* were these saints?” On the one hand, the text explicitly states these were ἄγίων who had fallen asleep or died prior to the death of Jesus himself.<sup>64</sup> “Sleep”—τῶν κεκοιμημένων—is a euphemism for death in Matthew 27:52.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Matt 27:52b-53 does not recount the great general resurrection from the dead. The resurrection of τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἄγίων is not glorified resurrection (27:52). Rather, as Wright would say, this “is a strange semi-anticipation of it.” The “church is still awaiting the final, complete general resurrection” from the dead. See N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 634.

<sup>62</sup>Matera suggests this resurrection marks the beginning of the new age and alludes to Ezek 37. He states, “God fulfills his ancient promise made through Ezekiel to the covenant people” at the death of the Son of God. This is true, at least in part. See Frank J. Matera, *Passion Narrative and Gospel Theologies: Interpreting the Synoptics through Their Passion Stories*, Studies in Contemporary and Theological Problems, ed. Lawrence Boadt (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 116-17. Commenting on the development of resurrection thought in the early church, Wright states the “theme of Jesus raising other – perhaps all the pre-Christians righteous – to new life is developed in several works from the second century onwards: e.g., *Od. Sol.* 42.11; *Ign. Magn.* 9:2; *Iren. Frag.* 26, making the link with the present passage.” See Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 635.

<sup>63</sup>Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 190. Contra Calvin, who suggested “it is doubtful if this resurrection took place before [Jesus'] resurrection . . . [it is] more probable that, when Christ died, the graves were opened, and that, when he rose, some of the godly, having received life, went out of their graves, and were seen in the city. *For Christ is called the first-born from the dead.*” Emphasis added. See John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. The Calvin Translation Society, *Harmony of the Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 324. Similarly, Bengel argued, “The first who rose from the dead to die no more was Christ . . . [and] after his resurrection, that of the saints also took place.” John Albert Bengel, *Matthew-Acts*, *Bengel's New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1981), 307.

<sup>64</sup>Perhaps these were believers like Simeon (Luke 2:25; see *Acts of Pilate* 17.1) and the prophetess, Anna (Luke 2:36); believers like Lazarus (John 11). Though conjecture, believers who had died in recent history would be capable of providing powerful testimony to the legitimacy of Jesus' divine sonship (the focal point of the pericope!). A raising of Old Testament saints like Abraham, Moses, and David would not provide a witness to τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν filled with Jews who had no idea what these saints look like (Who would believe them?). Therefore, it seems most probable these saints were people others would immediately recognize as they testify to the life-giving power of Jesus' death on the cross (Matt 27:50-53).

<sup>65</sup>In Matt 27:52, τῶν κεκοιμημένων refers to the state of being dead. See BDAG, s.v. “κοιμάω”



Further, the text explicitly states more than one person was raised. The Scripture says many bodies (πολλὰ σώματα) of the ἁγίων were raised. Therefore, this event would have been notable in its impact and influence of the prevailing thought of the day.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, however, the text does not specify their identity or their whereabouts.

“Matthew knows perfectly well . . . that the bodies he speaks about were not still walking around, and he makes no attempt to explain what happened to them.”<sup>67</sup> Though raised, the text merely says the πολλὰ σώματα venture into τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν after the resurrection of Jesus (Matt 27:53).<sup>68</sup> Their precise identification is left ambiguous. Therefore, their precise identification is not necessary for a correct understanding of the pericope or its accompanying theological foci employed by Matthew.

The compositional structure of the entire death-resurrection scene (Matt 27:45-28:20) coupled with Matthew 27:51-54’s intentional placement within the death-resurrection scene places an eschatological emphasis in prominence.<sup>69</sup> The death of Jesus

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Similarly, LSJ suggest κοιμάω can refer to “the sleep of death.” LSJ, “s.v. κοιμάω”

<sup>66</sup>Ignatius may refer to these saints when he speaks of the prophets raised by Jesus (Ign. *Mag.* 9.1-2). I am thankful for Michael Licona’s work for making me aware of this reference. See Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 551.

<sup>67</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 635.

