



# **Dispensationalism and why evangelical Christians embrace Zionism so strongly.**

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# Index

<b>1</b>	<b><i>Introduction</i></b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2</b>	<b><i>What is the theory of Dispensationalism?</i></b>	<b>3</b>
2.1	Introduction	3
2.2	What does dispensation mean?	3
2.3	Different views on dispensation	3
2.4	The Millennium	4
2.5	Darby's basic assumptions	5
2.6	The speech of the Mount of Olives	6
2.7	Theory of the Rapture	8
2.7.1	Gospel of John	9
2.7.2	Thessalonica	9
2.8	Great Tribulation	10
2.9	The Antichrist	10
<b>3</b>	<b><i>Why do a lot of evangelical Christians embrace Zionism?</i></b>	<b>10</b>
3.1	History	11
3.2	How the nation in the Middle East came into existence	11
<b>4</b>	<b><i>What does the Bible say about Israel</i></b>	<b>12</b>
4.1	The relationship between Jewish and Greek	12
4.2	Will all of Israel be saved?	14
<b>5</b>	<b><i>Bible passages?</i></b>	<b>15</b>
5.1	New Testament (there is no difference of Jewish and Gentiles)	15
5.2	Old testament	17
5.3	What arguments do the Dispensationalists have?	18
<b>6</b>	<b><i>Replacement theology</i></b>	<b>19</b>
<b>7</b>	<b><i>Conclusion</i></b>	<b>19</b>
<b>8</b>	<b><i>Bibliography</i></b>	<b>20</b>

## 1 Introduction

In Christian communities there are a lot of controversies about the future and the end times. Why is this so important to Christians? Should Christians not lead morally correct lives rather than argue over these issues?

It seems to be very important to Christians to see how the future will look like. Paul said: "What good is it to me if the dead are not raised? Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we are dead!"<sup>1</sup> Paul mentioned when there is no resurrection and a life after dead there is all in vain. Therefore, the resurrection and the afterlife are at the centre of Christian doctrine.

Now why do Christians argue about so many different variations of the end times? What is the problem and where do these discussions come from?

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Kor 15.32

## 2 What is the theory of Dispensationalism?

### 2.1 Introduction<sup>2</sup>

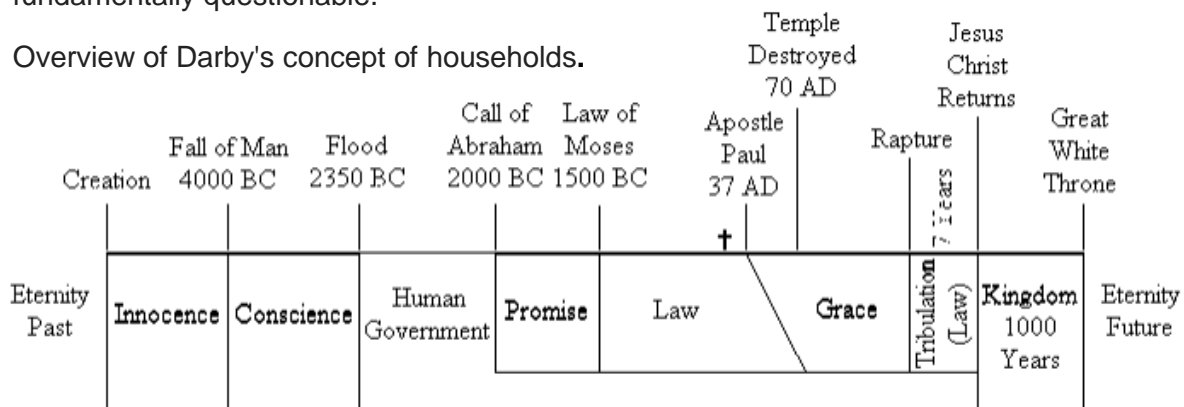
In the 19th century, the so-called theory of Dispensationalism and the doctrine of Rapture were preached by John Nelson Darby. He taught a premillennialist eschatology that awaits a 1000-year reign of Jesus Christ over the earth. This reign is preceded by the Great Tribulation in which the Antichrist reigns over the earth. Every believing Christian will be removed from the earth before or during the Great Tribulation in the so-called "Rapture".

The Anglican Bishop, N. T. Wright, vehemently criticized this theory. He said that Dispensationalism spreads a one-sided, pessimistic worldview for Christians. They do no longer hope for God's renewal and transformation of the world through his salvation, which is already taking place in a fragmented manner<sup>3</sup>.

### 2.2 What does dispensation mean?

Dispensationalism is a doctrine taught by John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). It divides the Bible into households (dispensations). In each section, God works and intervenes in different ways. This has already been done by various church fathers and does not seem to be fundamentally questionable.

Overview of Darby's concept of households.

