

A FUTURIST VIEW OF THE TWO WITNESSES IN REVELATION 11

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THE FIRST AND SECOND ARTICLES in this series critiqued three preterist views on the identity of the two witnesses in Revelation 11, and the third article critiqued idealist and historicist views. Each was found to be problematic and unsustainable. This article presents a futurist view of the two witnesses and gives evidence in defense of that position.

FUTURIST APPROACH TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION

A futurist approach to Revelation views chapters 4–22 as subject to future fulfillment.¹ This approach understands “eschatological passages [as] being fulfilled during a future time, primarily during the seventieth week of Daniel, at the second coming of Christ, and during the millennium.”² Futurists “insist that the principle of plain [i.e., literal, normal] interpretation be followed consistently throughout the book,” while also acknowledging the presence of symbols and other figures of speech.³

This is the fourth article in a four-part series “A Defense of a Futurist View of the Two Witnesses in Revelation 11:3–13.”

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¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Revelation*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 9; and John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 20.

² Thomas Ice, “What Is Preterism?” in *The End Times Controversy*, ed. Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2003), 21; Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 20–21.

³ Ryrie, *Revelation*, 10. “To interpret ‘literally’ means to explain the original sense of the speaker or writer according to the normal, customary, and proper usages of words and language” (Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* [Dallas: Bible Communications, 1974], 29). As Tan explains, “the presence of figures [of speech] in Scripture . . . does not militate against literal interpretation. Since literal interpre-

Support for the futurist approach to Revelation is found first in Revelation 1:1. “The book as a whole is concerned with ‘the things which must shortly come to pass,’ and which are thus identified as belonging to the future as far as the seer is concerned.”⁴ Second, verse 19 segments the book into three chronological divisions: “the things which you have seen,” “the things which are,” and “the things which will take place after these things.”⁵ Third, 4:1 identifies the visions of the future as starting from that point of time.⁶

Historically the early church “held to a futurist, premillennial interpretation of prophecy in a primitive and non-systematized form.”⁷ Researching the writings of early church fathers, Crutchfield explains that “from Justin and Irenaeus we learn that the doctrine of the premillennial reign of Christ on earth was regarded as the orthodox faith of the early church. The evidence indicates that millennialism (or chiliasm as it was originally called) was the predominant belief of the church of the first three centuries.”⁸

Some strengths of the futurist approach are these: First, it permits a more literal interpretation of the prophecies in the Apocalypse.⁹ Ioe points out that “futurism is the only approach that can consistently apply literal interpretation, that is, the historical, grammatical, contextual hermeneutic. Other approaches must supply key elements of their system from outside of the text of Scripture.”¹⁰ Second, literal interpretation recognizes that many

tation properly accepts that which is normal and customary in language—and figurative language is certainly normal and customary—literal interpreters are not hindered by that which is figurative” (ibid., 31). Walvoord identifies at least twenty-six symbols used in the Apocalypse (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 29–30).

⁴ Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 140. See also the discussion of “timing” terms in Revelation in Christine Joy Tan, “The Preterist Views of the Two Witnesses in Revelation 11,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171 (January–March 2014): 72–95.

⁵ John A. McLean, “Revelation, Structure of the Book of,” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 373.

⁶ Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*, 140.

⁷ Ron J. Bigalke Jr., “The Revival of Futurist Interpretation Following the Reformation,” *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 13 (August 2009): 50.

⁸ Larry V. Crutchfield, “The Early Church Fathers and the Foundations of Dispensationalism: Part VI,” *Chafer Theological Journal* 3 (August 1999): 191. In the second and third centuries a “major change to prophetic interpretation occurred . . . with Origen. . . . It was his method of spiritualizing and allegorizing that became unusually excessive throughout the church” (Bigalke, “The Revival of Futurist Interpretation Following the Reformation,” 50–51).

⁹ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 21.

¹⁰ Thomas Ice, “Revelation, Interpretative Views of,” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, 370.

events described in Revelation have never yet occurred. For instance one-fourth of the earth's inhabitants have not died (6:8), one-third of the earth's waters have not turned to blood (8:8), and one-third of the sun, moon, and stars have not been darkened (8:12). Third, literal interpretation takes into account the prophetic nature of the book (1:1, 19). Tenney notes that the futurist approach has "accepted the validity of predictive prophecy in Revelation. They [futurists] have taken seriously the order and character of the prophecies, and have attempted to connect them with the personal return of Christ."¹¹

Some perceived weaknesses of the futurist approach may be noted. One criticism is that this approach makes much of Revelation irrelevant to Christians of any age.¹² Walvoord replies, "It is strange that such an objection should be considered weighty. Much of the prophecy of the Bible deals with the distant future, including the Old Testament promises of the coming Messiah, the prophecies of Daniel concerning the future world empires, the body of truth relating to the coming kingdom on earth as well as countless other prophecies."¹³ He continues, "If the events of chapters 4 through 19 are future, even from our viewpoint today, they teach the blessed truth of the ultimate supremacy of God and the triumph of righteousness. The immediate application of distant events is familiar in Scripture, as for instance 2 Peter 3:10–12."¹⁴

Another criticism is that the validity of literal interpretation cannot be tested and verified from history.¹⁵ However, prophecies that have already come to pass lead to expectations for the future of other prophecies. Feinberg points out that "the only way to know how God will fulfill prophecy in the future is to ascertain how He has done it in the past."¹⁶

Since chapters 4–22 are subject to future fulfillment, from the apostle John's point in time (cf. 1:19; 4:1), chapter 11, as part of that segment of Scripture, is also to be viewed as futuristic.

¹¹ Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*, 145.

¹² Steve Gregg, ed., *Revelation: Four Views* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 42.

¹³ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 21–22.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁵ Gregg, *Revelation: Four Views*, 42–43.

¹⁶ Charles L. Feinberg, *Premillennialism or Amillennialism?* (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen, 1954), 18. See also Robert Anderson, *The Coming Prince* (1895; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1984), 147.

FUTURIST VIEW OF THE TWO WITNESSES OF REVELATION 11

The predominant futurist view of the two witnesses in Revelation 11:3–13 is that they will be two individuals in the yet-future Tribulation who will perform judgmental miracles and speak prophetically. Some futurists understand that the witnesses are “two men who lived previously and have been restored to the earth for this ministry.”¹⁷ The most widely held identifications are Elijah and Moses, and Elijah and Enoch.¹⁸ Others hold that the two witnesses cannot be identified today, for they “will be raised up from among those who turn to Christ in the time following the rapture.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, as Hitchcock points out, “the one consistent thread in all these [futurist] views is that the two witnesses will be two literal individuals who will prophesy in the end times.”²⁰

A FUTURIST INTERPRETATION OF THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT

The “temple of God” (τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, v. 1) refers to an actual temple structure located in Jerusalem during the Tribulation.²¹

¹⁷ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 306.

