

# The Two Witnesses

Revelation 11:3-14

By Phillip G. Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2017-1-29

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### Text

11:1 I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood saying, “Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who are worshiping there. 2 And leave out the outer court of the temple and do not measure it, because it has been given to the nations; and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months.

3 And I will give authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.” 4 These are the two olive trees, even the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. 5 And if anyone wants to harm them fire comes out of their mouths and consumes their enemies. So if anyone wants to harm them he must be killed in this way. 6 They have authority to shut up the sky so that no rain falls during the days of their prophecy; and they have authority over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they wish.

7 When they finish their witness, the Beast of prey that comes up out of the Abyss will make war with them, overcome them and kill them 8—and leave their corpses in the street of the great city! (which is called Sodom and Egypt, spiritually speaking), even where their Lord was crucified.

9 And those from the peoples, tribes, languages and ethnic nations look at their corpses three-and-a-half days, and will not allow their corpses to be buried. 10 And those who dwell on the earth rejoice over them, and they will enjoy themselves and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

11 And after three-and-a-half days the breath from God entered them and they stood on their feet, and a great fear fell on those who were watching them. 12 And I heard a loud voice from the heaven saying to them, “Come up here!” And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. 13 And in that day there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city fell, and seven thousand individuals were killed in the earthquake. And the rest became fearful and gave glory to the God of heaven.)

14 The second woe is past. Look out, here comes the third woe!<sup>1</sup>

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1 Translation of the Majority Text by Wilbur M. Pickering - [The Sovereign Creator Has Spoken](#).

## Introduction - recap

We come now to a discussion of two witnesses who invaded a dangerous city with the Gospel at the very time that all the other Christians are commanded to bail. Which immediately informs us that God has different callings for different folks, right? God preserves some through fleeing (and God Himself commands them to flee) and God leads others to confront the enemy head on. And next time I preach on this passage we will get into some of the nitty gritty implications and applications. But there are two controversies that need to be settled this morning before we can do that. The first is the length of the war and the second is the identity of the witnesses.

And since its been some weeks since I preached on the first two verses of chapter 11, let me give a brief recap. Chapters 6-9 are a seamless timeline of events from AD 30 all the way up to Vespasian's troops arriving on the scene in the late winter of AD 67. I won't recap all the dates of those chapters, but if you want dates to put next to verse 1, John measures this temple for destruction on the very day that the Jews are feverishly starting to prepare Jerusalem for protection. That is Adar 19 of AD 67, which, if my calculations are correct, would be February 20 of AD 67. So the measurement takes place exactly 1260 days before the temple is burned. Now, John prophesied a year earlier, but he is looking here slightly into the future.

We saw that the first half of verse 2 describes the extent of the destruction (which occurred in the first half of the seven year war) and the second half of verse 2 says that even after the city and temple are destroyed in AD 70, the Romans are going to stick around. They are not going to leave. They are going occupy the temple outer courts and they will use those courts as a base of operations to trample Jerusalem for forty two additional months. At the end of those 42 months they hand the administration of the city back over to Jewish authorities. So verses 1-2 are the general overview of the whole seven year war.

Then verse 3 goes back to the beginning of that seven year war and says that these two witnesses would prophecy during the first half of that war - before Jerusalem is destroyed. Since verses 3-14 clearly describe their witness before the city is destroyed, he is clearly going back to the beginning of the war. So shortly after all other Christians escape the city, these two enter the city on what appears to be a suicide mission. They would prophecy from Adar 19 of AD 67 to four days before Titus burned the Temple. But even their bodies and their resurrection will continue their witness against Rome. So if you add the three and a half days, you do have exactly 1260 days of

witness.

And I have diagrammed that seven year war for you in your outlines. The reason I am spending a bit more time on it is that a failure to understand these seven years has kept most Partial Preterists from adequately answering Dispensational objections. Dispensationalists correctly understand a seven year period of tribulation, and they are not going to buy anything less. But more importantly, failure to understand this makes us automatically misinterpret a number of passages in Revelation. Even though it might seem too technical to you, it is an important topic. Sorry about that, but we have to take at least one Sunday to settle these controversies before we can dig into the exciting stuff.

## **I. The seven year war referred to in verses 1-3**

### **A. *Histories of the war refer to it as a seven year war***

So how long was the war? If the only thing you read was the Partial Preterist commentaries (and I am in the Partial Preterist camp that believes most of chapters 1-19 has already been fulfilled) you would get the impression that the war was only three and a half years long. But all the early and later histories of the Jewish War with the Romans refer to it as a seven year war. Josephus, Eusebius, Hegesippus, Yosippon, Seutonius, Tacitus, and other ancient historians are consistent. And modern historians like Cornfeld, Mazar, Maier, and Schurer say the same. Here are just a few quotes:

Grace Aguilar says, "...the destructive Jewish war lasted seven years..."<sup>2</sup>  
George English said, "...the horrible Jewish war lasted seven years..."<sup>3</sup> The forward to Josephus' account calls it, "A firsthand account of the seven year war...", and of course, Josephus himself documents in minute detail a seven year war. Emil Schurer<sup>4</sup> and others do the same.

