

# A CRITIQUE OF PRETERIST VIEWS OF THE TWO WITNESSES IN REVELATION 11\*

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**T**HE FIRST ARTICLE IN THIS SERIES discussed preterist views of the two witnesses and showed that assumptions underlying preterist identifications of the witnesses are untenable. This second article critiques the preterist views that the two witnesses of Revelation 11 (a) were Christians who remained in Jerusalem in AD 67–70, (b) symbolize Jewish governmental and religious authorities, or (c) represent the entire line of Hebrew prophets.

## THE PRETERIST VIEW THAT THE TWO WITNESSES WERE CHRISTIANS IN JERUSALEM IN AD 67–70

### NOT FITTING THE FIRST-CENTURY JERUSALEM CONTEXT

A weakness of the preterist view that the two witnesses were Christians who remained in Jerusalem in AD 67–70 is the lack of external corroboration of events alleged to have happened during AD 67–70, especially the witnesses' miracles, resurrection, and ascension. Preterists explain this lack by referring to first-century events such as the Roman invasion, the idea that most Christians fled east of the Jordan (in obedience to Christ's warning in Matthew 24:16–22 and in fulfillment of Revelation 12:6, 14), and the idea that the two witnesses chose to stay in Jerusalem. As a result no record from Christians exists of the two witnesses. But this is

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both historical conjecture and an erroneous application of Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, these preterists understand the witnesses' miraculous powers, death, resurrection, and ascension literally, as having actually occurred in AD 67–70.<sup>2</sup> True, the biblical text supports a literal understanding of the witnesses' miraculous activities.<sup>3</sup> However, preterists fail to point to any historian who verifies the activities of the witnesses. Josephus's writings are the only extant eyewitness account of Jerusalem's first-century destruction.<sup>4</sup> In seeking to explain the lack of corroborating external evidence for the two witnesses' activities in AD 67–70, preterists fail to take into account the following concerning Josephus.

<sup>1</sup> See Moses Stuart, *Hints on the Interpretation of Prophecy* (New York: Dayton and Newman, 1842), 117; idem, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* (Edinburgh: Maclachlan, Stewart, & Co., 1847), 600; and James M. Macdonald, "Date of the Apocalypse from Internal Evidence," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 26 (January–March 1869): 470. That Christ's warning in Matthew 24:16–22 was not in reference to AD 67–70 (but to a yet-future tribulation period) is evidenced by the fact that the abomination of desolation (v. 15) did not happen in the first century, and that the horrific events of AD 67–70 were not the worst the world has ever seen. See Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Matthew," in Dr. *Constable's Bible Study Notes*, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/matthew.pdf>, 2008, 317–19 (accessed March 22, 2009); and Thomas Ice, "The Olivet Discourse," in *The End Times Controversy*, ed. Tim La Haye and Thomas Ice (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2003), 177–83.

<sup>2</sup> Macdonald, "Date of the Apocalypse," 471; and J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 432–43.

<sup>3</sup> For instance a literal fire is emphasized by the announcement in Revelation 11:5 and is consistent with the drought and plagues described in verse 6. See Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 90. Other miracles involving fire are similarly described (cf. 13:13; 20:9), and John in his Gospel used ποιέω σημεῖον in reference to Christ's miracles and also in Revelation 13:13. See Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 175; and Andy Woods, "Revelation 13 and the First Beast," in *The End Times Controversy*, ed. Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2003), 249.

<sup>4</sup> Josephus (AD 37/38–ca. 100) was uniquely positioned to write about the siege and fall of Jerusalem. He was a Jewish military commander who switched allegiance to the Romans and was protected by the Roman general Titus. Thus he had firsthand information about events on the Roman side, as well as what was happening inside the besieged city (through reports). Overall Josephus's writings are regarded as accurate and reliable. See A. W. Mosley, "Historical Reporting in the Ancient World," *New Testament Studies* 12 (1965): 23; Lee I. Levine, "Josephus' Description of the Jerusalem Temple: War, Antiquities, and Other Sources," in *Josephus and the History of the Greco-Roman Period: Essays in Memory of Morton Smith*, ed. Fausto Parente and Joseph Sievers (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 246. Josephus's writings have some weaknesses. Paul L. Maier points out that "like most ancient historians, Josephus also had trouble with numbers, uncritically accepting and then transmitting augmented statistics as to population and distance sizes, the number of battle casualties, and even mountain heights" ("Introduction," in *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999], 14).

