1. Introduction: The Dispensational Family Tree

Dispensationalism is one of the most influential theological systems within the universal church today. Largely unrecognised and subliminal, it has increasingly shaped the presuppositions of fundamentalist, evangelical, Pentecostal and charismatic thinking concerning Israel over the past one hundred and fifty years.

John Nelson Darby is regarded as the father of dispensationalism and its prodigy, Christian Zionism. It was Cyrus. I. Scofield and D. L. Moody, however, who brought Darby's sectarian theology into mainstream evangelical circles. R. C. Sproul concedes that dispensationalism is now 'a theological system that in all probability is the majority report among current American evangelicals.' [1] Most of the early popular American radio preachers such as Donald Grey Barnhouse, Charles E. Fuller, and M. R. DeHaan were dispensationalists. Today, virtually all the 'televangelists' such as Jerry Falwell, Jim Bakker, Paul Crouch, Pat Robertson, Jimmy Swaggart and Billy Graham are also dispensationalists.

Other leading dispensationalists include Charles Ryrie, Dwight Pentecost, John Walvoord, Eric Sauer, Charles Dyer, Tim LaHaye, Grant Jeffrey and Hal Lindsey. Notable political proponents include Jimmie Carter and Ronald Reagan. Probably the most significant Christian organisations to espouse dispensationalism have been the Moody Bible Institute, Dallas Theological Seminary and the International Christian Embassy, Jerusalem.

2. Dispensationalism Defined

The basic text upon which dispensationalism is based is the Authorised translation of 2 Timothy 2:15, where the Apostle Paul calls upon Timothy to, 'rightly divide the word of truth.' Scofield took this verse as the title for his first book which is a defence of this way of 'dividing' Scripture into discrete dispensations. [2] In its classical form, Charles Ryrie insists the sine qua non of Dispensationalism to be,

1. A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the Church distinct...
2. This distinction between Israel and the church is born out of a system of hermeneutics that is usually called literal interpretation...

3. A third aspect... concerns the underlying purpose of God in the world... namely, the glory of God... To the normative dispensationalist, the soteriological, or saving, program of God is not the only program but one of the means God is using in the total program of glorifying Himself. [3]

2.1 The Seven Dispensations
Following Darby and Scofield, dispensationalists claim to find in Scripture evidence of seven distinct dispensations during which mankind has been tested in respect of specific revelation as to the will of God. In each dispensation, including the present sixth dispensation of the church, mankind has failed the test. These dispensations began with creation and will end in an exclusive Jewish kingdom on earth. Charles Ryrie offers the clearest outline of dispensationalism. [4]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Dispensations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innocency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriarchal Rule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosaic Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millennium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These dispensations are seen by proponents as literally 'providing us with a chronological map to guide us' [5] toward the seventh and final dispensation which will be inaugurated by the imminent return of Jesus Christ and climax to world history.

2.2 A Distinction Between Israel and the Church
Dispensationalists believe that God has two separate but parallel means of working, one through the church, the other through Israel, the former being a parenthesis to the later. [6] Thus there is, and always will remain, a distinction, 'between Israel, the Gentiles and the Church.' [7] Darby was not the first to insist on a radical distinction between Israel and the Church.

Marcion stressed the radical nature of Christianity vis-a-vis Judaism. In his theology there existed a total discontinuity between the OT and the NT, between Israel and the church, and even between the god of the OT and the Father of Jesus. [8]
It was, however, Darby who first insisted that, 'The Jewish nation is never to enter the Church.' [9] Scofield developed this idea further,

Comparing then, what is said in Scripture concerning Israel and the Church, we find that in origin, calling, promise, worship, principles of conduct and future destiny all is contrast. [10]

Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary and a student of Scofield's elaborated on this dichotomy between Israel and the church,

The dispensationalist believes that throughout the ages God is pursuing two distinct purposes: one related to the earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved which is Judaism; while the other is related to heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives involved, which is Christianity. [11]

For Chafer, 'Israel is an eternal nation, heir to an eternal land, with an eternal kingdom, on which David rules from an eternal throne,' [12] that is, on earth and distinct from the church who will be in heaven.

2.3 A Literalist Hermeneutic

Dispensationalism is based on the hermeneutical principle that Scripture is always to be interpreted literally. Darby's approach might be summarised in one sentence in which he admitted, 'I prefer quoting many passages than enlarging upon them.' [13] Scofield, who popularised and synthesised Darby's theology explains further,

Not one instance exists of a 'spiritual' or figurative fulfilment of prophecy... Jerusalem is always Jerusalem, Israel is always Israel, Zion is always Zion... Prophecies may never be spiritualised, but are always literal. [14]

Ryrie similarly asserts,

To be sure, literal/historical/grammatical interpretation is not the sole possession or practice of dispensationalists, but the consistent use of it in all areas of biblical interpretation is. [15]

The logical deduction of a literalist dispensational hermeneutic, is summarised by Dwight Pentecost, another former member of the Dallas faculty.