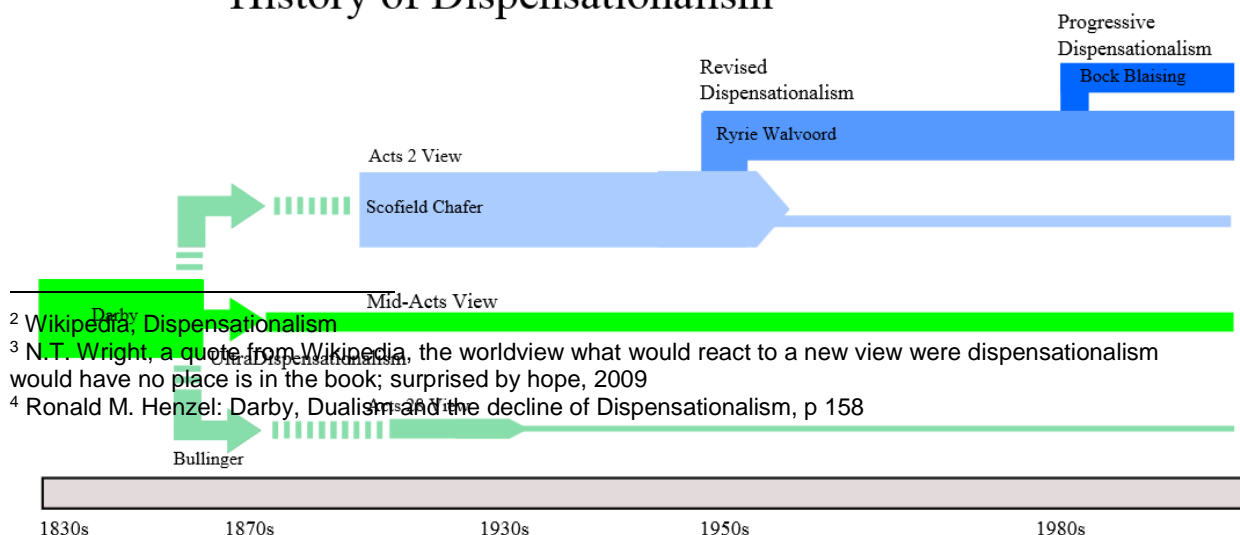


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### 2.3 Different views on dispensation

An overview of the development of different dispensationalist views<sup>4</sup>:

#### History of Dispensationalism



<b>Darby Dispensationalism</b> (Ca. 1830 Darby, Kelly) Classical styl	<b>Dispensationalism</b> (after 1880 Moody, Scofield, Larkin) Revised	<b>Dispensationalism</b> (After 1960 named after Scofield, Walvoord, Pentecost, Ryrie)	<b>Progressive Dispensationalism</b> (after 1980 progressive revelation, block, Blaising)
An eternal heavenly- earthly dualism determines the whole theology, resulting in an eternal dichotomy between Israel and the church.	Eternal dualism is rejected. There remains the eternal dichotomy of Israel and the church, in the world dualism is only in eschatology.	Dualism is completely rejected, which leads to a temporal dichotomy between Israel and the church (that is, they are not eternally separated).	The dichotomy between Israel and the church is rejected. Distinguishing between Israel and the church (two phases in the one divine plan of salvation).

## 2.4 The Millennium

Throughout the history of the church different theologians have written about the Millennium, the thousand-year period, in different ways. With Darby, the discussion about the thousand-year period and the end time really flared up. Especially the passage in the Revelation of Jesus Christ 20: 1-9 is regarded by many Dispensationalists as proof of their theory.

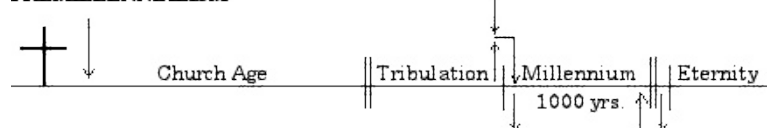
Before the nineteenth century the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation was regarded as a pastoral book written in a poetic form. They considered the Revelation to be a book showing that despite all affliction and suffering, good will win and evil will be destroyed in the end. In the nineteenth century, the view of Revelation changed significantly and people started to interpret the Revelation literally.

Those new interpretations were developed by Darby about 150 years ago. Before 1800 there was hardly any debate about the end times. During the Enlightenment, theologians tried to prove the doctrine of the Bible scientifically and this led to confusion. The Bible is not a scientific book, but a personal letter written with a lot of poems and symbolism. By interpreting the Bible just literally will obviously not help. One would never do that to a work by Goethe. Goethe is poetic like many parts of the Revelation and of the Bible too. Therefore, it is impossible to try to read the Bible just literally.

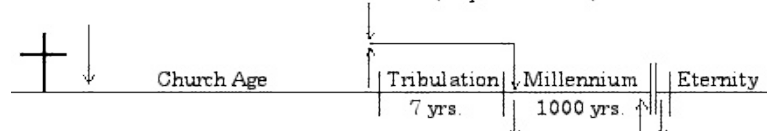
The question remains, however, in which literary style the Revelation was written. Is a literal interpretation of the Revelation helpful or does it oppose the original author's intention?

