

PRETERIST VIEWS ON THE TWO WITNESSES IN REVELATION 11*

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ACCORDING TO PRETERISTS most of the book of Revelation was fulfilled in the initial centuries of the Christian era, either at Jerusalem's fall (AD 70) or at the demise of Jerusalem (first century) and Rome (fifth century).¹ With the rise of Christian reconstructionism the preterist approach to eschatology has experienced a revival of lay interest.² The present series begins by examining preterist theories in one area of interest—the identity and era of the witnesses described in Revelation 11.

* This is the first 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 C. Marvin Pate, “Introduction to Revelation,” in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 17. Ice's distinction between extreme, moderate, and mild preterism is helpful. Thomas Ice, “What Is Preterism?” in *The End Times Controversy*, ed. Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2003), 22–24. Extreme (or full) preterists believe Christ's second coming (and believers' bodily resurrection) occurred in AD 70, and believers now live in the eternal state (John Noë, *Beyond the End Times: The Rest of . . . The Greatest Story Ever Told* [Bradford, PA: Preterist Resources, 1999], 260–61). Moderate (or partial) preterists consider almost all prophecy fulfilled in Jerusalem's fall (AD 70) but hold to a yet-future second coming of Christ and the believers' resurrection (Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion* [Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992], 159). In mild preterism (as originated by Luis de Alcazar, Revelation 1–11 relates to Jerusalem's desolation (in AD 70), Revelation 12–19 to Christianization of the Roman empire (in the fourth century), Revelation 20 to Antichrist's final persecution and judgment day, and chapters 21–22 to the glories of the Roman church. See LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1948), 507; Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 17.

² Pate, “Introduction to Revelation,” 18; and Thomas Ice, “Reconstructionism, Christian,” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 362.

PRETERISTS AND THE TWO WITNESSES IN REVELATION 11

Preterists hold one of three views on the identity of the two witnesses in Revelation 11: (1) Christians remaining in Jerusalem during AD 67–70; (2) symbols of Jewish governmental and religious authorities during the first-century Jewish War; and (3) representatives of the entire line of Hebrew prophets, who bore witness against apostate Jerusalem, before its destruction in AD 70.

CHRISTIANS AT JERUSALEM IN AD 67–70

Table 1 lists variations within the preterist view that the witnesses represent Christians who remained in Jerusalem in AD 67–70.

<i>Table 1. The Witnesses as Christians in AD 67–70 Jerusalem</i>	
<i>Preterists</i>	<i>Views on the Two Witnesses' Identity</i>
Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. ³	“probably represent a small body of Christians who remained in Jerusalem to testify against it”
Moses Stuart ⁴	Christians, especially faithful Christian teachers in Judea and Jerusalem during the Roman invasion
J. Stuart Russell ⁵	St. James and St. Peter
James M. Macdonald ⁶	two lesser-known apostles (including James the Less)

Several interpretive decisions frame preterists' understanding of the passage: (1) the temple in Revelation 11:1–2 refers to the first-century Herodian temple;⁷ (2) the measuring rod and the

³ Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, 407–8; and idem, *Before Jerusalem Fell* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), 225. Gentry is a leading partial preterist.

⁴ Moses Stuart, *Hints on the Interpretation of Prophecy* (New York: Dayton and Newman, 1842), 115–19; and idem, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse* (Edinburgh: Maclachlan, Stewart, 1847), 589–614. Stuart taught mild preterism.

⁵ J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 423–47. Russell is considered the father of full preterism.

⁶ James M. Macdonald, “Date of the Apocalypse from Internal Evidence,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 26 (January–March 1869): 466–73.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 467; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 165–92; Russell, *The Parousia*, 423; and Stuart, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 590.

measuring itself (v. 1) symbolize destruction;⁸ (3) Revelation 11:1–2 and Luke 21:24 refer to the same event—the destruction of the temple in AD 70;⁹ (4) the 42 months (Rev. 11:2) and the 1,260 days (v. 3) refer to AD 67–70;¹⁰ (5) 11:1–2 was fulfilled in the destruction of the Herodian temple and Jerusalem in AD 67–70;¹¹ and (6) the beast in verse 7 is Nero.¹²

Russell and Macdonald believe that the “two witnesses” in verse 3 are two personages, but Gentry and Stuart view them corporately.¹³ They will minister in Jerusalem.¹⁴ These preterists suggest that when the Romans invaded Palestine, the majority of Christians there fled east of the Jordan River in obedience to Christ’s warning (Matt. 24:16–22); however, the two witnesses, they say, stayed in Jerusalem and preached to their countrymen.¹⁵ The witnesses’ miracles, death, resurrection, and ascension are be-

⁸ Russell (*The Parousia*, 424–26) and Macdonald (“Date of the Apocalypse,” 468) adopt this interpretation. Gentry, however, says the “inner temple” (to be measured, and thus preserved) signifies Christians, and the “outer temple court” (to be left unmeasured, and thus destined for destruction) refers to “the physical temple, which is to be destroyed” (*He Shall Have Dominion*, 407–8).

Stuart says Revelation 11:1–2 refers to the AD 70 destruction of the Jerusalem temple, but he spiritualizes the passage’s details because he cannot correlate them with the historical events of the first century. So he concludes that Revelation 11:1–2 symbolizes “*the preservation of all which was fundamental and essential in the ancient religion, notwithstanding the destruction of all that was external, in respect to the temple, the city, and the ancient people of God*” (*Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 590, italics his).

⁹ See Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 175; Macdonald, “Date of the Apocalypse,” 467; and Stuart, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 593–94. Russell differs slightly in saying that both passages refer to “the violent and sacrilegious occupation of Jerusalem and the temple by the hordes of Zealots and Edomites,” which occurred near the beginning of the first-century Jewish War (*The Parousia*, 426–28).

¹⁰ Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, 408; Macdonald, “Date of the Apocalypse,” 469–70; Russell, *The Parousia*, 428–30; and Stuart, *Hints on the Interpretation of Prophecy*, 115–17.

¹¹ Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, 408; Macdonald, “Date of the Apocalypse,” 468–69; and Stuart, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 590–93.

¹² Russell, *The Parousia*, 457–65; and Kenneth I. Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation* rev. ed. (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2002), 9–77. Stuart differs somewhat in understanding θηρίον (“the beast”) to refer to Satan (*Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 604–5).

¹³ Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, 408; Stuart, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 599.

¹⁴ Russell, *The Parousia*, 432; and Stuart, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 601.

¹⁵ Macdonald, “Date of the Apocalypse,” 470; Stuart, *Hints on the Interpretation of Prophecy*, 117; and idem, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 600.

lieved to have occurred literally and in AD 67–70.¹⁶ The witnesses' death is attributed ultimately to Nero.¹⁷ Stuart understands that the clause "those who dwell on the earth" refers to those who will celebrate the witnesses' demise.¹⁸ Russell believes the catastrophic events in verse 13 that will occur in conjunction with the witnesses' ascension were fulfilled in an incident in the Jewish war.¹⁹

JEWISH GOVERNMENTAL AND RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

A second preterist view sees the witnesses as symbolic of Jewish governmental and religious authorities during the Jewish War (in the first century AD). Adams and Clark hold this view,²⁰ which includes the following: (1) While there is some uncertainty as to the significance of measuring in Revelation 11:1, verse 2 is understood to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.²¹ (2) The forty-two months (v. 2) and the 1,260 days (v. 3) both refer to "the time of the siege, sack, and pillage of Jerusalem by the Roman armies."²² (3) Revelation 11:2 and Luke 21:24 refer to the same event, the destruction of the temple in AD 70.²³

According to Clark, the two witnesses "may be thought of as personifications, or as personal representatives of [the Jewish] religion and government" during the Jewish War. Adams draws a

¹⁶ Macdonald, "Date of the Apocalypse," 471; Russell, *The Parousia*, 432–43; and Stuart, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 602–3, 608–9.