And that is why it is such a mystery to me that the vast majority of Partial Preterists think of the war as ending in AD 70. It's a huge mistake. They completely miss the references to the second three and a half years - which in some ways were even more devastating - with millions more being killed during that period.

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<sup>2</sup> Grace Aguilar, *Essays and Miscellanies*, (Philadelphia: A. Hart, 1853), p. 119.

<sup>3</sup> George Bethune English, *The Grounds of Christianity Examined*, (Boston: Author, p. 1813), p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> "...the seven year war..." Emil Schurer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Christ*, volume 1, (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), p. 513.

## **B. Daniel 9**

But turn to Daniel 9 and I want to read the prophecy that Jesus referred to when He also predicted this war. We looked at Daniel 9:24 in much more detail a few weeks ago when we dealt with the ending of prophecy in AD 70. So AD 70 is a significant date for the ending of the Old Covenant and the ending of prophecy. But look at the first phrase of verse 24: "Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city..." God would continue dealing harshly with the people and city right up to the end of the seventy weeks.

And let me remind you of what these weeks are. In Hebrew thinking a week can be a period of seven days with the seventh day being a Sabbath day, or it can be a period of seven years with the seventh year being a Sabbath year. But those seven years were also called a week. This passage is describing weeks of years. And in context the purpose of the prophecy was to describe how long God would be patient with abuse of the land when the Jews refused to let the land lie fallow during the sabbath years. Any time they were faithful those years did not count against them. And Daniel was predicting that there would be seventy weeks in which the Jews would violate the sabbath rest year before the Jewish nation and the holy city would be destroyed. Revelation 11:1 has talked about both people and holy city being destroyed. It is referring to same event and using the same language.

If you go down to Daniel 9 verse 26 we have a description of the last week. The seventy weeks are divided up into three periods. It says, "And after sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off..." The Hebrew word for "after" is *וְאַחֵרַי* (wa-Acherei), and literally refers to the tail end or immediately after. Jesus was not cut off in the middle of the seventieth week, as so many people believe. He was cut off at the very end of the second grouping of weeks, namely sixty-two weeks. That leaves an entire week after Jesus's death. But just as there was a forty year gap of Sabbath-year-keeping before the seven (when Zerubbabel, Ezra and others were in charge), and between the seven weeks and the sixty-two weeks, there was a forty year gap of Sabbath-year-keeping between the sixty-two-weeks and the last week. That is why they are divided up into three groups. And people point out that it was as a result of John the Baptist bringing people to repentance. They started letting the land lie fallow again.

Now, the rest of verse 26 describes that whole war that was fought under Titus. It says,

And the people of the prince who is to come...

That prince was Titus. He was not yet the emperor. Even at the end of the war he was still only a prince. His dad was the emperor and his dad had announced that Titus would succeed him, but as heir apparent he was a prince. And as prince, Titus ran the show of this war. So verse 26 again:

And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined.

Notice that phrase, "till the end of the war." Not "till AD 70," but "till the end of the war." So verse 26 is describing the whole war - the whole seven year period. And then verse 27 will go back and describe that seven year period and emphasize just how certain its destruction would be. The New King James unfortunately starts by saying, "Then" as if it was the next in sequence, but that is a mistranslation. Virtually all other translations say "And" because it is simply going back and describing another facet of what will happen during the same time. So it should say,

And he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate.”

John Martin Butt's commentary comments on these verses perfectly. He says,

And if the Messiah, as is plain, was to be cut off at the end of the sixty-nine weeks, and Jerusalem was to be destroyed in the seventieth week, it follows, that the last week of the seventy was unquestionably designed to be separate from the sixty-nine weeks, and not immediately to follow them, as some have supposed. The Jewish war lasted seven years; and in the year of Christ sixty-six, which was the first of the seven years, the Christians escaped out of Jerusalem, in obedience to the New Testament, and were thereby preserved from destruction. In the year seventy, the City and Temple were destroyed, and consequently the sacrifice and oblation therein ceased; but the war was carried on for three years and a half after that event, as it had been for the same period before.<sup>5</sup>

So it is seven years divided up into two equal periods of three and a half years each. If Revelation is the fulfillment of Daniel 9, then we would expect to see a full seven years being discussed. And we do. It is absolutely imperative that we see a seven year timeline for the war.

### **C. Daniel 12**

Now flip over to Daniel 12, and we will read verses 6-13.

Dan. 12:6 And one said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, “How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?” Dan. 12:7 Then

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<sup>5</sup> John Marten Butt, *A Commentary on the Prophecy of Daniel, relating to the Seventy Weeks*, (London: J. Hatchard, 1807), p. 20.

I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time;...

A "time" is one year (or shorter), "times" is two years, and "half a time" is half a year. If you add those up you will get the first three and a half years of the war. Verse 7 continues by saying that there is still more after that:

and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.

It was not completely shattered until AD 74, as he will soon point out. Verse 8:

Dan. 12:8 Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, "My lord, what shall be the end of these things?" Dan. 12:9 And he said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. 10 Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand. Dan. 12:11 "And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days.

