

Dispensational Premillennialism (*Influence of John Nelson Darby*)

1. Background

- A. John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) is credited as being the father of modern dispensationalism, being the first to systematize its concepts.
- B. Darby, an Irishman, born in London, England to a highly honorable family, and received a very good education. He entered Trinity College in Dublin Ireland at the age of 15 and studied law.
- C. After about one year practicing law, he was converted to Christ. In 1825, he entered the ministry and was given an Anglican Irish parish.
- D. He became disillusioned with the church, left the church, and with other dissenters inaugurated a movement known as the Plymouth Brethren.
- E. Biblical prophecy and the second coming of Christ were emphasized. Darby was the dominate individual in the movement.
- F. In 1827, Darby suffered a broken leg during a horse-riding accident that required an extended time of convalescence. It was during this time he developed the fundamental principles that would define his new theological system, now known as dispensationalism.

2. Overview of Dispensationalism

- A. Dispensationalism is a theological framework for interpreting the Bible that divides history into ages called dispensations.
- B. A dispensation is a period-of-time when God deals with His people in a particular way.
- C. God gives a commandment, it was broken, then judgment came from God. These dispensations progress through time as God builds upon His redemptive plan.
- D. Darby took a "*Futurism*" interpretative approach for Jesus's Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation. Most of the events described are in *our future*.
- E. Many of the familiar terms associated with Christ 2nd coming originate from the Olivet Discourse (great tribulation, abomination of desolation, Jesus coming in the clouds, the gathering of His elect (rapture), and one taken and one left (left behind)).

3. Four Distinctive Features of Dispensationalism

- A. There is a distinction between *Israel* and the *Church*. There are two peoples of God, with two distinct and unique plans of God.
- B. Scripture was divided up into seven time periods that represents God progressive plan through the ages. (Innocence, Conscience, Human Government, Promise, Law, Grace, Kingdom/Millennium).
- C. A wooden literal hermeneutic that gets applied to prophecy and apocalyptic literature. "*Wooden literal*" is a phrase used to describe a rigid, inflexible interpretation of text, that takes every word at its most basic, literal meaning without considering context, figurative language, or genre.
- D. Constructed an eschatological system regarding the 2nd coming of Christ. This system of eschatology is the popular view today.

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4. Three things that helped dispensationalism spread:

- A. The beginning of the Bible Institute movement in the 1800s.
- B. Prophecy conferences that were popular in the early 1900s.
- C. The publication of the Scofield Reference Bible by C.I. Schofield in 1909.

5. Darby's Eschatological System Teachings:

- A. Two peoples of God with two separate plans, and two distinct destinies.
- B. Pretribulation secret rapture of the Church (1st phase of 1st resurrection).
- C. Seven-year tribulation where God's wrath is poured out as judgement on Israel and an unbelieving world (first 3 ½ years peaceful, last 3 ½ years called the Great Tribulation).
- D. The Great Tribulation is the worst times the world has ever experienced.
- E. Building of the 3rd Jewish Temple with animal blood sacrifices.
- F. Gap theory of Daniel's Seven Weeks Prophecy (7-year tribulation is 70th week).
- G. Appearance of the antichrist, one world government, and mark of the beast.
- H. 2nd coming of Christ Battle of Armageddon, resurrection of tribulation saints and O.T. saints (2nd phase of 1st resurrection), Judgment of Nations.
- I. Kingdom Age or the Millennium, Satan bound, animal sacrifices for the atonement of sin.
- J. Satan released for his final rebellion, Battle of Gog & Magog.
- K. 2nd Resurrection of the wicked dead & the Great White Throne Judgment.
- L. New Heaven & New Earth, or the Eternal State.
- M. This system teaches 3 resurrections of the dead, 3 end time battles, and 3 judgments.