¹⁷ Russell, *The Parousia*, 443, 457–65. Stuart identifies the beast in verse 7 as Satan and believes that the Zealots executed the two witnesses (*A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 600; and idem, *Hints on the Interpretation of Prophecy*, 118).

¹⁸ Stuart, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 607.

¹⁹ Josephus, *The Jewish War*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, ed. G. P. Goold (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), 4:286, 4:305–13; and Russell, *The Parousia*, 443–44.

²⁰ David S. Clark, *The Message from Patmos* (1921; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 74–80; and Jay E. Adams, *The Time Is at Hand* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), 68–71.

²¹ See Clark, *The Message from Patmos*, 74; and Adams, *The Time Is at Hand*, 69.

²² Clark, *The Message from Patmos*, 75. Clark also writes of a symbolic meaning in the time period. "Here the forty-two months or three and a half years evidently refers to the time of the siege, sack, and pillage of Jerusalem by the Roman armies. We first find this term in Daniel when Jerusalem was oppressed three and a half years by Antiochus Epiphanes, and the term may have taken on a symbolical meaning expressing a period of oppression. It was exactly the time of Antiochus's outrages, and approximately, at least, the time of Rome's active operation against Jerusalem" (ibid.).

²³ Adams, *The Time Is at Hand*, 69.

similar conclusion.²⁴ Clark and Adams give three lines of evidence that allegedly support this identification. (1) The olive trees and lampstands in 11:4 refer to Zechariah 4.²⁵ (2) The witnesses' activities resemble those of Moses and Elijah, "who also may represent civil and religious government."²⁶ (3) The death of the witnesses fits with the Romans' obliteration of the Jews' religious and civil power in AD 70.²⁷ Adams explains their "resurrection" in this way: "These both [i.e., Jewish governmental and religious authorities] rose to life again in a new and more vital way in the church of Jesus Christ."²⁸ Clark says their resurrection refers to the reinstatement of government and religion.²⁹

LINE OF HEBREW PROPHETS

The third preterist view sees the witnesses as representing the entire line of Hebrew prophets who bore witness against apostate Jerusalem before its destruction in AD 70. Chilton, who holds this view,³⁰ says the temple's inner court refers to the church,³¹ and the

²⁴ Ibid.; and Clark, *The Message from Patmos*, 77. Clark elaborates, "[I]n the social and civil convulsions that destroyed Jerusalem when the Jewish state was crushed, when the temple was burned, and the leaders of state and church were slain, it would look as if the power of law and religion had perished; . . . But . . . [m]en must revert at length to law and order and moral restraint. . . . And so the witnesses are resurrected. Anarchy may last for a little while, and the wicked may rejoice; but government and religion can't stay dead" (ibid., 76–77). See also Adams, *The Time Is at Hand*, 69.

²⁵ See Clark, *The Message from Patmos*, 76; and Adams, *The Time Is at Hand*, 69.

²⁶ Adams, *The Time Is at Hand*, 69.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 69–70.

²⁹ Clark, *The Message from Patmos*, 77.

³⁰ David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, 271–93. Chilton (1951–1997) was a prominent partial preterist who converted to full preterism after his books were published. Another proponent of this view is Hank Hanegraaff, for whom the two witnesses, "as literary characters in the apocalyptic narrative, 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" (*The Apocalypse Code* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007], 131). He supports his view by addressing three aspects (with emphasis on the third): First, the witnesses' powers are reminiscent of Moses and Elijah. Second, Old Testament law required two witnesses minimum to convict someone of a crime (Deut. 19:15). Third, the reference to the olive trees and lampstands (Rev. 11:4) harks back to Zechariah 4, where the witnesses were Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest. However, while Zechariah 4 "points inexorably to the sevenfold Spirit who fills Zerubbabel and Joshua to overflowing as they lead God's people in the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple" (cf. Zech. 4:6), in Revelation 11:4 "the imagery of the lampstand and the two olive trees are reconfigured into an intricate linguistic tapestry, the threads of

outer court refers to apostate Israel.³² Since measuring indicates “divine protection from destruction,” the church will be protected “from the outpouring of God’s wrath.”³³ In contrast, apostate Israel, excluded from the protective measuring, will experience Jerusalem’s destruction.³⁴ Chilton also believes that the forty-two months (= 1,260 days and three and a half years) symbolize “sadness, death, and destruction” during a “limited period [when] . . . the wicked are triumphant.”³⁵ (4) He also believes that 11:1–2 parallels the Olivet Discourse in referring to Jerusalem’s destruction culminating in AD 70.³⁶ Chilton summarizes the message of Revelation 11:1–2 thus, “[T]he Church will be saved through the coming Tribulation, during which Jerusalem is to be destroyed by an invasion of Gentiles. The end of this period will mean the full establishment of the Kingdom.”³⁷

which are drawn from a host of Old Testament passages” (cf. Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, 131–2). Hanegraaff summarizes his understanding of what the reconfigured imagery of Revelation 11:4 conveys. “They form a composite image of the Law and the Prophets, culminating in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of a Prophet and Priest who is the earnest of all who are his witnesses and who will reign with him in a New Jerusalem wherein dwells righteousness” (*The Apocalypse Code*, 132).

³¹ Chilton’s reasoning is as follows: (1) The imagery of Revelation 11:1 is taken from Ezekiel 40–43, where the ideal temple (i.e., the church) is measured (cf. Mark 14:58; John 2:19; 1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:19–22; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 3:6; 1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 3:12). (2) In the book of Hebrews, the heavenly sanctuary is the pattern (while the earthly Jewish one is a copy, Heb. 8:5), and the true sanctuary (9:24), belongs to the people of the new covenant (6:19–20). Christ’s ministry as high priest in this sanctuary (10:19–22; 12:22–24) means earthly believers already participate in the worship. (3) Much of the action in Revelation has occurred or originated from the inner sanctuary of the temple. (4) The worshipers in Revelation 11:1 are priests (Exod. 28:43; 29:44), the church is a kingdom of priests (Rev. 1:6; 5:10; Matt. 27:51; Heb. 10:19–20), and God’s people are shown before the altar of incense (Rev. 5:8; 6:9–10; 8:3–4). See Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 272–73.

³² *Ibid.*, 272–74.

³³ *Ibid.*, 273.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 274.

³⁵ *Ibid.* Chilton defends his symbolical interpretation of the forty-two months (Rev. 11:2) thus: First, it is taken from Daniel 7:25, where it symbolized a “period of wrath and judgment due to apostasy.” Second, its symbolical nature is indicated by the chiasmic arrangement of the period of time in the Trumpets section (i.e., 11:2; 11:3; 11:9; 11:11; 12:6; 13:5). Third, Chilton asserts that “[t]his kind of imagery is used throughout the Bible,” and cites as examples Daniel 12:1–2 and Matthew 1:17 (Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 274–75).

³⁶ Chilton emphasizes the “symbolical significance” of the “forty-two months,” while acknowledging a three-and-a-half-year Roman siege (i.e., AD 67–70) (*ibid.*, 275).