Does not a literal interpretation leave people in fear over all these terrible events of the future, instead of giving them hope? In any case, this has led to confusion and unnecessary quarrelling amongst Christians. That is why the doctrine of Darby needs to be assessed with a critical

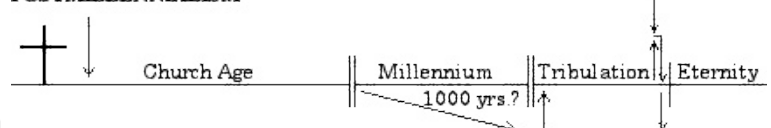
### PREMILLENNIALISM



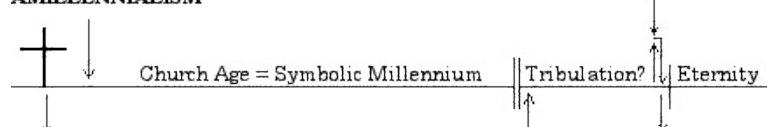
### PRETRIBULATION PREMILLENNIALISM (Dispensationalism)



### POSTMILLENNIALISM



### AMILLENNIALISM



mindset.

There are basically three different views of the millennium as shown in the graphic below.

The first schema; Premillennialism describes the Rapture and Jesus coming back before the Millennium.

The second schema (Pretribulation Premillennialism) is the view of Darby. He indicates the Rapture and Jesus coming back before the tribulation.

The third schema, Postmillennialism describes Jesus coming back after the Millennium.

The fourth schema depicts Amillennialism, meaning that the Millennium has already begun with Jesus. In the fourth view, the Millennium is to be seen as symbolic and not literal.

Darby said that Jesus has risen and is taken to heaven. There is a separation between the kingdom of God in heaven and the kingdom of the world until Jesus returns. Christians are removed and separated from the Jews in the Rapture. Before this the Jews return to their homeland. This is followed by a tribulation of seven years. Then Jesus comes back and the Millennium begins. After that the judgment and the final transfer into the new creation for all who believe take place. Let us look at a passage from which a lot of Christians deduce a dispensationalist view.

## 2.5 Darby's basic assumptions

1827-1831 Darby studied theology. During this time, he was strongly influenced by Prof Richard Graves (1763-1829), a supporter of the Jews Community. He believed that the people of God (Israelites) would initiate the 1000-year kingdom by their conversion and return to their old homeland<sup>5</sup>.

Graves stated; "Since Israel rejected Jesus as a Messiah, a non-Jewish move had taken place. The Old Testament promises to Abraham and his seed are, however, not linked to conditions. The blessings prophesied to the Jewish people could soon be fulfilled by a dedicated mission service among the Jews<sup>6</sup>». Darby embraced Graves' convictions.

The first theories of Darby originated around 1830 in the communities of the Brethren movement in England and spread rapidly throughout Europe. Through his travels to the United States, his teachings became very well known amongst Presbyterians and Baptists. Evangelists like Dwight L. Moody and Cyrus I. Scofield became convinced representatives of this view<sup>7</sup>.

In order to base their teaching on biblical grounds, the following assumptions were made:

- a) The era of the Church was over. They didn't take their mandate and therefore God took it away from them and gave it back to ethnic Israelites.
- b) Interpretation of the Old Testament just literally. The Old Testament speaks exclusively of Jews and not of Christians. The main goal is the eternal separation between the church and Israel.

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<sup>5</sup> The Gathering Storm: Understanding Prophecy in Critical Times, 2013

<sup>6</sup> dito

<sup>7</sup> In Germany, it was Carl Brockhaus, Rudolf Brockhaus and Emil Dönges who represented his writings.

- c) The New Testament is not to be understood literally. It must mainly be understood in a spiritual manner.

The doctrine of Darby is mainly an Old Testament doctrine, or in other words, a Jewish doctrine. Therefore, the church of Jesus Christ has no place in the Jewish Kingdom. He came to the conclusion that there must be a so-called Rapture. Darby believed that Christians have to be taken away before the Millennium can come, so that the Old Testament promise could be fulfilled.

Darby says: " The Scriptures know only a single covenant, and this is the covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. This will be accomplished in the future, and the church of Christ will not stand in the way of this covenant. The covenant of this letter was concluded with Israel and not with us. The gospel is not a covenant, but a revelation of the salvation of God. We enjoy all the advantages of the New Covenant, whose foundation God has laid through Jesus, but we enjoy them spiritually and not literally<sup>8</sup>».

This view, however, does not match the Bible, especially the New Testament. The suspicion remains that Darby wanted to prepare Christians for the acceptance of Zionism.

The Bible clearly says that this is not true.

- A) The whole Bible is God's word. One part may not be considered literal and the other not<sup>9</sup>.
- B) Jesus has clearly effaced the differences between Jews and Gentiles<sup>10</sup>.

### **Darby's presuppositions for his theory**

1. Return of the Jews to their old homeland
2. Separation of Israel from Christians.
3. The blessings of the Old Testament concern only the ethnic Israelites.
4. The Old Testament is to be understood literally, while the New Testament is to be understood spiritually.

Darby rejected the authority of the Bible, the preaching of Jesus, and also Jesus himself. He downgraded the doctrine of the New Testament. Darby misused the Word of God in his theory and must therefore in his theory be denied.

## **2.6 The speech of the Mount of Olives<sup>11</sup>**

It seems that in this speech Jesus uses the typical Jewish poetic language to describe what will happen. He does not tell a literal story.

One day, Jesus was in the Temple in Jerusalem with his disciples. As they left the temple, one of Jesus' disciples (Peter) said with pride; "Jesus, look at this great monumental building of the Jews. What a wonderful building this temple is."

