

Revelation 16:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.

Analysis

And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.... This verse from Revelation's vision of seven bowls of wrath - final judgments, battle of armageddon, babylon's fall announced employs apocalyptic imagery rich with Old Testament allusions and symbolic meaning. The Greek text uses vivid apocalyptic language characteristic of Jewish prophetic literature, drawing heavily from Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Zechariah.

The symbolism must be interpreted within its first-century context while recognizing timeless spiritual realities. The imagery would resonate powerfully with persecuted believers facing Roman imperial cult worship, providing hope that despite present suffering, Christ reigns sovereign and will consummate His kingdom. The apocalyptic genre uses symbolic numbers (seven, twelve, 144,000), colors, beasts, and cosmic imagery to convey theological truth rather than photographic descriptions.

Christologically, Revelation consistently exalts Jesus as the victorious Lamb, the faithful witness, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Every vision ultimately points to Christ's supremacy, His finished redemptive work, and His certain return to judge the living and dead and establish the new creation.

Historical Context

John received this revelation circa AD 95 during Domitian's persecution, exiled on Patmos for his testimony. The seven churches of Asia Minor faced increasing pressure to participate in emperor worship and pagan religious practices. Refusal meant economic hardship, social ostracism, and potential martyrdom. Understanding this context illuminates Revelation's encouragement to faithful endurance.

The apocalyptic genre was familiar to first-century Jewish and Christian readers. Rather than newspaper-style predictions, apocalyptic literature uses symbolic imagery to reveal spiritual realities behind earthly events, encourage the faithful, warn the unfaithful, and assert God's ultimate sovereignty over history. Parallels with Daniel, Ezekiel, and intertestamental apocalyptic writings would help original readers decode the symbols.

Rome's imperial cult demanded worship of Caesar as divine, placing Christians in impossible situations—compromise their faith or face persecution. Revelation identifies Rome as "Babylon" and assures believers that despite appearances, the Lamb conquered through His death and resurrection, and all earthly kingdoms will submit to His reign.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does Revelation 16:18 reveal God's character, particularly His sovereignty, holiness, and justice?

2. What specific encouragement or warning does this verse offer for maintaining faithful Christian witness amid cultural pressure?
3. How does this passage point to Christ's victory and the hope of new creation, and how should that shape your present priorities?

Interlinear Text

καὶ ἐγένοντο φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ ἀστραπαὶ καὶ
 And there was voices And thunders And lightnings And
 G2532 G1096 G5456 G2532 G1027 G2532 G796 G2532

σεισμὸς ἐγένοντο μέγας οὕτος οὐκ ἐγένοντο ἀφ' οὐ
 an earthquake there was a great such as not there was since
 G4578 G1096 G3173 G3634 G3756 G1096 G575 G3739

οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἐγένοντο ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς τηλικοῦτος
 G3588 men there was upon G3588 the earth so mighty
 G444 G1096 G1909 G1093 G5082

σεισμὸς οὕτως μέγας
 an earthquake and so a great
 G4578 G3779 G3173

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 4:5 (Light): And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

Revelation 11:19 (Light): And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

Revelation 11:13 (Parallel theme): And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.

Daniel 12:1 (Sin): And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.

Revelation 6:12 (Parallel theme): And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;

Revelation 8:5 (Light): And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.

Matthew 24:21 (Sin): For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org