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Chilton says the two witnesses “represent the line of prophets, culminating in John the Baptizer, who bore witness against Jerusalem during the history of Israel” and gave further testimony of Jerusalem’s guilt before its destruction in AD 70.³⁸ He then 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.”³⁹

Chilton builds the case for his line-of-prophets view of the witnesses by interpreting the details of Revelation 11:3–13 as follows:

(1) The 1,260 days are related (but not identical) to the forty-two months, which Chilton understands symbolically.⁴⁰

(2) The witnesses’ sackcloth attire (v. 3), traditional garb of prophets (from Elijah to John the Baptist), symbolizes mourning over national apostasy.⁴¹

(3) Biblical prophecy and symbolism is replete with the idea that two witnesses are required for biblical law.⁴²

(4) The reference to the two olive trees and the two lampstands in verse 4 is complex imagery from Zechariah 4 that symbolizes “the Holy Spirit’s filling and empowering work in the leaders of His covenant people” and represents the officers of the covenant (i.e., the witnesses) “belong[ing] to the royal house and the priesthood.”⁴³ Chilton then attempts to relate the ideas of prophetic testimony, kingship, priesthood, and the church.⁴⁴

(5) The witnesses’ miraculous works (vv. 5–6) are symbolically understood, as their powers recall those of Moses and Elijah, and “this becomes 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).⁴⁵

(6) The “beast” (Rev. 11:7) from the abyss, who kills the witnesses, is seen as having “various historical manifestations,” with

³⁸ Ibid., 276, 278.

³⁹ Ibid., 284.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 276.

⁴¹ 2 Kings 1:8; Isaiah 20:2; Jonah 3:6; Zechariah 13:4; Matthew 3:4; Mark 1:6. See Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 276.

⁴² Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Matthew 18:16; cf. Exodus 7:15–25; 8–11; and Luke 10:1 (ibid., 276).

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 276–77.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 277.

its ultimate identity being Satan.⁴⁶ Later Chilton identifies the “beast” coming up out of the sea (13:1), which he associates with the abyss, as the Roman Empire and specifically Nero.⁴⁷

(7) The witnesses’ dead bodies metaphorically lie in the streets of the “great city” (v. 8), which Chilton identifies as Jerusalem.⁴⁸

(8) The refusal of burial (v. 9) is viewed as symbolizing “the oppression of the Kingdom of priests by the heathen.”⁴⁹

(9) The phrase “those who dwell on the earth [lit. ‘land’],” v. 10) refers to the Jews.⁵⁰ “Israel and the heathen world [will be] united in their evil gloating at the destruction of the prophets.”⁵¹

(10) The three and a half days (v. 11), when the corpses remain unburied and the persecutors rejoice symbolize “a period of sadness and oppression.”⁵²

(11) The witnesses’ resurrection (v. 11) is viewed as related to the resurrection of Jesus Christ,⁵³ and the parallel between the witnesses’ ascension (v. 12) and John’s ascension (4:1) is underscored.⁵⁴ Chilton concludes, “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 (Eph. 1:20–22; 2:6; Heb. 12:22–24): She now possesses an imperial grant to exercise rule over the ends of the earth, discipling the nations to the obedience of faith (Matt. 28:18–20; Rom. 1:5).”⁵⁵

(12) The earthquake (Rev. 11:13a) is associated with Christ’s

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 279–80.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 326–29.

⁴⁸ Chilton writes, “It is Jerusalem that is guilty of the blood of the Old Covenant Witnesses; she is, par excellence, the killer of prophets” (Matt. 21:33–43; 23:34–38; cf. Luke 13:33) (*ibid.*, 281).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 281–82.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* Chilton sees the destruction of the witnesses as including the murder of individual prophets and ultimately of Christ (*ibid.*, 283).

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ “Through the resurrection of Christ, the Church and her Testimony became unstoppable. . . . The Witnesses did not survive the persecutions; they died. But in Christ’s resurrection they rose to power and dominion that existed not by might, nor by power, but by God’s Spirit, the very breath of life from God” (*ibid.*, 284).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

ascension and the doom of apostate Israel.⁵⁶ The fall of one-tenth of Jerusalem (v. 13b) relates to the “first siege of Jerusalem, under Cestius,” serving as a warning to the city.⁵⁷ The seven thousand people killed in the earthquake (v. 13c), symbolizes the fact that the wicked—now in the minority—are destroyed, and the overwhelming majority are converted and saved (v. 13d).⁵⁸

PRETERIST ASSUMPTIONS RELATING TO THE TWO WITNESSES OF REVELATION 11

REVELATION WRITTEN BEFORE AD 70

Dating the writing of Revelation in the time of Nero is the linchpin of the preterist view. As Hitchcock observes, “Obviously, if Revelation was written after AD 70 when Jerusalem fell to Rome, then it cannot be prophesying this event.”⁵⁹ Preterists acknowledge the dependence of their scheme on the early date of Revelation.⁶⁰ In fact leading preterist Gentry devoted his doctoral dissertation (subsequently published as *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*) to making the case for a pre-AD 70 composition for the book of Revelation.⁶¹ Indeed, “the entire preterist system . . .

⁵⁶ According to Chilton, “one of the results of Christ’s ascension, as He foretold, would be the crack of doom for apostate Israel, the shaking of heaven and earth. Scripture connects as one theological Event—the Advent—Christ’s birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, the outpouring of His Spirit upon the Church in A.D. 30, and the outpouring of His wrath upon Israel in the Holocaust of A.D. 66–70: Thus in that Day there was a great earthquake (cf. Rev. 6:12; Ezek. 38:19–20; Hag. 2:6–7; Zech. 14:5; Matt. 27:51–53; Heb. 12:26–28)” (*ibid.*, 284–85).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Mark L. Hitchcock, “The Stake in the Heart,” in *The End Times Controversy*, 123.

⁶⁰ Gentry explains, “If the destruction of the Temple looms in the near future for the author, it would seem that historically verifiable events within the prophecies could be discerned with a heightened degree of confidence. . . . If the book was written two and one-half decades *after* the destruction of the Temple, however, then the prophecies are necessarily open to an extrapolation into the most distant future, and to the exclusion of the important events of A.D. 67–70” (*Before Jerusalem Fell*, 20–21, italics his). R. C. Sproul writes, “If the book was written after A.D. 70, then its contents manifestly do not refer to events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem—unless the book is a wholesale fraud, having been composed after the predicted events had already occurred” (*The Last Days according to Jesus* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998], 140). See also David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Tyler, TX: Reconstruction, 1985), 159–60.

⁶¹ See Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*.

rises or falls on the early date of Revelation.”⁶²

Hitchcock wrote his doctoral dissertation to rebut Gentry’s preterist claims and to defend the Domitianic dating (AD 95) of Revelation.⁶³ Regarding external evidence he examines the testimony of Hegesippus (ca. AD 150) and Irenaeus (ca. AD 120–202), who were the earliest witnesses for the dating of the Apocalypse, and he concludes that these writers support the Domitianic dating of Revelation.⁶⁴ Then he considers relevant testimonies from twenty more ancient witnesses. Regarding internal evidence Hitchcock critiques the nine main internal arguments given by preterists for the Neronic dating of Revelation, concluding that these are not persuasive.⁶⁵ Then he defends internal evidence for the Domitianic dating of Revelation.⁶⁶ Hitchcock concludes that “the external and internal evidence support the Domitianic date of Revelation by a preponderance of the evidence.”⁶⁷ Thus the entire preterist system is built on an unstable foundation.