<sup>68</sup>Sim notes the Matthean pericopal-hapax is dependent upon Ezek 37. Further, he sees the resurrection of the dead as one of two eschatological end-time events that must take place prior to judgment. According to him, the pericope is an attempt by Matthew to preserve “the Christian tradition of the primacy of Jesus’ resurrection.” David C. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, NTS 88 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 110-11. Similarly, Aus suggests the application of Matt 27:51b-53 to Jesus’ crucifixion is a “Judaic interpretation of 1 Samuel 28 as the Day of Judgment.” His death “signified for his followers the real turn of the ages, is such a reality, such a religious truth. However, he wrongly concludes “Matt 27:51b-53 is not ‘historical,’ it is ‘true’ in a religious sense.” Roger D. Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus: Three Early Palestinian Jewish Christian Gospel Haggadoth*, South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 105 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 115, 120, 124, 130, 132.

<sup>69</sup>See Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come*, 41-46; and Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 110-28.

calls a new people into being (Matt 27:54; cf. 4:15-16). Yet, God does not forsake the saints of his covenant (Matt 27:52b). Contrary to the taunts of the passersby (Matt 27:40) and the chief priests (Matt 27:42), the Son of God did not come to save himself. Rather, as Watson states, “Jesus dies on behalf of others and as their substitute [in Matthew’s Gospel] . . . Others are saved while he is lost; they are saved, but at his expense.”<sup>70</sup> The Son of God’s death is neither an end nor an unimaginable disaster. Rather, it is a victory over sin and death and hell. Therefore, Hilary of Poitiers, stated,

The earth shook . . . Rocks were split, for the Word of God and the power of his eternal goodness rushed in, penetrating every stronghold and principality. Graves were opened, for the gates of death had been unlocked. And a number of the bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep arose. Dispelling the shadows of death illuminating the darkness of hell, Christ destroyed the spoils of hell at the resurrection of the saints.<sup>71</sup>

The Son of God died so that others may live. The resurrection of the dead manifests his death is actually the cause of life. Hence, when he died others were resurrected to life. The resurrection of the sleeping-saints at his death is an eschatological sign testifying to his divine-identity as the Son of God.<sup>72</sup> Though the resurrection of the sleeping saints is the climactic sign, the crescendo of the revelatory sign-series is the confession of the centurion, and his entourage—Jesus *is* the Son of God (Matt 27:54). The faith-

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<sup>70</sup>Francis Watson, *The Fourfold Gospel: A Theological Reading of the New Testament Portraits of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 152-53.

<sup>71</sup>Manlio Simonetti, *Matthew 14-28*, ACCS, vol. 1b, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 297.

<sup>72</sup>Hence, Matt 9:24, ἀναχωρεῖτε, οὐ γὰρ ἀπέθανεν τὸ κοράσιον ἀλλὰ καθεύδει. Jesus raised the sleeping-dead-girl in Matt 9:25 as a testimony to his divine-identity. In Matt 27:52b he raised the saints by his death. Apollinaris argued, “It is plain that [the saints] have died again, having risen from the dead in order to be a sign.” See Simonetti, *Matthew 14-28*, 297. Bauer notes God reveals Jesus’ divine sonship through the signs accompanying his death. David R. Bauer, “The Major Characters of Matthew’s Story: Their Function and Significance,” in *Gospel Interpretation: Narrative-Critical & Social Scientific Approaches*, ed. Jack D. Kingsbury (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 29.