¹⁸ Futurists who identify the two witnesses of Revelation 11 as Elijah and Moses include Thomas, Whitcomb, Tenney, Ottman, Smith, Larsen, and Bleek. See Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 88; John C. Whitcomb, “The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11,” in *The Rapture, the Great Tribulation and the Millennium* (Indianapolis: Whitcomb Ministries, 2010), 8–24; Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*, 191; Ford C. Ottman, *The Unfolding of the Ages in the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1905), 271; J. B. Smith, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1961), 169; David L. Larsen, *Jews, Gentiles and the Church: A New Perspective on History and Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1995), 293; Friedrich Bleek, *Dr. Friedrich Bleek’s Lectures on the Apocalypse*, trans. Samuel Davidson (London: Williams and Norgate, 1875), 252.

Futurists who identify the two witnesses as Elijah and Enoch include J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse* (1865; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1900), 244–54; Robert Govett, *Govett on Revelation* (1861; reprint, Miami Springs, FL: Conley & Schoettle, 1981), 512; Henry M. Morris, *The Revelation Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1983), 193–95.

¹⁹ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 179. Other futurists who take this view include Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 308; Ryrice, *Revelation*, 88; Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (San Antonio: Ariel, 1982), 234–35; Daniel K. K. Wong, “The Two Witnesses in Revelation 11,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154 (July–September 1997): 347; and Eugene Mayhew, “Revelation 11, The Two Witnesses of,” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, 365.

²⁰ Mark Hitchcock and Thomas Ice, *Breaking the Apocalypse Code* (Costa Mesa, CA: The Word for Today, 2007), 166.

²¹ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 176; Whitcomb, “The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11,” 2–3; Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 238; Ryrice, *Revelation*, 83; and Morris, *The Revelation Record*, 189–91. Thomas sees the “temple of God” in 11:1 as “a literal

“The court which is outside the temple” (τὴν αὐλὴν τὴν ἔξωθεν τοῦ ναοῦ, v. 2) refers to the court of the Gentiles.²² Suggestions vary regarding the significance of the instruction to measure the temple, the altar, and the worshippers and exclude the outer court from measurement.²³ The “holy city” (τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἁγίαν) refers to Jerusalem.²⁴ The forty-two-month period when Jerusalem will be trodden underfoot by the nations is usually understood by futurists as the second half of Daniel’s seventieth week (Dan. 9:24, 27).²⁵

A FUTURIST UNDERSTANDING OF REVELATION 11:3–13

Following is a brief description of the futurist understanding of the two-witnesses prophecy, which the subsequent sections will defend. The 1,260-day period of the two witnesses’ ministry (Rev. 11:3) refers to half of Daniel’s seventieth week (Dan. 9:24, 27). Futurists differ on whether the two witnesses will minister in the first half or the second half of the seven-year tribulation.²⁶ The attire of the two

temple that will exist in actuality during the future period just before Christ returns,” and he points out that “Jesus’ anticipation of the future abomination of desolation (Matt. 24:15) and Paul’s prophecy regarding a future temple (2 Thess. 2:4) require a literal temple in the future” (*Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 81–82).

²² Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 83; Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 239; and Ryrie, *Revelation*, 84.

²³ Some futurists view the measuring as indicating ownership and evaluation (e.g., Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 176–77; and Ryrie, *Revelation*, 83. Other futurists view it as an indication of God’s favor, with the exemption from measurement as being excluded from God’s favor (e.g., Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 83; Hitchcock, “A Critique of the Preterist View of the Temple in Revelation 11:1–2,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164 (April–June 2007): 226.

²⁴ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 176–77; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 81–84; Whitcomb, “The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11,” 1; and Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 236–37.

²⁵ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 84–86; Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 177; Whitcomb, “The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11,” 1; Ryrie, *Revelation*, 84; and Morris, *The Revelation Record*, 192, 198.

²⁶ Futurists who view the two witnesses as ministering in the first half of the seven-year Tribulation include Ryrie, Whitcomb, Fruchtenbaum, Cohen, Morris, and English. See Ryrie, *Revelation*, 84; Whitcomb, “The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11,” 1–8; Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, 232–33; Gary G. Cohen, *Understanding Revelation: An Investigation of the Key Interpretational and Chronological Questions Which Surround the Book of Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 133–36; Morris, *The Revelation Record*, 198; E. Schuyler English, “The Two Witnesses,” *Our Hope* 47 (1941): 670–71.

Futurists who believe the two witnesses will minister in the second half of the Tribulation include Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 178; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 85, 89; Daniel K. K. Wong, “The Johannine Concept of the Overcomer” (ThD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1995), 61; Stewart Custer, *From Patmos to Paradise* (Greenville, SC: BJU, 2004), 124; Lehman Strauss, *The Book of the Revelation: Outlined Studies* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux

witnesses is seen as actual “sackcloth” (Rev. 11:3), which denotes the character of their ministry.²⁷ The description of the witnesses as two olive trees and two lampstands (v. 4) is seen as a reference to Zechariah 4, especially the witnesses’ empowerment by the Spirit.²⁸ The power to perform judgmental miracles, attributed to the two witnesses (Rev. 11:5–6), is understood literally.²⁹ Likewise, their deaths (vv. 7–8), resurrection, and ascension (vv. 11–12) are taken literally.³⁰ The enemy of the two witnesses who causes their death—the beast from the abyss (v. 7)—is identified as the future Antichrist.³¹ The “great city” where the witnesses’ corpses (v. 8) will lie is Jerusalem, with “Sodom and Egypt” referring to the city’s spiritual state.³² The three-and-a-half-day period during which the two witnesses’ corpses are denied burial (v. 9) is taken literally, as

Brothers, 1964), 212; Mayhew, “Revelation 11, The Two Witnesses of,” 365.

Thomas writes, “The 1,260 days of their [the two witnesses’] ministry will be simultaneous with the trampling of the holy city (11:2) and the work of the false Christ in the world (11:7; 13:5)” (*Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 89).

²⁷ Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 251–52; Morris, *The Revelation Record*, 193; and Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 212. Walvoord comments that “their unusual character as prophets of doom is symbolized in the fact that they are clothed in sackcloth (cf. Isa. 37:1–2; Dan. 9:3)” (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 179). According to Thomas, “The sackcloth clothing of the witnesses is in token of needed repentance and approaching judgment (cf. Isa. 22:12; Jer. 4:8; 6:26; Jon. 3:5, 6, 8; Matt. 11:21)” (*Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 89).

