



PARTICIPANT HANDOUT: CLIFFHANGER

Session 5: Mount Tabor

Jesus' Power over Death

Holy Scripture provides us with an astonishing account of a miracle that occurred upon the death and resurrection of Jesus. This account is described in two short sentences, and is found only in the Gospel of Matthew:

At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

(Matthew 27:51-53 NIV)

What an incredible witness to the glory and deity of Jesus Christ these resurrected people provided to everyone they encountered on the streets of Jerusalem! Can you imagine running into a long-deceased relative at the market or outside the Temple—possibly a grandparent—someone who had been a great influence in your faith in the one true and living God? What an amazing experience that would be!

Much mystery surrounds this scriptural account, but Matthew thought it was important enough to be included in his Gospel. Joseph Benson (1749–1821), an English Methodist minister and writer of biblical commentary, helps to shed some light on the meaning of this miraculous event.

Benson believes this event was a fulfillment of Christ's prophecy in John 5:25 (NIV): "Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live." Colossians 1:18 tells us that Jesus is the head of the church and the beginning and the firstborn (or first-fruit) from among the dead. Those who were raised from the dead immediately upon the death of Jesus stayed in their tombs until the moment of his resurrection. Then they left their tombs and went into Jerusalem, where they appeared to many people. Benson postulates that these resurrected people were a kind of "first-fruits" of Jesus' power over death.²

The identity of these resurrected individuals is unclear. Some scholars believe they were great people of faith from the Old Testament times, such as Moses and Elijah. But many believe the resurrected persons were more recently deceased people who possibly knew Jesus during their lifetimes and believed in him—people whom the population of Jerusalem would know and recognize. Either way, this event is a powerful witness to the power of our risen Lord and a great encouragement for all of those who believe in him.

1 Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

2 Joseph Benson, "Matthew 27:52-53" in "Matthew 27: Benson Commentary," *Benson Commentary on the Old and New Testaments* (New York: T. Carlton and J. Porter, 1857), Bible Hub, accessed May 9, 2019, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/benson/matthew/27.htm>.