confession of the guard manifests “the ultimate design of the temple was beginning to be fulfilled in Jesus . . . Yahweh’s revelatory presence was extending out beyond the boundaries of ethnic Israel to include Gentiles.”<sup>73</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Three critical theological planks serve as interpretive guides supporting a literary reading of Matthew 27:51-54 as definitive for a correct understanding of both the pericope itself and its accompanying theological foci employed by Matthew. The intentional placement of Matthew 27:51-54 within the death-resurrection scene emphasizes the theological meaning latent in this Matthean pericope—Christology, missiology, and eschatology. The extraordinary signs accompanying Jesus’ death (cf. Matt 27:51-53) portray Jesus as the Son of God (Matt 27:54) and prepare Matthew’s readers for the intrusion of eschatological resurrection on Easter morning (Matt 28:1-10). The stage is set in Matthew’s Gospel-narrative for the public vindication of Jesus before his enemies—he is not dead, he rose just as he said that he would (Matt 28:6 cf. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19). Matthew’s resurrection narrative in chapter 28 brings the plot of his Gospel to its resolution. Jesus’ “greater” resurrection is what the religious leaders were afraid of, it proved that they were wrong about him—he *is* the Son of God. His “greater” resurrection proves to his doubting disciples he is truly alive and he does have “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matt 28:18). His “greater” resurrection gives hope to all of his followers, for they know that Jesus is the resurrected Son of God. He has conquered sin and death and hell. And now, the Son of God is “God with us” (Acts 1:8,

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<sup>73</sup>Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 191; Gurtner, *The Torn Veil*, 188-89.

2:4; 1 Cor 6:19; Eph 1:13-14) as his people go about proclaiming his gospel, a gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins (Matt 28:20 cf. 1:23).

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### Summary

The grammar of the death-resurrection scene points forward toward a literary reading based on the compositional structure of the words themselves as well as their exact placement in the pericope. A literary reading of a text incorporates a historical-grammatical exegesis and a presumed theological significance by means of architectonic interpretive keys that both construct and relate different phenomena toward the intended theological meaning.<sup>1</sup> The architectural process of construction and relation (both building *and* connecting) becomes the hermeneutical key to understanding seemingly irreconcilable texts with corresponding theological ideas.

J. W. Wenham's seminal article became the impetus for a shift in interpretation of Matthew 27:51-54 by various theologians who separated the first three portents from the latter two resulting in a displacement of the pericope in the Matthean narrative. Questions emerging from this practice rendered the text all but un-interpretable as to its theological meaning. In the contemporary context, the resulting interpretive dichotomy

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<sup>1</sup>Anthony Esolen, *Out of the Ashes: Rebuilding American Culture* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2017), 56-61. Esolen's use of the term "architectonic" incorporates his conception of grammar as a means that both builds and relates one idea to another. It breaks the bounds of language and relates the foundational elements of grammar (organization, observation, and manipulation) to other human sciences viewing them as "grammatical in structure." Grammar, therefore, is never to be understood as disconnected idioms isolated from other academic disciplines. To the contrary, by "thinking grammatically" a more holistic approach toward other academic thought other than language opens new understandings from existing words and ideas toward newfound realizations of intention and meaning.

has obscured the function and meaning of the pericope and established two distinct and opposing readings.

Matthew 27:51-54 is the *crux interpretum* enabling an examination of corresponding resurrection texts (both prophetic and apostolic) that provide interpretive clues toward a resolution between the interpretive polarities. Lexical thought connections compared with Matthew 28:1-15 reveal a parallelism whereby Matthew emphasizes the death-resurrection scene of Jesus as regulative for the resurrection of the saints in Matthew 27:52b-53. Ezekiel 37:1-14 provides the primary prophetic witness for which the resurrection of the saints is foreshadowed and, thereby, partially fulfilled in Matthew 27:52b-53. Examination of each *passivum divinum* is connected by a coordinating conjunction that manifests the entire pericope as one textual hinge in the death-resurrection scene.

Matthew 27:52b-53 is yet another sign bearing theological ramifications at Jesus' cross-death. As such, it becomes the lens whereby the cumulative theological effect of the pericope is constructed. Each portent, therefore, builds toward a theological crescendo evidenced by the centurion's confession. The events of the text are transposed to broader antinomous theological realities taking place simultaneously. Identification of Jesus as the Son of God by the soldiers attending to the crucifixion bears Christological import whereby he becomes the focus for future missiological endeavors as evidenced by the eschatological realities of the *velum scissum* and the resurrection of the sleeping saints in this pericope.