²⁸ See Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 180; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 89.

²⁹ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 180; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 90–91; Whitcomb, “The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11,” 22; Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 259; Ryrie, *Revelation*, 85; and Morris, *The Revelation Record*, 193, 197–98. Thomas observes, “Their power will even exceed that of Moses because they will call upon it whenever they wish (ὅσάκις ἐὰν θελήσωσιν [*hosakis ean thelēōsin*, ‘as often as they desire’]). [Whereas] Moses had to await a divine command before he could inflict a plague” (*Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 91).

³⁰ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 175, 181–83; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 96–98; Whitcomb, “The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11,” 18, 21–22; Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 244, 263–66; Hitchcock and Ice, *Breaking the Apocalypse Code*, 164; Ryrie, *Revelation*, 85–86; and Morris, *The Revelation Record*, 193, 199–204.

³¹ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 92–93; Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 334; Whitcomb, “The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11,” 3–5; Morris, *The Revelation Record*, 199–201; John F. Walvoord, “Revelation,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983; reprint, Colorado Springs: Cook, 1996), 956.

³² Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 181; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 93–94; Whitcomb, “The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11,” 21–22; Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 264; Hitchcock and Ice, *Breaking the Apocalypse Code*, 162–63; Ryrie, *Revelation*, 85; and Morris, *The Revelation Record*, 201–2.

a period of half a week,³³ and the subsequent merriment over the demise of the two witnesses (vv. 9–10) is seen as worldwide.³⁴ The catastrophic events that occur in conjunction with the two witnesses' ascension (v. 13) are understood literally: A great earthquake will take place, as a result of which a tenth of the city of Jerusalem will fall, seven thousand persons will perish, and the survivors will give glory to God.³⁵

A FUTURIST EXPOSITION OF REVELATION 11:3–13

This section provides a brief exposition of the two-witnesses passage, showing how 11:3–13 fits the futurist view of Revelation.

Daniel's seventieth week, the seven-year Tribulation period, will commence with the Antichrist confirming a seven-year treaty with the Jews (cf. Dan. 9:27a). The Tribulation (described in Rev. 6–18) will involve three series of divine judgments—seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls (with the seventh seal opening the trumpet judgments, and the seventh trumpet opening the bowl judgments).³⁶ After three and a half years the Antichrist will break the treaty and end the Levitical sacrificial system (Dan. 9:27). In its place he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, an image that the world will be required to worship (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15; 2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:14–15). The midpoint of Daniel's seventieth week, at which the Antichrist will set up the abomination of desolation, corresponds to the sixth seal judgment (Rev. 6:12).³⁷

During this second half of the seven-year Tribulation the Antichrist will reveal his proud and blasphemous nature (13:5–6) and exercise worldwide domination (v. 7), encompassing even the global economy (vv. 16–18). He will continue to make war against believ-

³³ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 182–83; Whitcomb, "The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11," 3–4; and Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 265.

³⁴ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 181; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 95–96; Whitcomb, "The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11," 3–4; Ryrie, *Revelation*, 86; Morris, *The Revelation Record*, 202–3.

³⁵ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 175, 183; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 98–99; Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 266; Morris, *The Revelation Record*, 204–5.

³⁶ This is known as the "telescoping" (or "dove-tailing") view of the progression of the book of Revelation. For a defense of this approach see Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 525–43.

³⁷ See McLean, "Revelation, Structure of," 374–75; idem, *The Seventieth Week of Daniel 9:27 as a Literary Key for Understanding the Structure of the Apocalypse of John* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical, 1996), 187–92; and Jeffrey Louie, "Expositional Study of the 144,000 in the Book of the Revelation" (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas, 1991), 61–62.

ers and overcome them (v. 7; Dan. 8:24). The trumpet and bowl judgments, with their progressive severity, will be unleashed during this period. However, Israelites will find safety in the wilderness (Rev. 12:14) and experience divine protection (vv. 15–16). Armageddon, a “campaign that extends over the last half of the tribulation period,” commences with the King of the North’s invasion of the land (Ezek. 38–39) at the middle of Daniel’s seventieth week.³⁸

The Levitical sacrificial system functioning in Jerusalem’s rebuilt temple will be discontinued by the Antichrist (Dan. 9:27b), who will place an abomination in the temple (Dan. 9:27c; cf. Matt. 24:15; Rev. 13:14–15). Before this, John was commanded to measure the temple, its altar, and the worshippers (11:1), an action signifying God’s ownership (cf. Ezek. 40; Rev. 21). The temple’s outer court was to be left unmeasured, for it will be controlled by Gentiles, who trample the city of Jerusalem for forty-two months (11:2) during the second half of the Tribulation.³⁹

God will raise up two special witnesses who will perform judgmental miracles and speak prophetically. McLean argues persuasively that the two witnesses will minister during the second half of the seven-year Tribulation, rebutting twelve arguments proposed in support of the view that these witnesses will appear in the first half.⁴⁰ The sackcloth attire of the two witnesses (v. 3) will manifest outward evidence of their sorrow and the impending judgment. These witnesses will prophesy (v. 3), proclaiming God’s messages and perhaps even predicting the future. Like Zechariah, the high priest, and Zerubbabel, the governor, they will minister in the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 4).

God’s two witnesses will be given special powers to do miracles, including incinerating their enemies (v. 5), preventing rain from falling, turning water into blood, and striking the earth with plagues (v. 6). These powers are reminiscent of the activities of Moses and Elijah, but the practice here will exceed them, for the two witnesses will exercise these powers at their discretion (v. 6d). These miracles will inflict divine judgment on unrepentant earth dwellers and will also protect the two witnesses.

³⁸ See Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 340–58. This correlation (of the closing events of Armageddon with the concluding events of the two witnesses’ ministry) appears to be difficult but not impossible.

³⁹ That the forty-two months of Revelation 11:2 may refer to the second half of the Tribulation is supported by the subsequent reference to the seventh trumpet (v. 15) and the correlation of passages that trace the Antichrist’s career (13:5; cf. Dan. 9:27).

⁴⁰ McLean, “The Chronology of the Two Witnesses in Revelation 11,” 460–71.