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<sup>8</sup> William Kelly, he Collected Writings of J.N. Darby, 1867–1900

<sup>9</sup> Mt 5.17-20, Rom 3,31, Heb 9.15-17, 2 John 9

<sup>10</sup> Mt 8.11,28.11ff, Gal 3.28, Ep, 2.11-22

<sup>11</sup> Mk 13.1-37

Jesus's answer shocked all of them. What did he say? "This temple will lose its entire splendour and everything will be destroyed." This totally messed up their thinking.

Now, Peter, James, John and Andrew came and asked him, but probably not with the same certainty as before, "*Jesus, when will this be and what signs will indicate that this is going to happen*"?

It seems that the disciples asked two questions. The first one was about the destruction of the temple but the other question was probably deeper. It was a question about the end, when God will come and judge all the people and destroy evil forever. For Matthew, who mainly wrote to the Jews, it was very important to make clear that the disciples asked two questions. He added: "*Jesus tell us when the time is for your coming and when is the end of the days*"<sup>12</sup>. It is obvious that there were two open questions. This is important to know in order to understand what Jesus says next.

Jesus answered: "Watch out, many will come and claim I am Jesus, but don't let anyone fool you, and don't be troubled when you see battles and wars, earthquakes and famines. Such things will happen but it doesn't mean that the end has come. You will be arrested and taken before courts. Be strong and don't be tempted." Jesus understood that they had some confusion in their mind about the end times. He calmed them and gave them an answer that they did not even directly ask for in the Gospel of Mark: "listen, many things will happen but this will not mean that it is the end. Before the end comes the gospel must be preached to all people. So, don't be afraid when you see destruction or persecution. All who remain steadfast until the end will be saved."

Then he answered the question that they asked him directly in the Gospel of Mark. When will the destruction of the temple be? When you see awful things happen (the destruction of the temple) as is it written in the Prophet Daniel, then run away. Daniel prophesied that the King of the North (Syria) would come and desecrate the temple. When we read Daniel, we should keep in mind that most of those prophecies of Daniel had already been fulfilled by the time of Jesus. Here, Jesus specifically meant the desecration of the temple in 168 BC by Antiochus Epiphanies and the ensuing destruction of it. It seems that Jesus pointed to this story and said it will happen again, that the king of the north will come (Daniel 11.31) and destroy the temple again. In 69 AD, the Romans destroyed it again. But it was not the end and it was not the end after Antiochus either. But when you see it, run away, because it will be awful. Those days will be a time of suffering like never before. It was an awful, horrible time when the Romans destroyed the temple and Jerusalem in 69 AD. The temple was destroyed and many Jews were killed. It was a brutal, awful time and a lot of blood was shed in Jerusalem. But the Christians ran away to a city called Pella and were saved. It seems that the Christians understood this message and reacted according to Jesus teaching. "I told you everything in advance".

"But after the suffering of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of heaven will be shaken". Now, Jesus turns from Jerusalem to a general judgement of the world.

Joel used this language (Joel 2.10) to describe the destruction of Israel and of the nations. After these destructions, the sun and the moon were still there and the heavens didn't

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<sup>12</sup> Math. 24.3

disappear. The passage seems to be written in poetic language and it means that God will intervene tremendously and the earth will no longer look the same.

“Watch out and be ready as you don’t know when Jesus will come back”.

Others will come and proclaim, “Here is the Messiah.” Don’t be confused or seduced. It will be like a master leaving his household in the hands of his servants. He will come back. So make sure that the household is in order, as no one knows when it will be.

Matthew added three more parables (Mat 25.1-46) and made it very clear. He added the story of the ten widows, the talents and the story of the sheep and the goats. All of them tell us the same thing: that people should be ready when Jesus comes back. In the last story, he made it even clearer. A lot of people say that they follow Jesus, but they do not. It is obvious that this is what the passage is about. Always be ready.

Matthew (24.40-41) added the analogy “one shall be taken, and the other left”. This is also written in John 14.3. A lot of people think this passage is about the Rapture. Jesus takes the good people to heaven and leaves the evil ones behind. In Greek “shall be taken” means to “receive” and not “to go away”. I assume that this is also an analogy expressing the fact that there will be a separation. But it didn’t say which one goes away.

The story tells Christians that there will be persecution and suffering, but Jesus will win in the end. Be watchful and stand firmly in his promises. So (don’t) be alarmed and don’t live like the people in Noah’s.