OLIVET DISCOURSE REFERRING TO FIRST-CENTURY DESTRUCTION

Preterists understand the Olivet Discourse (and Revelation) as referring to the destruction of Jerusalem (and the temple) culminating in AD 70.⁶⁸ Futurists agree with preterists that Luke 21:20–24,

⁶² Mark L. Hitchcock, “A Defense of the Domitianic Date of Revelation” (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2005), 7.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 11–38.

⁶⁵ These internal arguments include the thematic focus of 1:7; the temporal expectation of the author; the looming Jewish war; the contemporary integrity of the temple in 11:1–2; no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem; Nero and the beast; persecution of Christians under Nero; the sixth king in 17:9–11; and the Jewish character of Christianity in Revelation (ibid., 80–173).

⁶⁶ Ibid., 174–223.

⁶⁷ Ibid., iv.

⁶⁸ Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991), 23–35. Gentry writes, “John’s Gospel is the only Gospel that does not contain the Olivet Discourse, and . . . it would seem John’s Revelation served as his exposition of the Discourse. . . . If . . . Revelation is indeed John’s exposition of the Olivet Discourse, we must remember that in the delivery of the Discourse the Lord emphasized that it focused on Israel (Matt. 24:1, 2, 15–16; cp. Matt. 23:32ff.) and was to occur in His generation (Matt. 24:34)” (*Before Jerusalem Fell*, 130–31). For a brief summary of preterist interpretation of the Olivet Discourse (especially the differing perspectives of partial preterists Gentry and DeMar), see Stanley D. Toussaint, “A Critique of the Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151 (October–December 2004): 470–71.

the Lord's answer to the disciples' first question,⁶⁹ refers to the AD 70 destruction. However, the other portions of the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24–25; Mark 13; Luke 21)—Christ's answer to the disciples' second question⁷⁰—are taken by futurists as unfulfilled, for they anticipate a future Tribulation period.⁷¹

REBUTAL REGARDING THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

Following are reasons why the Olivet Discourse was not fulfilled in AD 70.⁷² First, as Ice points out, the focus and message of Luke 21:20–24, as distinguished from other portions of the Olivet Discourse, indicate a difference in the timing of fulfillment. Most of the Olivet Discourse is to be fulfilled in the future, but Luke 21:20–24 was fulfilled in AD 70.⁷³ Second, preterists seem to avoid Matthew 23:39. Since they say that “you” in that verse refers to the

69 “When will these things happen?” (Matt. 24:3; cf. Mark 13:4; Luke 21:7). This first question is concerned with the destruction of the temple, which Jesus had just predicted (cf. Matt. 24:1–2; Mark 13:1–2; Luke 21:5–6).

70 “What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matt. 24:3 NASB; cf. Mark 13:4; Zech. 14).

71 Ice, “The Olivet Discourse,” 156–58; Toussaint, “A Critique of the Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse”; idem, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1980), 266–92; J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ: A Study of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 397–411; and John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 179–204.

72 For excellent assessments of the preterist perspective of the Olivet Discourse, see Toussaint, “A Critique of the Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse”; Ice, “The Olivet Discourse”; Price, “Problems with a First-Century Fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse”; J. Randall Price, “Historical Problems with Preterism’s Interpretation of Events in A.D. 70,” in *The End Times Controversy*; idem, “Preterist ‘Time Texts,’” in *The End Times Controversy*, 83–108.

73 As Ice observes, the focus of Luke 21:20–24 and that of 21:25–28 seem to be different. While the former passage has a local, Jerusalem focus (which was apparently fulfilled in the first-century destruction of the city by the Romans), Luke 21:25–28 has a global perspective and includes a description of heavenly and worldwide events that did not happen in AD 70. “If preterists such as Gentry would interpret verses 25–28 in the same way they did verses 20–24, then the events of 25–28 would be understood to be global, and if they are global, then they did not occur in the first century.”

Second, the essential message of Luke 21:20–24 and 21:25–28 differ. While the former passage refers to God’s judgment on Israel (“days of vengeance,” “great distress,” “wrath”), the latter speaks of the nation’s deliverance (“your redemption is drawing near,” v. 28).

Third, in Matthew 24 and Mark 13 no mention is made of wrath or judgment on Israel. Instead, her deliverance is noted (Matt. 24:31; Mark 13:27). Ice appropriately asks, “When was Israel rescued in A.D. 70?” Of course the answer is that there was no first-century deliverance of Israel. These considerations suggest that the events prophesied in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21:25–28 were not fulfilled in the first century, but will be fulfilled in the future tribulation period.

generation of Jews who originally heard Jesus say these words, Toussaint appropriately asks, "When in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem did Israel look to the Lord Jesus and say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord?'"⁷⁴

Third, Price identifies differences between the first-century Herodian temple and the future-Tribulation temple of Matthew 24.⁷⁵ This demonstrates, as Ice notes, that "the details of Matthew 24 cannot be made to fit into a first-century fulfillment."⁷⁶

Fourth, Toussaint gives reasons why the abomination of desolation should be seen as a future event in God's eschatological program.⁷⁷ Along similar lines, Ice points out that elements of the abomination of desolation required by relevant prophetic passages were not present in the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Toussaint, "A Critique of the Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse," 482.

⁷⁵ "There are a number of contrasts within this text that indicate that Jesus was talking about *two different Temples*" (J. Randall Price, *Jerusalem in Prophecy* [Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1998], 253). While the temple of Matthew 24:15 is described as being desecrated, not destroyed (cf. Rev. 11:2), the temple of Matthew 24:2 (i.e., the Herodian temple of Jesus' day) was to be completely leveled ("not one stone will be left upon another," Mark 13:2; Luke 19:44). The Jews living when the temple will be desecrated can anticipate Messiah's coming "immediately after" (Matt. 24:29), but the Jews who experienced the destruction of the Herodian temple did pass away. Also the worldwide tribulation will be "coming upon the world" (Luke 21:26; cf. Matt. 24:21–22 and Mark 13:19–20), and Jewish people will be gathered "from one end of the sky to the other" (Matt. 24:31) and "from the four winds" (Mark 13:27). In addition the Messiah will be revealed universally (Matt. 24:30–31; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:26–27). Price notes that "this scope accords with the prophesied end-time battle for Jerusalem recorded in Zechariah 12–14, where 'all nations of the earth will be gathered against it' (Zechariah 12:3). By contrast the A.D. 70 assault on Jerusalem predicted in Luke 21:20 is by the armies of one empire (Rome)." Price concludes, "Therefore, if there are two different attacks on Jerusalem, separated by more than 2,000 years, then two distinct Temples are considered in Matthew 24:1–2 and Matthew 24:15" (Price, *Jerusalem in Prophecy*, 253–55).

⁷⁶ Ice, "The Olivet Discourse," 159.

⁷⁷ First, the context surrounding Christ's words points to a future time, as indicated by the fact that the events of Matthew 24:14 and 21 have not yet been fulfilled (Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 274). Second, the seventieth week of Daniel has been postponed to the end times (*ibid.*). Third, Mark used the masculine participle "standing" (ἑστῆκότα) with the abomination of desolation (13:14), showing that he saw it as "being manifested by a person who sets himself up as God in the temple." This has not yet occurred (*ibid.*, 274–75). Fourth, 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4 and Revelation 13:11–18 anticipate the revealing of the man of sin as the abomination (*ibid.*, 275).

