

History of the Reformation

John Nelson Darby

Birth of Dispensationalism

- Voices Out of the 2nd Great Awakening
 - Charles G Finney (1792 – 1875)
 - Preacher of Revivalism – focus on the emotional response to the Gospel
 - William Miller (1782 – 1848)
 - The Great Disappointment of 1844
 - Ellen G. White
 - 7th Day Adventist
 - Joseph Smith (1805 – 1844)
 - Mormonism
 - Barton Stone/Alexander Campbell
 - Restoration Movement (Churches/Disciples of Christ)
 - John Nelson Darby (1800 – 1882)
 - Dispensationalism

- John Nelson Darby
 - Background (1800 – 1882)
 - Born Westminster, London 18 Nov 1800 – 29 Apr 1882
 - Educated Trinity College in Dublin
 - Focus – languages
 - Ordained as curate in Church of England 1825
 - Appointed to ministry in Ireland
 - Evangelism to Catholic peasants
 - 100's of converts joined him
 - Disillusionment 1827 – Archbishop of Dublin – all converts must swear allegiance to English king
 - Darby offended – resigned post as curate
 - Seriously injured
 - Studied bible seriously
 - Bias
 - Disillusionment with organized religion
 - Intrigued by 2nd Great awakening (similar revivalism in England)
 - Came to the conclusion that the Kingdom of Isaiah was vastly different than the Church of the NT
 - Reached notions
 - Should be no paid clergy – lay people could be channels of the Spirit of God
 - Egalitarian approach
 - Informal group of men
 - Came to be called Plymouth brethren
 - Diverse movement against coldness of established church
 - Darby was most powerful leader among many in the Brethren
 - Dublin, Plymouth, Bristol were centers
 - Theology of Brethrenism
 - Desire for closeness to Christ and union with other true believers (less sectarian division)



- Breaking of bread together was important
 - At first very spontaneous, but as leaders arose, it became more structured
 - Later, eschewed appointed or designated elders/clergy
 - Darby would separate himself (and his fellowship) from those who allowed leaders
 - 1848 – the Plymouth Brethren split between “Open” and “Exclusive” fellowships
 - Darby published tracts criticizing the Open Brethren and justifying his splitting off to form a separate group
 - Darby’s view of the church
 - The church exists, even if there are no people
 - Reaction to abuses of the day
 - Organized churches then currently around are all apostate (needed restoration)
 - All believers are priests, therefore, there cannot be any clergy
 - Later, in America, Darby’s ecclesiology was not embraced as was his eschatology
 - Eschatological ideas
 - 1831 – Powerscourt Conference
 - Lady Powerscourt – very interested in millenarianism of 2d Great Awakening
 - Edward Irving (Church of Scotland)
 - “the Charles Finney of England” (powerful revivalistic appeals)
 - Taught that one of signs of return of Christ was the reinstatement of the Charismatic gifts
 - Especially speaking in tongues and prophetic utterances
 - Often happened in his meetings
 - Referred to utterance of Margaret MacDonald
 - Ecstatic trance
 - Two-stage return of Christ
 - As end of the world approached, before Armageddon, . . . , was the taking out of the world the church – believers to escape by means of rapture
 - Irving incorporated that into his own preaching
 - Translated *The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty*
 - Written by a Jesuit
 - Predicted
 - the apostasy of Christianity
 - the restoration of the Jews
 - the imminent return of Christ
 - Kernel stuck into his message
 - Eventually dismissed from Church of Scotland
 - Started Catholic Apostolic Church – forerunner of modern Pentecostalism
 - Secret Rapture captured imagination of Darby
 - Catastrophic dissolution of the world order at the end of history before Christ returns
 - But before that happens, believers would be taken out of the world(I Thess – all caught up in the air to meet Christ) (not 2nd coming, but a precursor)
 - Establish a kingdom on earth
 - This will happen through the political nation Israel
 - As opposed to universal church understanding that the promises of the OT would come through
 - Promises of OT are to come through ethnic nation of Israel
- Gains remarkable world-wide ministry 1830’s – 1840’s
 - Well known throughout English speaking world
 - Stated purpose was “to establish Plymouth Brethren fellowships”

- At least 5 journey's to America 1862 – 1877
 - Especially in the East
 - Gained lots of followers
 - James H. Brookes, DD, Presbyterian Pastor in St Louis
 - Became closest American friend
 - Felt it was his purpose in life to spread Darby's theology as far as he could
 - Criticism
 - James Grant – *The Plymouth Brethren: Their History and Heresies*
 - Primarily criticized the aggressive proselytization of established churches
 - Refers to the Darbyite party of the Plymouth Brethren
 - C. H Spurgeon – 1869 – *Sword and Trowel* article agreeing with Grant
 - Darby – a strange doctrine that Christ went through “non-atoning” suffering on the cross
 - Literary
 - Good and polished writer
 - Wrote tracts, pamphlets, books, biblical translations
 - Most important was A Commentary on the Bible based on his Dispensational Ideas
 - Broad sections and thematic treatments of his thoughts
 - Worked out his eschatology
 - Today 47 volumes of his collected writings
 - American Influence
 - James H. Brooks – most important
 - Cyrus Ingersol Scofield – a disciple of Brooks
 - Dwight L. Moody – evangelist
 - Lewis Sperry Chafer – founder of Dallas Theological Seminary
- Hermeneutics of John Nelson Darby
 - Basic elements and hermeneutical pattern of Darby's eschatology
 - Dichotomy between Israel and the church, i.e. there are two peoples of God, not one. There are two programs, two kingdoms not one
 - A rigid, literal approach to the interpretation of the prophetic references to Israel, the earthly people of God
 - Israel was called of God and was promised a government upon the earth. The nation of Israel was temporarily set aside because it rejected the offer of the kingdom to Israel at the first advent
 - This earthly kingdom was postponed until a future time of fulfillment, i.e. the millennium
 - There is one covenant for Israel and another for the church. The covenant for Israel is the primary covenant for God's work in history
 - The church is the “heavenly” people of God. As such, the church on earth is but a parenthesis (Darby) in God's plan with Israel (an intercalation = i.e., “unrelated to” Israel – Lewis S. Chafer).
 - The distinction between law and grace: Early - salvation by law keeping. Recently – salvation always by faith, but a distinction is made between the “gospel of the kingdom” and the “gospel of grace.”