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Krapf Commentary Series

## **Revelation Pt. 1: A Vision of Jesus (Rev. 1:1-20)**

In this opening chapter John is introducing the book, setting the scene and giving us the reason for this book. This chapter can be divided into three main parts: the introduction (vss. 1-3), the greeting (vss. 4-8), and the first vision (vss. 9-20).

### **The Introduction (Revelation 1:1-3)**

What we will find in this letter to the seven churches is so remarkable that the author prefaces it by citing the source of the revelation, how it was transmitted, and the blessing it contains for all who read and obey. Nowhere in the New Testament does a book begin with such authority, solemnity and promise as this book does.

**First, the author of this revelation is God.** The word revelation in the Greek is "*apocalypse*" – a disclosure of what had previously been hidden.

Only an all-knowing God can reveal these things. He alone holds the key to the events of all human history hidden from our eyes. And he alone holds with certainty the future, already settled in the eternal decrees of God.

**The content of this revelation is "Jesus Christ."**

As God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, Jesus knows all things. But Jesus is presented to us in this book as our Mediator. God delivered this revelation to his Son in his office as our Mediator (Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22).

**The context of this revelation is of those things that will "soon take place."** The earlier prophets looked forward to a time when the "God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed" (Daniel 2:44). Those same prophets called this period of time "the last days" (Isaiah 2:2; Daniel 2:18; Micah 4:1; Joel 2:28ff; Acts 2:16ff; 3:24). The setting up of the kingdom has arrived and the visions revealed to John in this book show those things which will soon take place in that context.

**The transmission of this revelation.** This is not John's revelation, just God's. God made it known to Jesus, Jesus to the angel, the angel to John on the Isle of Patmos and John to us. The transmission

outlined here shows the dignity of the offices that God has ordained for the building up of his people (see Ephesians 4:11). From his Mediator to his ministers.

**The purpose of this revelation is to encourage and strengthen “his servants” in the midst of persecution and affliction.** This theme will become clear as we proceed because it is prominent throughout the book.

**The blessing of this revelation.** How can a book that is specifically intended to bless the Church be allowed to confuse and frustrate us and to cause division so much division in the Church? See previous study of the seven-fold blessing.

### **The Greeting (Revelation 1:4-8)**

This greeting begins like the greetings of all other New Testament letters, but it becomes evident very quickly that this is like no other New Testament letter. One key distinction is that here John brings greetings—“grace and peace”—from all three persons of the Trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The order however—Father, Spirit, Son—is unusual, but perhaps connects this vision with the tabernacle, which was a shadow of the heavenly

sanctuary (Hebrews 8:5). The Holy of Holies (the Father); the altar of incense at the entrance of the Holy of Holies (the Spirit), and the altar of burnt offering outside the Tabernacle (the Son).

The description of the Father also is (grammatically) unusual, and the description of the Spirit is mysterious, most likely referring to the sevenfold description in Isaiah 11:2. The description of the Son however, rooted in Psalm 89:27,37, is detailed, but clear. He describes the Son in his threefold office.

- **Prophet, the "witness" to the truth** (John 3:32). The word "witness" is the word "martyr" and has become our English word for those who die for their faith. The death of the martyr is a witness, but the witness of the martyr began long before the individual is called to give their lifeblood for the faith. The martyr was one who witnessed the truth and who was then called to witness that same truth by his death – the emphasis in the Bible is on the witness, not the death.
- **Priest.** Here, the "firstborn of the dead" (see also 1 Corinthians 15:23) points to Jesus as our sacrifice, and our priest, bearing witness to the message that he

had sealed with his own blood. In his resurrection he witnessed the accomplishments of his death, and he lives to make intercession for us in a life that cannot die (Hebrews 7:25).

- **King.** He is now exalted to the throne of heaven (Psalm 2:1-12).

John's opening greeting now develops into an appropriate doxology (vs. 5b); he loved us, washed us in his blood and has made us a kingdom and priests unto God.

### **The First Vision (Revelation 1:9-20)**

It is a vision of the Church on earth with the Son of Man in the midst. John was told to "write what you see in a book" (vs. 11). When he turned to see, the first thing he saw was the seven golden Lampstands (vs. 12). Thus drew his attention, not the "Son of Man" who is clearly more descriptive and more glorious, with a face shining as the sun in full strength (vs. 16), but to the Church.

John wants us to know that this vision is not just *of* the Church, but a vision *for* the Church, for its encouragement and strength in the midst of persecution and the encouragement is Jesus himself.

The number seven is symbolic, and you can see this symbolism carried through the entire book. There were most likely more than seven churches in Asia at this time, but the Spirit chooses seven churches to represent the complete Church, the Church in its entirety, and it includes the Church today.

John identifies with the prophets of the Old Testament and anticipates the fulfilment of all the prophecies in this book. But he identifies himself with those to whom he is writing, and they all identify with the Son of Man, who is in the midst of the Church—they are brothers in the faith and in a threefold fellowship; tribulation, the kingdom, and endurance of Jesus (vs. 9). As one writer said, "*In Patmos, we suffer, in Spirit, we reign*" (vss. 9-10).

Note two things about the Son of Man, his appearance and his activity. His appearance is glorious, and it corresponds with the bride and bridegroom's descriptions of each other in the Song of Solomon which are intended to highlight their attraction to each other. These visions are intended to show us the glorious attraction of our Lord.