Scripture is unintelligible until one can distinguish clearly between God's program for his earthly people Israel and that for the Church. [16]

Ernest Sandeen observes that dispensationalism has, 'a frozen biblical text in which every word was supported by the same weight of divine authority.' [17]

Based on this interpretative principle, dispensationalists hold that the promises made to Abraham and through him to the Jews, although postponed during this present church age, are nevertheless eternal and unconditional and therefore await future realisation since they have never yet been literally fulfilled. So, for example, it is an article of normative dispensational belief that the boundaries of the land promised to Abraham and his descendants from the Nile to the Euphrates will be literally instituted and that Jesus Christ will return to a literal and theocratic Jewish kingdom centred on a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. In such a scheme the church on earth is relegated to the status of
a parenthesis, [18] a ‘Plan B...’, [19] and ‘...a sort of footnote or sidetrack in contrast to God's main mission to save ethnic, national Israel.’ [20]

2.4 An Apocalyptic Eschatology
Crucial to the dispensationalist reading of biblical prophecy is the conviction that the period of tribulation is imminent along with the secret rapture of the church and the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple in place of, or along side, the Dome of the Rock. This will signal the return of the Lord to restore the Kingdom to Israel centred on Jerusalem. This pivotal event is also seen as the trigger for the start of the war of Armageddon in which most of the world's population together with large numbers of Jews will suffer and die. [21]

Convinced that a nuclear Armageddon is an inevitable event within the divine scheme of things, many evangelical dispensationalists have committed themselves to a course for Israel that, by their own admission, will lead directly to a holocaust indescribably more savage and widespread than any vision of carnage that could have generated in Adolf Hitler's criminal mind. [22]

Clearly such views, whether promulgated by academics from theological institutions like Dallas Theological Seminary and the Moody Bible Institute, or by Jewish fanatics such as Baruch Ben-Yosef and the Temple Mount Yeshiva, [23] the consequences can only be devastating, especially since dispensationalists have considerable political influence through which they seek the fulfilment of their apocalyptic vision of the future. That dispensational vision began in 1828 when Darby wrote his first tract against the prevailing optimism of the established church. [24]

Darby is rightly regarded as the first to espouse dispensationalism as a discrete theological system, although William Kelly and Edward Irving played no small part in the restoration of premillennial speculations out of which Darby's dispensationalism arose. [25] Darby was not the first to discover dispensations within Biblical history, nor was his own scheme universally accepted even within Brethren circles. Charles Ryrie attempts, unconvincingly, to show that Darby's ideas were latent in the writings of the French mystic Pierre Poiret (1646-1719); the amillennial Calvinist John Edwards (1639-1716) and Isaac Watts (1674-1748). [26] He does concede however that it was Darby who systematised and popularised the idea of dispensationalism. [27]

Darby was a charismatic figure, a dominant personality, persuasive speaker and zealous missionary for his dispensationalist beliefs. He personally founded Brethren churches in Germany, Switzerland, France and the United States, which in turn sent missionaries to Africa, the West Indies, Australia and New Zealand. By the time of his death in 1885, around 1500 separatist Brethren churches had been founded world-wide.

During his lifetime, Darby wrote more hymns than the Wesleys, travelled further than the Apostle Paul, and was a Greek and Hebrew scholar. His writings filled forty volumes... If Brightman was the father of Christian Zionism, then Darby was its greatest apostle and missionary... [28]

Harry Ironside, a dispensationalist and former pastor of Moody Memorial Church in Chicago, claimed Darby had rediscovered the apostolic teaching lost to the church,
Until brought to the fore through the writings and preaching and teaching of a distinguished ex-clergyman, Mr J. N. Darby, in the early part of the last century, it is scarcely to be found in a single book or sermon through a period of sixteen hundred years. [29]

The clearest expression of Darby's thinking is to be found in *The Apostasy of the Successive Dispensations.* In this work it is noticeable that Darby's views are vague and embryonic compared with later attempts by Scofield and Ryrie, to systematise seven discrete dispensations. Ryrie's interpretation of Darby's dispensations is significantly at variance with Darby's own writings but more consistent with Scofield. It is an understatement when Ryrie claims Darby's scheme is, 'not always easily discerned from his writings'. [30] Ryrie appears to have read back into Darby's writings, a scheme that suited his own purposes. From Darby's own works it is possible to reconstruct his dispensational chronology and compare it with Ryrie's interpretation, together with Scofield's 1909 version, itself at variance with a subsequent revision made by Schuyler English in 1967.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Paradisaical state</td>
<td>1. Innocency (Genesis 1:28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Noah (Government)</td>
<td>2. Noah</td>
<td>2. Conscience (Genesis 3:23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Abraham</td>
<td>3. Human Government (Genesis 8:20)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Moses (Law)</td>
<td>4. Israel-under law under priesthood under kings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Aaron (Priesthood)</td>
<td>4. Promise (Genesis 12:1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Kingly (Manasseh)</td>
<td>5. Law (Exodus 19:8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Spirit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Millennium</td>
<td>7. Kingdom (Ephesians 1:10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Darby defended his dispensational interpretation on two grounds. First, he claimed others had not studied the Scriptures correctly.