⁷⁸ These relevant prophetic passages include Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; Matthew 24:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:4; and Revelation 13:14–15. In the first-century destruction of Jerusalem, there was "no image set up in the holy place," "no worship of the image required," "no 3½ year period of time between that event and the coming of Christ," and "no image came to life and beckoned men to worship it" (Ice, "The Olivet Discourse," 179). For further discussion of these elements missing in the AD

Fifth, several historical problems are associated with a first-century fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse.⁷⁹ Thus the preterist interpretation that the Olivet Discourse was fulfilled in the first century is fraught with difficulties.

“TIMING” TERMS REQUIRING FIRST-CENTURY FULFILLMENT

Preterists claim that the events prophesied in Revelation were fulfilled near the date of composition, emphasizing three “timing” terms—τάχος, ἐγγύς, and μέλλω.⁸⁰ Preterists say the usage of these terms in Revelation means that the two witnesses in Revelation 11:3–13 appeared in the first century.

The term τάχος occurs in Revelation 1:1 and 22:6, and ταχύς occurs in 2:16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7, 12, and 20. Both focus on the “speed, quickness, swiftness, haste” of an activity or event.⁸¹ The word ἐγγύς, in 1:3 and 22:10, means “near” (referring either to space or time).⁸²

The preterist understanding of τάχος and ἐγγύς is problematic in at least three areas. First, occurring at the beginning and the end of the book of Revelation, these “timing” terms frame the contents of the book. The introductory portion (1:1–8) has the terms ἐν τάχει (1:1) and ἐγγύς (1:3), and the concluding portion (22:6–21) has the terms ἐν τάχει (22:6), ταχύς (22:7, 12, 20), and ἐγγύς (22:10). Although preterist Gentry comments on these occurrences,

70 destruction of Jerusalem see *ibid.*, 177–83.

⁷⁹ See J. Randall Price, “Historical Problems with a First-Century Fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse,” in *The End Times Controversy*, 377–98; H. Wayne House, “Josephus and the Fall of Jerusalem: An Evaluation of the Preterist View on Jerusalem in Prophecy” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Pre-Trib Study Group, Dallas, TX, December 8–10, 2008); and Ice, “The Olivet Discourse.”

⁸⁰ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 133–45. See also Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, 21–22, 26–27, 32. The term μέλλω occurs in Revelation 1:19; 2:10; 3:2, 10, 16; 6:11; 8:13; 10:4, 7; 12:4, 5; and 17:8. See John R. Kohlenberger, Edward W. Goodrick, and James A. Swanson, eds., *The Exhaustive Concordance to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 622–24. However, Gentry focuses on the occurrences of μέλλω in 1:19 and 3:10 (*Before Jerusalem Fell*, 141–42).

Toussaint addresses timing texts in Matthew (23:39; 24:15, 27, 30, 34), and other passages (“A Critique of the Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse,” 469–90). Ice also shows why Matthew 10:23; 16:27–28; and 24:34 were not fulfilled in the first century (“Preterist ‘Time Texts,’” in *The End Times Controversy*, 83–97).

⁸¹ 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), 992–93.

⁸² Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 214.

he does not grasp the full implication of their location.⁸³ As Hitchcock states, “With these statements serving as bookends for the entire prophetic content of Revelation, whatever meaning one gives to these terms must be applied to all the events in the book. . . . Thus the preterist interpretation of these timing terms requires fulfillment in A.D. 70 of the *entire* Apocalypse, including 20:7–22:21. Yet partial preterists, such as Gentry, say this portion of Revelation refers to yet-future eschatological events.”⁸⁴

Within the camp of moderate preterists, there is disagreement, as fellow partial-preterist DeMar includes Revelation 22:6 among his list of “time indicators” in Revelation.⁸⁵ Pinpointing the inconsistent stance of the partial preterist view, Ice writes, “Since Revelation 22:6 refers to the whole book of Revelation, it would be impossible to take *táchos* as a reference to A.D. 70 (as Gentry does) and at the same time hold that Revelation 20:7–9 teaches the second coming. Gentry must either adopt a view similar to futurism or shift to the extreme preterist view that understands the entire book of Revelation as past history and thus eliminates any future second coming and resurrection.”⁸⁶ However, with its rejection of a future second coming of Christ and its unorthodox view of the resurrection, extreme preterism is considered heretical even by partial preterists.⁸⁷ Thus the preterist understanding of these “timing” terms is plagued by interpretive and theological inconsistencies.⁸⁸

Second, the book of Revelation is described as a prophecy (1:3; 22:7). However, if it “was written in A.D. 65–66 and the events in 1:1–20:6 were fulfilled ‘soon’ in the events of A.D. 64–70, as partial preterists maintain, then the bulk of the book was already fulfilled before most Christians ever heard or read its contents.”⁸⁹

⁸³ According to Gentry, “This [temporal] expectation is emphasized in a variety of ways: by strategic placement, frequent repetition, and careful variation” (*Before Jerusalem Fell*, 133). Noting the location of these terms, he further writes, “Its appearance in both of these chapters [i.e., 1 and 22] is significant because these chapters bracket the highly wrought drama of the prophetic body of the book contained in the section from Revelation 4:1 through 22:6” (*ibid.*).

⁸⁴ Hitchcock, “A Critique of the Preterist View of ‘Soon’ and ‘Near’ in Revelation,” 472 (*italics his*). See also Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, 254, 276, 418.

⁸⁵ See DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 23.

⁸⁶ Ice, “Preterist ‘Time Texts,’” 105.

⁸⁷ See Sproul, *The Last Days according to Jesus*, 153–70.

⁸⁸ Hitchcock, “A Critique of the Preterist View of ‘Soon’ and ‘Near’ in Revelation,” 472–73.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 473.

Third, the preterist understanding of the “timing” terms in Revelation reveals their inconsistent hermeneutic. As Woods observes, “Because of their literal and chronological understanding of Revelation’s timing texts, preterists believe that they are justified in spiritualizing most of Revelation so that it is given an A.D. 70 realization. But why are the timing texts to be understood literally while the vast majority of Revelation’s contents are not to be understood in like manner?”⁹⁰

A strong case can be made that *τάχος/ταχύς* in Revelation refers to the manner in which an action occurs (i.e., as qualitative indicators, “suddenly,” “quickly”), rather than its timing (“soon,” as preterists hold).⁹¹ This understanding of the terms is within their field of meanings. First, Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich define the noun *τάχος* as “speed, quickness, swiftness, haste.”⁹² Second, the term *ταχύς* occurs six times in Revelation (2:16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7, 12, 20), always with the verb *ἔρχομαι*. These six occurrences of *ταχύς* in the Apocalypse are adverbial, meaning “without delay, quickly, at once.”⁹³ Third, Blass, Debrunner, and Funk list four categories of adverbs: adverbs of manner, adverbs of place, adverbs of time, and correlative adverbs,⁹⁴ but they cite no examples of *ταχύς* as an adverb of time.⁹⁵ Moreover, Blass, Debrunner, and Funk classify *ἐν τάχει* as an example of “manner” (citing Luke 18:8).⁹⁶ Fourth, the Septuagint uses *ταχύς* in passages “which even by the most conservative estimations could not have fulfillments

⁹⁰ Andrew Woods, “The First Beast of Revelation 13 Has Not Yet Appeared in World History” (ThM thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2002), 68.

⁹¹ John F. Walvoord writes, “That which Daniel declared would occur ‘in the latter days’ is here described as ‘shortly’ (Gr., *en tachei*), that is, ‘quickly or suddenly coming to pass,’ indicating rapidity of execution after the beginning takes place. The idea is not that the event may occur soon, but that when it does, it will be sudden (cf. Luke 18:8; Acts 12:7; 22:18; 25:4; Rom. 16:20). A similar word, *tachys*, is translated ‘quickly’ seven times in Revelation (2:5, 16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7, 12, 20)” (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary* [Chicago: Moody, 1966], 35; see also Ice, “Preterist ‘Time Texts,’” 102–4).