6. Other Historical Facts

- A. Margarete McDonald gave a charismatic utterance, or message in tongues in 1830 that some say Darby used in forming his pretribulation rapture view.
- B. Darby never considered her message in tongues to be from God, so her messages did not have a part in the development of the secret rapture view. Darby had written out his pretribulation views in January 1827, three years prior to MacDonald's utterance.
- C. When MacDonald's message is read closely, it appears to be referring to a post tribulation rapture, rather than a pretribulation rapture.
- D. Dispensationalists take offense at the claim that the pretribulation rapture view is an invention of the nineteenth century.
- E. There are some biblical scholars who cite ancient examples of the dispensational premillennial view. Their views were less defined and sophisticated, but they reflect rudimentary features of dispensationalism.
- F. In the early church, elements of the schemes of ages and dispensations are found in the writings of Justin Martyr (110-165), Irenaeus (130-200), Tertullian (160-220), Methodius (died 311), and Victorinus of Petau (died 304).
- G. These few examples mentioned, do not provide convincing evidence to show dispensationalism was a widely held belief.
- H. The early Church did not teach a pretribulation rapture, a key feature of modern dispensational premillennialism. The early church held to a "historical premillennial view."

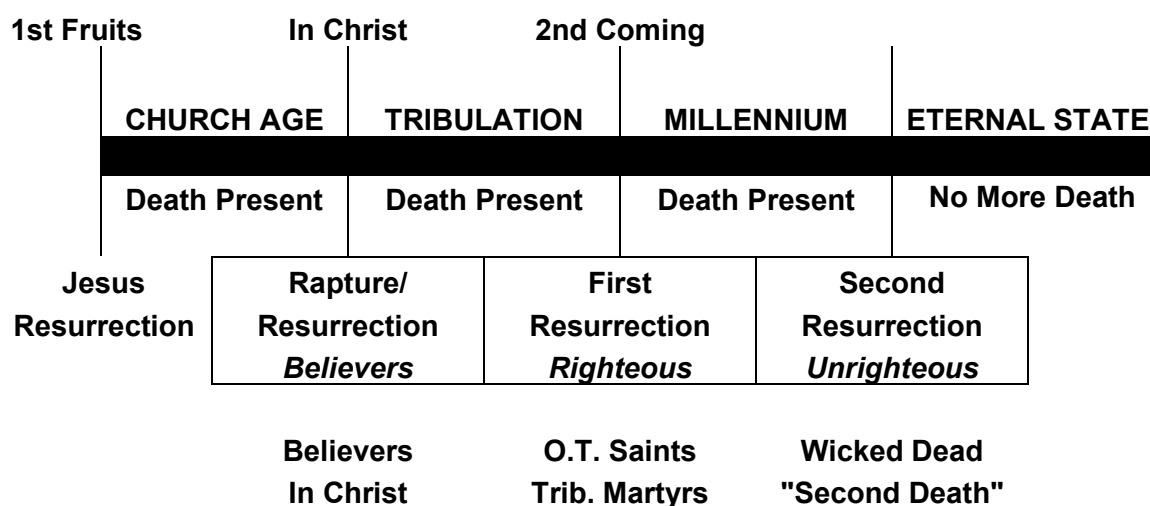
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7. Final Comments

- A. The eschatological system constructed by John Nelson Darby appears to be biblical, but it does not stand the test of scripture. There is not a single passage in scripture that speaks of Jesus coming to secretly rapture the church to escape a seven-year tribulation, and then coming again publicly after the seven-years.
- B. Dispensationalism's position for a secret rapture is determined by reason or inference, which can be subjective in nature. If some idea or interpretation is scriptural, it should be supported by direct statements of scripture that are objectively understood.
- C. The whole eschatological system of dispensational premillennialism was defined by one person making impositions on the scripture.
- D. The teaching for a secret rapture was further advanced by others, such as C.I. Scofield and his reference Bible that endorsed Darby's position and influenced generations, Hal Lindsey's 1970 "The Late Great Planet Earth, and the "Left Behind" series of books written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, published from 1995-2007.
- E. The rapture doctrine is one of the most recent new doctrines in the history of the church. The pretribulation rapture position was systematized around 1830, and no church taught it prior to that time. Just because it is a modern teaching does not mean it is false, but we should test it thoroughly to determine if it is true.
- F. Many Christians just blindly accept John Nelson Darby's eschatological teachings without examining the biblical evidence for themselves because that is what they were taught.
- G. Dispensationalism is one way, or "*interpretative lens*" to understand prophetic passages.
- H. Many Christians today do not realize there are other interpretative lenses in which to view Bible eschatology.

Timeline #1:

Dispensational Premillennialism – The Prevailing or Popular View Incorporates Multiple Physical Resurrections of the Dead



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Timeline #2:

1 Corinthians 15:23-24

Scripture Describes One Physical Resurrection of the Dead