(The covenant is a word common in the language of a large class of Christian professors... but in its development and detail, as to its unfolded principles, much obscurity appears to me to have arisen from a want of simple attention to Scripture. [34]

Second, Darby believed the Lord had revealed it to him personally.

For my part, if I were bound to receive all that has been said by the Millenarians, I would reject the whole system, but their views and statements weigh with me not one feather.
But this does not hinder me from enquiring by the teaching of the same spirit... what God has with infinite graciousness revealed to me concerning His dealing with the Church. [35]

Even Roy Coad, in his otherwise sympathetic history of the Brethren Movement, admits that 'For the traditional view of the Revelation, another was substituted.' [36] James Barr is less charitable arguing dispensationalism was, '...individually invented by J. N. Darby... concocted in complete contradiction to all main Christian traditions...' [37]

Darby's strong and repeated condemnation of the visible church as apostate, clearly influenced his emerging belief that the church era was merely a 'parenthesis' of the Last Days. Darby regarded the church as simply one more dispensation that had failed and was under God's judgement. Just as Israel had been cut off, so the church would be. Just as only a small remnant of Israel had been saved, so would only a small remnant of the church. The remnant taken from the ruins of the church were naturally his own followers.

Darby insisted these seven dispensations were irreversible and progressive, speculating that the church would soon be replaced on earth by a revived national Israel.

The Church has sought to settle itself here, but it has no place on the earth... [Though] making a most constructive parenthesis, it forms no part of the regular order of God's earthly plans, but is merely an interruption of them to give a fuller character and meaning to them (the Jews). [38]

Darby regarded the covenantal relationship between God and Abraham as binding for ever, and that the promises pertaining to the nation of Israel, as yet unfulfilled, would find their consummation in the reign of Jesus Christ on earth during the millennium. Speaking of the imminent return of the Jews to Palestine, Darby predicted,

The first thing, then, which the Lord will do will be to purify His land (the land which belongs to the Jews) of the Tyrians, the Philistines, the Sidonians; of Edom and Moab, and Amon - of all the wicked, in short from the Nile to the Euphrates. It will be done by the power of Christ in favour of His people re-established by His goodness. The people are put into security in the land, and then will those of them who remain till that time among the nations be gathered together. [39]

Darby was as dismissive of the Jews as he was of Arabs. He not only taught that God would 'purify' the Arabs from between the Nile and the Euphrates and give it all to the Jews, he also believed the majority of Jews would eventually identify with the Antichrist. The government of the fourth monarchy will be still in existence, but under the influence and direction of the Antichrist; and the Jews will unite themselves to him, in a state of rebellion, to make war with the lamb... Satan will then be displayed, who will unite the Jews with this apostate prince against heaven... a remnant of the Jews is delivered and Antichrist destroyed. [40]

Clarence Bass summarises the novel nature of Darby's emerging theological position.

It is not that exegetes prior to his time did not see a covenant between God and Israel, or a future relation of Israel to the millennial reign, but they always viewed the church as a continuation of God's single program of redemption begun in Israel. It is dispensationalism's rigid insistence on a distinct cleavage between Israel and the
church, and its belief in a later unconditional fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant, that sets it off from the historic faith of the church. [41]

Darby's dispensational views, like those of Edward Irving, would probably have remained the exotic preserve of sectarian Brethren assemblies were it not for the energetic efforts of individuals like William Blackstone, D. L. Moody and above all, Cyrus I. Scofield who introduced them to a wider audience in America and the English speaking world through his Scofield Reference Bible.

4. Cyrus I Scofield: The Author of the Scofield Reference Bible
The publication of the Scofield Reference Bible in 1909 by the Oxford University Press was something of a literary coup, since for the first time, explicit dispensational notes were added to the pages of the biblical text. While such a systematic chronology was largely unknown prior to Darby and Scofield, the Scofield Reference Bible became the leading bible used by American Evangelicals and Fundamentalists for the next sixty years. [42]

By 1945 more than 2 million copies had been published in the United States alone. Between 1967 and 1979 a further 1 million copies were sold. [43] In a move to make Scofield's work more accessible, in 1984 a new edition based on the New International Version was published followed by a CD Rom electronic version.

Scofield's notes relied heavily on Darby's writings. Gerstner notes that the resemblance between Scofield and Darby 'is deep and systematic.' [44] It is significant, however, that neither in the Introduction to his Reference Bible, nor in the accompanying notes does Scofield acknowledge his indebtedness to Darby.