Their testimony will result in some coming to faith in Christ, for Scripture indicates that there will be believers who survive the Tribulation and enter the millennial kingdom in their mortal bodies (Matt. 25:1–13; 25:31–46; Isa. 11:6). Matthew 24:14 testifies of worldwide preaching of the gospel during the Tribulation, and Revelation 7 refers to 144,000 Jews who will be sealed for physical preservation around the middle of the Tribulation.⁴¹ However, the majority of the earth’s population will despise the two witnesses, as evidenced by worldwide merriment at their demise (11:10).

The Antichrist will make “war” against these two witnesses (v. 7), and at the end of their 1,260 days of prophesying God will allow the Antichrist to overcome and kill them. Their corpses will simply lie in the streets of Jerusalem, whose spiritual status will be comparable to that of Sodom and Egypt (v. 8). The refusal to bury their bodies evidences the dishonor and disregard given to these servants of the Lord. For three and a half days people of different nationalities will gaze at the corpses and celebrate (vv. 9–10).

After these three and a half days, however, the two witnesses will be publicly resurrected and ascend into heaven (vv. 11–12). An earthquake will cause the fall of one-tenth of the city of Jerusalem and the deaths of seven thousand people (v. 13). The survivors will be terrified and will give glory to the God of heaven. These events will occur at the end of Daniel’s seventieth week.

TEXTUAL SUPPORT FOR THE FUTURIST VIEW OF THE TWO WITNESSES

This section demonstrates that biblical testimony supports the futurist view of the two witnesses, namely, that these will be two literal persons in the yet-future Tribulation, who will perform judgmental miracles and speak prophetically. These details show that the previously examined preterist, idealist, and historicist views of the two witnesses do not satisfy the details of the biblical text.

THE WITNESSES WILL BE LITERAL PERSONS

The following facts support the view that the two witnesses will be literal persons, not symbols. First, as Zuck notes, “If we follow the basic hermeneutical principle of normal, grammatical interpretation, then we should understand prophetic literature . . . in [its]

⁴¹ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 146. For a discussion of the significance and timing of the sealing of the 144,000 in Revelation 7, see Louie, “Expositional Study of the 144,000 in Revelation,” 51–62.

normal, ordinary-literal sense, unless there is reason for taking the material figuratively or symbolically.”⁴² According to hermeneutical guidelines, “when a ‘symbol’ is found, the interpreter must test his discovery by asking whether it contains details unnecessary and incidental to the intended symbolism. If so, its symbolism should be denied and its non-symbolical character affirmed.”⁴³ Thus “the two witnesses of Rev 11 must be nonsymbolic persons; otherwise the details given concerning their ministries, death, resurrection, as well as the earthquake which killed 7,000 would be quite superfluous.”⁴⁴ Moreover, the introduction of the word πνευματικῶς (“spiritually,” v. 8, KJV) “settles the literalness of the narrative. Only the names ‘Sodom and Egypt’ are to be spiritualized, or taken in a sense different from the letter.”⁴⁵

Second, the word μάρτυσιν (“witnesses,” v. 3) supports the position that these two witnesses will be literal persons. Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich give three definitions for the word μάρτυς (“witness”), each of which requires the involvement of a literal person or persons.⁴⁶ Also the word μάρτυς occurs five times in Revelation (1:5; 2:13; 3:14; 11:3; 17:6), and as Hitchcock and Ice correctly observe, μάρτυς “always refers to a literal person or persons. In Revelation 1:5 and 3:14 it refers to Jesus; in 2:13 it refers to Anti-

⁴² Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1991), 243. Although Revelation uses symbols, to understand the entire book as symbolic is erroneous. Pentecost explains, “The word ‘signify’ in Revelation 1:1 does not primarily mean ‘to make known by symbols’ but rather refers to an historical fact that has some spiritual significance to it. The seven ‘signs’ in John’s Gospel were not mere symbols, but actual historical events to which spiritual significance was attached. The use of ‘signify’ would not give warrant for a non-literal interpretation here. Consistency to the literal method demands that that which is revealed be understood literally unless the text clearly indicates otherwise” (*Things to Come*, 305).

⁴³ Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, 160.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 160–61.

⁴⁵ Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 264.

⁴⁶ Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich offer the following definitions for the word μάρτυς: (1) “one who testifies in legal matters, *witness*” (e.g., Matt. 18:16; Acts 7:58; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19), (2) “one who affirms or attests, *testifier, witness*,” (used of God or Christ as witness, e.g., Rom. 1:9; Phil. 1:8; 1 Thess. 2:5; of humans, e.g., 1 Thess. 2:10; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 2:2; or “of witnesses who bear a divine message,” e.g., Acts 1:8; Luke 24:48; Acts 1:22; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39; 26:16), (3) “one who witnesses at cost of life, *martyr*” (e.g., Acts 22:20; Rev. 2:13; 17:6). See Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 619–20. They classify the use of μάρτυσιν in Revelation 11:3 as “witnesses who bear a divine message,” noting that the meaning here approaches “martyr” (*ibid.*). However, the verb μαρτυρέω may be used of things bearing witness (e.g., John 5:36; 10:25) (*ibid.*, 617–18).

pas; in 17:6 it refers to martyrs; and in 11:3 it refers to the two witnesses.”⁴⁷ The thirty other times μάρτυς is found in the New Testament, it is used only of literal persons.⁴⁸

Third, the two witnesses are prophesying (προφητεύουσιν, v. 3) and are referred to as prophets (προφήται, v. 10), which strongly suggests that they are literal persons. Regarding the verb προφητεύω (v. 3), its meanings assume the involvement of literal persons.⁴⁹ Moreover, almost all twenty-eight instances of προφητεύω in the New Testament refer to literal persons.⁵⁰ The one exception is Matthew 11:13, which refers to the prophets and the law as writings prophesying.

The noun προφήτης can mean “a person inspired to proclaim or reveal divine will or purpose, *prophet*,”⁵¹ and “by metonymy, the writings of prophets.”⁵² Of this word’s 144 occurrences, “by and large the NT understands by the prophet the biblical proclaimer of the divine, inspired message.”⁵³ Moreover, details given of the two witnesses’ miracles (Rev. 11:5–6), death (v. 7), resurrection (v. 11), and ascension (v. 12) argue against any notion that the witnesses represent the writings of the prophets.

Fourth, the overall description of the witnesses supports the

⁴⁷ Hitchcock and Ice, *Breaking the Apocalypse Code*, 163.

⁴⁸ Matthew 18:16; 26:65; Mark 14:63; Luke 11:48; 24:48; Acts 1:8; 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 6:13; 7:58; 10:39; 10:41; 13:31; 22:15; 22:20; 26:16; Romans 1:9; 2 Corinthians 1:23; 13:1; Philippians 1:8; 1 Thessalonians 2:5; 2:10; 5:19; 6:12; 2 Timothy 2:2; Hebrews 10:28; 12:1; and 1 Peter 5:1. See also Wong, “The Two Witnesses in Revelation 11,” 348; and Ryrie, *Revelation*, 88.

