

## A Response to Charlie Campbell

by Don K. Preston

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**A** DAM HAS REQUESTED THAT I offer some thoughts in response to an internet article by Charlie Campbell.<sup>1</sup> An introductory note: There are actually seven points that Mr. Campbell seeks to affirm. It would take a lengthy article to fully address each point, far beyond the space limitations of this magazine. So, what I will do is to list Campbell's points and then offer some brief, but, I think, powerful points of refutation. Further corroboration of my points can be found in a host of sources, including my own books, so I urge the reader to dig deeper.

At the outset of his post, Mr. Campbell offers the common objection that is based on 2 Thessalonians 2 and 2 Timothy 2:18. In these texts, the false teachers (Judaizers) were claiming that the Day of the Lord and the resurrection had already come. Mr. Campbell asserts that preterism is a modern-day manifestation of that identical error. This is a wholly anachronistic "argument."

The indisputable fact is that the Bible posits the resurrection, the kingdom, and salvation all at the time of the judgment of old covenant Jerusalem. Space forbids a full demonstration of this, but in my book, *These Are the Days in Which All Things Must Be Fulfilled*, I catalog numerous passages in which this connection is simply undeniable. Now look at some bullet points that Mr. Campbell does not consider.

- Related to what I just said, Revelation posits the Great Tribulation for the first century. In Revelation 7:14, we find that the 144,000 of the Jewish saints came out of the Tribulation. In Revelation 14:4, we discover that the 144,000 were the "first fruit of those redeemed to God from among men." That means that they were the very first generation of Jewish Christians! (Think Pentecost onward!)
- The New Testament posits the time of the resurrection, the time of the judgment of the living and the dead as at hand and coming soon, without delay. Peter said Christ was "ready" (from *hetoimos*) to judge the living and the dead" at His "epiphany" (1 Pet 4:5). In verse 7, he said "the end (*telos*, meaning goal) has drawn near (perfect tense of *engus* – *eggeken*, meaning "has arrived"). And, in verse 17, the apostle said, "The time" (the divinely appointed time, from *kairos*) has come for "the judgment" (to *krino*—the judgment, referring back to v. 5). That means that

verse 17 undeniably says that the time for the resurrection had come. Since the time had arrived when Peter wrote, Hymenaeus was wrong to say it was past.

- *How is this possible?* Mr. Campbell affirms that Hymenaeus said that the resurrection was past. Evidently, he has not paused to consider the following: If the Day of the Lord and the resurrection is an earth burning (or earthly renovation) when all of the dead of all time are physically raised out of the dirt or the oceans, how could anyone convince anyone that this cataclysmic event had already happened? Could you be convinced that the material cosmos was dissolved yesterday? Could you convince anyone that time had ended, that all the graves were empty? See my books, *How Is This Possible?* and *The Hymenaeian Heresy: Reverse the Charges!* for a fuller exposition of the Hymenaeian Heresy.

We turn now to Mr. Campbell's "Six Reasons for Rejecting Preterism."

**Reason #1** — Preterist misunderstanding of "this generation"

Matthew 24:33 (sic - v. 32) says when you see all of these things know it is near... Jesus was talking about the generation of people who would be alive during the events leading up to His Second Coming, that is, during the time of tribulation . . .

Why would Jesus speak of events that were so far off? Because He was answering the question His disciples asked Him a few minutes earlier about the "end of the age" (v. 3).

Notice what they asked Him in Matthew 24:3.

Matthew 24:3 'What will be the sign of Your coming and the end of the age?'

That's why Jesus spoke to them about events so far off. They asked! If what Jesus said in Matthew 24 was about events that would transpire in A.D. 70 (as preterists believe), then Jesus failed to answer their question.

**Matthew 10:23** – Now, there are a few different views regarding what Jesus may have meant here, so I don't want to be dogmatic here with an interpretation. But I believe, along with a good number of Bible commentators, that Jesus was simply telling His disciples that there was so much work to be done (so many cities to reach with the gospel) that they would not finish taking the gospel to their own country before His Second Coming.

Persecution (e.g., Acts 8:1) and a prevailing Jewish unreceptivity to the gospel prevented the disciples from going through all the cities of Israel. And to this day the job of taking the gospel to all the Jews has not been completed.

**Revelation:**

“Behold I come quickly”– Jesus was not describing when the events will occur, but rather the manner in which they will take place when they do occur. He was saying that when these events take place, they are going to unfold suddenly, quickly, with great swiftness.

**Response:** It is true that Jesus was speaking of the generation that would see the signs. What was one of the chief signs? It was the completion of the great commission (24:14).