In the Introduction to the Scofield Reference Bible, he claims it to be the 'remarkable results of the modern study of the Prophets, in recovering to the church... a clear and coherent harmony of the predictive portions...' Scofield defined his dispensations as periods of time, '...during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God...' [45]

The Dispensations are distinguished, exhibiting the majestic, progressive order of the divine dealings of God with humanity, the 'increasing purpose' which runs through and links together the ages, from the beginning of the life of man to the end in eternity. Augustine said: 'Distinguish the ages, and the Scriptures harmonize.' [46]

Whether Augustine understood 'ages' in terms of Scofield's dispensations is extremely unlikely. Nevertheless, Scofield believed that his scheme of seven was natural and self evident in Scripture,

...there is a beautiful system in this gradualness of unfolding. The past is seen to fall into periods, marked off by distinct limits, and distinguishable period from period by something peculiar to each. Thus it comes to be understood that there is a doctrine of Ages or Dispensations in the Bible. [47]

Scofield's rigid adherence to these dispensations required him to make some novel assertions to ensure consistency. So for example, in describing the transition between his fourth dispensation of promise to his fifth dispensation of law, Scofield claims,
The descendants of Abraham had but to abide in their own land to inherit every blessing... The Dispensation of Promise ended when Israel rashly accepted the law (Ex. 19. 8). Grace had prepared a deliverer (Moses), provided a sacrifice for the guilty, and by divine power brought them out of bondage (Ex. 19. 4); but at Sinai they exchanged grace for law. [48]

Similarly, in his introduction to the Gospels, Scofield artificially imposes stark divisions before and after Calvary which lead him to the assertions that,

The mission of Jesus was, primarily, to the Jews... The Sermon on the Mount is law, not grace... the doctrines of Grace are to be sought in the Epistles not in the Gospels. [49]

Strangely, Scofield ignored the one division that is self evident between the Old and New Covenants. Mark 1:1 categorically states, 'The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ', And Matthew 11:13 further informs us, 'For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John.' Yet Scofield places the life and ministry of Jesus within the dispensation of Law along with John the Baptist and the Old Testament Prophets, arguing that the sixth dispensation of grace only 'begins with the death and resurrection of Christ'. [50] For Scofield, the Lord's Prayer, and in particular the petition, 'Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.' (Matthew 6:12) are not applicable to the church, since it is 'legal ground'. [51] He even suggested the possibility of salvation by works,

As a dispensation, grace begins with the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 3. 24-26; 4. 24, 25). The point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation, but acceptance or rejection of Christ... The predicted end of the testing of man under grace is the apostasy of the professing church... [52]

Scofield believed the Gospels were essentially for the Jews and therefore not relevant for the Church. In the footnote to Ephesians 3, he claims, 'In his (Paul's) writings alone we find the doctrine, position, walk, and destiny of the Church.' [53] Similarly, in perpetuating the distinction between Israel and the Church, Scofield claimed, that Israel is the earthly wife of God and the Church is the heavenly bride of Christ.

That Israel is the wife of Jehovah (see vs. 16-23), now disowned but yet to be restored, is the clear teaching of the passages. This relationship is not to be confounded with that of the Church to Christ (John 3.29, refs.). In the mystery of the Divine tri-unity both are true. The N.T. speaks of the Church as a virgin espoused to one husband (2 Cor. 11.1,2); which could never be said of an adulterous wife, restored in grace. Israel is, then, to be the restored and forgiven wife of Jehovah, the Church the virgin wife of the Lamb (John 3.29; Rev. 19. 6-8); Israel Jehovah's earthly wife (Hos. 2, 23); the Church the Lamb's heavenly bride (Rev. 19.7) [54]

In many ways Scofield was representative of, but at the same time became a focus for, the growing prophetic and millennial fundamentalist movement in North America influenced by the Plymouth Brethren. The views later popularised by Scofield, were shaped by a series of Bible and Prophetic Conferences held across North America beginning in 1868 which followed the pattern established by Darby and Irving at Albury and Powerscourt from the 1830's.
Both the method of 'Bible readings' and the topics of the conferences strongly suggest that the gatherings were a result of J. N. Darby's travels in the United States and the influence of the Plymouth Brethren. [55]

One of the resolutions adopted by the 1878 Niagara Conference gives clear evidence of the influence of Darby's dispensationalism.

*We believe that the world will not be converted during the present dispensation, but is fast ripening for judgment, while there will be fearful apostasy in the professing Christian body; and hence that the Lord Jesus will come in person to introduce the millennial age, when Israel shall be restored to their own land, and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord; and that this personal and premillennial advent is the blessed hope set before us in the Gospel for which we should be constantly looking.* [56]

William E. Cox, a former dispensationalist and subsequent critic of Scofieldism offers this appraisal of his abiding influence. Scofield's footnotes and his systematic schemes of hermeneutics have been memorized by many as religiously as have verses of the Bible. It is not at all uncommon to hear devout men recite these footnotes prefaced by the words, 'The Bible says...' Many a pastor has lost all influence with members of his congregation and has been branded a liberal for no other reason than failure to concur with all the footnotes of Dr. Scofield. Even many ministers use the teachings of Scofield as tests of orthodoxy! [57]

Craig Blaising, professor of Systematic Theology at Dallas Theological Seminary, acknowledges,

*The Scofield Reference Bible became the Bible of fundamentalism, and the theology of the notes approached confessional status in many Bible schools, institutes and seminaries established in the early decades of this century.* [58]

In 1890 Scofield began his Comprehensive Bible Correspondence Course through which tens of thousands of students around the world were introduced to his dispensational teaching about a failing Church and a future Israel. Scofield directed the Course until 1914 when it was taken over by the Moody Bible Institute. In the 1890's during Scofield's pastorate in Dallas he was also head of the Southwestern School of the Bible, the forerunner to Dallas Theological Seminary, founded in 1924 by another of his students, Lewis Sperry Chafer, who became probably Scofield's most influential exponent.