⁹² Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 807.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 55–57.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*; and Ice, “Preterist ‘Time Texts,’” 104.

⁹⁶ Blass, Debrunner, and Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Christian Literature*, 118; and Ice, “Preterist ‘Time Texts,’” 104.

within hundreds or even thousands of years” (e.g., Isa. 5:26; 13:22; 51:5; 58:8).⁹⁷

However, two considerations suggest that assigning a temporal meaning to ἐν τάχει in Revelation 1:1 might be preferable. First, Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich classify these two occurrences of the phrase ἐν τάχει (in 1:1; 22:6) with the meaning “soon, in a short time.”⁹⁸ Second, as Hitchcock suggests, “the temporal meaning of ἐν τάχει in 1:1 is reinforced in the immediate context by the words ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς (‘for the time is near’) only two verses later (v. 3). Here ἐγγύς denotes ‘being close in point of time, *near*’ since ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς in verse 3 carries a temporal meaning, it seems more contextually consistent to translate ἐν τάχει in verse 1 temporally as well.”⁹⁹

A compelling case can also be made for the point that the terms τάχος/ταχύς and ἐγγύς in Revelation denote imminence, as the apostle John was writing with the prophetic viewpoint. Preferring this understanding of the “timing” terms in Revelation, Mounce writes, “The most satisfying solution is to take the expression ‘must soon take place’ in a straightforward sense, remembering that in the prophetic outlook the end is always imminent. Time as chronological sequence is of secondary concern in prophecy. This perspective is common to the entire NT.”¹⁰⁰

The New Testament authors described this present age, the period between the two advents of Christ, with the phrase “latter days” (or similar expressions).¹⁰¹ In 1 John 2:18 the apostle John

⁹⁷ Ice, “Preterist ‘Time Texts,’” 105; Alfred Rahlfs and Robert Hanhart, eds., *Septuaginta*, rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 573, 584, 636, 644.

⁹⁸ Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 807.

⁹⁹ Hitchcock, “A Critique of the Preterist View of ‘Soon’ and ‘Near’ in Revelation,” 475; see also Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 55.

¹⁰⁰ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 41. Thomas comments, “The purpose of *en tachei* is to teach the imminence of the events foretold, not to set a time limit within which they must occur” (Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 56). Regarding these “timing” terms, Grant R. Osborne writes, “It is better to see this as apocalyptic language similar to that throughout the NT on the ‘soon’ return of Christ (cf. Luke 18:8; Rom. 16:20; 1 Pet. 4:7). . . . The language of imminence intends to draw the reader into a sense of expectation and responsibility, a sense meant to characterize every age of the church” (*Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002], 55).

¹⁰¹ G. K. Beale, “Eschatology,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 330-32.

(who also wrote Revelation) twice referred to the present age as the “last hour,” but this period has been continuing for over two thousand years.¹⁰² In the Olivet Discourse, the imminent return of Jesus Christ and the need for believers to be ready are repeatedly emphasized by the Lord.¹⁰³

Other New Testament writers also described future events as “near.”¹⁰⁴ Paul exhorted believers to live godly lives because “the night is almost gone, and the day is near [ἐγγίζω]” (Rom. 13:12). Similarly Peter called believers to sound judgment since “the end of all things is near [ἐγγίζω]” (1 Pet. 4:7). James encouraged believers to be patient and strong, “for the coming of the Lord is near [ἐγγίζω]” (Jas. 5:8). These passages make the best sense when “near” is understood as referring to the next imminent event.¹⁰⁵

This understanding of the imminence of these “timing” terms in Revelation makes sense, especially in light of Revelation 22:10,¹⁰⁶ “And he said to me, ‘Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.’” Thus the preterist understanding of τᾶχος and ἐγγυς in the book of Revelation is problematic, and other options (i.e., seeing the terms as qualitative indicators or denoting imminence) are more plausible.

REVELATION 11 TEMPLE AS FIRST-CENTURY HERODIAN TEMPLE

An important preterist view is that the temple of Revelation 11:1–2 refers to the Herodian Temple of the first-century AD, and that these verses were fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem and the

¹⁰² W. Hall Harris says that the “last hour” in 1 John 2:18 refers to the period between the two advents of Jesus Christ (*1, 2, 3 John: Comfort and Counsel for a Church in Crisis: An Exegetical Commentary on the Letters of John* [Dallas: Biblical Studies, 2003], 105). See also I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978), 148–51.

¹⁰³ Hitchcock, “A Critique of the Preterist View of ‘Soon’ and ‘Near’ in Revelation,” 477.

¹⁰⁴ The verb ἐγγίζω means to “approach” or “come near” (Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 213).

¹⁰⁵ Ice, “Preterist ‘Time Texts,’” 108.

¹⁰⁶ “The phrase ‘time of the end’ occurs five times in Daniel (8:17; 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9). The ‘time of the end’ refers to Israel’s final period of history, which Daniel was told to seal but John is told not to seal” (Ice, “Preterist ‘Time Texts,’” 106). Moreover, “since 22:10 is at the end of the book and refers to the total message of Revelation, it is inconsistent to interpret part of the message as having already been fulfilled and the other part as still future” (ibid.).

temple in AD 67–70.¹⁰⁷ This is considered a principal piece of internal evidence for the Neronian dating of Revelation.¹⁰⁸ Preterists believe that Revelation 11:3–13 refers to the first century. However, the following points show that this premise is untenable.¹⁰⁹

First, Revelation 11:1–2 does not state that the temple will be desecrated. This suggests that these verses are not referring to the first-century Herodian temple, which was destroyed in AD 70.¹¹⁰

Second, referring to Luke 21:24 and Revelation 11:2, Gentry states that “the correspondences are so strong, they bespeak historical identity rather than mere accidental similarity,” and he says both were fulfilled in the events leading up to AD 70.¹¹¹ However, as Hitchcock points out, “significant differences between these two texts and their contexts indicate they are not referring to the same

¹⁰⁷ Russell, *The Parousia*, 423; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 165–92; idem, *He Shall Have Dominion*, 408; Macdonald, “Date of the Apocalypse,” 467–69; and Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 590–93; Clark, *The Message from Patmos*, 74; and Adams, *The Time Is at Hand*, 69. Chilton’s understanding of the temple in Revelation 11:1–2 differs somewhat from the perspective of other preterists.

¹⁰⁸ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 118–19, 165–92; and Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, 159–60. Gentry lists several nineteenth-century scholars who held the same view, including F. W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity* (New York: Cassell, Petter, Galpin, 1882), 412; Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (1882; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 1:835; and Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics: A Study of the Most Notable Revelations of God and of Christ* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1898; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 258–59.

Other proponents of an early date of Revelation who emphasize the importance of the temple reference in Revelation 11 include Robert A. Briggs, *Jewish Temple Imagery in the Book of Revelation*, Studies in Biblical Literature (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 24–29; and Charles C. Torrey, *The Apocalypse of John* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1958), 87.

¹⁰⁹ In Hitchcock’s critique of the preterist view of the temple in Revelation 11:1–2 he assesses the four views of the identity of this temple: a symbol of the church, a heavenly temple, the Herodian temple, and a future end-time temple (Mark L. Hitchcock, “A Critique of the Preterist View of the Temple in Revelation 11:1–2,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164 [April–June 2007]: 219–36). See also J. Randall Price, *The Temple and Bible Prophecy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2005); and idem, “The Desecration and Restoration of the Temple as an Eschatological Motif in the Tanach, Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and the New Testament” (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1993).