(1) Josephus was aware of events in besieged Jerusalem; he was capable of reporting specific names and events. He described the cannibalism of Mary, daughter of Eleazar.<sup>5</sup> He recorded how a false prophet predicted Jewish deliverance.<sup>6</sup> If the two witnesses were prophesying in Jerusalem in AD 67–70, why did Josephus not mention them?

(2) Josephus was not above recording events of a supernatural nature. He mentioned omens portending Jerusalem's fall.<sup>7</sup> Surely, miraculous powers as described in Revelation 11:5–6 would have merited attention in his records.

(3) Josephus recorded no Jewish merriment (certainly not worldwide) associated with the events surrounding Jerusalem's fall. According to preterism, the two witnesses' deaths should have been met with rejoicing (v. 10). Instead Josephus's account mentions one misery after another.<sup>8</sup>

(4) The preterist distinction between Christian, pagan, and Jewish histories is artificial and not recognized by the early church. Goodman notes that "Philo's treatises were kept by the Church as edifying tracts" and that Philo and Josephus were "treated by some early Christian fathers as . . . honorary Christian[s]."<sup>9</sup> Yamauchi observes that "the writings of Josephus the Jew were more highly valued by Christians than by Jews. Josephus is quoted extensively by Theophilus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, Minucius Felix, and above all by Eusebius and Jerome."<sup>10</sup>

A second problem is that the preterist identification of the two witnesses' archenemy—the beast (Rev. 11:7; 13)—as the first-century emperor Nero does not correlate with preterist relating of

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<sup>5</sup> Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 5.429–41, 6.201–13.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.285–86.

<sup>7</sup> Josephus described a star (resembling a sword) over the city and a year-long comet, and before the Jewish rebellion, a very bright light around the altar and temple, the eastern gate of the temple court opening by itself, and Jesus (son of Ananus) continuously crying woe to Jerusalem (*ibid.*, 6.289, 6.290–96, 6.300–309).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.220–442.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Goodman, "Diaspora Reactions to the Destruction of the Temple," in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135*, ed. James D. G. Dunn, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1992), 29.

<sup>10</sup> Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Josephus and the Scriptures," *Fides et historia* 13 (Fall 1980): 58.

the forty-two months and 1,260 days (vv. 2–3) with AD 67–70.<sup>11</sup> According to 11:3 the witnesses will prophesy for 1,260 days and then be killed by the beast (v. 7). So according to the preterist scheme, the witnesses should have been killed in AD 70. But Nero killed himself in AD 68. So by the preterists' own criterion, Nero could not have been the beast of verses 7 and 13.<sup>12</sup> This weakens the rationale for locating the two witnesses in the first century.

To fit the two-witnesses prophecy into a first-century Jerusalem context, preterists say the phrase “those who dwell on the earth” (οἱ κατοικοῦντες τῆς γῆς, v. 10) refers to those who rejoice in the witnesses' demise, in a local sense.<sup>13</sup> To this idea, Thomas comments, “The suggested limitation of these earth-dwellers to people in the land of Palestine might be feasible if it were not for the worldwide scope of the listings in v. 9 and the use of the technical expression for ‘those who dwell upon the earth’ in the rest of Revelation.”<sup>14</sup> Stuart's bewilderment regarding the communication and transportation logistics in having worldwide rejoicing over the witnesses' death is solved if the fulfillment of this prophecy is not forced into a first-century context. It can certainly be explained in light of modern technological advances.

Thus the preterist view—that the two witnesses were Christians who remained in Jerusalem in AD 67–70—is untenable. The following discussion demonstrates that specific identifications of the two witnesses within this view are unsustainable as well.

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<sup>11</sup> For the preterist identification of the beast as Nero see Russell, *The Farousia*, 443, 457–65; Macdonald, “Date of the Apocalypse,” 471; and Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *The Beast of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2002), 9–77. For the preterist equation of the forty-two months and 1,260 days with AD 67–70, see Kenneth L. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), 250–53.

<sup>12</sup> Other problems associated with the identification of the beast of Revelation 13 (and 11:7) as Nero have been addressed in Tan, “The Preterist Views of the Two Witnesses in Revelation 11,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171 (January–March, 2014): 72–95.

<sup>13</sup> See Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 607.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 95–96. According to Stephen S. Smalley, οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς “is used nine times in Revelation (3.10; 6.10; 8.13; 11.10 [bis]; 13.8, 14 [bis]; 17.8), and three times in a varied form (13.12; 14.6; 17.2). In each case the expression is a technical term, which refers negatively to unbelievers who are subject to divine judgment because they persecute the people of God, and practise idolatry” (*The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005], 92). See also Thomas Ice, “The Meaning of ‘Earth Dwellers’ in Revelation” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Pre-Trib Study Group, Dallas, TX, December 8–10, 2008).