Chafer has, in the history of American Dispensationalism, a double distinction. First, he established and led Dispensationalism's most scholarly institution through the formative years of its existence. Second, he produced the first full and definitive systematic theology of Dispensationalism. This massive eight-volume work is a full articulation of the standard Scofieldian variety of dispensational thought, constantly related to the Biblical texts and data on which it claims to rest. Its influence appears to have been great on all dispensationalist teachers since its first publication, though it is fading today.

All of Chafer's work and career was openly and obviously in the Scofieldian tradition. A few years before his death, Chafer, faithful to his mentor to the last, was to say of his greatest academic achievement, *'It goes on record that the Dallas Theological Seminary uses, recommends, and defends the Scofield Bible.'* The major line of dispensational orthodoxy is clear and unbroken from Darby to Scofield to Chafer to Dallas. [59]
It is perhaps therefore not surprising that the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago and Dallas Theological Seminary have since then continued to be the foremost apologists for Scofield's dispensational views, and Christian Zionism in particular.

5. Hal Lindsey: The Father of Apocalyptic Dispensational Zionism

Hal Lindsey is undoubtedly the most influential contemporary dispensationalist. As another Dallas student, Lindsey has been described by Time as 'The Jeremiah for this Generation', and by the New York Times as 'the best selling author of the decade.' [60] His latest publisher describes him as 'The Father of the Modern-Day Bible Prophecy Movement,' [61] and, 'the best known prophecy teacher in the world.' [62] The author of over 20 books, Lindsey's most famous, The Late Great Planet Earth has been described by the New York Times as the '#1 Non-fiction Bestseller of the Decade.' having gone through more than 108 printings with sales of more than 18 million copies in English, with between 18-20 million further copies in 54 foreign language editions. [63]

Lindsey's popularity may be attributed to a combination of factors including his readable, journalistic style of writing, his imaginative, if dogmatic insistence that contemporary geopolitical events are the fulfilment of biblical prophecy and, above all, his categorical assertions that the end of the world is imminent. What makes Lindsey's writings distinctive, however, is that like J. N. Darby and C. I. Scofield, he confidently claims his interpretation of the Bible shows what will happen in the future.

*Today, almost before I finish explaining a developing trend - it's already an accomplished fact.* [64]

This book describes in more detail and explicitness than any other just what will happen to humanity and to the Earth, not a thousand years from now, but in our lifetime—indeed in this very generation. [65]

In this riveting non-fiction book, the father of modern-day Bible prophecy cracks the "Apocalypse Code" and deciphers long-hidden messages about man's future and the fate of the earth. [66]

*Hal will be your guide on a chilling tour of the world's future battlefields as the Great Tribulation, foretold more than two thousand years ago by Old and New Testament prophets, begins to unfold. You'll meet the world leaders who will bring man to the very edge of extinction and examine the causes of the current global situation - what it all means, what will shortly come to pass, and how it will all turn out.* [67]

Like Darby, Lindsey claims his interpretations to have been revealed personally by God.

*I believe that the Spirit of God gave me a special insight, not only into how John described what he actually experienced, but also into how this whole phenomenon encoded the prophecies so that they could be fully understood only when their fulfilment drew near... I prayerfully sought for a confirmation for my apocalypse code theory...* [68]

Lindsey may also be popular writer because he tends to revise those predictions in the light of changing world events. Without carefully comparing each of his books, one would not necessarily realise that 'The Final Battle' (1994) is a revision of the 'Late Great Planet Earth' (1970); 'Apocalypse Code' (1997) is a revision of 'There's a New World...

Lindsey's particular kind of reading of history, coloured by an imaginative exegesis of selected biblical scriptures, is dogmatic, dualistic and highly speculative. The titles of Lindsey's books show an increasingly exaggerated and almost pathological emphasis on the apocalyptic, on death and suffering. In each Lindsey insists that biblical prophecy is being fulfilled in this generation, like never before and signals the imminent destruction of the world.

We are the generation the prophets were talking about. We have witnessed biblical prophecies come true. The birth of Israel. The decline in American power and morality. The rise of Russian and Chinese might. The threat of war in the Middle East. The increase of earthquakes, volcanoes, famine and drought. The Bible foretells the signs that precede Armageddon... We are the generation that will see the end times ...and the return of Jesus. [70]

Lindsey's last but one book, The Final Battle, includes the statement on the cover,

"Never before, in one book, has there been such a complete and detailed look at the events leading up to 'The Battle of Armageddon.'" [71] Lindsey claims that the world is degenerating and that the forces of evil manifest in godless Communism and militant Islam are the real enemies of Israel. He describes in detail the events leading to the great battle at Megiddo between the massive Russian, Chinese and African armies that will attempt but fail to destroy Israel. He offers illustrated plans showing future military movements of armies and naval convoys leading up to the battle of Armageddon. [72]

