

Revelation 16:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood.

Analysis

The third angel pouring his vial on rivers and fountains, turning them to blood, parallels Egypt's first plague (Exodus 7:19-21). This judgment strikes fresh water sources, making them undrinkable and deadly. The completeness ('became blood') emphasizes total corruption, not partial contamination. Reformed theology sees these judgments as both literal and symbolic—literal consequences of sin's curse on creation, symbolic of spiritual death. The progression from sea (v. 3) to fresh water sources shows comprehensive judgment affecting all water—nowhere to escape contamination. This answers the martyrs' blood shed unjustly (v. 6).

Historical Context

Water sources were vital for ancient cities' survival. Contaminated water brought disease and death. The plague recalls Egypt's judgment for enslaving Israel. First-century believers understood this imagery as just recompense—persecutors who shed believers' blood would themselves thirst, finding only blood to drink. The reversal emphasized divine justice.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does the contamination of life-sustaining water sources illustrate the comprehensive reach of God's judgments?
2. What does the connection to martyrs' blood (v. 6) teach about God's justice in answering innocent suffering?

Interlinear Text

καὶ ὁ τρίτος ἄγγελος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ εἰς
And G3588 the third angel poured out G3588 vial G846 upon G1519
G2532 G5154 G32 G1632 G5357 G5204 G2532

τοὺς ποταμοὺς καὶ εἰς τὰς πηγὰς τῶν ὑδάτων καὶ
G3588 the rivers And upon G3588 fountains G3588 of waters And
G4215 G2532 G1519 G4077 G5204 G2532

ἐγένετο αἷμα
they became blood
G1096 G129

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 14:7 (Parallel theme): Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

Revelation 16:5 (Parallel theme): And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus.

Isaiah 50:2 (Parallel theme): Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? when I called, was there none to answer? Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver? behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness: their fish stinketh, because there is no water, and dieth for thirst.

Hosea 13:15 (Parallel theme): Though he be fruitful among his brethren, an east wind shall come, the wind of the LORD shall come up from the wilderness, and his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up: he shall spoil the treasure of all pleasant vessels.

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