## CORPORATE BODY

Stuart and Gentry suggest that the two witnesses were corporate entities composed of multiple first-century individuals in Jerusalem.<sup>15</sup> But this has several problems. First, in view of Gentry's explanation that large, rounded numbers in Revelation should be taken symbolically and smaller numbers taken literally, his understanding that the two witnesses mean more than two is inconsistent.<sup>16</sup> Second, Stuart's taking a corporate view of the witnesses, after just citing various Old Testament passages in which two witnesses were required, is also incongruous. Third, in response to Stuart's justification for his corporate view (i.e., that more than two persons are needed to meet the situation), one may respond that two persons are enough, if they are Spirit-empowered (as the allusion to Zechariah 4 in Revelation 11:4 indicates these witnesses are) and endowed with miraculous powers (vv. 5–6).

## JAMES, PETER, OR OTHER APOSTLES

The previously mentioned problems associated with a first-century Jerusalem fulfillment of the two-witnesses prophecy also apply to the theory of Russell, who identifies the apostles James and Peter as the two witnesses. This is difficult to sustain for the following reasons. (1) The two witnesses of Revelation 11 seem to minister together and in Jerusalem (v. 3). In contrast, while James's ministry was based in Jerusalem, Peter's ministry circle was geographically wider, including Samaria (Acts 8:14–25), Lydda (9:32–35), Joppa (vv. 36–43), Caesarea (Acts 10), and "Babylon" or Rome (1 Pet. 5:13).<sup>17</sup> (2) James and Peter ministered for more than 1,260

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<sup>15</sup> The word "corporate" refers to the preterist view that the witnesses were more than two persons. Stuart wrote that they were "a *competent* number of divinely commissioned and faithful Christian witnesses, endowed with miraculous powers, [who] should bear testimony against the corrupt Jews, during the last days of their Commonwealth" (*A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 599; italics his). Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. cites passages that require two persons as "legal witnesses to the covenant curses" (Deut. 17:6; 19:5; Matt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19; Heb. 10:28), but he fails to explain why he understands the witnesses to "probably represent a small body of Christians who remained in Jerusalem to testify against it" (*He Shall Have Dominion* [Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992], 408).

<sup>16</sup> Woods, "Revelation 13 and the First Beast," 244. See also Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 163.

<sup>17</sup> James, the half-brother of Jesus, received a special post-Resurrection appearance from the Lord (1 Cor. 15:7). Afterwards, he was in the upper room at Jerusalem, together with his family and Jesus' disciples, waiting for the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14). James is seen in an increasingly prominent role in the church in Jerusalem (Gal. 1:18–19; 2:9; Acts 12:17; 15:13–21; 21:18) (Homer A. Kent Jr., *Faith That Works: Studies in the Epistle of James* [Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1986], 24–25).

days. (3) While Peter performed some miracles (e.g., Acts 3:1–11; 9:32–43), neither of these apostles did such things as incinerate enemies, control rain, turn water into blood, or inflict plagues, as did the two witnesses in Revelation 11:5–6. (4) While James’s martyrdom was in Jerusalem, it was at the hand of the Jews (not the Romans), and traditionally in AD 62 (several years before the Roman siege began).<sup>18</sup> (5) There is a strong tradition that Peter died in Rome (not Jerusalem) in either AD 64 or 67.<sup>19</sup> Macdonald’s identification of the witnesses of Revelation 11 as two lesser-known apostles is also awkward. Surely prophets displaying the miraculous power recorded in verses 5–6 would have been well known, and no one would need to guess their identities.

### THE PRETERIST VIEW THAT THE TWO WITNESSES SYMBOLIZE JEWISH GOVERNMENTAL AND RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES

Some preterists say that the two witnesses symbolize Jewish governmental and religious authorities during the Jewish War in the first century AD. This view is similar to the first preterist view in that both hold to a first-century Jerusalem framework for the fulfillment of the two-witnesses prophecy. But this second view emphasizes the allusion to Zechariah 4 (cf. Rev. 11:4), and it has a symbolic, nonpersonal understanding of the witnesses.

This section shows how the three lines of evidence given to support this view of the two witnesses are problematic. Then arguments for a personal, nonsymbolical view of the witnesses will be given and critiqued.

#### TENUOUS EVIDENCE

The three lines of evidence given to support this identification of the two witnesses are problematic. First, the emphasis on the allusion to Zechariah 4 in Revelation 11:4 (“These are the two olive

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<sup>18</sup> Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 339. Eusebius recounts Hegesippus’s testimony of James’s martyrdom by the Jews (*Ecclesiastical History*, 2.23.8–19).

