

Revelation 6:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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... This verse from Revelation's vision of seven seals - god's judgments on rebellious earth, cry of martyrs 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 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does Revelation 6:8 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 εἶδον καὶ ἴδού, ὥππος χλωρός καὶ ὁ καθήμενος

And I looked And behold horse a pale And G3588 that sat
G2532 G1492 G2532 G2400 G2462 G5515 G2532 G2521

ἐπάνω αὐτοῖς ὄνομα αὐτοῖς ὁ θανάτω καὶ ὁ ἄδης

on him name him death And G3588 Hell
G1883 G846 G3686 G846 G2288 G2532 G1849 G86

ἀκολούθει μετ' αὐτοῖς καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἔξουσία

followed with him And was given him power
G190 G3326 G846 G2532 G1325 G846 G1849

ἀποκτεῖναι ἐπὶ τὸ τέταρτον τῆς γῆς ἐν ρομφαίᾳ

to kill over the fourth part of the earth with sword
G615 G1909 G3588 G5067 G1093 G1722 G4501

καὶ ἐν λιμῷ καὶ ἐν θανάτῳ καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν θηρίων

And with hunger And with death And with G3588 the beasts
G2532 G1722 G3042 G2532 G1722 G2288 G2532 G5259 G2342

τῆς γῆς

of the earth
G1093

Additional Cross-References

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.

Zechariah 6:3 (Parallel theme): And in the third chariot white horses; and in the fourth chariot grisled and bay horses.

Jeremiah 16:4 (Word): They shall die of grievous deaths; they shall not be lamented; neither shall they be buried; but they shall be as dung upon the face of the earth: and they shall be consumed by the sword, and by famine; and their carcases shall be meat for the fowls of heaven, and for the beasts of the earth.

Revelation 1:18 (Parallel theme): I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

Revelation 9:18 (Parallel theme): By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths.

Revelation 9:15 (Parallel theme): And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men.

Ezekiel 5:12 (Word): A third part of thee shall die with the pestilence, and with famine shall they be consumed in the midst of thee: and a third part shall fall by the sword round about thee; and I will scatter a third part into all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them.

Isaiah 25:8 (Parallel theme): He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.