¹¹⁰ J. Randall Price points out several differences between the first-century Herodian temple (Matt. 24:1–2) and the future tribulational temple, referred to in Matthew 24:15. He contends that “there are a number of contrasts within this text that indicate that Jesus was talking about two different Temples” (*Jerusalem in Prophecy* [Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1998], 253).

¹¹¹ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 175–76.

event.”¹¹² (1) The events of Revelation 11:8, 13 show that Jerusalem will not be totally destroyed during the forty-two months of treading. So verses 1–2 could not be referring to the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem.¹¹³ (2) While verse 2 specifies a forty-two-month time limit for the trampling of the city, Luke 21:24 “leaves the time of trampling open-ended and implies that it will endure for a long time (‘until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled’).”¹¹⁴

Third, as Hitchcock points out, Gentry’s practice of taking Revelation 11:1 figuratively and verse 2 literally is not hermeneutically sound.¹¹⁵

Fourth, as the Old Testament background for 11:1–2 is Ezekiel 40–42¹¹⁶ (wherein Ezekiel “saw a temple that did not exist at the time of his vision”),¹¹⁷ the apostle John “could just as easily describe a future temple as well.”¹¹⁸

Thus this preterist view—that the temple of Revelation 11:1–2 refers to the first-century AD temple, and that these verses were fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 67–70—is problematic. The importance of this to the Neronian dating of Revelation reveals the weak foundation of preterism.

¹¹² Hitchcock, “A Critique of the Preterist View of the Temple in Revelation 11:1–2,” 223.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 224–26. Gentry says that the “inner temple” signifies Christians, and the “outer temple court” refers to “the physical Temple, which is to be destroyed” (*He Shall Have Dominion*, 407–408).

¹¹⁶ Hitchcock observes that “almost every scholarly commentary or journal article on Revelation 11:1–2 mentions the close connection between Ezekiel 40–48 and Revelation 11:1–2. Yet Gentry incredibly never mentions Ezekiel 40–48 even once in his discussion of Revelation 11:1–2. His only mention of Ezekiel 40–48 in *Before Jerusalem Fell*, according to his own Scripture index, is in a footnote on page 224 that has nothing to do with the passage in Revelation” (“A Critique of the Preterist View of the Temple in Revelation 11:1–2,” 228; see also Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 224).

¹¹⁷ Hitchcock presents several strong arguments for the view that the temple in Ezekiel 40–48 refers to the millennial temple, and not a historic temple from Israel’s past or a symbolic temple (“A Critique of the Preterist View of the Temple in Revelation 11:1–2,” 229–35).

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 226. Hitchcock adds, “Though both . . . temples are eschatological, they are not the same. . . . The setting for the [Revelation] temple . . . is tribulation and desecration, while the setting in [Ezekiel 40–48] is restoration. Thus the [Revelation] temple . . . will exist in Jerusalem during the Tribulation (Matt. 24:15; 2 Thess. 2:4), and the temple in Ezekiel . . . will exist during the messianic kingdom” (*ibid.*, 236).

42 MONTHS AND 1,260 DAYS OF REVELATION 11 IN AD 67–70

Preterists understand that the forty-two months of Revelation 11:2, as well as the 1,260 days of verse 3, refer to AD 67–70.¹¹⁹ This entails at least three problems.

First, the view that the forty-two months (and 1,260 days) were fulfilled in AD 67–70 is arbitrary and even unhistorical. The First Jewish War is generally agreed to have begun in AD 66.¹²⁰ However, Gentry begins the forty-two-month count with the arrival of Vespasian (commissioned by Nero) in the early spring of AD 67 to lead the Roman military campaign.¹²¹ However, as Hitchcock notes, “since the war began in AD 66, one cannot arbitrarily move the date forward one year to achieve a predetermined outcome.”¹²² Spargimino concurs that Gentry’s deduction “is highly subjective and lacks valid textual controls.” He says, “There are other equally valid ways of looking at the historical data that make the period of Gentile domination in the first century longer than three-and-one-half years and therefore not compatible with Revelation 11:2.”¹²³ Spargimino points out that verse 2 “says nothing about the [three-and-one-half-year] period beginning with some kind of ‘imperial sanction.’”¹²⁴ Furthermore Gentry’s “equation of the Roman siege of Jerusalem with the forty-two-month period of trodding underfoot” is problematic.¹²⁵

Second, as Woods observes, preterist discussion of the numbers in Revelation is inconsistent. “On one hand, they interpret the

¹¹⁹ Gentry demarcates this forty-two-month period “from the time of this official imperial engagement in the Jewish War (early Spring, A.D. 67) until the time of the Temple’s destruction and Jerusalem’s fall (early September, A.D. 70)” (*Before Jerusalem Fell*, 253).

¹²⁰ Mark L. Hitchcock, “A Critique of the Preterist View of Revelation and the Jewish War,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164 (January–March 2007): 98. See also Stephen K. Stein, “The Jewish Revolt of 66–70 CE,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion and War*, ed. Gabriel Palmer-Fernandez (New York: Routledge, 2004), 232–34; and L. I. Levine, “Jewish War (66–73 C.E.),” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:839–45.

¹²¹ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 252.

¹²² Hitchcock, “A Critique of the Preterist View of Revelation and the Jewish War.” 98.

¹²³ Larry Spargimino, “How Preterists Misuse History to Advance Their View of Prophecy,” in *The End Times Controversy*, 212.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 213.

¹²⁵ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 86. “This misrepresents what such a period of oppression is. Siege is not the same as dominant control. Besides, the period of siege was much longer than forty-two months, extending back to 65 or 66 rather than to an alleged beginning in 67” (*ibid.*, 86).

numbers 42 (Revelation 13:5), 666 (Revelation 13:18), and 1, 5, and 7 (Revelation 17:10) in a straightforward, literal fashion. On the other hand, preterists contend that the numbers 1,000, 12,000, and 144,000 are purely symbolic.”¹²⁶ To Gentry’s explanation that larger rounded numbers in Revelation should be viewed symbolically and smaller numbers literally, Woods comments that this “leaves readers with the impression that he is inconsistently vacillating between hermeneutical methods in support of a predetermined theological outcome.”¹²⁷ Furthermore Woods points out Gentry’s inconsistency in understanding that the two witnesses “represent a small body of Christians who remained in Jerusalem to testify against it.”¹²⁸

Third, the period that preterists take to fulfill the forty-two-month and 1,260-day prophecies does not match the biblical description. Gentry writes, “The fact is that it took *almost exactly* forty-two months for Rome to get into a position to destroy the Temple in the Jewish War of A.D. 67–70.”¹²⁹ However, as Woods points out, prophecies involving a time indicator have been fulfilled precisely.¹³⁰ For instance, Hoehner’s proposed chronology for 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.¹³¹ Thus the three problems associated with AD 67–70 being the prophesied forty-two months or 1,260 days show that that time period does not fulfill the prophe-

¹²⁶ Woods, “Revelation 13 and the First Beast” in *The End Times Controversy*, 243. See Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 151–64, 253–55; and idem, *The Beast of Revelation*, 33–36.

¹²⁷ Andy Woods, “A Case for the Futurist Interpretation of the Book of Revelation” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Pre-Trib Study Group, Dallas, TX, December 2007), 21–23; <http://www.pre-trib.org/article-view.php?id=333> (accessed March 7, 2009). See also Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 162–63; and idem, *He Shall Have Dominion*, 408.

