

Revelation 3:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

Analysis

Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.... This verse from Revelation's vision of letters to sardis, philadelphia, laodicea - dead religion, faithful witness, lukewarmness 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

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does Revelation 3:4 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

ἔχεις	όλιγα	όνόματα	καὶ	ἐν	Σάρδεσιν	ἃ	οὐκ
Thou hast	a few	names	and	in	Sardis	which	not
G2192	G3641	G3686	G2532	G1722	G4554	G3739	G3756
ἐμόλυναν	τὰ	ιμάτια	αὐτῶν	καὶ	περιπατήσουσιν	μετ'	
defiled	G3588	garments	G846	and	they shall walk	with	
G3435		G2440		G2532	G4043		G3326
ἐμοῦ	ἐν	λευκοῖς	ὅτι	ἄξιοί	εἰσιν		
me	in	white	for	worthy	they are		
G1700	G1722	G3022	G3754	G514	G1526		

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 7:9 (Parallel theme): After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

Revelation 3:5 (Parallel theme): He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

Revelation 6:11 (Parallel theme): And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.

Ecclesiastes 9:8 (Parallel theme): Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment.

Revelation 3:18 (Parallel theme): I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and

that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

Revelation 19:14 (Parallel theme): And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

Revelation 4:4 (Parallel theme): And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

Revelation 19:8 (Parallel theme): And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

Jude 1:23 (Parallel theme): And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

Mark 16:5 (Parallel theme): And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.