

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

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
1.			■			■		■			■			■	■	■
2.						■		■			■			■	■	■
3.						■								■	■	■
4.														?	?	■
5.														?	?	?
6.																
7.							■					■				
8.									■				■		■	■
9.	■				■	■						■		■	■	■
10.	■				■	■						■		■	■	■
11.	■				■	■						■		■	■	■
12.	■				■	■						■		■	■	■
13.	■				■	■						■		■	■	■
14.	■				■	■						■		■	■	■
15.	■				■	■						■		■	■	■
16.	■				■	■						■		■	■	■
17.	■				■	■						■		■	■	■
18.	■				■	■						■		■	■	■
19.	■				■	■		■				■		■	■	■
20.	■				■	■			■			■		■	■	■
21.	■				■	■						■		■	■	■
22.	■	■	■	■	■	■				■		■		■	■	■
23.	■			■	■	■				■		■		■	■	■
24.	■		■	■	■	■				■		■		■	■	■
25.	■		■	■	■	■				■		■		■	■	■
26.	■		■	■	■	■		■		■		■		■	■	■
27.	■				■	■				■		■		■	■	■
28.	■		■	■	■	■		■		■		■		■	■	■
29.	■		■	■	■	■				■		■		■	■	■
30.	■				■	■				■		■		■	■	■
31.	■				■	■				■		■		■	■	■
32.	■				■	■				■		■		■	■	■
33.	■		■	■	■	■				■		■		■	■	■
34.	■				■	■				■		■		■	■	■
35.	■		■	■	■	■		■		■		■	■	■	■	■
36.	■		■	■	■	■				■	■	■		■	■	■
37.	■		■	■	■	■				■		■		■	■	■

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.”

Who are the two witnesses that prophecy for 1260 days? This is a perplexing puzzle that has plagued the history of interpretation with many vying viewpoints. Having scanned my own growing library of ninety-four commentaries on Revelation, I can see why people are bewildered. I will use an inductive method to rule out all competing interpretations. In order to sort through the possibilities, we will lay out all the interpretations that people have given, then systematically seek to rule out those that clearly contradict the text of Revelation 11.

I. Competing Views On The Identity Of These Two Witnesses

A. Individuals Who Died Prior To The Writing Of Revelation

1. Jesus Christ in His two offices of priest and king.
2. John the Baptist and Jesus¹
3. Peter & Paul dying in Rome under Nero²

B. Individuals Who Died Shortly After The Writing Of Revelation

4. James & Peter³ (who, it is claimed, died in Jerusalem during the war)
5. Peter & the apostle John; or James & John
6. Two (As Yet) Unidentified Prophets During The War Against Jerusalem⁴
7. An unidentified civil & religious authority in the first century⁵
8. Two Jewish high priests killed in AD 68.⁶

C. Two Individuals During The Reformation or other periods of church history

9. John Huss and Luther⁷
10. John Huss and Jerome of Prague⁸
11. Pope Sylvester and Mena when they wrote against the Eutychians⁹
12. The monastics, Francis and Dominic¹⁰
13. Many cults claim two of their members were the two witnesses, some rather bizarre – like Muggletonian claim that they were the two seventeenth-century London tailors, John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton.

D. Individuals Who Will Die Immediately Before The Second Coming

14. Moses & Elijah come back to earth¹¹
15. Enoch & Elijah come back to earth¹²

¹ Stuart cites Ulbertinus

² William Steuart McBirnie, *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1973). See also Munck, Petrus and Paulus, e.g., 17–19; Court, Myth and History, 90–104.

³ Stuart Russell gives several pages of information pointing to these two. See James Stuart Russel, *The Parousia*, (Bradford, PA: Kingdom Publications, 1996), pp. 430–444.

⁴ Moses Stuart, myself, and many others.

⁵ David S. Clark, *The Message of Patmos*, pp. 76–77.

⁶ Alford, Greek Testament IV, 659; Leivestad, Christ the Conqueror, 228–30.

⁷ Some post-Reformation commentators such as Horzoff.

⁸ Attributed to Vitranga by Stuart - Moses Stuart, A Commentary on the Apocalypse, vol. 2 (Andover; New York: Allen, Morrill and Wardwell; M. H. Newman, 1845), 219.

⁹ Attributed to Lyranus and Ederus by Moses Stuart, *Ibid*.

¹⁰ Stuart says that Cornelius of Lapide held to this view. *Ibid*.