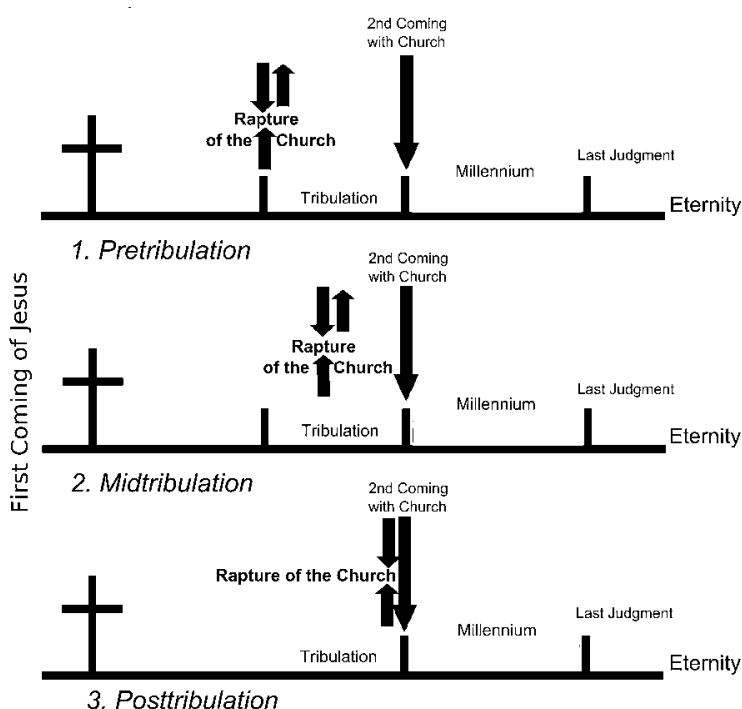
It is therefore wrong to deduce from this passage the doctrine of the Rapture and tribulation. The Dispensationalist’s interpretation of this passage is highly speculative. Therefore, Dispensationalism should be viewed very critically.

## 2.7 Theory of the Rapture<sup>13</sup>

The doctrine of the Rapture teaches that Christians are taken away from the earth before the tribulation period. There are mainly three different views.

The Rapture will happen: Before during or after the tribulation. Pre-, midst or post tribulation.

We already looked at what Jesus said in the three synoptic gospels. We will also take a closer look at two more passages from the Bible that, according to Darby, prove the Rapture.



<sup>13</sup> Wikipedia, Rapture



### 2.7.1 Gospel of John<sup>14</sup>

In Greek, this expression means "preserved" or "saved", and not "taken away", as it is sometimes translated. This passage can hardly serve as proof that God would take us away from the earth.

### 2.7.2 Thessalonica<sup>15</sup>

*But we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve like other people who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so through Jesus God will bring those who have died with him. For we declare to you what the Lord has told us to say: We who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who have died. With a shout of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of God's trumpet, the Lord himself will come down from heaven, and the dead who belong to the Messiah will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. So then, encourage one another with these words.*

In the original Greek language, the word "caught up" is "harpazo", which means "to tear". It doesn't mean Rapture or going up to heaven. God is "taking us into his presence" would be a better translation.

"Jesus comes", in verse 15, is "parousia" in Greek. This word appears seven times in Thessalonians and signifies: The king arrives in a city. It was a common term at this time used to express that a high official was coming into the city and that the people receive him or run towards him. "Parousia", however, does not only mean that Jesus comes back, but also applies to Paul or Stephen who come back in 1 Co 16.17.

The cloud in the Old Testament is a symbol for God: The cloud in the desert. The cloud filled the temple and the tabernacle. Now the temple is destroyed and the cloud has come over Jesus. It is not the visible cloud in the sky. It is a symbol of God's presence, which all the Jews would have understood at that time.

"Air" (in Greek "aemi") means mind or breath. It doesn't mean the natural air around us. It means the breath of God, his presence or his spirit.<sup>16</sup>

Also, this passage does not support the theory of Rapture. In general, we can see that the Rapture is not a concept from the Bible. This concept is an invention coming from the time of Darby or from Darby himself. This passage only emphasizes that the living will have no advances before the death when Jesus is coming back. The living gets transformed and the death raise almost in the same time.

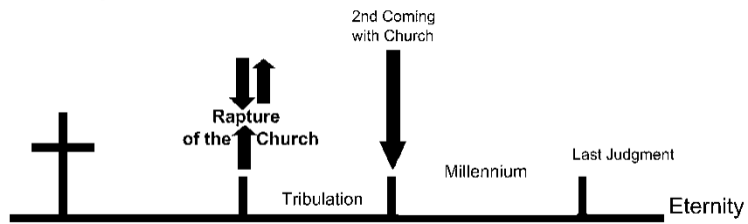
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<sup>14</sup> Jn 14.3

<sup>15</sup> 1 Thes. 4.13-17

<sup>16</sup> Mt 24,21, Mk 13.9, Luk 21.24

## 2.8 Great Tribulation<sup>17</sup>



This idea is mainly deduced from Daniel and the Revelation<sup>18</sup>. As we have seen, the Rapture theory has been seen in a variety of ways and so has the tribulation. But this is the most common view.

The great tribulation of the end times is portrayed as an accumulation of distress, a time of war and disasters. These include, in particular, the Seven Seals and the Apocalyptic Horsemen. The Rapture of the Church will take place before the Tribulation. Then Israel will make a covenant with the Antichrist. This is supposed to last seven years, which is deduced from the book of Daniel. The tribulation shall be a judgment of the nations and of Israel, and ultimately lead to the repentance of the people of Israel. Israel, according to this doctrine, will acknowledge Jesus as Messiah at the end of the tribulation.

This interpretation mainly comes from a literal interpretation of the Bible. But in Darby's doctrine, concerning the understanding of Israel, he said that the New Testament is to be understood spiritually and not literally. But for his own purpose he changed revelation against to a literally interpretation. It leaves us with the feeling that Darby read and interpreted the Bible whichever way he wanted.