<sup>19</sup> Peter H. Davids holds the traditional date of Peter’s martyrdom in Rome to be AD 64 (*The First Epistle of Peter*, New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 8). See also D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1977), 2:350–58; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 607–59; Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 347–66; and Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville, B&H Academic, 2009), 754–55.

trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth”) is itself appropriate. Merrill notes that “there can be little doubt that Zechariah, by referring to ‘the two anointed ones’ [Zech. 4:11] with such specificity, has in mind these two anointed offices, priest and king. . . . More immediate to Zechariah’s own time and perspective, the two anointed ones would likely refer to the latest generations or representatives of the respective offices, namely, Joshua and Zerubbabel.”<sup>20</sup> The view that part of the description of the two witnesses relates to Jewish governmental and religious authorities is possible. However, to understand the two witnesses as symbolizing civil and religious authorities being subjugated during the tumultuous events of AD 70, seems to overemphasize the affirmations in Revelation 11:4 and to minimize or even neglect the other aspects of the two-witnesses prophecy.

Second, to support this identification of the witnesses, preterists note that their activities resemble those of Moses and Elijah, “who also may represent civil and religious government.”<sup>21</sup> Granted, many commentators have pointed out similarities between the miraculous powers described in verses 5–6 and those exercised by Moses and Elijah.<sup>22</sup> However, this preterist analogy fails in that Elijah did not represent either civil or religious government. He was a prophet—not a king or a priest. He neither guided the civil government nor led the temple sacrificial system. Also Moses served concurrently with the established priesthood (Exod. 28–29) and before the establishment of the kingship (Deut. 17:14–20).

Third, preterists correlate the deaths of the two witnesses with Roman obliteration of Jewish religious and civil power in AD 70.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *An Exegetical Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 156.

<sup>21</sup> Jay Adams, *The Time Is at Hand* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1966), 69.

<sup>22</sup> See for instance Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 88; and John C. Whitcomb, “The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11,” in *The Rapture, the Great Tribulation and the Millennium: Studies in Biblical Eschatology* (Indianapolis: Whitcomb Ministries, 2010), 22; Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 191. However, it should be noted that the miraculous judgments of the two witnesses will be far more intense and have a wider (i.e., global) audience than those of Elijah (and Moses). See Eugene Mayhew, “Revelation 11, The Two Witnesses of,” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 365. Moreover, the two witnesses are able to exercise their miraculous powers at will (ὁσάκις ἐὰν θελήσωσιν, Rev. 11:6), while “Moses had to await a divine command before he could inflict a plague” (e.g., Exod. 7:14–20; 8:20–24). See Thomas, *Revelation: An Exegetical Commentary*, 8–22, 91.

<sup>23</sup> Adams, *The Time Is at Hand*, 69.

They explain the witnesses' resurrection as either the rise of the church of Jesus Christ or the reinstatement of government and religion.<sup>24</sup> However, Adams's switch from a Jewish referent (for the witnesses' deaths) to a Christian one (for the witnesses' resurrection) is hermeneutically unjustified. Moreover, these preterist explanations do not cohere with historical realities for either the Jewish state or the Christian church. The early church of AD 70 had yet to undergo terrible persecutions.<sup>25</sup> Also, as Price observes,

Despite the "world-changing" religious and political consequences of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple for Jewish nationalism and ritual Judaism, the preterists' scheme of a final judgment on the Jews fails in light of the ongoing survival of the Jewish people, the preservation of their religion through rabbinic Judaism, their reemergence as a national force and return to independence in the Bar-Kokhba Revolt, their continued eschatological hope of restoration, their 20 centuries of unbroken habitation in the land of Israel, and the modern revival of Jewish national sovereignty in the State of Israel and over the city of Jerusalem.<sup>26</sup>

Thus the evidence given in support of this second preterist view of the Revelation 11 witnesses is shown to be untenable.

The witnesses will have miraculous powers (vv. 5–6),<sup>27</sup> but the Jewish governmental and religious authorities certainly did not have this kind of power in AD 67–70. Otherwise, it would have been recorded by Josephus, who documented the ebb and flow of siege events.<sup>28</sup> According to verse 9, the witnesses lie dead for three and a half days. If these witnesses were Jewish governmental and religious authorities (as many preterists contend), and their deaths symbolized the crushing of authority by the Romans in AD 70, then logically Jewish government and religion would be inoperative for

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 69–70; and David S. Clark, *The Message from Patmos* (1921; reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 77.