The fact is that Paul, who knew what Jesus taught (Galatians 1:10ff) said repeatedly, later in that very same generation, that the gospel had been preached to “every creature under heaven” (Col 1:23; See also Rom 10:18f; Rom 16:25-26; Titus 2:11).

Be sure to read my comments above about the Great Tribulation. Since that first-century generation was the generation of the first fruit and since the first fruit was to experience the Great Tribulation, this proves that the first century generation was the generation Jesus spoke of in Matt 24:32. This proves definitively that “this generation” was not a reference to a far distant generation.

Mr. Campbell argues from a purely presuppositional position when he argues that the apostles asked about a far distant coming of the Lord and end of the age. He assumes, without offering any evidence, that the apostles were asking about some “end of time” or end-of-the-Christian-age event. But why would the apostles think of the end of time or, even more to the point, why would they link the destruction of the temple to *the end of the Christian age*, when the Christian age had not even begun? The temple had been destroyed in BC 586, had it not? Did time end at that time? Patently not. Thus, why would the apostles now associate the end of time, or again, the end of the Christian age, with the destruction of that temple? See my book *Watching for the Parousia: Were Jesus’ Apostles Confused?* for an in-depth discussion about the apostles’ questions, and the common claim that they were confused to conflate the predicted destruction of Jerusalem with the end of the age.

In regard to Matthew 10:23, Mr. Campbell completely misrepresents what Jesus said. The Lord was not saying that the apostles would not complete the mission due to Jewish persecution. His focus was on the

flight of His apostles from Jewish persecution! Jesus did not even remotely suggest that the world mission would fail, as we demonstrated just above.

### **Reason #2** — Silence of Church Historians

And as far as the church fathers and preterism are concerned, there is zero indication from known writings of the church fathers that anyone understood the New Testament prophecies from a preterist perspective.

There are no early church writings that teach that Jesus returned (physically or spiritually) in the first century . . .

**Response:** Arguing from silence is always a tenuous practice. Basing a doctrine on what the Bible does not say is actually dangerous. This is illustrated by archaeology and history. Skeptics long argued that there was no record of the “kingdom of Israel” or “the house of David” because the archaeological record did not support the Biblical claim. Well, archaeologists kept digging and in 1993 they discovered what is called the Tel Dan stele.<sup>2</sup> It is the first historical evidence of King David. It confirms that David was king. In other words, the absence of evidence was not evidence of absence. The lack of record about David (up to 1993!) was not proof that David did not exist.

When it comes to the historical testimony of preterism, Mr. Campbell’s argument about the silence of the early writers takes too much for granted. Evidently, Mr. Campbell is unaware of the fact that only a very small percentage of the early writings have even been translated.

Gary DeMar and Francis Gumerlock illustrate this by noting:

Most of what the church fathers wrote remains untranslated - 218 Latin and 166 Greek volumes – therefore, we cannot be dogmatic in asserting what the early church Fathers believed. The works that Jeffrey studied come out to approximately 7,000 pages. While this seems a lot, the untranslated Greek and Latin works ‘weigh in at over a million pages’ (*New Testament Eschatology* [Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2024], 60).<sup>3</sup>

The point should be obvious: To claim that “no early church writer taught or believed in preterism” is far too broad of a claim.

**Reason #3** — The Christians alive during A.D. 70, as well as the church fathers, believed the Second Coming was a future event.

...The Didache. It is a simple collection of early church doctrine. Most scholars believe it was written near the close of the first century, most likely around A.D. 80. It was used and cited by many of the church fathers, as well as by the Christian historian Eusebius (see his Ecclesiastical Church History 3:25). So its early existence is well documented.

**Response:** Once again, Mr. Campbell makes some tenuous claims. Concerning the Didache, Gary DeMar says:

But there is a good reason to place its composition early, prior to the destruction of the temple... In the authoritative work *The Apostolic Fathers*, we read the following:

‘A remarkably wide range of dates, extending from before A.D. 50 to the third century or later, has been proposed for this document . . . The Didache may have been put into its present form as late as 150, though a date considerably closer to the end of the first century seems more plausible. The materials from which it was composed, however, reflect the state of the church at an even earlier time. The relative simplicity of the prayers, the continuing concern to differentiate Christian practice from Jewish rituals (8.1), and in particular the form of church structure—note the twofold structure of bishops and deacons (cf. Phil. 1:1) and the continued existence of traveling apostles and prophets alongside a resident ministry—reflect a time closer to that of Paul and James (who died in the 60s) than Ignatius (who died sometime after 110). ((Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, [1992] 1999), 247-248. Emphasis added) . . .