A literary reading of Matthew 27:51-54 encompassing Christology, missiology, and eschatology facilitates a holistic reading of the text whereby historicity

and theological meaning are fused to form a complete picture of what is accomplished at the cross-death event. The bifurcation commonly accepted by many scholars does not fully understand the historical cross-death as it directly relates to the resurrection as evidence of the accomplishment procured by Jesus. To separate the syntax of the grammar from the theological imperative renders the entire event in this text as mythological or legend. This text is a sign of the work of Christ whereby Matthew incorporated the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy at this particular point in time with future effects evidenced by a historical and bodily resurrection of the dead at the time of Jesus' finished cross-work. 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.

### Further Study

Areas of research exist where more work could be done in relation to Matthew 27:51-54. First, the *velum scissum* (Matt 27:51a) partially fulfilled the *Beatific Vision* in the Matthean Gospel-narrative by making the inaccessible God accessible and visible (Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4).<sup>2</sup> The response of the centurion and those with him to the revelatory sign-series—ἀληθως θεοῦ υἱὸς ἦν οὗτος (Matt 27:54)—harkens the reader back to Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount, μακάριοι οἱ καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν θεὸν ὁψονται (Matt 5:8).<sup>3</sup> In Matthew's Gospel the invisible God is *seen* in the face of the Crucified—Jesus, Son of God (Matt 27:54; cf. 2 Cor 4:6). This

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18; 3:12; Heb 1:3; 4:16.

<sup>3</sup>This is the highest knowledge of God of which creatures are capable. See also Job 42:5; Ps 11:7; 1 Cor 13:12; Heb 12:14; 1 John 3:2; Rev 22:4.

dissertation did not assert the partial fulfillment of the *Beatific Vision*, but rather to state the satisfaction of divine justice rendered the Old Covenant obsolete (Matt 27:51a; Heb 8:13). The fulfillment of the Law's demands whereby the law would now be written on the heart (Jer 31:33; cf. Ezek 36:26-27; 37:14) became effectual because of the death of Jesus, the Son of God (Matt 27:45-50). Communion with God is now made possible in this life through a new and living way inaugurated through the torn veil of Jesus' flesh (Heb 10:20).

The death of Jesus removed the visible symbol of the Old Covenant and commenced the beginning of a new age. Therefore, this dissertation did not trace the concept of the *Beatific Vision* in the Matthean Gospel-narrative and its links to the death-resurrection scene (Matt 27:45-28:20). However, the *Beatific Vision* is partially realized in the death-resurrection of the Jesus (Matt 1:18-25; cf. John 1:14). Access to and communion with God are actualized through the merits of Jesus on the cross (Matt 27:45-54). Although other works address the issue of the *velum scissum* none appear to address its implications for New Covenant worship in relation to the *Beatific Vision* from this Matthean pericope. A more in-depth study would be useful to both scholars and the church. The *velum scissum* (Matt 27:51a) rendered Old Covenant worship obsolete (Heb 8:13) and instituted New Covenant worship in the interim between now and the second coming of Jesus (Rev 19:11-16).

Second, New Covenant worship in communion with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit is contingent on the accomplishment of Jesus' cross-death. John Owen notes the primary benefit of worship under the New Covenant is knowing God explicitly in his triune manifestation. Christian worship depends on the Father as the origin of all divine



grace; the Son as the One who actualizes the forgiveness of sins through his atonement; the Spirit as the One who individually applies divine grace. Owen stresses the work of each person in the work of redemption.<sup>4</sup>

Matthew 27:51-54 is a Trinitarian text as it reveals the glory of the Triune God in the exclusive work of the three persons in redemption. Public worship, therefore, is a primary means whereby Christians celebrate the work of each of the three persons--especially the work of the Son of God. Trinitarian thought is embedded in the knowledge of God in divine revelation, but at the moment of the *velum scissum* the innermost veil symbolizes the new reality of unhindered worship between God and humankind. Further research is needed in examination of this text as an explicitly Trinitarian text and its implications for New Covenant worship.

