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## The Resurrection of Saints at the Death of Christ

The death of Jesus on the cross was accompanied by some astounding miracles, which are enumerated in Matt. 27:51-53: "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, and the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose and came out of the graves after His resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared unto many."

Much has been said, more can be said, about each of these miracles; but this article concerns itself with, and restricts itself to, the last-mentioned occurrence: the opening of the graves and the resurrection of saints.

*Did these saints arise with mortal bodies or with glorified bodies?*

If we read these words carefully, we find that the account is very vivid, as evidenced by the interjection "behold" and the connective "and" repeated after each miracle. Reading these verses with simplicity of mind, we learn that, when Jesus yielded up the ghost, there were a number of happenings: the veil of the Temple was rent in twain; the earth did quake; the rocks were rent; the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose. As far as we are able to find, there was never a voice heard among the interpreters of Scripture which did not look upon these events as happening simultaneously, and indeed that is the plain meaning of vv. 51 and 52.

Devoting our special study to the second part of v. 52 and v. 53, we read that the bodies of the saints that slept arose. Later on we read that they came out of the graves and went into the holy city and appeared unto many. Our Bible therefore distinguishes between arising and coming out of their graves, and this is in entire harmony with the original Greek. The Greek uses the word ἠγέρθησαν, the Pass. Aor. of ἐγείρω, "to rouse from sleep." The form may be translated, "They were awakened" or, "They woke up." Both fit well into the context. Only the body sleeps, only the body can awaken. Since death is here called sleep, the awakening from death can be nothing else than the return to life. Thus we find that, when these graves were opened, the bodies in those graves returned to life when they were awakened by God. The words simply can mean nothing else, neither do we know of any one who interprets them otherwise.

V. 53 makes three further statements concerning these saints. The subject now is οἱ ἅγιοι, as seen from the masculine form of the participle. The sentence has two predicates: they "went into the holy city"; they "appeared unto many." Besides these predicates



there is the participle ἐξεληθέντες. A translation that would give force to the participle construction would read about as follows: "And having come out of their graves, they went into the holy city." We note that the bodies were brought back to life — they came out of their graves; they went into the holy city and appeared unto many. So far everything is easy. But now we find the further words μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ, after His resurrection. These words are easy to translate, but harder to understand because they may be connected with one of two verbs. They can be construed with ἐξεληθέντες. Then we translate: "And when they had come out of their graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city." Or they can be connected with εἰσηλθόν, and we would then translate: "And having come out of their graves, they went into the holy city after His resurrection." Grammatically there would be no objection to either of the renderings; and that being the case, we look for other canons of interpretation which may guide us to the proper understanding of this verse. It is an elementary maxim of interpretation that, if two interpretations are grammatically possible, one of them, however, is ludicrous, the latter should be rejected in favor of one that is not. An instance: When we read, Luke 23:43, that Jesus said to the dying thief: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise," we know that the word "today" can grammatically be connected with the preceding words, making the entire passage read thus: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee today, Thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." We are perfectly right in rejecting this interpretation, not because it is grammatically impossible but because it is ludicrous.

Now, what picture do we get if we connect these words "after His resurrection" with the participle "after they came out"? We have seen that at the death of Jesus the graves opened and these bodies were made alive. Now, if the words "after His resurrection" should go with ἐξεληθέντες, we have the impossible thought that, after being made alive, these saints remained lying in their graves unto the third day and that they then came forth! How simple and reasonable is the situation that arises when we connect the words "after His resurrection" with their following action of coming into the city. They were made alive at the death of Christ and, of course, came out of their graves; and after they had come out of their graves, they did not at once enter the holy city, but did so after three days, as witnesses of Christ's resurrection and as an assurance of our own resurrection.

We next read, as the English Bible has it: "They appeared unto many." The Greek word here used is ἐφανίζεσθαι. We must not only know what this word means, but we must also pay atten-



tion to its voice and tense. It is evidently derived from the same stem as the adjective ἐμφανής, which means visible, manifest, clear. The first meaning of the verb is, therefore, "to make visible." By an easy and common metaphor we may also translate it "to make known." The verb is used ten times in the New Testament and in each instance can be shown to have the meaning "to make visible," "to make known." In secular literature it is used in the same sense.

