

I recently viewed a disappointing conversation between Jack Hibbs, Pastor of Calvary Chapel Chino Hills and Dr. Paul Wilkinson from Prophetic Witness Ministry International. They were discussing dispensationalism and fulfillment theology in the church today. I wasn't disappointed by their dispensationalism, I am very familiar with Jack Hibbs, so there was no surprise there. I was disappointed and a little outraged, however, to hear Hibbs elevate his dispensational Zionism to a primary deal breaker issue, labeling anyone who disagreed with Zionism as a 'blasphemer.'

I don't know if it would surprise Hibbs or Wilkinson, but it might surprise you to learn that the list of 'blasphemers' is actually pretty long (if Hibbs is right). It would include people like William Carey, Hudson Taylor, C.S Lewis, Charles Spurgeon, John and Charles Wesley, George Whitfield, Jonathan Edwards, Matthew Henry, John Calvin, Martin Luther and every single Christian believer who lived prior to the 1830's (including the Apostles John and Paul who both taught that the Israel and the church are one). Why the 1830's you ask? Well, it is true that Zionism (in some form) existed before the 1830's but dispensationalism, with its 'secret pre-tribulational rapture' and its distinction between Israel and the church, did not.

Of course, no dispensationalist or any other protestant evangelical theologian worth their salt is going to concede that they have taken a stand solely on something a theologian invented 180 plus years ago, which is why you have likely heard very little if anything about John Nelson Darby- the most influential theologian that you've never heard of- even if you hold to a secret pre-trib rapture. Dispensationalist's insist that their theology is purely biblical and in line with sola scriptura. Any that acknowledge Darby acknowledge him as one who discovered dispensational theology from the scripture.

I wanted to introduce you to Mr. Darby myself but I figured, why re-invent the wheel when Jerry Johnson has already made a much better introduction and put it on youtube? Therefore I want to begin by directing you to the video below which is a 20 minute synopsis of J. N. Darby's life and his 'contribution' to dispensational theology. However, there are a few things the video does not cover so please continue reading here after the video. If the embedded video does not appear please re-load the page. if it still doesn't show follow [this link to youtube](#)

Once, after describing an A-millennial view of theology, I was light heartedly accused of sounding like a 'Mormon.' In truth, the dispensational view of theology has far more in common with Mormonism than any of my views. For instance, according to both camps it took 1800 years for the church to discover such these "fundamental and important" truths in the scripture. Like Joseph Smith and Charles Taze Russell, John Darby and others of the Plymouth brethren held the view that the pure New Testament church had disintegrated by the end of the second century and had been lost until the 19th century. Each of these men claimed to be the one who had recovered the true church for the latter days; each held himself to be a 'latter day saint' (though only one claimed to be Mormon).

But why did Darby feel the need to develop this new theological system? because Darby was frustrated with the ritualism and legalism he saw in the organized church, he placed a intense emphasis on the distinction between the law and grace in the life of believers. His overreaction to a very real problem led him to imposed a multitude of exaggerations on the scriptures as he began to section them up in to various 'dispensations.'

Up to and through the period of the protestant reformation (in the 1500's) the dominant understanding of the church was more in line with covenant theology and Christians generally held to either an "Inaugurated millennialism" (also know as the A-millennial view) or an Historicist view of eschatology. A futurist view of the last days (which supposes that the events described in the book of Revelation are yet future) was put forward in 1590 by a Roman Catholic Spanish Jesuit named Francisco Ribera. This he did to counter protestant reformers like Martin Luther who insisted that the Pope was the Anti-Christ and the Roman church the great harlot. By the 19th century, futurism was all the rage but a comprehensive dispensationalism with a "pre-tribulation rapture," did not exist before Darby. This, (if you watched the video, you will know) Darby himself admitted. By 1833 Darby had fully formed his views of a secret rapture which he claimed to have drawn from II Thessalonians 2:1-2.

Darby's views were not warmly welcomed by many people. As stated in the video, his own friends in the Plymouth brethren rejected his teaching because it just didn't line up with the whole counsel of God's word, as did CH Spurgeon. So how on earth did this teaching called dispensationalism become so prominent? Well, Americans, as it turns out, are suckers for a good marketing strategy. Darby brought this view across the pond to the states where he received much more acceptance. Even though he did not like D.L. Moody, Darby's doctrine

owes him its popularity along with another man named C.I. Scofield who published the first study bible to present the doctrines of Darby along side the scriptures.

This happened around the time of the so called 'Third Great Awakening' (roughly 1850-early 1900's). During this time a number of idealists endeavoured to "modernize" the Bible by 'de-mythologizing' it; dismissing anything miraculous or spiritual as fairy tales. At the same time these liberal theologians championed their 'social' gospel, which taught that the bible was really concerned with making us better people who love each other. As the battle lines were drawn between the social gospel and the true biblical gospel (which in addition to being very concerned about people loving one another, is also concerned with love for the God of truth) Darby's followers were found among the faithful. His teaching was then dispensed through traditional Bible conferences and revival meetings. Eventually, as various schools and seminaries were established, conservative evangelicalism was infiltrated and this aberrant tradition was fed to pastors and then congregations.

Finally in the mid to late 1960's Chuck Smith made a decisive (and wise) movement away from Pentecostalism and the Four-Square church as he and others with him pursued a slightly more conservative view of sola scriptura. This birthed the Calvary Chapel movement which became spread across the states and throughout the world. Their message, coupled with popular music and media, reinforced the dispensational tradition in modern evangelicalism. This was in concert with various other denominations and popular teachers (like Chuck Swindoll and J. Vernon McGee) who expounded on the rapture and the distinction between the church and Israel. So that currently, the dispensational system of theology is dominant.

To be fair, the dispensationalism of Chuck Smith and Chuck Swindoll is a little different than the dispensationalism of John Nelson Darby and C.I. Scofield. For instance the idea that people in the Old Testament were saved by the law would be regarded as repugnant heresy in a Calvary Chapel; which is as it should be. After all Paul clearly denounces the idea that anyone was ever saved by keeping the law. Dispensationalism has evolved and mutated over the years and has become as multifaceted and diverse as the various groups that hold the view, which is not damning, but does suggest that the doctrine may carry a significant level of ambiguity and pliability.

Never the less, every dispensationalist agrees with Darby on certain issues. These are as follows: a hyper univocal interpretation of scripture (Darby's hermeneutic, which claims to

be 'literal'), a progression of divine revelation tied to each dispensation, at least 3 dispensations (usually the Patriarchs age, Israel age and the Church age), the absolute distinction between Israel and the Church and an imminent secret rapture which will end the church age and restart the Israeli age. It is my sincere hope to expose some of the more serious errors of dispensationalism in future posts.