⁴⁹ Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich give the following definitions of προφητεύω: (1) “to proclaim an inspired revelation, *prophesy*” (e.g., Matt. 7:22; Acts 2:17; 19:6; 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:4; 13:9; 14:1); (2) “to tell about [something] that is hidden from view, *tell, reveal*” (e.g., Matt. 26:68; Mark 14:65; Luke 22:64); (3) “to foretell [something] that lies in the future, *foretell, prophesy*” (e.g., Matt. 11:13; 15:7; Mark 7:6; 1 Pet. 1:10) (*A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 890).

⁵⁰ Matthew 7:22; 15:7; 26:68; Mark 7:6; 14:65; Luke 1:67; 22:64; John 11:51; Acts 2:17; 2:18; 19:6; 21:9; 1 Corinthians 11:4; 11:5; 13:9; 14:1; 14:3; 14:4; 14:5 (twice); 14:24; 14:31; 14:39; 1 Peter 1:10; Jude 1:14; Revelation 10:11; and 11:3.

⁵¹ Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich give six categories of persons of whom the term προφήτης is used in the New Testament (*A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 890–91).

⁵² Matthew 5:17; 11:13; Luke 16:29, 31; 24:44; John 6:45; Acts 8:28, 30; and Romans 3:21 (*ibid.*); and Colin Brown, “προφήτης,” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 3:81.

⁵³ Gerhard Friedrich, “προφήτης, κτλ.,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 828.

point that these are literal persons. The two witnesses speak (vv. 3, 6), wear sackcloth (v. 3), have power to kill their enemies (v. 5), have mouths, ears, and feet (vv. 5, 11–12), are killed (v. 7) and have corpses (vv. 8–9).⁵⁴ John's use of the term πτώμα to refer to the witnesses' dead bodies (twice in v. 9) supports the narrative's literalness. Of the four other occurrences of πτώμα in the New Testament, two refer to the corpse of John the Baptist (Matt. 14:12; Mark 6:29), one refers to the dead body of Christ (Mark 15:45), and one refers to a corpse that vultures will devour (Matt. 24:28).⁵⁵

Fifth, the sudden appearance of τὰ πτώματα ("the corpses") in Revelation 11:9, when the collective singular (πτώμα) was used earlier in the verse, is probably because of the separate handling needed for two dead bodies.⁵⁶ This further supports the view that the witnesses are literal persons.

Sixth, John had previously referred to another witness, Antipas, who had been killed (2:13). It seems likely that the witnesses, who will also experience martyrdom, will also be literal persons.⁵⁷

Seventh, the phrase "to stand on one's feet" (ἔστησαν ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας αὐτῶν, 11:11) is an expression sometimes used to emphasize that a dead person has come back to life (cf. 2 Kings 13:21; Ezek. 37:10).⁵⁸

Eighth, the two witnesses will perform miracles and execute judgments (Rev. 11:5–6), and "nothing of the sort is ever predicted of anything but personal agents."⁵⁹

Thus hermeneutical, grammatical, lexical, and contextual considerations support a personal, nonsymbolic understanding of the witnesses of Revelation 11. Seiss comments, "Not without the greatest violence to language and fact . . . can we regard these Witnesses as other than real persons."⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Wong, "The Two Witnesses in Revelation 11," 348.

⁵⁵ Wilhelm Michaelis writes, "The only meaning in the NT [of πτώμα] is 'corpse,' the carcass of an animal in Mt. 24:28 . . . otherwise a human corpse: Mt. 14:12 . . . par. Mk. 6:29 of the body of John the Baptist, Rev. 11:8 f. of the bodies of the two witnesses . . . The body of Jesus is called πτώμα only in Mk. 15:45" ("πίπτω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 6:166–67).

⁵⁶ Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), 138–39; David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 621; and Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 95.

⁵⁷ Wong, "The Two Witnesses in Revelation 11," 352.

⁵⁸ Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 624.

⁵⁹ Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 243.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

THE WITNESSES WILL BE TWO IN NUMBER

Eight facts suggest that the witnesses will be two individuals, and not a great number of persons.

First, two witnesses were enough to establish a fact under Israelite law (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15; cf. Heb. 10:28).⁶¹ Those Old Testament witnesses were not symbolic of a larger group; so a similar understanding is probably true in Revelation 11.⁶² Also Christ established (as minimum) the number two to confirm a disciplinary point (Matt. 18:16) or to verify truth (John 8:17).⁶³ And Paul stated that two persons were needed to validate a judgment (2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19).⁶⁴

Second, the witnesses' identification as the "two olive trees . . . that stand before the Lord of the earth" (Rev. 11:4) is an allusion to Zechariah 4, which refers to the governor Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua.⁶⁵ This is "scriptural precedent for the two olive trees symbolizing two literal persons."⁶⁶

Third, the overall description of the witnesses in Revelation 11 has too many details for them to represent a group.⁶⁷ The depiction of the witnesses' miracles (vv. 5–6), death (v. 7), resurrection (v. 11), and ascension (v. 12) "all seem to identify them as individual men."⁶⁸ In fact, "individuality could hardly find a clearer expression than in 11:5 where a national interpretation regarding the witnesses' opponents is impossible."⁶⁹

⁶¹ Wong, "The Two Witnesses in Revelation 11," 348. Govett comments, "If accuracy in the number be important any where, it would be here [in the legal setting]" (*The Locusts, the Euphratean Horsemen and the Two Witnesses* [1852; reprint, Miami Springs, FL: Conley and Schoettle, 1985], 85).

⁶² Wong, "The Two Witnesses in Revelation 11," 348.

⁶³ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 87.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ According to Eugene H. Merrill, "There can be little doubt that Zechariah, by referring to 'the two anointed ones' 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" (*Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 156

⁶⁶ Wong, "The Two Witnesses in Revelation 11," 349. See also Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 305.

⁶⁷ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 87–88; Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, 160–61. See also Elliott E. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Academic, 1990), 159–68.

⁶⁸ Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 305.

⁶⁹ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 87. See also Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1958), 4:659.