Third, Matthew 27:51-54 has been appropriated hermeneutically to advocate *descensus Christi ad infernos*—Christ’s descent into hell. Trinitarian thought has held a consensus view emanating from the first fifteen centuries of the church that Jesus did, in fact, descend into hell during the interim between his death and resurrection. In this act he preached and released the righteous dead of the Old Testament.<sup>5</sup>

Further research as to the extent of this act reaching back to the earliest teaching of the church based on this text could build on the literary reading capacities developed in this dissertation. The roadmap articulated in this study could easily form the basis for future study whereby seemingly conflicting texts could be understood as the

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<sup>4</sup>Ryan M. McGraw, “Trinitarian Doxology: Reassessing John Owen’s Contribution to Reformed Orthodox Trinitarian Theology,” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 41, no. 2 (2015): 38-68.

<sup>5</sup>See Bass for a recent treatment of the *Descensus* view. Justin Bass, *The Battle for the Keys: Revelation 1:18 and Christ’s Descent into the Underworld* (Eugene, OR: Paternoster, 2014).

basis for a more holistic view of what exactly happened in the interim between the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

A better understanding of the accomplishment of Jesus in his atonement from this text could impact the view of the location and activity of Jesus in the interim between his crucifixion and resurrection. This text—with all the resulting phenomena immediately following the death of Jesus—further the question as to what took place on the cross and where he was spiritually located immediately upon death. The atonement, therefore, bears critical importance to the events in the wake of Jesus' death.<sup>6</sup> How revealed truth impacts Christian orthodoxy can be further explored by a literary reading of this text

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<sup>6</sup>For further study on the accomplishment and impact of the atonement, see John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2007), 188-90; Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning & Significance* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1983), 160-61; and John R. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 193.

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## ABSTRACT

### I SEE DEAD PEOPLE: THE FUNCTION OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE SAINTS IN MATTHEW 27:51-54

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The grammar of the death-resurrection scene points forward toward a literary reading based on the compositional structure of the words themselves as well as their exact placement in the pericope. A literary reading of a text incorporates an historical-grammatical exegesis and a presumed theological significance by means of architectonic interpretive keys that both construct and relate different phenomena toward the intended theological meaning. The architectural process of construction and relation (both building *and* connecting) becomes the hermeneutical key to understanding seemingly irreconcilable texts with corresponding theological ideas.

J. W. Wenham's seminal article became the impetus for a shift in interpretation of Matthew 27:51-54 by various theologians who separated the first three portents from the latter two resulting in a displacement of the pericope in the Matthean narrative. Questions emerging from this practice rendered the text all but un-interpretable as to its theological meaning. In the contemporary context, the resulting interpretive dichotomy has obscured the function and meaning of the pericope and established two distinct and opposing readings.

Matthew 27:51-54 is the *crux interpretum* enabling an examination of corresponding resurrection texts (both prophetic and apostolic) that provide interpretive clues toward a resolution between the interpretive polarities. Lexical thought connections compared with Matthew 28:1-15 reveal a parallelism whereby Matthew emphasizes the death-resurrection scene of Jesus as regulative for the resurrection of the saints in Matthew 27:52b-53. Ezekiel 37:1-14 provides the primary prophetic witness for which the resurrection of the saints is foreshadowed and, thereby, partially fulfilled in Matthew 27:52b-53. Examination of each *passivum divinum* is connected by a coordinating conjunction that manifests the entire pericope as one textual hinge in the death-resurrection scene.

Matthew 27:52b-53 is a yet another sign bearing theological ramifications at Jesus' cross-death. As such, it becomes the lens whereby the cumulative theological effect of the pericope is constructed. Each portent, therefore, builds toward a theological crescendo evidenced by the centurion's confession. The events of the text are transposed to broader antinomous theological realities taking place simultaneously. Identification of Jesus as the Son of God by the soldiers attending to the crucifixion bears Christological import whereby he becomes the focus for future missiological endeavors as evidenced by the eschatological realities of the *velum scissum* and the resurrection of the sleeping saints in this pericope.

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Appendix for “From Slight Peg to Corner Stone to Capstone: The Resurrection of Christ on ‘The Third Day’ according to the Scriptures.” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 76, no. 2 (2014): 371-409.

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