The definitive work on the Didache was written by the French-Canadian Jean-Paul Audet who concluded “that it was composed, almost certainly in Antioch, between 50 and 70” ((John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 323)), “contemporary with the first gospel writings.” ((Jean-Paul Audet, *La Didachè: Instructions des Apôtres* (Paris: Gabalda, 1958), 187-210.))<sup>24</sup>

Did the early church believe in a yet future Parousia? By and large, in the records that we have, the answer is yes. The question is, why? Several scholars have answered that by noting that, at a very early time, the early church became Hellenized and lost touch with the metaphoric nature of Hebraic apocalyptic language.

**Graydon Snyder** says that Biblical eschatology is “radically disjunctive”:

It affirms the absolute validity of God’s promises to mankind through Israel and of the historical locus of its fulfillment; yet denies that present history or the present institutions of man could lead to its fulfillment.” . . . “Paul proclaimed this eschatological form not only in terms of mythology of the cross, but also with a more full orbed apocalyptic framework. In the Hellenistic world this apocalyptic form was understandably misunderstood. In some instances it was literalized dualistically (i.e. the myth becomes a cosmology) so that a struggle between flesh and spirit resulted. In some instances it was misunderstood chronologically (i.e. the myth becomes history), so that an actual end of time was expected...the chronological misunderstanding resulted in a problem regarding the delay of the parousia to such a point that the community was forced to identify that disjuncture with the baptism or the birth of Jesus rather than to speak of a radical disjuncture yet at hand...in other words, the problem of the delay of the parousia is a problem only in so far as the early community misunderstood and literalized the apocalyptic (Graydon Snyder, *“The Literalization of the Apocalyptic Form in the New Testament Church,”* Chicago Society of Biblical Research, Vol. 15 [1969], 5-18).

Daniel Rogers cites additional scholars who corroborate this:

John J. Collins, for instance, dedicated an entire volume to the Hellenization of Jewish Wisdom. Many Bible scholars and students today fall into the trap of relying on these Hellenized writings to determine the common understanding of the common Jew in the time of Christ. Tom Holland, of the Wales Evangelical School of Theology, explained the problem of relying on intertestamental writings for this purpose.

“There is no doubt these documents give fascinating insight into this period of Judaism, but their relevance for the New Testament message must be questioned... They assume there is a strict equivalence in terminology and themes found in these writings and in the New Testament. They use intertestamental texts as the key for understanding the New Testament texts. This presupposes they share the same theological outlook and their meanings are transposable. However, this understanding is flawed” (Daniel Rogers, *Ancient Philosophy*, Professor Hill, September 7, 2018 (page 2f).

In addition to the problem of the Hellenization of the early church, there is another issue that Mr. Campbell does not mention. That is, we have records in very early church writings of a disappointment,

indeed, even a crisis of faith over the fact that the Lord had not come at the time of the judgment of Jerusalem! Richard Bauckham speaks of a “crisis of faith” present in the post-AD 70 church over the failure of the Parousia (*Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 50, Jude, 2 Peter* [Waco, TX: Word Publishers, 1983], 293).

Likewise, Christopher Hays, along with other scholars, notes what was happening late in the first century: “It seems that a number of Christians were feeling uncomfortable with the non-occurrence of the eschatological consummation, and that different Christians leaders felt obligated to take action to control attendant disbelief in Jesus’ second coming.”

Hays quotes from 1 Clement 23:3, 50 (circa 95-97 CE), “Wretched are the double-minded who doubt in their soul and say, ‘We have heard these things even in the days of our fathers, and look, we have grown old, and none of these things have happened to us’ ...Truly his purpose will be accomplished quickly and suddenly, just as the Scripture also testifies: ‘He will come quickly and not delay, and the Lord will come suddenly to his temple, even the Holy One you expect.’”<sup>5</sup>

Former preterist Sam Frost documented how the epistles of Barnabas, Hermas and Clement all expressed this kind of disappointment over the “failure” of the Parousia (Sam Frost, *Misplaced Hope* [Colorado Springs, CO: Bimillennial Press, 2002]).

It is obvious from these citations that it is not sufficient to simply claim that the early church believed in a future eschaton. We must seek to know why they had a crisis of faith over the seeming failure of Christ to come in AD 70. That reason is simple: The New Testament writers emphatically posited the Parousia to occur in the first century.

**Reason #4** — A strong case can be made that the Book of Revelation was written in approximately A.D. 95, long after the events of A.D. 70.

[Citing Irenaeus] I want you to notice when he says John the apostle had his apocalyptic vision...