Fourth, repetition of the word δύο (“two”)—four times in this pericope (vv. 3, 4 [twice], 10)—supports the contention that the witnesses will be two in number.⁷⁰

Fifth, since other numbers in this chapter (e.g., “forty-two months,” v. 2; “1,260 days,” v. 3; “three and a half days,” vv. 9, 11; “seven thousand people,” v. 13) are best understood literally, the number two should also be taken literally.⁷¹

Sixth, elsewhere in Revelation John was not averse to using numbers to describe a crowd (e.g., 144,000 in 7:4; an innumerable multitude in 7:9). Surely if he had intended to convey that he was describing more than two witnesses, he could easily have done so.⁷²

Seventh, if the two witnesses function corporately as the believing remnant in the Tribulation, it “would require that all believers of the future undergo martyrdom, denying the possibility of survivors that will remain to populate the Millennium.”⁷³ However, the believing remnant, even though its numbers will have been decimated by the beast’s activities (13:15; cf. 7:9–14), will persevere throughout the tribulation until the coming of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 25:1–46; Isa. 11:6–8).⁷⁴ This argues against identifying them with the two witnesses.⁷⁵ Indeed, “as long as a portion of the remnant continues there would be no cause for rejoicing (Rev. 11:10). The rejoicing comes because this particular witness has terminated. Thus the conclusion is that this does not refer to the believing witnessing remnant, but rather to two literal individuals, who have been specially set apart by God.”⁷⁶

Eighth, some who opt for a corporate understanding of the witnesses of chapter 11 argue that the beast would hardly be said

⁷⁰ Govett, *Govett on Revelation*, 518–19.

⁷¹ Pentecost writes, “The forty and two months (11:2), the thousand two hundred and threescore days (11:3), are taken in a literal manner so as to be understood to describe one-half of the seventieth week period. There seems to be no reason not to take the three and one-half (11:9, 11) literally. Thus, since the other numbers are not spiritualized the number two should not be either” (*Things to Come*, 305).

⁷² Andy Woods makes a similar case for the 144,000 of Revelation 7 (“A Case for the Futurist Interpretation of the Book of Revelation,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the Pre-Trib Study Group, Dallas, Texas, December 10, 2007; <http://www.pre-trib.org/article-view.php?id=333> [accessed March 7, 2009]).

⁷³ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 88.

⁷⁴ Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 305.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

to make war against just two people.⁷⁷ The use of πόλεμος (“war”) in this context, however, bolsters the notion that the witnesses are two individuals endowed with miraculous powers to inflict supernatural judgments against the beast and his forces. The beast will need to wage “war” against these two individual persons.

Thus numerical, linguistic, contextual, and logical considerations militate against taking a corporate view of the two witnesses of Revelation 11.

THE WITNESSES WILL PERFORM JUDGMENTAL MIRACLES

Textual considerations support a literal understanding of the witnesses’ miraculous activities in 11:5–6 (i.e., that their miracles are to be understood as happening as the text describes). A literal fire is emphasized by the double announcement in verse 5 and is consistent with the drought and plagues described in verse 6.⁷⁸ The genuineness of the witnesses’ miracles is supported by the fact that other miracles involving fire are described similarly (13:13; 20:9), and John in his Gospel used ποιέω σημεῖον in reference to Christ’s miracles, words John also used in Revelation 13:13.⁷⁹ Further support that these are actual miracles is found in parallel passages, in which Elijah called down fire from heaven that consumed two companies of soldiers (2 Kings 1:9–12), and fire that consumed 250 men who rebelled against Moses’ and Aaron’s authority by offering

⁷⁷ See, for instance, Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 225.

⁷⁸ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 90; and Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 659.

⁷⁹ 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; and Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 175. In his Gospel, John used ποιέω σημεῖον of Christ’s miracles in 2:11, 18, 23; 3:2; 4:54; 6:2, 14, 30; 7:31; 9:16; 11:47; 12:18, 37; and 20:30. According to Karl H. Rengstorf, “The distinctiveness of the Johannine use of σημεῖον is that here, both in the Gospel and Rev., the word has taken over the role which δύναμις . . . plays elsewhere in the NT and especially in the Synoptics, namely, as the exclusive term for certain miraculous events. What John calls this is the result of a personal action, as is shown by the regular combination of σημεῖον with a word of activity, usually ποιεῖν (so also Rev. 13:13; 16:14; 19:20) (σημεῖον, κτλ.,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 7 (1971), 245. Rengstorf also notes that “in Rev. we twice find the phrase ποιεῖν σημεῖα (13:14; 19:20) which is common in the Gospel. It is here a kind of negative counterpart of the use of the same phrase in the Gospel. It relates to the miracles which the prophet of antichrist does in his capacity as a pseudo-prophet to obscure the truth, to confuse men, and to give a wrong orientation to their inner allegiance. If a formal parallel can hardly be denied here, one must assume dependence on the usage in John’s Gospel” (ibid., 255).

incense (Num. 16:35).⁸⁰ Moreover, “like the Prophet Elijah, the two witnesses [will] also have power to shut up the heavens that it cannot rain [1 Kings 17–18]. . . . Like Moses, they have power to turn water into blood and to bring plagues upon the earth as often as they will (cf. Exodus 7:17–19).”⁸¹

THE MINISTRY OF THE TWO WITNESSES WILL BE PROPHETIC

The prophetic nature of the two witnesses’ ministry is underscored by the biblical description of their persons (Rev. 11:10), activities (vv. 3, 6), and their attire (v. 3). As stated earlier, the word προφηῆται in verse 10 points to their ministry as prophets.

In verse 3 the two witnesses are described as prophesying (προφητεύουσιν). Although Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich state that the use of προφητεύω in verse 3 is an example of the meaning “to proclaim an inspired revelation,” Alford (with Thomas) makes a strong case for the meaning “to foretell [something] that lies in the future” here.⁸² The combination of προφηρείας with τὰς ἡμέρας (“the days”) in verse 6 “shows that προφητεία denotes the ‘work of the prophet’ here.”⁸³

The two witnesses’ attire is described in verse 3 as σάκκους (sing. σάκκος). Sackcloth was associated with prophets, in addition to its use to express mourning (both personal and national) or to show penitence.⁸⁴ Stählin notes, “The verse [Rev. 11:3] is an important example of σάκκος as prophetic garb. . . . Especially in Rev 11:3 the σάκκοι of the witnesses probably signify their task of preaching and threatening punishment, just as the raiment of the Baptist (Mark. 1:6) may be regarded as a parabolic action . . .