¹¹ This is perhaps the most popular view among Futurists. See Oliver B. Greene, *The Revelation: A Verse By Verse Study*, (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, 1963), pp. 291ff. Also see J. B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 169–170. Also I. M. Haldeman, *Synopsis of Revelation*, p. 13. See also [Michael Wilcock](#), *The Message of Revelation, The Bible Speaks Today*; ed. John R. W. Stott (Downers Grove.: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 105. Lindsey, *New World Coming*, 149–50. William Henry Simcox, *The Revelation of S. John the Divine with Notes and Introduction*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1894), 69. Thomas, Robert L. *Revelation 1–7. Revelation 8–22. An Exegetical Commentary*. 2 vols. Chicago: Moody Press, 1992, 1995. Charles, R. H. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John*. The International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920.

¹² Seiss, *Apocalypse*, 242–68; Lang, *Revelation*, 185; Robert Govett, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 225–250. Also some early church fathers like Tertullian, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus of Rome. This is based in part on Malachi 4:5 and the fact that (it is alledged) neither of these died, and Hebrews says it is appointed unto man once to die. (It should be remembered that those alive when Christ comes back will not die, so this is not a strong argument. There is also clear evidence that Elijah did indeed die “cast down” upon some mountain. Furthermore, Christ said that Elijah had already come back.).

16. Elijah & Elisha come back to earth
17. The resurrected figures of Joshua & Zerubbabel (Zech. 4) come back to earth
18. Unidentified prophets in a future tribulation¹³
19. Representatives (or leaders) of all witnesses during a future tribulation¹⁴ or representatives of Jewish believers during that time¹⁵
20. A future Jewish Pope¹⁶
21. People in contemporary history have claimed to be the witnesses¹⁷

E. Corporate Interpretations

22. The elect of Old Testament Israel & the NT Church¹⁸
23. Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus.¹⁹
24. The Waldensians and Albigensians during the “1260 years” of Romanist domination²⁰
25. Witnesses in a future tribulation
26. The church from Christ’s first coming to His second coming²¹
27. One portion of the church, namely martyrs²²
28. An era of the church, such as the Protestant Reformation

F. Symbolic Representation Of Scripture

29. The Law & the Prophets²³
30. The witness of the Old and New Testaments against a godless church²⁴

Other authors who hold to this: David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A Companion Volume to the Jewish New Testament*, electronic ed. (Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1996), Re 11:3. Aune, David E. *Revelation*. Word Biblical Commentary, Vols. 52a and 52b, edited by Ralph p. Martin. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997 and 1998.

¹³ Edgar Ainslie, *The Dawn of The Scarlet Age*, pp. 93-94.

¹⁴ Arno Gaebelein in *The Revelation*, p. 70 is one example

¹⁵ Gingrich summarizes this viewpoint by saying, “Other Bible scholars believe that these two men are men chosen by God from the Jewish end-time generation to witness God’s truth to the homeland Jews of their generation and that we do not now know their identity. This is the best view.” Roy E. Gingrich, *The Book of Revelation* (Memphis, TN: Riverside Printing, 2001), 54.

¹⁶ Leon G. Van Wert, *The Jewish Popes: The Two Harbingers of the End Times*. (USA: Tate Publishing, 2009).

¹⁷ Clifford Hill writes that “two young men from Denmark announced that they were the two witnesses of Revelation 11:3 sent by God to prepare the way for Messiah. Two years earlier I had met two young Americans camping on the Mount of Olives also claiming to be the two witnesses.” in *Prophecy Past and Present: An Explanation of the Prophetic Ministry in the bible and the Church Today* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1989), p. 5.

¹⁸ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Revelation, The Pulpit Commentary* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 289.

¹⁹ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 576. JFB says, “As two candlesticks are mentioned in Rev 11:4, but only *one* in Zec 4:2, I think the twofold Church, Jewish and Gentile, may be meant by the two candlesticks represented by the two witnesses: just as in Rev 7:1–8 there are described first the sealed of Israel, then those of all nations.”

²⁰ Many historicists (like Elliott) hold to this. Some add in other faithful groups.

²¹ Michael Wilcock says, “These two symbolize the witness of the whole church, and perhaps also the certainty of that witness...” Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Revelation: I Saw Heaven Opened*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 105.; see also Herman Hoeksema, *Behold He Cometh!* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1974), pp. 380-384. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text, NIGTC; Accordance electronic ed.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 573. Kendall H. Easley, *Revelation*, vol. 12, *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 190. Christopher A. Davis, *Revelation, The College Press NIV Commentary* (Joplin, MO: College Press Pub., 2000), 233. *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001], 329). Wilcock proposes a similar view indicating that the two witnesses represent “God’s people among the heathen nations” (*The Message of Revelation: I Saw Heaven Opened*, *The Bible Speaks Today* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1975], 104–105. Tom Wright, *Revelation for Everyone, For Everyone Bible Study Guides* (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 99. Caird, G. B. *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*. Black’s New Testament Commentaries, edited by Henry Chadwick. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966. Mounce, Robert H. *The Book of Revelation*. Revised ed. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, edited by F. F. Bruce and Gordon D. Fee. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977. Bruce, F. F. *The Revelation to John*. A New Testament Commentary, edited by G. C. D. Howley. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969. Swete, Henry Barclay. *Commentary on Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1977.