“...For that was seen not very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian’s reign.” Irenaeus says John had his “apocalyptic vision (the things he writes about in the Book of Revelation) towards the end of Domitian’s reign.”

Who was Domitian? Domitian was a Roman Emperor near the end of the first century.

Here's what is so fascinating about Irenaeus's statement. Domitian's reign did not even begin until A.D. 81. His reign ended with his assassination on September 18th, A.D. 96.

**Response:** While a book could be written in response to just this singular point, the reader needs to be aware of how much Mr. Campbell simply asserts but offers no documentation for his claim. (See Kenneth Gentry's *Before Jerusalem Fell* for one of the best examinations of the late date claims about Revelation. While Mr. Campbell seeks to convince his readers that the late date is firmly established, the reality is that this is simply not true. Let me offer a few bullet points in response.

- While the current consensus among scholars is that Revelation was written in the reign of Domitian, this view is changing:
- Early attempts to use archeology to prove that certain Christian individuals were involved in the alleged persecution have, in recent times, found to be faulty and in need of correction. Improved assessments of dating techniques have effectively placed the key individuals outside the persecution time frame that could have involved Domitian.
- Revisionist historians have sought to rehabilitate Domitian's place in history and their efforts have provided a credible alternative to long standing accounts from traditionalist historians. It is extremely likely that Domitian was not as bad as he has been portrayed and that he did not persecute Roman Christians at any time during his troubled rule.<sup>6</sup>

Robert Briggs offers this: "The alleged evidence for a Domitianic persecution against Christians turns out on closer scrutiny to be highly nebulous at best and therefore ought to be dismissed as illusory."<sup>7</sup> These kinds of quotes could be multiplied many times over.

Revelation is written in the midst of persecution in the seven churches of Asia. They were promised imminent vindication at the coming of the Lord (Rev 22:10-12). The indisputable fact is that if one posits Revelation in the time of Domitian, Rome, the ostensible persecutor, did not fall for almost 400 years, thus lying outside the delimitation of "*these things must shortly come to pass*" (Rev 1:1-3).

Kenneth Gentry has noted:

Another detriment to the strained interpretations listed above is that John was writing to historical churches existing in his own day (Rev 1:4). He and they are presently suffering



“tribulation” (Rev 1:9a). John’s message (ultimately from Christ 1:1) calls upon each to give careful, spiritual attention to his words (2:7, etc.). John is deeply concerned with the expectant cry of the martyrs and the divine promise of their soon vindication (6:10; cp. 5:3-5). He (John, DKP) would be cruelly mocking their circumstances (while committing a ‘verbal scam’ according to Mounce) were he telling them that when help comes it will come with swiftness—even though it may not come until two or three thousand years later.<sup>8</sup>

In another work, he wrote:

The New Testament epistles were speaking to real people in their original settings. Historically, the early church to whom the apostles write exists in throes of a rapidly expanding and increasingly deepening persecution. Consequently, the warnings of persecutorial suffering apply to the original recipients in a direct, relevant, and important way. We misconstrue them if we universalize them so as to require the continued persecution of the church until the second advent.<sup>9</sup>

To suggest, as Campbell does, that all Revelation communicates is that when the Lord finally gets around to coming, even if that is tens of thousands of years removed from the time of Revelation, that He will take the fastest chariot out of heaven is untenable and completely counterintuitive. Consider Revelation 22:10: *“And he said to me, ‘Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.’”*

Consider that Revelation, as all scholars agree, anticipated the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, including the book of Daniel specifically. The prophecy of the resurrection, for instance (Revelation 11 & 20), draws on Daniel 12. Daniel was told to seal the vision of his book because it was far off. It was not near.

John, however, reiterating Daniel’s prophecies, was told, *“Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.”* What Daniel foretold was not near when he wrote, so he was to seal the book. John, repeating Daniel’s prophecies, was told, *“Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.”*

It is patently not proper, therefore, to simply affirm that John was being told that, when the end would finally come, it would just occur rapidly. That destroys the temporal contrast between Daniel and Revelation.