⁸⁰ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 180.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Referring to Revelation 11:3, Alford writes, “προφητεύουσιν here has generally been taken to mean, *shall preach repentance*. It may be so: but in [Rev. 10:11], the verb is used in its later and stricter sense of foretelling events, as in 1 Pet. 1:10; Jude 14. If their testimony consisted in denouncing judgment, the other would necessarily be combined with it” (*The Greek Testament*, 658, italics his). Concurring, Thomas declares, “The ministry of the two, when they come, will undoubtedly include a preaching of repentance, but προφητεύουσιν. . . of necessity includes the foretelling of the future (cf. 10:11; 1 Pet. 1:10; Jude 14)” (*Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 89).

⁸³ Friedrich, “προφήτης, κτλ.,” 830.

⁸⁴ See Gustav Stählin, “σάκκος,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 7 (1971), 58–63.

which accompanied his preaching of repentance.”⁸⁵ Thus the biblical description of the two witnesses’ persons, activity, and attire indicate the prophetic nature of their ministry.

THE WITNESSES WILL MINISTER IN THE YET-FUTURE TRIBULATION

That the two witnesses will minister during the yet-future Tribulation is supported by the following considerations. First, the coherence of the futurist approach to Revelation supports the fact that the witnesses were future. As noted earlier, the future tenses of δώσω (“I will grant,” 11:3) and προφητεύουσιν (“they will prophesy,” v. 3) further indicate that the witnesses “are two prophetic voices of the future”—at least future from John’s point in time.⁸⁶

Second, the previous discussion has shown that the witnesses are literal persons, two in number, who will perform judgmental miracles and speak prophetically. However, in major historical accounts from the apostle John’s time to the twenty-first century, there is no record of such persons or occurrences.⁸⁷ So the fulfillment of the two-witnesses prophecy must be in the future.⁸⁸

Third, the two witnesses’ ministry will be in the future, because their time frame is during one-half of Daniel’s seventieth

⁸⁵ Ibid., 63.

⁸⁶ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 87.

⁸⁷ See, for instance, H. E. L. Mellersh, *Prehistory–AD 1491, The Ancient and Medieval World*, vol. 1 of *Chronology of World History* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1999); Neville Williams, *1492–1775, The Expanding World*, vol. 2 of *Chronology of World History* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1999); idem, *1776–1900, The Changing World*, vol. 3 of *Chronology of World History* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1999); idem, *1901–1998, The Modern World*, vol. 4 of *Chronology of World History* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1999); and *Encyclopedia of World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁸⁸ Wong, “The Two Witnesses in Revelation 11,” 352. That one should expect a literal fulfillment of the two-witnesses prophecy in the future, since it has not yet happened in the past, is supported by the fact that past prophecies have been literally fulfilled. According to Feinberg, “The only way to know how God will fulfill prophecy in the future is to ascertain how He has done it in the past” (*Premillennialism or Amillennialism?* 18). Fulfilled prophecies include numerous messianic prophecies fulfilled at the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (e.g., Gen. 49:10; 1 Chron. 17:11–13; Pss. 22:7, 14–18; 41:9; 69:21; Isa. 7:14; 35:4–6; 50:6; 53; Dan. 9:27; Mic. 5:2; Zech. 11:12–13; 13:7). See Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, 63–64; and idem, *A Pictorial Guide to Bible Prophecy* (Dallas: Bible Communications, 1991), 39–44.

Other examples of fulfilled prophecies include those concerning ancient lands, including Tyre (Ezek. 26:3–16), as well as the restoration of the nation Israel (idem., *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, 64–67). Tan concludes, “Thus, every prophecy that has been fulfilled has been fulfilled literally. On the basis of New Testament attestations and the record of history, the fulfillment of Bible prophecy has always been literal” (ibid., 63).

week, which is yet future. Their 1,260-day ministry duration (Rev. 11:3) corresponds to half of Daniel's seventieth week (Dan. 9:24–27).⁸⁹ Daniel's seventy-sevens prophecy refers to a 490-year period.⁹⁰ The understanding that the initial sixty-nine sevens of Daniel's prophecy have already been fulfilled and that the seventieth seven awaits a future fulfillment is best supported by internal (i.e., textual) and external (i.e., historical) considerations and is preferable to other interpretations.⁹¹ The beginning of Daniel's seventieth week is signaled by the Antichrist's confirming a treaty with Israel

⁸⁹ According to literal (or normal) hermeneutical guidelines, "when the immediate context does not give a clear meaning to a symbol, the interpreter should examine similar or analogous symbols used elsewhere in prophecy" (ibid., 163). So "a thousand two hundred and threescore days" (Rev. 11:3; 12:6) and "forty and two months" (11:2; 13:5) must be compared with "time and times and half a time" (Rev. 12:14; Dan. 7:25; 12:7) and Daniel's prophecy of the seventieth "seven" (Dan. 9:26–27) (ibid., 163; Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 178; and Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 84–86).

⁹⁰ The Hebrew שְׁבִיעִי is a "period of seven," with the units (whether of days, years, etc.) depending on the context. The following gives five reasons for understanding the שְׁבִיעִי of Daniel 9:24 as a period of seven years. First, the context supports this understanding. John F. Walvoord observes that "the fact that there were seventy years of captivity, discussed earlier in the chapter [cf. Dan. 9:2; Jer. 25:11–12], would seem to imply that years were also here in view" (*Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation: A Commentary* [Chicago: Moody, 1971], 218, italics his). Goldingay concurs, observing that "the original 'seventy' of Jeremiah [cf. Jer. 25:11–12] was explicitly a period of years (v 2)" (*Daniel*, 257). Second, the Israelites "were familiar with the concept of sevens of years as well as of days because the Sabbatical Year was based on this premise" (Lev. 25:1–7; 26:33–35; 2 Chron. 36:21; Jer. 34:12–22) (Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, New American Commentary [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994], 257–58). Third, a symbolic understanding of the sevens "must account for the fact that specific numbers are used and for seven, sixty-two, and one. Why would such definite numbers be employed to represent periods of indefinite length?" (ibid., 258). Fourth, Daniel 10:2–3 is the only other place in Daniel where שְׁבִיעִי is used (John R. Kohlenberger and James A. Swanson, *The Hebrew English Concordance to the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998], 1530). The phrase שְׁלֹשָׁה שָׁבָעִים יָמִים (literally, "three units of seven days," or twenty-one days) "has reference to Daniel's mourning for three weeks since the word יָמִים is included. . . . Everyone would have realized that Daniel would not have fasted twenty-one years, but the fact that he inserted יָמִים 'days' in 10:2, 3 when it was not necessary would seem to indicate that he would have used יָמִים in 9:24–27 if there he meant 490 'days'" (Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977], 118, italics his). Fifth, assuming that the seventieth seven is the future tribulation period, "there is evidence in other Scriptures that the duration of that period will be seven literal years" (Dan. 12:7; 12:11–12; Rev. 13:5; 11:2; 12:6, 14) (Miller, *Daniel*, 258).