## 2.9 The Antichrist

Likewise, the antichrist is always a hot topic among Christians. However, this concept does not occur in Revelation even though many people think it does. It appears in the letters of John<sup>19</sup>, which Dispensationalists never mention. Why do they take a name from the Bible and use it to describe something different? The antichrist is a human who rejects Christ as the Son. Speculations that the antichrist is the Pope or Obama are far from what the Bible says. According to the Bible, there have been many Antichrists and many others will appear. To expect that a particular person will appear at any time is therefore not substantiated biblically.

## 3 Why do a lot of evangelical Christians embrace Zionism?

Darby's theory rests strongly on the restoration of Israel as a nation. As this was never strongly debated before 1800, it seems that Darby and the Zionist initiative, (that Israel should become a nation) have a strong connection. So, let's have a look at the History of Zionism.

<sup>17</sup> Wikipedia, Great Tribulation

<sup>18</sup> Rev 7.14, Rev 20

<sup>19</sup> 1 John 2.18,22 4.3, 2 John 1.7

### 3.1 History<sup>20</sup>

Zionism is a political movement of Jews who want to rebuild Israel as a nation in Palestine. The beginning of the Zionist movement is the Hovevei Zion, which originated in 1880. They gathered about 3,000 emigrants to settle in Palestine. Theodor Herzl (1880-1904), wrote the book "The Jewish State" in 1896. He concluded that, when Israel has its own state, then anti-Semitism would end. In the main, it was not a religious movement, but more of a political liberation movement.

On 29 August 1897, the first Zionist Congress convened in Basel. There, Herzl demanded, for the first time, a legal Jewish state in Palestine. The Zionist World Organization (World Zionist Organization, WZO) was founded.

On 14 May 1948: David Ben-Gurion declared the independence of the state of Israel under a portrait of Theodor Herzl.

Some theologians argued, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that the Bible does not say that the Jews would return to Jerusalem. Years later, the Jews returned to Jerusalem and these theologians were seen as proven wrong. Through the founding of Israel, the doctrine of Darby has now gained a real boost. Many Christians now support Zionism.

### 3.2 How the nation in the Middle East came into existence<sup>21</sup>

In 1648, during the Peace of Westphalia, the present European nations were founded. Before that time, Europe was an empire; The Holy Roman Empire. The Middle East remained an empire (Ottoman Empire) until the First World War. The Caliphate of the Ottoman Empire held the Middle East together.

The victory of the British in the First World War ended the Ottoman rule in 1917. Following the conference of San Remo in 1920, the League of Nations, in 1922, gave the United Kingdom the mandate for Palestine (today Israel and Jordan). The obligation of the mandate was that the British should complete the Balfour Declaration from November 2, 1917, in which they had promised the founding of a national homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine, while preserving the rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine. They should not be affected in their culture and tradition. It was explicitly ensured that nothing should be done that could restrict the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine. On the board, new states were created - Palestine, Syria, Lebanon.

In July 1922, the British divided Palestine into two administrative districts, Palestine and Transjordan. Transjordan and Palestine were still regarded as an administrative entity. Jews were only allowed to settle west of the Jordan.

In 1937 the British Peel Commission presented the first plan of division. According to the plan, it was a distribution of population; Galilee and a coastal strip as Israeli and the larger part as the Arab area. The new immigrants were immediately enthusiastic, but the Arabs not so much and they reacted. The plan failed.

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<sup>20</sup> Wikipedia, Zionism

<sup>21</sup> Vishal Mangalwadi, Die offene Wunde des Islams, 2016

In 1941, al-Husseini, Mufti of Jerusalem, and influential leader of the Arab national movement, was welcomed by Adolf Hitler in Berlin. From Berlin, he and Adolf Eichmann planned the murder of the Jews living in the Arab world.

On 29 November 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations voted by a two-thirds majority for the UN plan of division for Palestine, into a Jewish and an Arab state, with Greater Jerusalem being placed under international control. With the aim of actually establishing an independent Jewish state and creating a homeland for the survivors of the Holocaust, the Jewish population accepted the plan. The Arabs, on the other hand, rejected the plan because they saw the Jewish presence in the region as a provocation. The Arabs then rejected Israel's right to exist, which has had consequences for the region to this day. David Ben Gurion proclaimed the independence of Israel on May 14, 1948. The colonies in the Middle East were now abandoned. One day after the decision of the UN General Assembly, the disputes escalated in Palestine.

## 4 What does the Bible say about Israel

Because of the doctrine of salvation of Israel dispensationalism came into existence. Dispensationalism is not based on the Bible. It is simply a justification of the doctrine of Dispensationalism. Therefore, let us now have a closer look at what the Bible says about Israel.

### 4.1 The relationship between Jewish and Greek

Do the Israelites still have a biblical promise for Israel? What exactly does the Bible say about the future of ethnic Israel?

Abraham was the father of all nations. That includes all nations<sup>22</sup>.