<sup>25</sup> John Foxe describes the persecution of the church during the reigns of the following Roman emperors: Domitian (AD 81), Trajan (AD 108), Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (AD 162), Severus (AD 192), Maximus (AD 235), Decius (AD 249), Valerian (AD 257), Aurelian (AD 274), Diocletian (AD 303) (*Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, ed. William Byron Forbush [Philadelphia: Universal Book and Bible House, 1926], 6–33).

<sup>26</sup> J. Randall Price, "Historical Problems with Preterism's Interpretation of Events in A.D. 70," in *The End Times Controversy*, 362–63.

<sup>27</sup> Further support that these were actual miracles is found in parallel passages, in which Elijah called down fire from heaven, which consumed two companies of soldiers (2 Kings 1:9–12), and fire consumed 250 men who rebelled against Moses' and Aaron's authority by offering incense (Num. 16:35) (Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary* [Chicago: Moody, 1966], 180).

<sup>28</sup> Josephus, *The Jewish War*.



only three and a half days (since preterists take the other numbers of chapter 11 literally, such as forty-two months and 1,200 days). However, this is historically not the case.<sup>29</sup> Also preterists are inconsistent in taking a literal view of the temple in verses 1–2 and a symbolic view of the witnesses in verses 3–13.<sup>30</sup>

### THE PRETERIST VIEW THAT THE TWO WITNESSES REPRESENT THE ENTIRE LINE OF HEBREW PROPHETS

This section critiques the preterist view, championed by Chilton, that the two witnesses represent the entire line of Hebrew prophets, who bore witness against apostate Jerusalem before its destruction in AD 70.<sup>31</sup> Chilton regards the two-witnesses episode as “a summary of the apostate history of the City [Jerusalem], focusing on its perennial persecution of the prophets”—further testimony of Jerusalem’s guilt, before its destruction in AD 70.<sup>32</sup> Specifically, he says the two witnesses “represent the line of prophets, culminating in John the Baptizer, who bore witness against Jerusalem during the history of Israel.”<sup>33</sup> He adds, “The story of the Two Witnesses is therefore the story of the witnessing Church, which has received the divine command to “Come up here” and has ascended with Christ into the Cloud of heaven, to the Throne.”<sup>34</sup>

The assumptions underlying Chilton’s view are, for the most part, similar to those of other preterists. A salient difference is that Chilton says the temple (*ναός*) of 11:1–2 refers to the church, and the outer court (v. 2) refers to apostate Israel.<sup>35</sup> These verses were fulfilled, he says, in the AD 70 destruction.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:220–442.

<sup>30</sup> Clark, *The Message from Patmos*, 74–77; and Adams, *The Time Is at Hand*, 68–69.

<sup>31</sup> “As literary characters in the apocalyptic narrative,” the two witnesses of Revelation 11 “represent the entire line of Hebrew prophets in testifying against apostate Israel and preside over the soon-coming judgment and destruction of Jerusalem and the second temple” (Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, 131).

<sup>32</sup> David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, TX: Dominion Press, 2006), 276.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* (see also 278).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 272–74.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 275. Chilton summarizes the messages of 11:1–2 in this way: “The Church will be saved through the coming Tribulation, during which Jerusalem is to be

However, the temple of 11:1–2 refers to an actual temple in Jerusalem, and not the church, as supported by the following observations: First, John’s mention of the temple, the altar, the court of the Gentiles, and the holy city shows that the discussion is unmistakably on Jewish ground.<sup>37</sup> Second, if the temple represents the church, who are the worshippers?<sup>38</sup> As Thomas observes, “This is an unbearable combining of figurative and literal elements connected only by καὶ.”<sup>39</sup> Third, it is inconsistent for Chilton to see both the ναός of verses 1–2 as well as the two witnesses of verses 3–13 as the church. Fourth, Chilton is correct in alluding to the temple in Ezekiel 40–43 in his discussion of the temple in Revelation 11:1–2.<sup>40</sup> However, his view that the Ezekiel temple is a symbol of the church is erroneous. Hitchcock gives three reasons why a symbolic interpretation of the temple in Ezekiel 40–48 is unsustainable.<sup>41</sup> (1) The architectural features recorded are too detailed for a symbolic interpretation.<sup>42</sup> (2) “Ezek 40–48 is reminiscent of Exod 25:9 and 1 Chr 28:19 where the Lord showed Moses and David, respectively, the detailed pattern of a tabernacle or temple they were to actually build. Why should the detailed pattern of the Ezekiel temple complex be treated differently?”<sup>43</sup> (3) “[I]nterpreting this section other than in a normal, literal approach contradicts the interpretive guide in the vision who commands Ezekiel to record all the minute details of the temple and its regulations so that these details might actually be carried out” (40:4; 43:10–11; 44:5).<sup>44</sup>

Chilton’s interpretation of the two witnesses in Revelation 11<sup>45</sup> is further evaluated here in twelve points.