When was the daily sacrifice permanently taken away? Smack dab in the middle of the week when the temple was burned. It was burned on Ab 9 of AD 70, which I convert to August 3. That was the date that Titus cursed the God of the temple, saying that he had defeated him. He then took a scroll of the law, laid it on the altar, had two prostitutes lie on top of the scroll, and defiled the scroll by having sex with them. He set up the sign of Rome, the eagle standard. And in other ways he sought to defile the temple. So Ab 9 of AD 70 is a very significant date.

But he also talks about 1290 days after that event. If you count forward 1290 days, Roman atrocities against the Jews around the empire ceased. There was a general cease fire and peace accord. Multiplied millions had died during the second half of the war. So it is a very significant part of the war. You can't just stop at AD 70 as most partial preterists do.

But there is one more warning that he gives. Even though Rome comes to peace with the Jews, God warns the believing Jews not to go back into Israel for a few more days because anyone who did so would be instantly conscripted by the prince who is to come (Titus) for slave labor to do the seige works against Masada - a stronghold occupied by a few Sicarri that had held out a few more days. The siege of Masada happened after the peace accord and was only considered to be an operation against private trouble-makers. So verse 12 warns,

12 Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days.

If you calculate from the burning of the temple forward 1335 days, you

come to the exact date that Masada fell - Nisan 15, AD 74. Verse 13 concludes,

Dan. 12:13 “But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days

And we will look at the issue of a first century resurrection at a later time. That's Revelation 20's first resurrection; the second is at the end of history. But if you keep a seven year chronology in mind, so many things will beautifully fall into place. And this is what I love about the Scripture - every detail works; every detail is important; every detail can be trusted.

And if you would like to be able to reference the dates on my timeline as we go through the rest of the book, I'm going to try to keep it updated. You can pick it up at [KayserCommentary.com](http://KayserCommentary.com) on your phones.

#### ***D. Practical implications of the seven year timeline***

But what are the practical implications? Even this less interesting material we went through has practical implications. The first implication is that things aren't getting worse and worse in world history. Why would I say that? Because everyone knows that the Bible prophecies things to get worse and worse leading up to that seven year period. If it is future, we are in a world of hurt; there will be no reversing it, and we cannot have the faith to expect great things for God or to attempt great things for God. If you mess up on this point of eschatology it will dampen or kill your faith. But if these seven years are in the first century, then it is exciting because from that point on the church has the needed tools to take over the world - if we will live by faith. We are not looking forward to the church being extinguished. That is past. The Beast is past. The Antichrist is past. Everything tied in with the Great Tribulation and the Great Wrath is past. That is a huge implication.

Second, if the leveling of civilization made way for the church to expand and eventually take over the Roman Empire, we should not fear similar judgments. Could America collapse? Yes it could, but if it does, it is to prepare the way for further advances of Christ's kingdom.

Third, the details of this timing proves that even tough times are totally under God's control. The saints should not be fear-based, but faith-based. We should have faith that God will cause even things like that to work together for the church's good.

Fourth, it does show God's incredible patience. It was forty years before Christ judged Israel for the crucifixion and for the deaths of other saints. We don't always know why God waits patiently - sometimes more patiently than



we care for. But He is patient. And His patience is a beautiful thing. It gives opportunity for repentance and salvation.

And fifth, despite His patience, judgments deserved will always rest upon nations unless they repent. Don't think that any nation will get off the hook for its rebellion. So those are the practical implications of this seven year war.

## **II. The identity of the two witnesses - internal clues from Revelation 11**

Now, let's dive into the identity of the two witnesses. And the reason we need to do this is that there is a lot of controversy. What's new, right? We are getting used to seeing that there is lots of controversy in this book. And we have to settle the controversies before we can adequately apply the chapter.

In scanning through my ever-growing set of commentaries (I now have 95 commentaries on Revelation), I have run across 37 different theories of who these witnesses might be. And commentators from all viewpoints on Revelation are frustrated that they can't seem to get to the bottom of the issue. F. W. Farrar expresses the opinion of many when he says this:

These questions have never been satisfactorily answered, and perhaps never will be. We must be content to leave them in the half-light in which the uncertainty of nineteen Christian centuries has left them hitherto. There are no two writers of any importance who even approximately agree in the interpretation of the symbols... Every interpretation seems to be beset with insuperable difficulties. No one school of commentators has been more successful than its rivals...

Well, I hope to prove him wrong this morning. I think we can know with an absolute certainty that they were two literal individuals in the first century. And because of the word "witnesses" and a couple other hints, I believe they were apostles as well. But at a minimum, they were two literal individuals in the first century. And let me explain how I came to that position.

Whenever I have a puzzle like this in Scripture, I write down every hint that I can find in the text, I then write down every theory that I have read, and then I use a spreadsheet to see which theories are eliminated by the hints. If they are all eliminated, then you are back to the drawing table. But contrary to what Farrar said in the 1800s, there are indeed three theories that fit the internal evidence, and there is at least one theory that fits all the internal and external evidence. After the service you can pick up a handout that goes into much more detail than I will give in this sermon. And once you get that, if you look at the spreadsheet on the front you will see a graphical narrowing down of the options. It's very easy to work with.