Look now at some more points from Revelation that overrule Campbell's claims:

- The sins committed by Babylon of Revelation were historical sins that simply do not fit the city of Rome.
- Babylon was the city that killed the Old Testament prophets (Rev 16:6). See my book, *Who Is This Babylon?* in which I document that the terminology used in chapter 16 demands that the prophets in view were old covenant prophets. And here is a simple, but profound truth: Rome never killed a single Old Testament prophet! Only one city in the Bible is ever described as the city guilty of killing the Old Testament prophets: “*It is not possible that a prophet perish outside of Jerusalem*” (Luke 13:33).
- It was the city “*where the Lord was crucified*” (Rev 11:8). Note that the text says that the “*great city*” was “*spiritually called Sodom and Egypt.*” The truth is that only one city in all the Bible is ever spiritually called Sodom, and that was old covenant Jerusalem (Isa 1:15f; Ezek 16 / 23).
- It was the city that was killing the apostles and prophets of Jesus (Rev 18:20-24). Jesus said it was Jerusalem that would kill His apostles and prophets (Matt 23:29-37; Luke 11:49).
- It was the city that had shed all the blood shed on the earth (Rev 18:20-24). This is almost a quotation from Matt 23:35-36).
- It was the city whose measure of sin for killing the servants of God and His Son was now full (Rev 17:6f). Jesus said that Jerusalem was to fill up the measure of her sin, which included the slaying of the prophets, as well as His apostles and prophets, in the first century (Matt 23:29- 37; See also Paul in 1 Thess 2:14-16, where Paul accuses Israel and Jerusalem of doing the very things that Revelation accuses Babylon of doing). This raises a serious question, or several questions actually.

Jesus was saying that the foregoing fathers of Jerusalem had killed the prophets. And their guilt would be filled up by the Jews of the first century. That means that it had taken Israel literally centuries to finally fill up the measure of her sin by persecuting the saints. Consider then that, as noted, the evidence for a Domitianic persecution is slim (to none). So, how was it possible for Rome to fill up the measure of her persecutorial sin in such a short period of time?

Even the sources that are commonly cited to show that Domitian persecuted the church posit that there was persecution only within the last two years (at most, perhaps even *the last year*) of his reign, and that it involved very few people. Did that fill up Rome's measure of sin? You then have to jump forward to the reign of Trajan (circa AD 112) when the issue of Christian persecution is even mentioned. Yet, it is clear

that it was not in any way a Roman policy. How could one argue that, in contrast to Israel's long, bloody history, the focus of Revelation is on Rome?

Revelation's promise of the imminent judgment of Babylon is the anticipation of the fulfillment of God's Old Testament promises made to old covenant Israel. Revelation is saturated with echoes of Old Testament prophecies of the last days judgment of the city of Jerusalem (Deut 32; Isa 24-27, 65-66; Dan 12:2-7; Zech 10-14, etc.). Why would Revelation apply all of those old covenant promises of the last days judgment of Jerusalem (prophecies foretelling the covenantal judgment of Jerusalem for the last days) to the non-covenantal city of Rome?

Note: I have not addressed Mr. Campbell's last two points, i.e., the identity of the beast in Revelation and his claims about the Great Tribulation. My comments on the dating of Revelation and the Tribulation sufficiently cover them, even though not addressing his comments on the beast directly.

In light of all of these points (and more), it is obvious that Mr. Campbell has far overstated his case. His objections are based on faulty presuppositions. He is guilty of several logical fallacies. He has actually distorted the Biblical narrative. He has made false linguistic claims. For all of these reasons (and more), his objection is overruled! †

1. Campbell, C. (2021, October 30). *Preterism: Examined and Refuted*. Always Be Ready. <https://alwaysbeready.com/preterism-examined-and-refuted/>
2. BAS Staff (2024, June 4). *The Tel Dan Inscription: The First Historical Evidence of King David from the Bible*. Biblical Archaeology Society. <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-artifacts/the-tel-dan-inscription-the-first-historical-evidence-of-the-king-david-bible-story/>
3. See also page 98, N. 8 – “Most of what the Church Fathers wrote remains untranslated in Latin (Patrologia Latina: 218 Volumes and Greek [*Patrologia Graeca*: 166 Volumes]. Therefore, we cannot be dogmatic in asserting what the early Church Fathers believed. “The patrologies combined weigh in at over a million pages” (Bloch, H. [1994]. *God's Plagiarist: Being an Account of the Fabulous Industry and Irregular Commerce of Abbe Migne* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press], 1).
4. <https://americanvision.org/20165/early-documents-in-the-debate-over-preterism-the-didache/>
5. Hays, C. M. (2017). *When the Son Didn't Come* (Minneapolis, Fortress), 88.
6. Laffer, K. (2005). *The alleged persecution of the Roman Christians by the emperor Domitian*. Retrieved from <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses/639>.
7. Briggs, R. (1999). *Jewish Temple Imagery in the Book of Revelation*, Studies in Biblical Literature, Vol. 10 (New York, Peter Lang Publishing), 37– 38.
8. Gentry, K. (2002). *The Beast of Revelation* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision), 27; 470.

9. Gentry, K. (2009). *He Shall Have Dominion* (Draper, VA: Apologetics Group).