*Therefore, the promise is based on faith, so that it may be a matter of grace and may be guaranteed for all of Abraham's descendants—not only for those who were given the Law, but also for those who share the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all. As it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations." Abraham acted in faith when he stood in the presence of God, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that don't yet exist. Hoping in spite of hopeless circumstances, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," just as he had been told: "This is how many descendants you will have."<sup>23</sup>*

*You see, then, that those who have faith are Abraham's real descendants. Because the Scripture saw ahead of time that God would justify the gentiles by faith, it announced the gospel to Abraham beforehand when it said, "Through you all nations will be blessed." Therefore, those who believe are blessed together with Abraham, the one who believed.<sup>24</sup>*

*Because all of you are one in the Messiah Jesus, a person is no longer a Jew or a Greek, a slave or a free person, a male or a female. And if you belong to the Messiah, then you are Abraham's descendants indeed, and heirs according to the promise<sup>25</sup>.*

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<sup>22</sup> Gen 17,1-8

<sup>23</sup> Rom 4:16-18

<sup>24</sup> Gal 3:7-9

<sup>25</sup> Gal 3:28-29

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is God's power for the salvation of everyone who believes, of the Jew first and of the Greek as well<sup>26</sup>.*

*Certainly, all who depend on the actions of the Law are under a curse. For it is written, "A curse on everyone who does not obey everything that is written in the Book of the Law!" Now it is obvious that no one is justified in the sight of God by the Law, because "The righteous will live by faith." But the Law has nothing to do with faith. Instead, "The person who keeps the commandments will have life in them<sup>27</sup>.*

*But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly wrong. Until some men arrived from James, he was in the habit of eating with the gentiles, but after those men came, he withdrew from the gentiles and would not associate with them any longer, because he was afraid of the circumcision party. The other Jews also joined him in this hypocritical behavior, to the extent that even Barnabas was caught up in their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I told Cephas in front of everyone, "Though you are a Jew, you have been living like a gentile and not like a Jew. So how can you insist that the gentiles must live like Jews?" We ourselves are Jews by birth, and not gentile sinners, yet we know that a person is not justified by doing what the Law requires, but rather by the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah. We, too, have believed in the Messiah Jesus so that we might be justified by the faithfulness of the Messiah and not by doing what the Law requires, for no human being will be justified by doing what the Law requires. Now if we, while trying to be justified by the Messiah, have been found to be sinners, does that mean that the Messiah is serving the interests of sin? Of course not! For if I rebuild something that I tore down, I demonstrate that I am a wrongdoer. For through the Law I died to the Law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with the Messiah<sup>28</sup>.*

*including us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but from the gentiles as well? As the Scripture says in Hosea, "Those who are not my people I will call my people, and the one who was not loved I will call my loved one. In the very place where it was told them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called children of the living God." Isaiah also calls out concerning Israel, "Although the descendants of Israel are as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashore, only a few will be saved<sup>29</sup>.*

*Now does this blessedness come to the circumcised alone, or also to the uncircumcised?*

*For we say, "Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness." Under what circumstances was it credited? Was he circumcised or uncircumcised? He had not yet been circumcised but was uncircumcised. Afterward he received the mark of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. Therefore, he is the ancestor of all who believe while uncircumcised, in order that righteousness may be credited to them. He is also the ancestor of the circumcised—those who are not only circumcised, but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised<sup>30</sup>.*

This means that all who believe as Abraham did will be blessed, the Jews and also the Gentiles. Therefore, a real Jew is someone who accepted Jesus. They both have the same

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<sup>26</sup> Rom 1:16

<sup>27</sup> Gal 3:10-12

<sup>28</sup> Eph 2:11-19

<sup>29</sup> Rom 9:24-27

<sup>30</sup> Rom 4:9-12

promises. The Israelis have no special role in the future. This was precisely the reason for the many letters of Paul, especially Romans, Galatians and Ephesians. He opposed the separation of Christians and Jewish Christians. This was one of the misunderstandings and challenges of the Early Church. Graves and Darby seem to have reversed this.

The doctrine of Darby, in his own view, is superior to the writings of the Apostles and of Paul. Without the separation of the church from the Jews, Darby's dispensationalism is not tenable. His theory is built upon wrong assumptions.

## 4.2 Will all of Israel be saved?

*For I want to let you know about this secret, brothers, so that you will not claim to be wiser than you are: Stubbornness has come to part of Israel until the full number of the gentiles comes to faith. In this way, all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion; he will remove ungodliness from Jacob"<sup>31</sup>.*

This text is often cited by the dispensationalists as proof of their theory. The meaning of the statement, "All Israel" can be interpreted differently and is determined by the worldview of the individual person. The question is not whether the interpretation is logical, but the question is, which world view is behind it. Calvin thought that "all" means; All who believe in Jesus, because Paul previously defined, in his letter, "Israel" as Gentile and Jewish Christians.

**There are four basic assumptions of the word 'all'.**

1. All Jews are those who believe in Jesus Christ. No matter if Jews or Gentiles.
2. All Jews means all ethnic Jews. All Jews are saved.
3. All Jews until the appearance of Jesus, who acknowledge Jesus
4. All Jews who accept Jesus as the Messiah when Jesus appears again

In all his letters Paul states that there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles. At first Christians had a huge discussion about it and the Jewish Christians always forced the Gentile Christians to follow their Jewish laws. They could not eat together or go to church together when not all of them were circumcised. It was a two-level community, something which Paul criticised vehemently. Paul believed strongly that there are only one people.

But gradually Christians became arrogant. As we know from history it ended in discrimination. Rome, strongly influenced by Hellenism, was the first community where the Gentile Christians started to look down on their Jewish brothers. They saw the law of the Jews as an obstacle to grace and blamed the Jewish for having killed Jesus.