## **A. A first century context**

But let's just do a tiny bit of investigative work ourselves this morning. We will only look at six of the sixteen clues. The first clue that we have is that this is a first century context. Since these witnesses will prophecy during the days of the Beast of Revelation, if you believe that the Beast of Revelation was in the first century, then you will be convinced that these prophets have to be in first century.

But since not all are equally convinced, let me give a few other proofs. We saw in the last sermon that verse 1 says that at the very moment that John was receiving this revelation there were Jews "who are worshiping" (in the present tense) at the altar of the temple. This means that the temple in view was the first century temple. It was still standing while John received the Revelation.

Second, verse 4 uses the perfect tense for the phrase, "that stand before the Lord of the earth." In Greek, the perfect tense refers to something that has started in the past with a continuation into the present. So the prophetic witness of these witnesses started before John received the revelation but was continuing even while John was being given this revelation.

But then these already existing prophets were given a new special commission that is future to this vision. If they are already living, they have to be first century people. But if the three and a half year commission is about to start, it can't start earlier than John's revelation. In other words, it can't start earlier than AD 66. Well, that rules out it being John the Baptist and Jesus and other people who had already died.

And the last proof is that after they die we saw that there would be an additional forty two months in which Rome would occupy the temple and trample the streets of Jerusalem. We looked at that in the last message and we saw that the only historical period that fits is AD 70-74. And it fits well.

So again, this nails down the timing for these prophets to not just the first century, but to the years 67-70. All by itself, that clue rules out thirty one theories; it rules out all but six theories. Talk about an efficient use of time. My spreadsheet goes to great lengths to outline all clues, but if you pick the right ones you can save yourselves a lot of time.

## **B. Individual humans**

But let's go on to the second clue. This text also teaches us that these two witnesses are real individual humans. Of course, many theories resist that

notion. Even some partial preterists insist that these witnesses have to be symbols of something corporate. So the corporate interpretation looks at these two as representing something like Israel and the church, or the elect from the Old and New Testaments, of the Waldensians and Albigensians, etc., etc. Others say that these are symbols of the law and the prophets, or the Old and New Testaments, or mercy and grace, or law and gospel, or the kingly and priestly aspects of the church, etc., etc. And again, even our own camp of Partial Preterists mess up here. There is a long line of symbolic interpretations. All of those interpretations can be ruled out if these two witnesses are real humans. Now, we are not ruling out the fact that real humans symbolize something. They do. But like the other symbols in this book, they are rooted in history. It is real people who stand as symbols.

Now, I am not going to take the time to give all the proofs that these are real individual humans. But let me give you a few. And we are going to go through these really quick. These two witnesses have personal properties like desire. The last phrase of verse 6 says that they can perform a certain miracle "as often as they desire." Well, desire is an attribute of personality. Likewise, verse 3 says that these witnesses have speech, verse 11 says they have breath, and verse 12 says they have hearing. Likewise verse 6 says that they exercise authority while verse 8 says that they are under authority. That simply does not make sense on many of the interpretations such as mercy and grace, law and gospel, etc. Verses 7-10 show that they are subject to death and actually experience death while verses 11 to 12 show them coming back to life. Can the Scriptures die and come back to life? That's one theory of what these witnesses represent. Anyway, they also have "bodies" (v. 8) with mouths (v. 5) and feet (v. 11) and these bodies are "clothed" (v. 3), have "the breath of life" (v. 11) and can be seen when dead (v. 9) or when alive (v. 12). When they are dead their bodies are called "corpses" (v. 8) and being denied graves is considered a great indignity (v. 9).

Can you see where I am going? It is extremely difficult for me to see how any of these features could be true of anything but literal human individuals. This is strengthened by the fact these two are called witnesses (v. 3) and prophets (v. 10). Witnesses everywhere elsewhere in the book are individual humans (1:2,5; 3:14; 20:4) as are prophets (10:7; 11:18; 16:6,13; 18:20,24; 19:20; 20:10; 22:6,9). Likewise, the image of "two olive trees" (v. 4) comes from Zechariah 4:14 and refers to two literal humans. The two witnesses are also likened to Elijah and Moses in verses 5-6, people who were also human prophets. Can you see how there is overwhelming evidence that these two witnesses are first century humans. Alford's commentary quotes verse 5,

“...and if any one be minded to harm them, after this manner (see Sir. 48:3) he must be killed” [and then he comments] (this whole description is most difficult to apply, on the allegorical interpretation; as is that which follows. And as might have been expected, the allegorists halt and are perplexed exceedingly. The double announcement here seems to stamp the literal sense, and the εἴ τις and δεῖ αὐτὸν ἀποκτανθῆναι are decisive against any mere national application of the words (as Elliott). Individuality could not be more strongly indicated.”<sup>6</sup>

Well, if you are convinced by my argumentation, this rules out numerous theories, including some partial preterist theories - like Chilton's.