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destroyed by an invasion of Gentiles. The end of this period will mean the full establishment of the Kingdom” (ibid.).

<sup>37</sup> Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 81; and J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse* (1865; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1900), 236.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas, *Revelation: An Exegetical Commentary*, 8–22, 81.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 272.

<sup>41</sup> Hitchcock discusses the temple in Ezekiel 40–48 and how this passage relates to Revelation 11:1–2 (“A Defense of the Domitianic Date of Revelation,” 119–34).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> See Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 276–86.

First, by understanding the 1,260 days in verse 3 as symbolic, Chilton allows a longer period for the fulfillment of verses 3–13 (in this case, even several centuries for the line-of-prophets view). However, this is inconsistent with his rigidly literal interpretation of 666 (13:18).<sup>46</sup> Moreover, 1,260 days (and forty-two months) are half of Daniel's seventieth-seven period. Hoehner's proposed chronology for the fulfillment of Daniel's initial sixty-nine sevens coheres with internal and external considerations and is a plausible construction. His calculations suggest that relevant portions of the Daniel 9:24–27 prophecy have been fulfilled precisely to the day.<sup>47</sup>

Second, Chilton notes that the witnesses are clothed in sackcloth, "the traditional dress of the prophets from Elijah through John the Baptizer, symbolizing their mourning over national apostasy."<sup>48</sup> Granted, sackcloth was a common attire for the prophets, but that was not its exclusive use.<sup>49</sup>

Third, Chilton's reference to the requirement that two witnesses testify to a crime (e.g., Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15) is self-defeating, for it does not support his view that the two witnesses were a corporate body.<sup>50</sup> In the Old Testament, two actual persons—not more—were required as the minimum to establish a fact.

Fourth, Chilton's attempt to relate the ideas of prophetic testimony, kingship, priesthood, and the church confuses these biblical ideas.<sup>51</sup> Nowhere do the Scriptures state that all Christians are

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 344–52.

<sup>47</sup> See Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 115–39. See also Robert Anderson, *The Coming Prince* (1895; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1984), 119–29; Alva J. McClain, *Daniel's Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1940); Ice, "The 70 Weeks of Daniel" in *The End Times Controversy*, 307–54; and Woods, "Revelation 13 and the First Beast," 244.

<sup>48</sup> Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 276.

<sup>49</sup> David E. Aune lists four reasons why sackcloth was worn: as a sign of individual mourning or national distress, to show submission in supplication, as a penitential practice, and for prophets mourning in anticipation of coming judgment (*Revelation 6–16*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 611. Also false prophets sometimes wore sackcloth (*Zech.* 13:4).

<sup>50</sup> See Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 276.

<sup>51</sup> Chilton affirms, "Revelation freely connects all of these, speaking of two shining lampstands which are two oil-filled olive trees, which are also two Witnesses, a king and a priest—all representing the Spirit-inspired prophetic testimony of the Kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6). (A major aspect of St. John's message . . . is that the New Covenant Church comes into the full inheritance of the promises as the true Kingdom of priests, the royal priesthood in which 'all the LORD's people are prophets')" (*Days of Vengeance*, 276–77).

prophets. Inserting the idea of the church into his exposition of Revelation 11:4 is foreign and unwarranted.

Fifth, Chilton takes a symbolical view of the witnesses' miraculous works (vv. 5–6), alleging that their powers recall those of Moses and Elijah and that fire is “a standard symbol for the power of the prophetic Word, as if fire actually proceeds from the mouths of God's Witnesses” (cf. Jer. 5:14).<sup>52</sup> However, as noted previously, the powers of the two witnesses differ significantly from those of Moses and Elijah. That actual fire is in view in Revelation 11 is supported by the double announcement in verse 5 and is consistent with the literal drought and plagues described in verse 6.<sup>53</sup> Another support for the genuineness of the miracles is that other miracles involving fire are described similarly (13:13; 20:9), and John in his Gospel used the combination ποιέω σημεῖον in reference to Christ's miracles and in Revelation 13:13.<sup>54</sup>

Chilton cited Jeremiah 5:14 (“Behold, I am making My words in your mouth fire”) to support his attempt to symbolize the “fire” of Revelation 11:5. However, likening God's words in Jeremiah's mouth to fire is an obvious metaphor, emphasized by the additional words in Jeremiah 5:14, in which the people were compared with wood that the fire will devour.<sup>55</sup> By contrast the idea of a metaphor is not present in Revelation 11:5. Furthermore, the subsequent verses (Jer. 5:15–17) elaborate on how the people will be devoured, that is, by an invading enemy.<sup>56</sup> In contrast, no intermediate instrument of destruction is mentioned in Revelation 11:5. Instead as

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 90.