⁹¹ 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), 144–64. For a survey of various views of the *terminus ad quem* of Daniel's seventy weeks (i.e., a Maccabean fulfillment, a Roman fulfillment, or a future eschatological consummation), see McLean, *The Seventieth Week of Daniel 9:27 as a Literary Key*, 235–75.

(Dan. 9:27a).⁹² Since this has not occurred, the seventieth week is yet future. And as their time frame is half of Daniel's seventieth week, the witnesses are in the future.

Fourth, the future appearance of the witnesses is further substantiated by their adversary's identity. The beast (θηρίον, v. 7) will make war against, overcome, and kill God's servants.⁹³ As this beast from the abyss is probably the future Antichrist, the objects of his persecution are also to be expected in the future.⁹⁴

⁹² The following six points indicate that the one making this covenant is the Antichrist (and not Jesus Christ). First, the closest antecedent is נַיִד הַבָּא, "the prince who is to come" (Dan. 9:26) (Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, 132; and Walvoord, *Daniel*, 218). Second, Daniel 9:27 has "a negative tone to it that is out of character with the Messiah. If the 'he' were Christ, the wording would have been more direct . . . and positive" (Charles H. Ray, "A Study of Daniel 9:24–27: Part III," *Conservative Theological Journal* 6 [March 2002]: 84). Third, Christ did not institute a covenant that continued for only seven years (Miller, *Daniel*, 257). Fourth, regarding Daniel 9:27 Hoehner appropriately asks, "If Christ did confirm a covenant in His first advent, when did He break it? Would Christ break a covenant He has made? Thus the covenant-confirmer refers to a prince who is yet to come" (*Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, 132–33). Fifth, Daniel 9:27 prophesies that in the middle of the seven years the covenant confirmer will put a stop to the sacrificial system. Christ's death did not fulfill this because the sacrificial system did not stop until AD 70 (some forty years afterwards), and Roman soldiers destroyed the temple, not Christ (Walvoord, *Daniel*, 218). Sixth, the context supports this view. "His behavior and ultimate doom match that of the 'little horn' described in chap. 7—the future ruler of a great empire in the last days and the persecutor of the saints—the Antichrist" (Miller, *Daniel*, 257).

⁹³ Tan, "The Identity of the Two Witnesses in Revelation 11," 61; and Wong, "The Two Witnesses in Revelation 11," 352.

⁹⁴ Wong posits five arguments for identifying the beast of 11:7 as the future Antichrist: First, the use of the definite article τὸ with θηρίον ("beast") in verse 7 "indicates that he is a figure well known to the writer" (Wong, "The Two Witnesses in Revelation 11," 353). Ferrell Jenkins points out, "The book of Revelation is the most thoroughly Jewish in its language and imagery of any New Testament book. The book speaks not the language of Paul, but of the Old Testament prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel" (*The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* [Marion, IN: Cogdill Foundation, 1972], 22). Then "since teaching on the Antichrist was so familiar to Jews and Christians through Old and New Testament prophecy (Dan. 7:2–25; 9:27; 11:35–45; Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14; 2 Thess. 2:3–12; 1 John 4:1–6), it is not impossible that John was thinking of him here" (Wong, "The Two Witnesses in Revelation 11," 353–54).

Second, "since the word 'beast' (θηρίον) in the Apocalypse is always used with reference to the future Antichrist or his system (13:1; 14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:2; 17:3; 19:20; 20:10), the beast in 11:7 should be seen in the same light" (*ibid.*, 354). Qualifying his own statement, Wong notes that "all references to the 'beast' in Revelation are singular in number (except 6:8). The usage of θηρίων τῆς γῆς in 6:8 is plural and refers to the beasts of earth in general" ("The Two Witnesses in Revelation 11," 354).

Third, the abyss-origin of the beast (11:7) indicates its satanic source and nature (cf. 9:1). This is also characteristic of the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:9–10) (*ibid.*, 354).

Fourth, the beast of 11:7 is one who ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου ("comes up out of the abyss"), while the beast of 17:8 is described as μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου ("about to come up out of the abyss"). Wong observes, "This correspondence is illu-

EARLY CHURCH SUPPORT FOR THE FUTURIST VIEW OF THE TWO WITNESSES IN REVELATION 11

The early church had a strong, long-standing (though by no means unanimous) tradition that the two witnesses of Revelation 11 would be two literal persons in the yet-future Tribulation. This consensus of early church interpretations further argues for the probable accuracy of this futurist understanding of the two witnesses. The present author has summarized the views of eighteen early-church fathers who believed the two witnesses will be literal persons: Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Hyppolytus, Commodian, Victorinus of Petovium, Tyconius, Quodvultdeus, Andreas of Caesarea, Arethas of Caesarea, Caesarius of Arles, Primasclus, Cassiodorus, Oecumenius, Gregory the Great, Isidore of Seville, Chronicon Paschale, John of Damascus, and Bede the Venerable.⁹⁵

CONCLUSION

This article has sought to demonstrate that the Scriptures support the futurist view of the two witnesses in Revelation 11. They will be literal persons (not symbols), they will be two in number, their miraculous activities are to be understood literally, their ministry is prophetic in nature, and they will minister during the yet-future Tribulation period. In addition the testimony of eighteen early-church fathers adds additional support to this view.

minating, for since the beast in 17:8 probably refers to the future Antichrist with his kingdom, the same is probably the case in 11:7" (ibid., 354). See also Wong, "The Johannine Concept of the Overcomer" (ThD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas), 98–109.

Fifth, the term *νικᾶω* ("to overcome") occurs three times in Revelation (6:2; 11:7; 13:7) in reference to the enemy of God's people (Wong, "The Two Witnesses in Revelation 11," 354). "Since other occurrences of the term are related directly to the coming Antichrist (6:2; 13:7), the same may be true in 11:7" (ibid., 354; see also Daniel K. K. Wong, "The First Horseman of Revelation 6," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 [1996]: 212–26; and idem, "The Johannine Concept of the Overcomer," 64–77). See also Woods, "Revelation 13 and the First Beast," 237–50; and Mark L. Hitchcock, "A Critique of the Preterist View of Revelation 13 and Nero," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164 (July–September 2007): 341–56.

⁹⁵ Tan, "A Defense of the Futurist View of the Two Witnesses in Revelation 11:3–13," 170–86.