

INTRODUCTION to REVELATION chapter 1

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1 THE THEME

JESUS CHRIST IS PRESENT AND ACTIVE AMIDST ALL THE CONGREGATIONS IN THE WORLD

2 THE STRUCTURE

a. The introduction, greeting and doxology

The introduction of the book of Revelation

It contains some important principles of interpretation of the book (1:1-3)

The greetings and doxology (1:4-8)

b. The first vision in the book

The first vision in the book consists of Revelation 1:9 to 3:22 and begins in Revelation chapter 1 with a symbolic picture of Jesus Christ standing amidst the seven lampstands.

c. The number 7 in the book

The number 7 is the number of divine perfection and completion, attaining God's perfect and complete will (see the symbolism of numbers in supplement 2). It occurs several times in the book of Revelation.

In Revelation chapter 1 the following 'sevens' are mentioned: the seven churches or congregations (1:4), the seven spirits (1:4), the seven golden lampstands (1:12) and the seven stars (1:16).

With regard to the structure: Revelation chapter 1 may be divided into seven parts.

The book of Revelation sometimes explains the symbolic meaning of its symbols and numbers and that gives to us the key how to interpret the book of Revelation in the way God wanted us to understand it. The seven lampstands represent the seven congregations and the seven stars represent the seven messengers of the congregations (1:20).

3 THE CONTENTS

a. Christ amidst the seven lampstands

The book of Revelation is a revelation of the exalted Jesus Christ to the Church in the whole world and throughout world history. It is a revelation in the form of visions and symbols about the major principles working between Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming. It is a blessing to everyone who reads it, hears it and takes its words to heart. It is about the unchangeable God of the covenant, the Triune God and especially Jesus Christ the Saviour and his people.

The visions are given to the apostle John on the island of Patmos about 95-96 A.D. The visions come in symbols (pictures and numbers) that are rooted in the Old Testament and in the experience of the Christian Church during the first century A.D.

The first vision is about Jesus Christ walking among seven lampstands. It is a symbol for all the congregations in the world and in history that Jesus Christ is present and active in their midst. He has the appearance of the exalted and glorious Saviour, who died and was resurrected. In a sovereign way he observes everything that happens in the congregations. And in a sovereign way he holds the leaders of the congregations in his hand. Jesus Christ commands the apostle John to write what he sees and hears on a scroll and send it to the seven historical congregations. The seven letters are at the same time messages for all the congregations in the world and in history (2:7).

b. The message of Revelation chapter 1

The message of Revelation chapter 1 is that Jesus Christ is present and active in the midst of all congregations in the world. He holds the key to death and to life and he holds the true leaders of the congregations in his hand.

4 THE BACKGROUND

a. The author of the book and the recorder of the book

The author. The book does not originate with any human source, but with the revelation which God gave to Jesus Christ. In Revelation chapter 5, God the Father gives to Jesus Christ, the Mediator between God and man, a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals, which he only had merited to open. This scroll symbolises God's plan (decree, decision) for the history of the world and the history of the Church. Ephesians 1:22 says about Jesus Christ, "God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the Church." God committed to Christ the government of the whole world in the interest of the Church. In his turn, Jesus Christ revealed *the general principles of this plan of governing the world and the Church* via an angel and the apostle John to his Church.

Revelation chapter 1:1-2 directly introduces the author of the book of Revelation as God himself. The book is therefore not a human invention, but a divine revelation. Jesus Christ caused John to see and hear this revelation by means of an angel.

The recorder. Revelation 1:17 and 2:1 etc. say that Christ himself spoke to John. Revelation 5:2, 17:1 etc. say that angels spoke God's words to him and showed visions from God to him. John was given the ability to hear and see God's revelation and to record it faithfully. According to Revelation 1:1,4,9 (22:8) the writer or rather the recorder of this revelation calls himself John. The only person named John in the New Testament that did not need any further introduction in the 1st century A.D. was the apostle John, who also wrote the Gospel of John and the three letters of John.

b. The Old Testament lampstand and the New Testament lampstands

See the introduction to section I (3c).

c. The kingdom

See supplement 1, part 1.