### **C. *Not one witness in two dimensions but two witnesses***

A third clue is that these are not one witness in two dimensions, as several theories would have it, but are two witnesses as to their persons. For example, some people say that these two witnesses are Jesus Christ in AD 30, and Jesus is called two witnesses because He has both a kingly and priestly function. (And I am thinking to myself, "Well, what about His prophetic function?") And I do admit that that interpretation does make some sense of His being dead three days and rising from the dead after three and a half days (well, that's actually half a day longer than Christ was in the grave, so there is something else going on). But that theory does make sense of a few other features of the passage.

But there are all kinds of problems with that interpretation. First of all, if the angel is a created angel speaking for Jesus (as I believe) how can a mere creature call Jesus "my two witnesses"? And furthermore, how can those two witnesses (if they are Jesus) be said to have Jesus as their Lord (as verse 8 does)? How can Jesus be Jesus' Lord? And if you claim instead that the angel is Jesus (as some do) how can Jesus call Jesus my two witnesses. And you still have the same problem in verse 8. That theory simply does not work, even though godly Christians have held to it. We need to allow the text to completely drive our interpretation.

But there are other theories that have the two witnesses be two dimensions of something else - like the kingly and priestly dimensions of the church. So they see both witnesses as representing the entire church. But I want you to notice that the word “two” prefaces their persons, not simply their roles. Verse 3 speaks of “my two witnesses,” verse 4 “the two olive trees,” and “the two lampstands,” and verse 10 speaks of “these two prophets.” And I won't take the time to reference verses, but throughout this chapter the angel speaks of these two witnesses using the personal pronouns “they,” “them,”

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<sup>6</sup> Henry Alford, *Alford's Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Guardian Press, 1976), 659.

and “their.” Next time we will be seeing that the image of “two olive trees” comes from Zechariah 4:14 and refers to two literal humans (the high priest and Zerubbabel the king), not simply two offices in one person. I just don't see how you can get around the fact that these are two prophetic people, not one person with two functions.

#### ***D. They prophesy for a limited time, not for an entire age***

A fourth clue is that these witnesses consistently prophesy for a limited time, not for an entire age. Many of the theories have the witnesses prophesying for an age or even for all time. But let's notice some very precise timing that can't be fuzzied.

Verse 3 says that they will prophesy for 1260 days. Verse 6 says that they have power to stop rain "during the days of their prophecy" - not before and not after. There is a time limitation. The phrase, "during the days of," indicates that it isn't ongoing forever or even for an age; it is limited. Verse 7 indicates that they finish their witness during the time of the Beast. Can that really be said of the theory that claims this is the witness of Scripture against a godless church? No. Does it really fit the interpretation that says it is the elect of the Old and New Testaments? No. Or the one that says it is the Jewish and Gentile believers of all time, or the church from Christ's first coming to His Second Coming. No. This principle rules out thirteen theories.

#### ***E. This is dealing with historical events not simply supra-historical ideals or principles***

The fifth clue is that several phrases and words in this chapter show that this is dealing with historical events, not simply suprahistorical ideals. All the way through there are cause and effect phrases. Something the witnesses do brings fire on enemies; something the witnesses do dries up the rain; etc. There is cause and effect.

But let me just read to you some of the obvious time indicators: “prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days,” “during the days,” “turn,” “as often,” “when they finish,” “three and a half days,” “after three and a half days,” “The second woe is past. Look out, here comes the third woe!” That all speaks of historical progression, not simply non-historical ideals. Well, if you accept this clue, then virtually all of the Idealist interpretations are ruled out.

***F. These witnesses functioned as prophets before John received his revelation (see perfect tense of verse 4) and continued to prophecy (now in sackcloth) up until AD 70 (see future tense of vv. 3,7,9,10). Yet they die before the entire city and temple is captured (see vv. 10-13)***

And I have sixteen similar clues on my paper that systematically rule out various theories, but let me give only one more. The sixth clue really narrows the window of time down. I've already mentioned that verse 4 uses a perfect tense for the verb "to stand" indicating that these witnesses had been standing before the Lord before John received this revelation (in other words, before AD 66) and that they continue to so stand. So whatever theory we hold to, they didn't just become prophets in AD 66 or 67. He is taking already existing prophets and is going to be giving them a new task.

But there is more. The future tense employed in verses 3,7,9, and 10 indicate that their dressing up in sackcloth as a sign of woe to Jerusalem and their three-and-a-half-year ministry in the city would be future to John's having received this Revelation; not past, but future. Yet it can't be a distant future because they apparently die before all the Jews in Jerusalem are captured. How do I come to that conclusion? Well, Josephus makes clear that there was no rejoicing once they were captured, yet verse 10 says that the people of the land of Israel (the Greek is γῆς) "will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell in the γῆς." So the Jewish rebels are still optimistic, yet the Romans have access to at least part of the city in verses 7-9. If you read the Jewish histories of Josephus and Yossipon and the Roman historians, there is only a small window of time that these verses could happen. Lord willing, in a future sermon, I will speak about those details in verses 10-13. But if you take those four facts together and you will see that it narrows things down to a very precise period.