²² Leon Morris says this is shown by the fact that here the church is represented by two candlesticks whereas in chapter 1 the church is represented by seven candlesticks. Morris, Leon. *The Book of Revelation, an Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Revised Edition. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987.

²³ Cf. Arthur Ogden, *The Avenging Of The Apostles And Prophets* (Somerset, KY: Ogden Publications, 1985), pp. 251ff.

²⁴ This is the view of Melchior, Affelman, and Croly. One interesting version of this comes from the Reformation. It states that the 1260 days stand for 1260 years in which the Roman Catholic

G. Symbolic Interpretations of General Concepts

31. Mercy and grace
32. Law and gospel
33. Kingly and priestly aspects of the church²⁵
34. The prophetic function of the church²⁶
35. All preachers instructed by the law and the Gospel²⁷
36. The Christian ecclesiastical and civil representations of Christ²⁸
37. Many cultic viewpoints could be inserted here such as the Shakers view that these two witnesses are the male and female aspects of God, linked to the first coming (Christ) and the supposed second coming (Mother Ann Lee, founder of Shakers)!

Most commentators agree that *all schools of interpretation* have great difficulty in clearly identifying the two witnesses of Revelation 11:3-13. F. W. Farrar expresses the opinion of many when he says, “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...”²⁹

Nevertheless, if every clue that John lays out is adequately taken into account, I believe that it narrows the scope down to three theories, each of which can adequately explain the internal evidence. When external evidence is applied, it is further narrowed to two possibilities.

II. Clues in Text that can help to narrow down the options

- A. **It is a first century context:** This can be seen by a number of indicators. While John was writing there were Jews “who are worshipping” (present tense) in the temple (v. 1). Verse 7 indicates that the two witnesses prophecy during the time of the Beast (which another study demonstrated to be first century) and these two prophets are killed by the Beast. Likewise, we have seen that the office of prophet ceases in AD 70, yet these two are called “prophets” (v. 10). Only AD 70-74 fits the evidence of a literal forty two months in which the Romans trampled the courts (their base of operations) and then turned it back over to the Jews. The perfect tense of “standing” in verse 4 indicates that they were already standing as prophetic lights before John received this revelation and they continue to stand. This rules out interpretations 9-37.
- B. **They are individual humans:** Unlike corporate entities (22-28), Scripture (29-30), or symbolic concepts (31-37), these two witnesses have personal properties of desire (v. 6), speech (v. 3), breath (v. 11), hearing (v. 12), exercising authority (v. 6), submitting to Christ’s authority as Lord (v. 8), experiencing death (vv. 7-10) and life (vv. 11-12). 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 alive (v. 12). When they are dead their bodies are called “corpses” (v. 8) and being denied graves is considered an indignity (v. 9). It is difficult to see how any of these features could be true of anything but individuals. This is strengthened by the fact these two are called witnesses (11:3) and prophets (v. 10). Witnesses 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

Church resisted the witness of the Bible. The death of testimony is the three and a half year period between the papal bull against Luther (1513) and the 95 theses Luther posted (1517). An alternative view is Lenski’s – he says that the two witnesses simply refers to adequacy of the witness of the whole Scriptures, not to its two-fold nature. Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963.

²⁵ Gerhard A. Krodel, *Revelation, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989), 223. Bruce, F. F. *The Revelation to John. A New Testament Commentary*, edited by G. C. D. Howley. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969.

²⁶ James Luther Mays, ed., *Harper’s Bible Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 1312.

²⁷ Thomas Aquinas.

²⁸ David S. Clark, *The Message from Patmos*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), pp. 76–77.

Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 39, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2012).

²⁹ Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity*, p. 459.

Zechariah 4:14 and refers to two humans. The two witnesses are also likened to Elijah and Moses in verses 5-6, people who were also human prophets. The individuality in verse 5 is also strong.³⁰

