

Revelation - Chapter 1

Revelation 1:5

And from Jesus Christ, *who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,*

And from Jesus Christ,

Of course, the “And” at the beginning of this verse indicates that it is a continuation of the previous verse—this being a phenomenon of the verse numbering system created by Robert Stephanus (aka Robert Estienne) in the mid-16th century, which, while highly advantageous, can be a little awkward at times. In fact, in our study of The Revelation, we will at times also recognize the incidental awkwardness of the chapter system created by Stephen Langton at the beginning of the 13th century. Point being, while chapter and verse designations throughout Scripture are almost of indispensable value to the Bible student, they were simply supplied as a useful accommodation and are not the result of divine inspiration.

who is the faithful witness,

Here, we find declared—almost in a matter-of-fact way—that Jesus is “the faithful witness.” Such can be readily understood as an appellation—that is, a type of identifying title which aptly characterizes the person it is applied to (compare John 1:9, 6:32, 8:12, 14:6, and 15:1). In fact, by the use of the word “the,” the implication is that Jesus is the one true epitome of a “faithful witness.” In other words, while there are others with impeccable and unflinching integrity, they are yet finite in wisdom and understanding and cannot know the truth of any matter as perfectly as does the divine Son of God. Because of this, He is one on whose testimony there may be entire reliance, or who is entirely worthy to be believed. Of course, such a declaration or claim cannot technically stand without evidence. For such, we rely on the story of Jesus’ life and ministry. Because of all who Jesus demonstrated himself to be, we can know with all certainty that the testimony of the prophecies of The Revelation are fully true, reliable, and divinely calculated to bless all who would apply themselves to its teachings, warnings, and counsels. Again, by strong implication, such means that all its prophecies can be understood. If not, what need is there to declare the unflinching veracity of its divine Author?

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But, even with the above explanation being true to all who have reason to place their confidence in him, equally true is Jesus' perfect witness and example of what the Father is like in character and purpose (Proverbs 14:5; John 1:1, 14; John 3:31, 32; John 5:19, 30, 36; John 8:14, 26; John 12:49, 50; John 14:9, 10; John 15:15; John 17:3-8; Colossians 2:9, 15; Hebrews 1:1-3). From this we can know that in all things pertaining to the love of God and the plan of redemption, Jesus has always been, for the Church, "the faithful witness." Therefore, in the book of Revelation, His testimony is recognized as unquestionably true and indispensable.

and the first begotten of the dead,

For anyone who has even a rudimentary knowledge of the New Testament, this phrase cannot have us understand that Jesus was literally the first to rise from the dead. We know that before his death on the cross he raised up Lazarus and the widow's son, as well as others unnamed (John 11:43, 44; Luke 7:14; Matthew 11:4, 5). But what we can understand, and what harmonizes sensibly and meaningfully with the greater theme of the story of redemption, is that this phrase simply yet powerfully refers to Jesus' preeminence among all who have, or ever would be, resurrected—that he was chief in regard to the dignity, value, and importance of his rising and is connected with all who had risen and that should rise (Colossians 1:18). In other words, he was the most illustrious of those who had been, or will be, raised from the dead—and from that standpoint, he is the head over them all. If, prior to Jesus' crucifixion, it had not been fully anticipated throughout Scripture that he would have victory over death, then not one could have legitimately been raised before and the whole of the Scriptures would have proven to be a tragic mockery to the miserable (John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:12-23).

and the prince of the kings of the earth.

Simply explained—because of His victory over sin and death, Jesus became the rightful ruler over all mankind (Psalm 68:16-18; Ephesians 1:17-22; Ephesians 4:8; Philippians 2:8-11; Colossians 2:15; I Timothy 1:17; Hebrews 1:1-4; see on Revelation 5:11-14, Revelation 17:14, and Revelation 19:11-16). Of course, in order to assert such an authority over the entire human race, He would necessarily have to possess an assumed preeminence over the highest ranking leader of every nation of the world—such being represented here by the "kings of the earth."

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With that being said, one might then naturally wonder how a “prince” could possess sovereign authority over all the “kings of the earth”, when, by definition, a prince is a male ruler ranked below a king? The answer is actually quite simple. The Greek word translated “prince” (archōn) means properly, “ruler, leader, the first in rank.” While it is true that the English word “prince” often applies to an heir to a throne who is not invested with absolute sovereignty, here, by virtue of its more proper meaning, it uniquely denotes that he actually exercises dominion over all the rulers of the earth. In addition to this, and as interesting to point out—according to Scripture, this is an exclusive authority which pertains to God alone (compare Isaiah 10:5; Isaiah 45:1; Psalm 47:2; Psalm 99:1; Psalm 103:9; Daniel 4:34). As a result, it is clear that in ascribing this to Jesus implies that he is possessed of divine attributes. Because it is the case, and for good reason, that much of the book of Revelation pertains to the assertion of power over the princes and rulers of this world, it was therefore significantly important to assert early on that he who was to exert that power was invested with the rightful prerogative to do so.

Unto him that loved us,

In the Greek, this might more literally read, “*To the one loving us.*” In other words, Jesus not only proved that He loves us by giving His life in our behalf (John 13:34; John 15:9-13; Romans 5:6-8; Ephesians 5:1, 2), but it is proven to us daily by His tireless and tender watch care (John 10:14-16; Isaiah 40:11; Hebrews 13:20).

and washed us from our sins in his own blood,

Again, in the Greek, this might more literally read, “*And having loosed us from our sins by his own blood.*” In other words, Jesus’ death on the cross sets the believer free from the penalty of sin and death (Psalm 51:2; Isaiah 42:6, 7; Luke 1:68-75; John 3:16; John 8:36; Romans 3:25; Romans 6:16-18, 21, 22; Romans 8:2; Galatians 5:1).