***G. See separate handout for sixteen more clues***

Now, I'm not going to bore you with a bunch more information. As I said, I have a handout that will bore you quite ably. But even with the measly six clues that I have shared this morning, we have ruled out all interpretations but three.

### **III. Which of the 37 theories are left standing once these clues are applied? Theories that involve either James, Peter, or John, and the view that these are two deliberately unidentified prophets.**

So which of the 37 theories out there are left standing? All three are actually pretty decent theories. The first viewpoint left standing is James Stuart Russel's view that it is James the brother of Jesus and the apostle Peter. The second involves the apostle John as one of the witnesses, and either sees Peter or James as the other witness. The third theory is the one I hold to, that it is two as yet unidentified prophets during the war against Jerusalem. And I think there is a deliberate reason why they are unidentified, yet known to John. Now, I am open to the first two theories. There is some evidence in their favor. But the evidence is mixed enough that I can't land solidly on either.

#### ***A. Possibilities and problems with any theory that sees James, Peter, or John as one of the witnesses***

And let me point out that none of the three theories will change the meaning or application of the passage. So we really don't need to settle this question to know exactly what this text means. Whoever these witnesses are, they are the last of a kind. By early AD 70 (just before they die) they will represent the last two authoritative witnesses, prophets, Spirit-inspired olive trees, and Spirit-shining lampstands. After AD 70 you will never have another olive tree of the kind explained in Zechariah. After AD 70 all such authoritative infallible revelatory gifts will cease. As Revelation 10:7 words it, "but in the days of the blast of the seventh angel (and that blast happens in 11:15), when he is about to trumpet, the mystery of God that He declared to His slaves the prophets would be finished." So prophecy ends when these last two prophets die.

But even though all three theories work, let me explain why I don't believe we can definitively prove that James, Peter, or John were one of the witnesses. Maybe more evidence will arise in the future, but let me start with what we have.

We'll start with James. When did he die? Well, there is debate on that. Josephus says that he was killed just before the war in a time that most scholars say was AD 62. So if that was true, he absolutely would not fit. But another early historian, Hegesippus, denies that. He claims that James was thrown off the temple, then stoned, then clubbed to death just before the city

fell, in AD 70. So if Hegesippus is correct, the timing is perfect. The Panarion, written in AD 374, quotes from a very early work titled The Ascents of James, and that work indicates that James lived through an early attempt to stone him. So it could be that he was stoned in AD 62 but survived and that he was killed in AD 70, and that Josephus just conflates the two accounts. It's hard to tell. The other problem that needs to be reconciled is that both historians say he was killed by the Jews, yet verses 7-8 says that Rome declares war on the witnesses and Rome kills them. There actually is a way that you can reconcile that but of evidence, but the evidence is divided. I put a question mark beside James.

What about Peter? Russel makes a fairly strong case for Peter being alive and in Jerusalem during this war. In doing that he is bucking against a lot of scholarship that places Peter's death in AD 64, or 67 or 68. ISO even the majority aren't sure when he died. If he did die that early, he certainly could not fit. But there is some recent scholarship that claims to have completely overturned the dogma that Peter died in Rome under Nero. In two extensive studies published in 2009 and 2013, Otto Zwierlein stated that "there is not a single piece of reliable literary evidence (and no archaeological evidence either) that Peter was ever in Rome."<sup>7</sup> Well, if he wasn't in Rome, he couldn't exactly have been killed in Rome in AD 68. And by the way, other scholars have been saying the same thing since the early 1900s.<sup>8</sup> The evidence for Peter being the first bishop of Rome is almost nil.

So the bottom line is that there are at least a minority of scholars who favor Peter being in Jerusalem right up to the end. If you take Babylon as reference to Jerusalem under judgment in 1 Peter 5:13 (which I do), then Peter was clearly still in Jerusalem in AD 65. But we just don't have enough information from early church documents to settle the point. There are late sources that say Peter was killed in Rome near the end of Nero's life (but they aren't very reliable). And there are early (but not very reliable) sources

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7 The book is in German and can be purchased here: [https://smile.amazon.com/Petrus-Paulus-Jerusalem-ROM-Untersuchungen/dp/3110303310/ref=smi\\_www\\_rco2\\_go\\_smi\\_g2609328962?\\_encoding=UTF8&Version=1&entries=0&ie=UTF8](https://smile.amazon.com/Petrus-Paulus-Jerusalem-ROM-Untersuchungen/dp/3110303310/ref=smi_www_rco2_go_smi_g2609328962?_encoding=UTF8&Version=1&entries=0&ie=UTF8) For a shorter article in English, see Otto Zwierlein, Bonn, "Has St. Peter ever been in Rome?" [https://www.philologie.uni-bonn.de/philologie/personal/zwierlein/st\\_peter\\_in\\_rome.pdf](https://www.philologie.uni-bonn.de/philologie/personal/zwierlein/st_peter_in_rome.pdf)

