

Revelation 20:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

Analysis

And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.... This verse from Revelation's vision of millennium, satan bound, final rebellion, great white throne - ultimate justice 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

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does Revelation 20:13 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 ἔδωκαν τὰ θάλασσα τὰ ἐν αὐτῶν νεκροὺς
And delivered up which the sea which were in it the dead
G2532 G1325 G3588 G2281 G3588 G1722 G846 G3498

καὶ τὰ θάνατος καὶ τὰ ᾗδης ἔδωκαν τὰ ἐν
And which death And which hell delivered up which were in
G2532 G3588 G2288 G2532 G3588 G86 G1325 G3588 G1722

αὐτῶν νεκροὺς καὶ ἐκρίθησαν ἕκαστος κατὰ τὰ
it the dead And they were judged every man according to which
G846 G3498 G2532 G2919 G1538 G2596 G3588

ἔργα αὐτῶν
works it
G2041 G846

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 6:8 (Parallel theme): And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

Hosea 13:14 (Parallel theme): I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.

Revelation 20:14 (Parallel theme): And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

Revelation 20:12 (Judgment): And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book

of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

Isaiah 26:19 (Parallel theme): Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.

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