- C. **It is not one witness (or prophet, or olive tree, etc) in two dimensions, but two witnesses (or prophets, or olive trees, etc):** 1) Note that the word “two” prefaces their *persons*, not simply their roles (“my two witnesses,” “two prophets,” “two olive trees,” “two lampstands”). Also note the use of “they,” “them,” and “their” throughout. 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.
- D. **They prophecy for only a limited time, not for the entire church age:** They prophecy for 1260 days (v. 3) and they are given power to stop rain any time they want “during the days of their prophecy” (v. 6). This implies a limited time. Likewise, they finish their witness during the time of the Beast (v. 7). This militates against interpretations that refer to all time (22,29,31-34) or to an entire age (23,26,27,30,35-37).
- E. **They prophecy and die in first century Jerusalem:** 1) That it is first century Jerusalem was proved in verses 1-2). 2) That it is in a literal Jerusalem is proved by verse 8. 3) Notice the references to “the great city” “where their Lord was crucified” “the city.” This rules out 9-22,24-37.
- F. **These witnesses were alive prior to John writing and continue to live after John’s prophecy:** The perfect active tense of “stand” in verse 4 indicates that they were already standing as prophetic light on behalf of Jesus before John received his revelation and that they continue to stand. Yet the three and a half years of prophecy are still future to when John got the vision (see future tenses in vv. 3,7,9,10). This rules out 1-3, 9-37.
- G. **These witnesses are not the prophetic revelation but are prophets who give the revelation (vv. 3,6):** Furthermore, they have a specified time period within which they are to prophesy, so this rules out any interpretations that are based on revelation (29-36) or that do not involve revelation (7-12,19,22-28,33,36)
- H. **These witnesses can be overcome (v. 7) and killed (v. 7).** It is hard to see how interpretations 1,2a,29,30 would fit. And since Christ guaranteed that the gates of Hades would not prevail against the church (Matt. 16:18), it is hard to see how 26,28,33-35 would fit. Likewise, can mercy, grace, law, gospel, or Scripture be overcome and killed? Thus this also rules out 29,30, 31,32.
- I. **These witnesses are believers:** This can be seen by the fact that they are Christ’s witnesses (v. 1), Christ is their Lord (v. 8), and they are prophets (v. 10). It is hard to see how high priests who killed Jesus and James would fit this description (8). This would also seem to rule out 20.
- J. **This is dealing with historical events not simply supra-historical ideals or principles:** This can be seen by the cause and effect clauses. It can also be seen by the time indicators of “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!” These clear historical markers rule out 22,23,26,27,29-37.
- K. **They must fit the phrase, “my witnesses”:** This is true whether one interprets the angel as “the mighty angel” of 10:1 who speaks for Christ (my view) or Jesus Christ Himself (as others hold). If it is the former, it is hard to see how Jesus was a witness for an angel. If it is the latter, it is hard to see how Jesus could be the witness of Jesus. Logic rules out 1,2,36,37.
- L. **These must be individuals who stand in the closest possible relationship with Jesus:** This can be seen by the fact that they stand “before the Lord of the earth” (v. 4) and are honored with a death that is similar to Christ’s (vs. 7-13), and are honored by a resurrection and ascension that is similar to Christ’s (vv. 11-12). God even marks the occasion with a great earthquake (v. 13). This would seem to rule out at least 7-13,19-25,28,35-37.
- M. **They are able to perform miracles:** This can be seen by their being likened to Elijah (vv. 5-6) in calling down fire and stopping rain. This would seem to rule out 8-13, 22-28, 35-37.
- N. **There must be evidence of water turned into blood during the time of their ministry (v. 6):** The only first century period that shows evidence of water being turned to blood are the years AD 66-70. This rules out those who died before that time (1-3,4?) and those who would not die (or live) till after AD 70 (5b??,9-21

³⁰ Alford says, “...and if any one be minded to harm them, after this manner (see Sir. 48:3) he must be killed (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 εἰ τις and δεῖ αὐτὸν ἀποκτανθῆναι are decisive against any mere *national* application of the words (as Elliott). *Individuality* could not be more strongly indicated.” Henry Alford, *Alford’s Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Guardian Press, 1976), 659.

- O. Since the 42 months ends in AD 70, any candidate who died before 70 would ruled out:** This includes 1-3,4?,5?,8. There is some early historical evidence that the apostles Peter and John did die in Jerusalem at the end of the Jewish War, though this is hotly contested. Irenaeus speaks of having seen the apostle in the reign of Domitian.
- P. They are killed by the Romans rather than by the Jews (v. 7), yet they die in a way that Romans can see them in the streets of the city (vv. 8-9), and as-yet unconquered Jews see them too and rejoice at their death (v. 10). There must also be at least three and a half days before the earthquake, falling of a tenth of the city and before the temple itself is penetrated by the Romans (vv. 7-13 with 16-19).** This timetable only makes sense if their death occurs in the last days of the Roman siege when the city was penetrated but the temple and parts of the city are still held by the Jewish rebels. This dates the death to AD 70 and rules out anyone who died before or after: 1-3,4,5??,8-37. Hegesippus does place the death of James during the war, but it has him being killed by Jewish authorities, not Roman. This is the major strike against theory 4.