8 For example, Peter Foakes-Jackson said, "We are amazed to discover that so little real information has survived regarding the man whom Jesus chose as the leader of the Twelve Apostles, who subsequently appears as their chief in the foundation of the Christian Church at Jerusalem, and also in the earliest preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles. It must strike every student that, whereas the unanimous voice of the Church from the first acknowledges and reverences St. Peter as the founder of the Roman Church, when we search for a strictly historic proof of even his having ever visited Rome, we have to acknowledge that it is wanting. F.J. Foakes-Jackson, *Peter: Prince of Apostles* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1927), p. vii.



that contradict that. For example, the Acts of Peter (though apocryphal) may preserve some well-known history when it says that Peter was led before King Herod Agrippa and crucified upside down. Well, King Herod Agrippa was with Titus fighting against Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup> He was Rome's representative in Israel. So Peter could fit as one of the last of the apostles. I put a question mark next to that theory, but I don't write it off.

What about John? Some scholars cite early histories that indicate that the apostle John was martyred in the city of Jerusalem just before the city was conquered. Of course that is a tiny minority view. It goes against the bulk of scholarship which says that he lived into the second century and died of old age. But it is just worth mentioning that there are scholars who strongly argue that the evidence points to John being a martyr in AD 70.

And rather than sifting through endless debates about non-inspired sources, I will have you turn with me to Matthew 20 and begin to read at verse 17. This is a passage, which if taken at face value, says that both James and John would suffer martyrdom. That completely contradicts Roman Catholic tradition.

Matt. 20:17 Now Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples aside on the road and said to them, 18 "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, 19 and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again."

So notice the context of Christ's martyrdom by both Jews and Gentiles, in Jerusalem, and a resurrection on the third day. Verse 20.

Matt. 20:20 Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. Matt. 20:21 And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom." Matt. 20:22 But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able." Matt. 20:23 So He said to them, "You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father."

When Jesus says in verse 23, "You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with," He was referring to His

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<sup>9</sup> "Peter thus spake, and all the brethren wept, behold four soldiers took him and led him unto Agrippa. [who] commanded him to be crucified on an accusation of godlessness. 37 ...[Peter said] I beseech you the executioners, crucify me thus, with the head downward... 38 And when they had hanged him up after the manner he desired, he began again to say:..." [(Gnostic) Acts of Peter 36-38] By quoting this document I in no way endorse its heretical and strange teachings. I just point out that by the mid second century there was already a tradition of Peter dying in Jerusalem.

death. As Philip Schaff words it,

‘The Lord had already the cup of His suffering at His lips: was already, so to speak, sprinkled with the first drops of the spray of His baptism of blood’ (Alford).<sup>10</sup>

The language is quite clear. Christ's cup is suffering and his baptism is martyrdom and the cup and baptism of James and John was the honor of both suffering for Christ and being martyred for His sake. And the only reason many commentators deny it and just generalize it to sufferings is because they think the apostle John lived to a ripe old age and died of old age. But the evidence from the early church is mixed. Two church historians quote Papias (a church father who was born in AD 70 and lived to 163 - so it is actually the earliest source). And they quote Papias as saying that John died at the hands of the Jews in Jerusalem - which would place it in the Jewish war. The Syrian martyrology of AD 450 lists both James and John as "apostles in Jerusalem" who died a martyrs death. Aphraates cites James and John as martyrs. The church father, Chrysostom, wrote a commentary on Matthew 20:23 and said this:

His meaning is, ye shall be counted worthy of martyrdom, and shall suffer these things which I suffer; ye shall close your life by a violent death, and in these things ye shall be partakers with me...<sup>11</sup>

Heinrich Meyer says that the plain meaning of the text is that "The cup and baptism of Jesus represent martyrdom."<sup>12</sup> So if there is mixed evidence in church history on whether John died of natural causes or died a martyrs death, and if this verse clearly says that both would die a martyrs death, I would think we should side with the church fathers who said that John died at the hands of the Jews in Jerusalem. Is it a definitive proof? No. That's why I put a question mark beside all three names. But it would certainly fit the evidence rather beautifully.

Now one text that might immediately come to your mind to rule out John is the last chapter of John. let me read that for you. After challenging Peter three times, "Do you love Me," and after reinstating Peter three times to office, Jesus begins talking about the kind of death that Peter will die in verse 18. He tells Peter,

John 21:18 Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded

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10 Philip Schaff, ed., Introduction, and the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, vol. 1, A Popular Commentary on the New Testament (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1879), 304.

11 John Chrysostom, "Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople on the Gospel according to St. Matthew," in Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. George Prevost and M. B. Riddle, vol. 10, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888), 399.

12 Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospels of Mark and Luke, ed. William P. Dickson, trans. Robert Ernest Wallis, vol. 1, Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1883), 170.

yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.”  
[Some people say that is actually Jerusalem, since Peter feared going to Jerusalem. Anyway, verse 19 says,] 19 This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me.”

The death referred to would be crucifixion - with hands stretched out. Verse 20.

John 21:20 Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, “Lord, who is the one who betrays You?” 21 Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, “But Lord, what about this man?”

John 21:22 Jesus said to him, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.”

