

Revelation 17:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:

Analysis

And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:... This verse from Revelation's vision of babylon the harlot - false religion, political-religious alliance judged 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

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does Revelation 17:1 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 ἦλθεν εἰς ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλων τῶν ἔχόντων
And there came one of which the seven angels which had
G2532 G2064 G1520 G1537 G3588 G2033 G32 G3588 G2192

τῶν ἑπτὰ φιάλας καὶ ἐλάλησεν μετ' ἐμοῦ λέγων
which the seven vials And talked with me saying
G3588 G2033 G5357 G2532 G2980 G3326 G1700 G3004

μοι, Δεῦρο δείξω σοι τῶν κρίμα τῶν
unto me Come hither I will shew unto thee which the judgment which
G3427 G1204 G1166 G4671 G3588 G2917 G3588

πόρνης τῶν μεγάλης τῶν καθημένης ἐπὶ τῶν ὑδάτων
whore which of the great which that sitteth upon which waters
G4204 G3588 G3173 G3588 G2521 G1909 G3588 G5204

τῶν πολλῶν
which many
G3588 G4183

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 19:2 (Judgment): For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.

Jeremiah 51:13 (Parallel theme): O thou that dwellest upon many waters, abundant in treasures, thine end is come, and the measure of thy covetousness.

Revelation 16:19 (Judgment): And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.

Revelation 21:9 (Parallel theme): And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.

Revelation 15:1 (Judgment): And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.

Isaiah 1:21 (Judgment): How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers.

Jeremiah 2:20 (Parallel theme): For of old time I have broken thy yoke, and burst thy bands; and thou saidst, I will not transgress; when upon every high hill and under every green tree thou wanderest, playing the harlot.

Isaiah 57:3 (Parallel theme): But draw near hither, ye sons of the sorceress, the seed of the adulterer and the whore.