These will merely hasten the return of Jesus Christ as King of the Jews who will rule over the nations from the rebuilt Jewish temple in Jerusalem. [73]

Obstacle or no obstacle, it is certain that the Temple will be rebuilt. Prophecy demands it... With the Jewish nation reborn in the land of Palestine, ancient Jerusalem once again under total Jewish control for the first time in 2600 years, and talk of rebuilding the great Temple, the most important sign of Jesus Christ's soon coming is before us... It is like the key piece of a jigsaw puzzle being found... For all those who trust in Jesus Christ, it is a time of electrifying excitement. [74]

Acknowledging that the Islamic world will not tolerate such a scenario, Lindsey graphically predicts the effect of a world-wide nuclear holocaust centred on Jerusalem with the 200 mile valley from the Sea of Galilee to Eilat flowing with irradiated blood several feet deep. [75]

...only a tiny fraction of the world's population will be left. Only a remnant will have survived. Many of the Jews would have been killed. [76] In The Final Battle, Lindsey claims, "The Jewish state will be brought to the brink of destruction." [77]

The land of Israel and the surrounding area will certainly be targeted for nuclear attack. Iran and all the Muslim nations around Israel have already been targeted with Israeli nukes... Zechariah gives an unusual, detailed account of how hundreds of thousands of
soldiers in the Israel battle zone will die. Their flesh will be consumed from their bones, their eyes from their sockets, and their tongues from their mouths while they stand on their feet (Zechariah 14:12)... But God's power is certainly stronger than any nuclear bomb... We do know God will supernaturally strengthen and protect the believing Israelites so that they will survive the worst holocaust the world will ever see. Amen. [78]

Lindsey's most controversial book is probably Road to Holocaust. In it, like Darby, he makes eschatology a test of orthodoxy. [79] He accuses those who refuse to accept dispensationalism's distinction between the Church and Israel of encouraging anti-Semitism since they apparently deny any future role for the State of Israel within the purposes of God. This is, he claims,

...the same error that founded the legacy of contempt for the Jews and ultimately led to the Holocaust of Nazi Germany. [80]

The purpose of this book is to warn about a rapidly expanding new movement in the Church that is subtly introducing the same errors that eventually and inevitably led to centuries of atrocities against the Jews and culminated in the Holocaust of the Third Reich... They are setting up a philosophical system that will result in anti-Semitism. [81]

Through his books, intelligence journals, and weekly television 'prophecy watch' programmes, Lindsey has encouraged evangelicals and fundamentalists to support Israel's right-wing Zionist agenda. Ironically, as the 'father' of 'armageddon' theology [82] his attempts to defend Israel and to refute anti-Semitism may actually be a self-fulfilling prophecy leading to the very holocaust he abhors yet repeatedly predicts.

6. The International Christian Embassy, Jerusalem

From its foundation in 1980 the charter of the ICEJ has been to 'comfort' Israel. This has been defined as encouraging and facilitating the restoration of the Jews to Eretz Israel although the geographical extent of greater Israel is not always made clear.

The embassy believes that God wants us to stimulate, encourage, and inspire Christians amongst the many nations concerning their role and task in the restoration of Israel. The Bible says that the destiny of nations, Christians, and even that of the church is linked to the way in which these groups respond to this restoration. [83]

Those who founded the ICEJ were drawn from Western evangelical, fundamentalist and charismatic circles. According to Don Wagner, virtually the entire ICEJ leadership are dispensationalists, who, like Darby, Scofield and Lindsey, believe that the restoration of the Jews to Israel and the contemporary State of Israel is the fulfilment of biblical prophecy. [84] Johann Luckoff, the director of ICEJ wrote,

The return to Zion from exile a second time (Isa. 11:11) is a living testimony to God's faithfulness and his enduring covenant with the Jewish people. [85]

With an international staff of 50 and representatives in over 80 countries, the ICEJ has gained significant status within Jewish political circles for its lobbying of foreign governments on behalf of Israel. Based on its dispensational convictions, the ICEJ sponsors an annual Feast of Tabernacles celebration at which the Prime Minister of Israel has direct access to around 5,000 Christian Zionists from over 70 nations. Every Prime Minister since 1980 has attended and addressed their celebration. ICEJ claim that this event is the largest single annual tourist event in Israel.
In 1996, in rebutting criticism of their theological position, the ICEJ repudiated those who refused to acknowledge the central place of Israel within God's continuing purposes,

*While Gentile believers have been grafted into that household of faith which is of Abraham (the commonwealth of Israel), replacement theology within the Christian faith, which does not recognize the ongoing biblical purposes for Israel and the Jewish People, is doctrinal error.* [86]

The ICEJ's emphasises that contemporary events are the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy concerning Israel. They distinguish the Church from Israel, speaking of "*the former and latter rains*", and, "*His beloved people, both Jew and Gentile*" [87]. Whereas the New Testament emphasises that Jesus Christ has made the two one [88], so that in Christ there is now neither Jew nor Gentile [89], the ICEJ insist on maintaining a distinction and superior status for those of Jewish ethnic descent, who remain, even apart from faith in Jesus Christ, the chosen people, "*His Jewish sons and daughters.*" [90]