<sup>54</sup> Woods, “Revelation 13 and the First Beast,” 249; and Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 175.

<sup>55</sup> “Because the people denied the validity of the Lord's word to his prophets the Lord determined to make that word a fire in Jeremiah's mouth to consume them” (Charles L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982], 59). J. A. Thompson writes, “Jeremiah's prophetic oracles were like *fire* in his mouth and the nation was as *wood* which would be consumed in the encounter” (*The Book of Jeremiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980], 245, italics his).

<sup>56</sup> In Jeremiah 5:15–16, “Jeremiah addresses the whole nation (‘house of Israel’) as he begins to describe the invading enemy (v. 15). . . . The description of the foe is both accurate and detailed. Five of their characteristics are given: (1) distance, (2) ancient, (3) enduring, (4) unintelligible in speech, and (5) deadly in war. Though they are not named, the description points to the Babylonians” (Feinberg, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 59).

fire proceeds from the mouths of the two witnesses, it “devours their enemies” (v. 5).

Sixth, Chilton says “the beast that comes up out of” the abyss (v. 7) has “various historical manifestations,” with its ultimate identity being Satan.<sup>57</sup> (Later he identifies the first beast of chapter 13 as the Roman Empire and specifically Nero.)<sup>58</sup> By noting that the beast of 11:7 has “various historical manifestations,” Chilton builds more flexibility in his line-of-prophets identification of the two witnesses, for most of the Old Testament prophets preceded the Roman Empire and Nero. However, his understanding of the beast in verse 7 is problematic. Granted, the ultimate instigator of nefarious powers throughout history is Satan. But in Revelation, Satan is portrayed as a dragon (12:9; 20:2). To identify the beast as Satan is problematic because in 13:2 the dragon, that is, Satan, gives power to the beast. (Chilton seeks to avoid this problem by switching the identification of the beast in chapter 13 to the Roman Empire and Nero.)

Seventh, 11:8 states that the bodies of the two witnesses “will lie in the street of the great city.” Chilton says this means “the Old Covenant Witnesses, ‘from righteous Abel to Zechariah.’”<sup>59</sup> However, this verse gives no indication that these corpses on the street should not be understood literally. Also Chilton’s use of Luke 13:33 and Matthew 23:34–38 is inappropriate.<sup>60</sup> Jesus mentioned Jerusalem as the place where prophets are killed. However, that fact does not mean that the two witnesses personify the entire line of prophets. Instead their deaths in Revelation 11:7–8 are simply another instance of God’s prophets being slain in Jerusalem.

Eighth, in middiscussion Chilton changes his view that the two witnesses refer to the entire line of prophets and identifies them as the church.<sup>61</sup> The fact that the witnesses’ corpses are not allowed to be buried (v. 9) symbolizes, Chilton argues, “the oppression of the Kingdom of priests by the heathen.”<sup>62</sup> However, equating the two witnesses with the church is not justified by the text.

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<sup>57</sup> Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 279–80.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 326–29.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 281–82.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

Ninth, Chilton takes the phrase “those who dwell on the earth” (Rev. 11:10) in a local sense, as referring to the Jews.<sup>63</sup> However, “The suggested limitation of these earth-dwellers to people in the land of Palestine might be feasible if it were not for the worldwide scope of the listings in v. 9 and the use of the technical expression for ‘those who dwell upon the earth’ in the rest of Revelation.”<sup>64</sup>

Chilton says the phrase οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς refers to Israel, who he says will gloat with the heathen world over the prophets’ deaths. From this he transitions to Jesus’ crucifixion so that somehow he sees the witnesses’ deaths as including that of Jesus Christ!<sup>65</sup> Chilton’s reasoning is rather disconnected, and he does not account for a big difference between the witnesses’ deaths and that of Christ (the former were not given a proper burial).

Tenth, people from everywhere will look on the corpses of the witnesses for three and a half days (v. 9). Chilton views this number as symbolic.<sup>66</sup> However, this symbolical understanding of numbers is unwarranted.