John 21:23 Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?”

Two things there: First, John made quite clear that he was not exempt from death. But he also indicated rather strongly that he would survive until Jesus came. And we saw in a previous sermon that Jesus visibly came on the clouds on the clouds of heaven and was seen by many witnesses when he came in judgment on Jerusalem in AD 66. Those Jewish witnesses saw a huge form of a man in the sky leading angelic armies. This wasn't the Second Coming to earth, but it was Christ's promised visible coming in the sky judgment. So John actually does fit. I put a question mark beside John's name simply because scholarship on the extra Biblical data is mixed. But he could well have been one of the two witnesses - especially since John is called Christ's witness in John 1:2. He calls Himself Christ's witness. So I am open to that.

### ***B. Two (as yet) unidentified prophets during the war against Jerusalem***

However, because I don't want to be dogmatic where the evidence is thin, I have defaulted to theory #6 (which could cover the other two theories), that these are two (as yet) unidentified prophets during the war against Jerusalem. I am 100% dogmatic that they are real prophets who prophesied during the first half of the war. That much is crystal clear to me. And if God wanted us to know their identity, He could have told us. The prophets may be two of the Peter, James, and John that we have just discussed, or they may simply be the last two prophets standing. In one sense it doesn't matter. But I like to emphasize the fact that they are deliberately unnamed prophets because they represent the end of the era of witnesses (in other words the

end of the era of apostles; the apostles were direct witnesses of Christ - one of the qualifications of being an apostle) and it is also the end of the era of prophets as a whole, which is what verse 10 calls them. Where chapter 10 emphasized prophecy ceasing, this chapter will emphasize the office of prophet ceasing. Now we will have to wait for my next sermon to go through the meaning of verses 3-14. There is a lot of cool stuff there. But let me end with three additional applications that we can make from just what we have seen so far about these witnesses.

## Conclusion

The first application is that martyrdom is a privilege and a great honor. The church of the first three centuries recognized that it was a tremendous honor, and many saints hoped that they could be one of the martyrs. Don't reject martyrdom if God gives it as a gift. It is the highest honor. These prophets stood before the Lord of the earth (v. 4), which means that their death was not because God had forgotten about them. Far from it. He honored them.

Second, think of the boldness of these men. They willingly entered a city destined for judgment. They willingly entered a city that every other Christian had just abandoned. They embraced a suicide mission of witnessing and evangelizing, knowing that they would one day be killed. Many missionaries take that kind of risk. How many missionaries went to headhunter tribes to share the Gospel knowing full well that they could be eaten? There have been many. It requires Holy Spirit engendered boldness. May we be bold in the face of our own difficult times.

Thirdly, God did not leave them to face this alone. He sent them on that suicide mission as a team of two. And Jesus did the same thing in the Gospels. When He sent the disciples out into hostile territory as missionaries, He never sent them alone. He sent them two by two. We were not meant to be loners. We were meant to have each other's backs. If it is time to die, then fine, we can die courageously. But being a team of two speaks of precautions and prudence as well. Don't be like early church fathers and turn yourself in for martyrdom. Make Satan have to work for it and to pay dearly for it. Verse 5 says that any who came after these two prophets in the first three years paid dearly for it. I like David Livingstone's approach to the use of self-protection. Some people criticized him for using guns when he was a missionary. And his response was, "I love peace as much as any mortal man. In fact I go quite beyond you, for I love it so much I would fight for it." That was a great answer. These prophets had no problem returning fire - very literally. In a later sermon I will explain what

verse 5 means, but there are obvious implications for missions. It says of these missionaries: "And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies." They returned fire - very literally.

So those are my last three applications today: Be willing to face death for God if He calls you to that. Second, be bold. Dare to be a Daniel. In fact, we are going to be singing that hymn in response. We need more bold Christians who won't back down or be intimidated in our culture wars. Third, use prudence and have each other's backs and be comfortable with returning fire. And may the Lord bless you as you face your own challenges by His grace. Amen.

Two Witnesses – Clues Correlated With Theories  
By Phillip G. Kayser

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**How to Read this Chart**

The vertical numbers (1-37) are most of the theories I have currently discovered on the identity of the two witnesses (see next page). The horizontal letters (A-O) are the clear hints found in the text of Revelation 11 (see following pages).

A dark color on a square means that this theory does not meet the evidence of this Scripture clue. A clear square means that the theory does at least partially meet that evidence. As would be expected, all theories meet some of the evidence.

As can be seen, only two theories meet all the internal clues and one (#5) has some external evidence against it. But both theories can adequately account for the applications that John will make on the cessation of prophecy, prophets, Scripture, or any other form of authoritative revelation. Whoever these witnesses are, they are the last of a kind. By early AD 70 (just before they die) they will represent the last two authoritative witnesses, prophets, Spirit-inspired olive trees, and Spirit-shining lampstands. After AD 70 all such authoritative infallible revelatory gifts will cease. As Revelation 10:7 words it, "but in the days of the blast of the seventh angel, when he is about to trumpet, the mystery of God that He declared to His slaves the prophets would be finished."