In no uncertain terms God has made known His intention to regather the scattered Jewish people and to plant them in the land with His "whole heart and soul" (Jeremiah 32:41). We believe that in the present massive wave of Soviet Jewish immigration to Israel (almost 400,000 since September 1989), the world is witnessing one of the most startling prophetic fulfilsments of our time - one that should deeply touch the heart of every Bible-believing Christian and provoke him to action. Since its inception in 1980 the vision for the release of Soviet Jewry has been a vital aspect of the work of the ICEJ. Along with a growing number of Christians internationally, we have seen the Soviet Jewry issue as pivotal in God's unfolding plan for Israel and the nations... It is an amazing fact that God, through His prophets, long ago ordained that He would use Gentiles to bring back His Jewish sons and daughters. [91]

The ICEJ has taken their religio-political hermeneutic somewhat further than most dispensationalists and reinterpreted the Great Commission. In place of the message of Jesus Christ which is 'to the Jew first', they have substituted a social gospel serving the expansionist agenda of the modern state of Israel.

*In the same sense that the first apostles were commissioned by the Lord to be his witnesses from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth, we also feel compelled to proclaim the word of Israel's restoration, and the Christian's response to it, to every country and in every place where there are believers.* [92]

The ICEJ has repeatedly identified uncritically and unconditionally with the position of the Likud party, using the bible to defend Israel's military settlement and colonisation of Syria's Golan Heights and the Occupied Territories in the face of international criticism. The ICEJ has also remained implacably opposed to the aspirations of the Palestinians for political autonomy, a shared Jerusalem, or the right of return for refugees who have lost their land through war or confiscation.

Though repugnant to the indigenous Christian community in Palestine, the ICEJ is in many respects the logical outcome of dispensationalism. Its theology is seen as nothing less than apostasy, [93] "*an anachronistic return to the Judaizing tendency the early church rejected at the first ecumenical council, recorded in Acts 15.*" [94]
7. Diversity and Contradiction within Contemporary Dispensationalism

Perhaps sensitive to criticisms of classical dispensationalism, a new generation of younger dispensationalists among the faculty of Dallas Theological Seminary have attempted to redefine their movement as 'progressive dispensationalism'. [95] They distance themselves from what they regard as the 'naïveté' of the founder's vision, [96] distinguishing the classical dispensationalism of Lewis Sperry Chafer and Charles Ryrie [97] from 'Scofieldism', [98] as well as from 'the popular 'apocalypticism' of Lindseyism'. [99] They regard themselves as 'less land centred' and less 'future centred'. [100]

Classical dispensationalism remains strong within conservative circles. Ryrie is sceptical of these developments, unwilling to concede to any revisionism. He describes the position of theologians such as Blaising and Bock as 'neo-dispensationalist' for holding to what he terms a 'slippery' hermeneutic. [101]

Ryrie similarly insists on distinguishing what he terms 'normative' dispensationalism from 'Ultradispensationalism'. This is rooted in the teaching of Ethelbert W. Bullinger (1837-1913) and his successor Charles H. Welch, who, according to Ryrie, have merely carried dispensationalism to its 'logical extremes'.

Ultradispensationalists hold for instance, that the church did not begin at Pentecost but in Acts 28 when Israel was set aside; the Great Commission of Matthew and Mark is Jewish and therefore not for the church; the Gospels and Acts describe the dispensation of the Law; only the Pauline prison epistles, that is Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, relate to the church Age; water baptism is not for the church Age; and Israel, not the church, is the Bride of Christ. [102] Their teachings are perpetuated today by the Berean Bible Society, Berean Expositor, Berean Publishing Trust [103] and Grace Mission.

Like Hal Lindsey, other dispensationalist writers continue to compete with one another to present the most accurate and timely interpretation of contemporary events as they unfold.

Charles Dyer, professor of Bible exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary, for example, in his book, The Rise of Babylon, includes photographs allegedly showing Saddam Hussein's reconstruction of Babylon to the same specifications and splendour as Nebuchadnezzar. [104] Dyer warns that this is evidence that Hussein plans to repeat Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Israel, the only Arab ever to have done so. 'The Middle East is the world's time bomb, and Babylon is the fuse that will ignite the events of the end times.' [105]

Mike Evans, founder and president of Lovers of Israel Inc., offers biblical justification for the continuation of American support for Israel. In his book, Israel, America's Key to Survival, he writes:

Only one nation, Israel, stands between Soviet-sponsored terrorist aggression and the complete decline of the United States as a democratic world power... Surely demonic pressure will endeavour to encourage her to betray Israel. This must not happen. Israel is the key to America's survival. For God has said of the nations who will oppose Israel, "Yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted... I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curseth thee..."(Isa.60:12; Gen. 12:3)... As we stand with Israel, I believe we
shall see God perform a mighty work in our day. God is going to bless America and Israel as well. It is not too late. I believe this is the greatest hour to be alive, and the key is unity, standing tall, proclaiming with a voice of love our commitment to the House of Israel, and to the God of Israel. [106]

