

Revelation 17:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.

Analysis

And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.... 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

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does Revelation 17:16 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	τὰ	δέκα	κέρατα	ἃ	εἶδες	ἐπὶ	τὸ	θηρίου
And	G3588	the ten	horns	which	thou sawest	upon	G3588	the beast
G2532		G1176	G2768	G3739	G1492	G1909		G2342
οὗτοι	μισήσουσιν	τὴν	πόρνην	καὶ	ἡρημωμένην			
these	shall hate	G3588	the whore	And	desolate			
G3778	G3404		G4204	G2532	G2049			
ποιήσουσιν	αὐτήν	καὶ	γυμνήν	καὶ	τὰς	σάρκας	αὐτήν	
shall make	her	And	naked	And	G3588	flesh	her	
G4160	G846	G2532	G1131	G2532		G4561	G846	
φάγονται	καὶ	αὐτήν	κατακαύσουσιν	ἐν	πυρί			
shall eat	And	her	burn	with	fire			
G5315	G2532	G846	G2618	G1722	G4442			

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 18:8 (Parallel theme): Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.

Leviticus 21:9 (Parallel theme): And the daughter of any priest, if she profane herself by playing the whore, she profaneth her father: she shall be burnt with fire.

Revelation 18:19 (Parallel theme): And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate.