

Tribulation Central

When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed...2 Thessalonians 1:1-8

The Unoriginal John Darby

by Dave MacPherson

<http://tribulationcentral.com/pdf/guest/mc-darby.pdf>

Go ahead. I dare you. Type in the name "John Darby" on Yahoo and other internet "search engines."

You will find that many still assume that this 19th century leader of the evangelical, Britain-based Plymouth Brethren was the most important figure in the development of "premillennial dispensationalism" - or, if you like choices, "dispensational premillennialism." (Those fond of brevity can call it "d-ism.")

Just for the fun of it, let's list the chief features of d-ism (after listing what supposedly led to those features) and see if Darby was the first person to teach them:

(1) The "Heavenly" Church.

This was the theme of Darby's first paper (1827). PRE-DARBY DATA: Manuel Lacunza (1812) and Edward Irving (1825-1827 sermons and other writings) had the same theme.

(2) The "Unity" of the Church.

This was the theme of Darby's second paper (1828). PRE-DARBY DATA: Lacunza (1812) and Irving (1825-27 sermons, etc.) had the same theme.

(3) The Church/Israel "Distinction."

In his 1965 d-ism book, Darby defender Charles Ryrie viewed this distinction as the most important basis for d-ism, adding in his 1981 rapture book that it led Darby to his church/Israel "dichotomy," that is, a pretrib rapture separating the two groups during a future tribulation.

As support for this distinction, d-ists see several supposedly original thoughts in Darby's 1829 paper:

Darby spoke of "the Jewish and Gentile dispensations." PRE-DARBY DATA: Irving (1825 etc.) referred to "the dispensations both Jewish and Gentile."

Darby said "the hope of the church is His coming." PRE-DARBY DATA: Irving (1825 etc.) stated that "the coming of the Lord" is the church's "hope and desire."

Darby wrote "looking daily for the Lord's coming." PRE-DARBY DATA: Irving (1826 - Lacunza preface) wrote "look daily for the coming of the Lord."

Darby said "the church...was a suffering church" before "the church became triumphant." PRE-DARBY DATA: Irving (1825 etc.) referred to "the suffering church" before it became "the triumphant church."

Darby mentioned "the restoration of the Jews to their own land." PRE-DARBY DATA: Irving (1825 etc.) mentioned the "restoration" of "the Jews...to their own land."

(4) The Gentile "Parenthesis."

In an 1830 article Darby talked about "the Jewish church or nation (exclusive of the Gentile parenthesis...)." PRE-DARBY DATA: In an 1811 book (which was reprinted in England in 1818, had several editions, and was widely read), American pastor William Davis referred to "the Jewish nation, exclusively of the Gentiles."

(5) The Pretribulation "Rapture."

Like many d-ists today, Darby saw Rev. 3's "Philadelphia" raptured and "Laodicea" left behind. In an 1833 letter he wrote that this view "commends itself morally to one's mind." PRE-DARBY DATA: As early as Sep., 1830 Irving's journal stated that the "Philadelphia" church (that is, church members then living) would be raptured BEFORE "the great tribulation" while "Laodicea" would be left behind. (Three months later, while still defending the posttrib view in a published article, Darby said he expected to be raptured eventually at Christ's "judging of the nations" - which Scofield puts in a posttrib setting!)

Anyone can go through Darby's writings in the early 1830's and observe that he had NO clear pretrib teaching or any church/Israel distinction (or anything else) that could have led to pretrib doctrine:

In 1832 he couldn't have been pretrib because he was still rejecting the idea of a "future" Antichrist and continuing to emphasize "the present antichristian principles"!

In his 1834 works we find him waiting for the "second coming" (and not a prior rapture) and waiting (with "the Jews"!) for the day when Christ "will not tarry" (Heb. 10:37) - what Scofield terms the "second advent"!

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As late as 1837, while being anything but "dichotomous," he saw the church "going in with Him to the marriage, to wit, with Jerusalem and the Jews"!

In 1839 he finally had some clear pretrib teaching. His rapture, however, was based on the symbol of the catching up of Rev. 12's "man child," and his tribulation was then only 3.5 years long - a "chart" he embraced for several more decades!

PRE-DARBY DATA: But Irving had taught the same thing as early as the June, 1831 issue of his journal when he stated that Rev. 12:5's "child" portrays a rapture before "the travailing woman is cast out into the wilderness" for 3.5 years!

My book *The Rapture Plot* (available at armageddonbooks.com¹) shows, with exacting documentation, that Darby wasn't first on ANY aspect of d-ism - the ones already discussed as well as the ruin of the church, the dispensations, literal interpretation, a primarily "Jewish" tribulation, etc.

Although I view Darby as a brother in Christ, I'm forced to conclude that his great weakness was his clever plagiarism of others!

If you are disturbed by the false claims for Darby that have long been repeated (and plagiarized) in d-ist writings, I invite you to send a copy of "The Unoriginal John Darby" to those writers.

It'll be your way of testing their fairness and honesty!

¹ <http://www.armageddonbooks.com/rapture.html>