John Walvoord, professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology and Chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary, and the author of the million copy best-seller, Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis, [107] wrote the foreword to Ready to Rebuild, about the 'Imminent Plan to rebuild the Last Days Temple' written by Dallas graduate, Randall Price and Thomas Ice. [108] The authors summarise the theological perspective of contemporary dispensationalism toward Israel and the future:

After centuries of persecution and dispersion, Jews are back in their land and pursuing the rebuilding of the Temple with increasing fervor. This fascinating, fast-moving overview of contemporary events shows why the Temple is significant in Bible prophecy and how, more than ever, Israel is ready to rebuild. [109]

8. Conclusions
Karen Armstrong is not alone in tracing within dispensationalism evidence of the legacy of the Crusades. They have, she claims, 'returned to a classical and extreme religious crusading.' [110] Rosemary Ruether also sees the danger of this kind of dispensationalism in its, 'dualistic, Manichaean view of global politics. America and Israel together against an evil world.' [111] Kenneth Cragg comments satirically,

It is so; God chose the Jews; the land is theirs by divine gift. These dicta cannot be questioned or resisted. They are final. Such verdicts come infallibly from Christian biblicists for whom Israel can do no wrong-thus fortified. But can such positivism, this unquestioning finality, be compatible with the integrity of the Prophets themselves? It certainly cannot square with the open peoplehood under God which is the crux of New Testament faith. Nor can it well be reconciled with the ethical demands central to law and election alike... Chosenness cannot properly be either an ethnic exclusivism or a political facility. [112]

The Middle East Council of Churches representing the indigenous and ancient Oriental and Eastern Churches, has been highly critical of the activities of dispensationalists in their tendency to,

...force the Zionist model of theocratic and ethnocentric nationalism on the Middle East... (rejecting)... the movement of Christian unity and inter-religious understanding which is promoted by the (indigenous) churches in the region. The Christian Zionist programme, with its elevation of modern political Zionism, provides the Christian with a world view where the gospel is identified with the ideology of success and militarism. It places its emphasis on events leading up to the end of history rather than living Christ's love and justice today. [113]

Clarence Bass makes this assessment of dispensationalism.

No part of historic Christian doctrine supports this radical distinction between church and kingdom. To be sure they are not identical; but dispensationalism has added the idea that the kingdom was to be a restoration of Israel, not a consummation of the church...
In the light of this principle, it is legitimate to ask whether dispensationalism is not
orientated more from the Abrahamic Covenant than from the Cross. Is not its focus centred more on the Jewish kingdom than on the Body of Christ? Does it not interpret the New Testament in the light of Old Testament prophecies, instead of interpreting those prophecies in the light of the more complete revelation of the New Testament? [114]

Whether intentionally or otherwise, dispensationalism is being used today to give theological justification to what the United Nations regards as racism [115] and the denial of basic human rights; supporting the ethnic-cleansing of Palestinians from their historic lands; endorsing the building of Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories; perpetuating religious intolerance by demonising Islam and any opposition to Israel; inciting religious fanaticism by supporting the rebuilding of a Jewish Temple on Mount Moriah; dismissing moderate Jewish opinion willing to negotiate land for peace; and advocating an apocalyptic eschatology likely to become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

It is therefore perhaps not surprising that among the indigenous Christians of the Holy Lands especially, dispensationalism is regarded as a dangerous heresy, an unwelcome and alien intrusion, advocating an exclusive Jewish political agenda undermining the work of justice, peace and reconciliation among Jews, Christians and Muslims.

2 July 1999
Stephen Sizer

Endnotes

[14] C.I. Scofield, Scofield Bible Correspondence Course (Chicago, Moody Bible Institute, 1907), pp. 45-46.


[64] Lindsey, *Planet*, Rev. Edn. p. 3

[65] Lindsey, *Final*, p. xiii


[67] Lindsey, *Planet Earth The Final Chapter*, back cover.


[69] Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth (London, Lakeland, 1973); *The Terminal Generation* (New York, Bantam); The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon (New York, Bantam, 1981); *Combat Faith* (1986); The Road to Holocaut (New York, Bantam, 1989); Planet Earth-2000, Will Man Survive? (Palos Verdes, California, Western Front, 1994); The *Final Battle* (Palos Verdes, California, Western Front, 1995); The *Apocalypse Code* (Palos Verdes, California, Western Front, 1997);

[70] Lindsey, 1980’s, back cover.

[71] Lindsey, *Final*, front cover.


[74] Lindsey, *Late*, pp. 56-58.


[77] Lindsey, *Final*, p. 184.


[81] Lindsey, *Road*, p. 3
[107] John Walvoord, *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1990)
This essay first appeared as 'Dispensational Approaches to the Land' in The Land of Promise (eds.), Philip Johnston and Peter Walker (Leicester: Apollos, 2000), 142-171, and it appears here with permission. No part of this article may be copied or transmitted in any form without prior permission.