¹²⁸ Woods, “Revelation 13 and the First Beast,” 244. See also Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, 408.

¹²⁹ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 250 (italics added).

¹³⁰ Woods, “Revelation 13 and the First Beast,” 244.

¹³¹ 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); Thomas Ice, “The 70 Weeks of Daniel,” in *The End Times Controversy*; and Woods, “Revelation 13 and the First Beast,” 244.

cies in Revelation 11:2–3.

BEAST OF REVELATION 13 AS NERO

A common preterist view is that the first beast (θηρίον) of Revelation 13 (previously introduced in 11:7) refers to the first-century Roman emperor Nero.¹³² Identifying this beast as Nero logically relegates the time frame of the two-witnesses prophecy to a first-century fulfillment. However, identifying the first beast of Revelation 13 with the Roman emperor Nero is problematic, as evidenced by the following four considerations.

First, the preterist attempt to get Nero's name to equal 666 is difficult. Using Nero's name with the title "Caesar," Gentry observes that when these Greek terms are transliterated into Hebrew, the gematria value is 666,¹³³ and the number 666 is the number of the name of the beast (Rev. 13:17–18). However, "Caesar" was a title, and not part of Nero's name. As Hitchcock observes, "Using Nero Caesar to calculate the number of his name would be similar to someone today using the title 'President' or 'Prime Minister' as part of a person's name to arrive at the gematria value of his name."¹³⁴ Interestingly in his three examples of names that equal 666, Irenaeus used only single names and did not include any titles.¹³⁵ (2) In addition, for Gentry's valuation of Nero's name to equal 666, the Greek must be transliterated into Hebrew. However, why would the apostle John, writing to a primarily Greek-speaking audience, have used the symbolism of gematria with a Hebrew (instead of a Greek) form of the name.¹³⁶ As Guthrie observes, "Irenaeus discusses the identification [of 666], but as-

¹³² Gentry dedicates an entire book to suggesting that the first beast of Revelation 13 is Nero (*The Beast of Revelation*). Other preterists who hold this view include Russell, *The Parousia*, 457–65; Macdonald, "Date of the Apocalypse," 473–78; Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 326–29. Nero reigned from AD 54 until his death by suicide in June of AD 68.

¹³³ Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 33–34; and idem, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 198–201.

¹³⁴ Hitchcock, "A Critique of the Preterist View of Revelation 13 and Nero," 344.

¹³⁵ Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1885; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 5.30.3; and Hitchcock, "A Critique of the Preterist View of Revelation 13 and Nero," 344.

¹³⁶ George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 186; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 395; and G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1966), 175.

sumes without question that the calculation must be done in Greek, although he comes to no satisfactory conclusion.”¹³⁷

Second, the preterist attempt to show that the first-century AD worship of Nero fulfills Revelation 13:3–4, 14–15 falls short of the biblical requirements. Referring to chapter 13, Gentry points out that “if Nero is indeed the personal incarnation of the Beast of Revelation, as I have been demonstrating, then it must be that he was worshipped.”¹³⁸ However, as Hitchcock notes, the question “is not whether Nero was the recipient of worship. No one can deny that Nero was worshiped during his reign. The issue is whether the worship of Nero fits the facts of the worship of the beast in Revelation.”¹³⁹ As his “best” illustration of the worship of Nero, Gentry refers to Tiridates’s (king of Armenia) worship of Nero in AD 66, as described by Cassius Dio.¹⁴⁰ Gentry then concludes, “By this action this king actually worshiped ‘the image of the Beast’ (Rev. 13:15).”¹⁴¹ However, Gentry’s conclusion is unwarranted, as Tiridates’s worship of Nero does not fulfill the specifications of Revelation 13. Three facts may be noted. (1) While Tiridates worshiped images (plural) of Nero, the “image” (εἰκῶν) of 13:14–15 is singular.¹⁴² (2) Cassius Dio did not record that the image Tiridates worshiped spoke (cf. 13:15).¹⁴³ (3) The worship of the beast in Revelation 13:8 will be global in scope, not local.¹⁴⁴

Third, the preterist attempt to show that Nero’s death fulfilled prophecy relating to the beast’s demise likewise falls short of the biblical specifications. Referring to 13:10, 14, Gentry emphasizes Nero’s death by means of the sword.¹⁴⁵ However, according to verse

¹³⁷ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 959–60; see Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” 1:5.30.3.

¹³⁸ Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 57. To make his case that Nero was worshiped, Gentry cites evidence from Seneca, Suetonius, Cassius Dio, inscriptions, and coinage (ibid., 63–66).

¹³⁹ Hitchcock, “A Critique of the Preterist View of Revelation 13 and Nero,” 348.

¹⁴⁰ Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 65. See also Cassius Dio, *Dio’s Roman History*, trans. Earnest Cary (London: W. Heinemann, 1914), 62.23, 63.4–5.

¹⁴¹ Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 65.

¹⁴² Hitchcock, “A Critique of the Preterist View of Revelation 13 and Nero,” 349; and Dio, *Dio’s Roman History*, 62.23.

¹⁴³ Hitchcock, “A Critique of the Preterist View of Revelation 13 and Nero,” 349; and Dio, *Dio’s Roman History*, 62.23.

¹⁴⁴ Hitchcock, “A Critique of the Preterist View of Revelation 13 and Nero,” 349.

¹⁴⁵ Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 68–69.

3, the mortal wound to the beast is inflicted by someone else.¹⁴⁶ In contrast, Nero committed suicide, with the help of his private secretary Epaphroditus.¹⁴⁷

Fourth, other biblical prophecies of the beast's activities were not fulfilled during Nero's reign. According to Revelation 13, the beast will suffer a mortal wound but will return to life (v. 3), there will be worldwide worship of the beast (vv. 3–4), the beast will be given power for forty-two months (v. 5), and the world population will be required to receive the mark of the beast on either right hand or forehead, in order to engage in commercial transactions (vv. 16–18). However, the works of Suetonius, Cassius Dio, and Tacitus, which are considered among the "most important" literary sources for the reign of Nero (AD 54–68), do not record such events as described in Revelation 13.¹⁴⁸ Thus the preterist assumption that the first beast of chapter 13 (previously introduced in 11:7) refers to the Roman emperor Nero is problematic, and assigning the two-witnesses prophecy to a first-century time frame is problematic and unnecessary.¹⁴⁹

SUMMARY

This article discussed preterist views of the two witnesses in Revelation 11 and examined assumptions underlying preterist identifications of the two witnesses, showing that they cannot be sustained. The next article will further critique preterist views of the two witnesses.

¹⁴⁶ Hitchcock, "A Critique of the Preterist View of Revelation 13 and Nero," 349.

¹⁴⁷ Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars*, trans. J. C. Rolfe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), 6.49; and Hitchcock, "A Critique of the Preterist View of Revelation 13 and Nero," 349.

¹⁴⁸ Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars*, 6.1–57; Dio, *Dio's Roman History*, 61.1–63.29; Tacitus, *The Annals (Books XIII–XVI)*, trans. John Jackson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937), 13.1–16.35; Miriam T. Griffin, "Nero," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 4:1076.

¹⁴⁹ Woods examined various contextual, hermeneutical, and exegetical aspects of Revelation 13 and concluded that these argue against the Neronian view and support the futurist interpretation of the first beast ("The First Beast of Revelation 13 Has Not Yet Appeared in World History," 78–103. See also Woods, "Revelation 13 and the First Beast," 237–50).