Looking now at the voice of the verb, we see that it is the passive. That seems to present no difficulty. If the active means "to make visible," the passive should mean "to be made visible," and we should translate our text, "They were made visible." There could be no real objection to such translation; but before we come to this decision, it will be well to study and compare other instances in literature where this verb is used in the passive voice.

We find several passives of this verb in secular writers, one being *Diog. Laert.*, Prol. 7. Diogenes is speaking of the magi who claim that the gods ἐμφανίζεσθαι αὐτοῖς, which practically all translators render "appear to them." We do not find fault with this translation, but would state that the form ἐμφανίζεσθαι need not necessarily be accepted as the passive since the middle voice would have the same form in the present tense. If we regard it as middle, the translation "to appear" would be an instance of the intransitive or reflexive use of the middle voice. We should, however, probably accept it as passive, and we must not be surprised that even those who consider it so, translate it "appear." It is a matter of elementary knowledge that during the Koine period the forms of the middle voice were being more and more obliterated by the passive. This tendency goes through the entire Koine. But while the forms of the middle were gradually being eliminated, this does not mean that there was no longer a middle voice in later Greek. The fact is that the forms of the passive voice are used for both the passive and middle ideas, and it is always a question of context how such passive forms should be translated, whether they should be looked upon as passive in meaning or as middle in meaning. There is no presumption one way or the other, and where the context does not decide, a translator must not be censured when he prefers to translate a passive form as having a passive meaning. Thus, in the text before us, the translation "They were made visible" could not be regarded as wrong. We are ready to admit, however, that the noted authorities we have for the acceptance of this word in Diogenes as having a middle rather than a passive meaning have much in their favor. A second instance of the passive form of this verb is found in Josephus, *Antiquities*, I, 13, 1, where he speaks of



God's appearing to Abraham, using the form *ἐφανερωθείς*. Here we have a passive form which most authorities again translate "appeared." For reasons above stated, we are again willing to accept this translation. We then have pointed to two instances where the passive forms of this verb are generally accepted to have the intransitive meaning "to appear." In this connection it may be stated that Josephus lived close to the end of the first century and Diogenes at least 100 years later. Both of them, therefore, flourished at a time when the tendency toward the use of the passive with the meaning of the middle was becoming more pronounced. Yet both these authors make frequent use of the middle forms also.

The next question is, What kind of an "appearing" is described by these two authors? The answer is: An appearing whereby the deity became visible. "To become visible" may have two meanings: Pike's Peak is a very large and, therefore, visible object; yet it is not visible to a person living in Minnesota. As we travel west, Pike's Peak becomes visible, which means that it comes into sight. That is one meaning of "to become visible," that an object which by its nature is a visible object comes into sight. But that is not the meaning we find in Diogenes or Josephus. Both of them speak of the divinity becoming visible. Evidently this does not mean that the divinity approached and, as it came closer, came into sight. Here we have a case of an object which, being by its nature and essence invisible, takes on the quality of visibility, becoming a visible object. Coming back to our text, we have no objection if any one wishes to translate *ἐφανερωθήσαν* "They appeared," in the sense that they became visible, using that term "to become visible" in the same sense in which we found it in Josephus and Diogenes.

A third meaning of the passive (middle) which also comes into consideration is the reflexive meaning, which would fit in very well in the examples just quoted, that the gods made themselves visible to the magi and that God made Himself visible to Abraham. As a matter of fact, that is exactly what happened when God appeared to Abraham; He became visible by making Himself visible. On the other hand, in the historical development of the Greek language the reflexive meaning of passive forms was not very common. The later Greek prefers the English method of using the active voice with the reflexive pronoun. The New Testament has an instance of *ἐφανερωθῆναι* used in a reflexive sense, that being John 14:21, where Jesus tells His disciples that He would manifest Himself to them, and He there uses the active voice with the reflexive pronoun. We have, however, one instance where the passive voice seems to have reflexive meaning, that being in Heb. 9:24, where it is said of Jesus that He entered into heaven itself "now to appear in the presence of God for us," *νῦν ἐφανερωθῆναι*