Eleventh, Chilton associates the witnesses’ resurrection (v. 11) with that of Jesus Christ, and their ascension (v. 12) with that of John (4:1). However, this confuses separate, distinct events.<sup>67</sup> Also he suggests that the two witnesses may depict the witnessing church, but this is an unjustified switch in referent. Moreover, his notion of an ascended church with dominion over the earth does not cohere with historical realities.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 95–96.

<sup>65</sup> Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 282–83. He declares, “The attempt to destroy the Witnesses seemed to be successful, not only in silencing individual prophets, but in abolishing the Testimony of the Covenant itself. The progressive war against the Word reached its climax with the murder of Christ; this was the ultimate crime that brought on Jerusalem’s destruction” (ibid., 283).

<sup>66</sup> See Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 283.

<sup>67</sup> See ibid., 283–84.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 284. This is seen in that the early church experienced persecutions during the reigns of Domitian (AD 81–96), Trajan (AD 98–117), and Marcus Aurelius (AD 161–180) (Everett Ferguson, *From Christ to Pre-Reformation: The Rise and Growth of the Church in Its Cultural, Intellectual, and Political Context*, vol. 1 of *Church History* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005], 65–66).

Moreover, J. Randall Price explains that “the Jews, whose dominion was supposedly ended (according to preterism), continued to assert themselves politically” (“Historical Problems with Preterism’s Interpretation of Events in A.D. 70,” in *The End Times Controversy*, 364–65).

Twelfth, Chilton's view of Revelation 11:13 is problematic. As Franz points out, Chilton is forced to take a symbolic understanding of this earthquake (and other earthquakes mentioned in Revelation) because historical records show that there were no earthquakes in AD 70.<sup>69</sup> Chilton's association of the earthquake with Christ's ascension and the doom of apostate Israel does not cohere with the historical reality of Israel's continued survival after AD 70.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, he must do hermeneutical gymnastics to arrive at his view of the seven thousand persons killed in the earthquake.<sup>71</sup>

Four other problems show the inadequacy of Chilton's view that the two witnesses represent the entire line of Hebrew prophets (who bore witness against apostate Jerusalem, before its destruction in AD 70) and also represent the church.<sup>72</sup> First, most events recorded in the book of Revelation were future from John's point in time (1:1, 19), and the prophesying of the witnesses is also said to be future (future tenses of δώσω and προφητεύσουσιν, 11:3). These considerations point to the witnesses' being future to John's time.<sup>73</sup> Certainly past prophets (as in the line-of-prophets view) do not qualify as the two witnesses in Revelation 11. Second, the miraculous powers of the witnesses (vv. 5–6) should be understood literally, as already noted. However, none of the Old Testament prophets had those kinds of powers. Third, in verse 10 "a globe-spanning interest in these two [witnesses'] deaths is anticipated."<sup>74</sup> By contrast the deaths of most Old Testament prophets are not recorded in Scripture. Fourth, in contrast to verses 11–12 no Old Testament prophet was resurrected or ascended into heaven (with the exception of Elijah, and his ascension was by a chariot and horses of fire, observed by only Elisha, 2 Kings 2:11–12).

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<sup>69</sup> Gordon Franz, "Was 'Babylon' Destroyed When Jerusalem Fell in A.D. 70?" in *The End Times Controversy*, 232. See D. H. K. Amiran, E. Ariei, and T. Turcotte, "Earthquakes in Israel and Adjacent Areas," *Israel Exploration Journal* 44 (1994): 265.

<sup>70</sup> See Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 284–85.

<sup>71</sup> Chilton holds that the seven thousand people killed in the earthquake (11:13), symbolize that the wicked—now in the minority—are destroyed, and the overwhelming majority will be converted and saved (*ibid.*).

<sup>72</sup> For a full discussion of the idea that the two witnesses are the church see Christine J. Tan, "A Defense of a Futurist View of the Two Witnesses in Revelation 11:3–13" (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas, 2010), 79–114.

<sup>73</sup> See Daniel K. K. Wong, "Two Witnesses in Revelation 11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154 (July–September 1997): 352.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 96.

## CONCLUSION

One preterist view understands the witnesses to be Christians who remained in Jerusalem in AD 67–70. A second view says the two symbolize Jewish governmental and religious authorities during the Jewish War in the first century AD. A third view holds that the witnesses represent the entire line of Hebrew prophets who bore witness against apostate Jerusalem before its destruction in AD 70. This article critiques these three preterist views, finding each to be problematic and unsustainable. The next article in this series critiques the idealist and historicist views of the two witnesses.