τῷ προσώπῳ τοῦ θεοῦ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν. Here the word seems to have a forensic meaning. The passage offers difficulty not only for its translation but also for its proper conception. It describes one phase of Christ's state of exaltation; and even here the passive idea is not entirely excluded, since the Bible frequently describes Jesus not as the subject but as the object of exaltation, ascribing the various stages of His exaltation not to His own operation but to the action of the Father, as we read in Phil. 2:9 that God exalted Him. Wilke-Grimm has the following note: "*De Christo coram deo in coelis se sistente*" (concerning Christ as placing Himself in heaven before God). That seems a very good understanding of the passage.

Summing up, therefore, the meaning of this word, we follow such dictionaries as Wahl, Thayer, Wilke-Grimm, Bauer, Ebeling, Preuschen, Schirlitz, Liddell and Scott, and others and translate it "to make visible," or with a common and easy metaphor "to make known," "to inform," and we translate the passive "to become visible," without, however, finding fault with any one who wishes to translate this passive form as having passive meaning.

We now look at the tense of the form in our text. We find that it is the aorist. This tense usually relates an event, simply telling us what happened. It is not generally used in a durative sense, does not describe a condition which prevailed over a considerable length of time, but rather tells us of an occurrence. Thus, we get the picture that these saints went into the holy city and that, when they got there, something happened. They became visible, which means, in full accordance with the meaning we found in secular literature, that they took on the quality of visibility. It is not surprising, therefore, that we now read the next word πολλοῖς, "to many." If they had become generally visible, there would be no additional meaning attached to the word "many." Why should the Bible tell us that they appeared and grew visible to many if they were generally visible, to be seen by every one at any time? We find, therefore, a very definite indication that they were not generally visible.

And now let us inquire into the bearing all this has on the question that we are attempting to answer: Did these saints arise with glorified bodies or with mortal bodies? Before applying what we have learned to the case at issue, we should bear in mind the general rule given in Heb. 9:27: "It is appointed unto man once to die," not twice, but once. To die twice is, therefore, an exception to the general rule, and the burden of proof rests upon him who contends that any individual died twice. It is true that God is Master of His own creation and can therefore make exceptions; in fact, it seems He has done so. In those well-known cases of resur-



rection in the Old and in the New Testament, that of Lazarus, the young man at Nain, the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Sarepta, and the son of the Shunamite, it is generally accepted that these persons were raised with mortal bodies and were therefore subject to a second death. In these cases, however, there was an element which is entirely absent in the case before us: The former were raised from the dead by the Lord in order to restore them to their loved ones. We may therefore presume that they again lived the life of an ordinary human being. God raised them with a purpose which is not discernible in the text now under consideration, giving us no reason to assume an exception to the general rule that man dies once. But it seems to this writer that the language of this text very plainly indicates that these saints had a glorified body. Why should it be said of persons having an ordinary mortal body that they became visible? We find no such words at the resurrection of Lazarus and others who were brought back to life, presumably with a mortal body. A mortal body does not become visible, but is by its very nature visible. And, furthermore, how can we imagine a human, mortal, ordinary body which is not generally visible but only visible to many? We have, furthermore, established the fact that there was an interval between their coming forth from the graves and their entrance into the holy city. Where were they in the mean time? Lenski answers that in a striking way: "They were where Jesus remained in the intervals between His appearances during the forty days after His resurrection. God had no trouble to find a place for these saints to stay." Now, while with a very vivid imagination one can conceive of these men with mortal bodies remaining in hiding for several days outside of Jerusalem, being seen by no one, yet the whole situation is so much simpler and easier to accept if we take it that they had glorified bodies and remained invisible except at such times when according to the will of God they became visible to some and not to others.

Giving full weight to the meaning of the words and to the entire situation created by the context, we therefore follow Origen, Jerome, Calov, Ebeling (tract), the *Weimarsche Bibelwerk*, F. W. Schmitt (Proceedings of Eastern District, 1876), Lenski, and others, and conclude that these dead arose not with mortal bodies but with glorified bodies.

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