It is possible as Paul wrote to Rome people from Rome came down and told him about the situation in the Roman Churches. So he added the eleventh chapter to tell the Christians that they should not become arrogant, because the Jews are the original olive tree and the root. He says that if Jesus had grace for those who were not his children, he will also have grace for those who are his children but rejected him. So, God has not rejected the Israelites, they have only stumbled. The Jewish people can also become Christian and be accepted into the family again. They have the same promise and the same status.

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<sup>31</sup> Rom 11:25-26

Therefore, it seems that the third interpretation fits the best in the context of Romans and the Bible. All Jews means all the Israelites who accept Jesus. The other two interpretations would not fit in the context.

If people just read chapter 11 they see and read all Israelites. But in the context of the whole Bible especially the New Testament, it seems to be clear that this interpretation is wrong.

“The covenant of all the fathers is so far from differing substantially from ours, that it is the very same; it only varies in the administration<sup>32</sup>.»

## 5 Bible passages?

Some more passages which undermine the teaching of Darby.

### 5.1 New Testament (there is no difference of Jewish and Gentiles)

*"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his unique Son so that everyone who believes in him might not be lost but have eternal life. Because God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of God's unique Son. (Joh 3:16-18)*

*This happened in order that the blessing promised to Abraham would come to the gentiles through the Messiah Jesus, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. (Gal 3:14)*

*Because the Scripture saw ahead of time that God would justify the gentiles by faith, it announced the gospel to Abraham beforehand when it said, "Through you all nations will be blessed." (Gal 3:8)*

*And so the Law was our guardian until the Messiah came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come about, we are no longer under a guardian. For all of you are God's children through faith in the Messiah Jesus. Indeed, all of you who were baptized into the Messiah have clothed yourselves with the Messiah. Because all of you are one in the Messiah Jesus, a person is no longer a Jew or a Greek, a slave or a free person, a male or a female. (Gal 3:24-28)*

*The Messiah has set us free so that we may enjoy the benefits of freedom. So keep on standing firm in it, and stop putting yourselves under the yoke of slavery again. Listen! I, Paul, am telling you that if you allow yourselves to be circumcised, the Messiah will be of no benefit to you. (Gal 5:1-2)*

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is God's power for the salvation of everyone who believes, of the Jew first and of the Greek as well. For in the gospel God's righteousness is being revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, "The righteous will live by faith." (Rom 1:16-17)*

*For a person is not a Jew because of his appearance, nor is circumcision something just external and physical. No, a person is a Jew inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the*

<sup>32</sup> John Calvin, Institutio christianae religionis, 1536

*heart, brought about by the Spirit, not by a written law. That person's praise will come from God, not from people. (Rom 2:28-29)*

*including us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but from the gentiles as well? As the Scripture says in Hosea, "Those who are not my people I will call my people, and the one who was not loved I will call my loved one. In the very place where it was told them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called children of the living God." Isaiah also calls out concerning Israel, "Although the descendants of Israel are as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashore, only a few will be saved. For the Lord will carry out his plan decisively, bringing it to completion on the earth." It is just as Isaiah predicted: "If the Lord of the Heavenly Armies had not left us some descendants, we would have become like Sodom and would have been compared to Gomorrah." (Rom 9:24-29)*

*There is no difference between Jew and Greek, because they all have the same Lord, who gives richly to all who call on him. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Rom 10:12-13)*

*which in previous generations was not made known to human beings as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This is that secret: The gentiles are heirs-in-common, members-in-common of the body, and common participants in what was promised by the Messiah Jesus through the gospel. (Eph 3:5-6)*

The secret that Paul wrote in the letter of Ephesians and Colossians is that gentiles and Jews will be saved. If we take this as, "all the Jews", of the flesh only, then it would contradict the rest and would change the understanding of the church for 1900 years that people get saved through grace.

*..., and reconciling both groups to God in one body through the cross, ... (Eph 2:11-20)*

*See to it that no one enslaves you through philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to the Messiah, because all the essence of deity inhabits him in bodily form. And you have been filled by him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. In union with him you were also circumcised with a circumcision performed without human hands by stripping off the corrupt nature by the circumcision performed by the Messiah. (Col 2:8-11)*

*and have clothed yourselves with the new nature, which is being renewed in full knowledge, consistent with the image of the one who created it. In him there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or free person. Instead, the Messiah is all and in all. (Col 3:10-11)*

*This was to fulfill what was declared by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "Here is my Servant whom I have chosen, whom I love, and with whom I am pleased! I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the gentiles. He will not quarrel or shout, and no one will hear him shouting in the streets. He will not snap off a broken reed or snuff out a smoldering wick until he has brought justice through to victory. And in his name the gentiles will hope." (Mat 12:17-21)*

*That is why I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce fruit for it. The person who falls over this stone will be broken to pieces, but it will crush anyone on whom it falls." When the high priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they knew that he was talking about them. (Mat 21:43-45)*



*Because my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared for all people to see a light that will reveal salvation to the gentiles and bring glory to your people Israel." (Luk 2:30-32)*

*Then the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the gentiles, too. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, "No one can stop us from using water to baptize these people who have received the Holy Spirit in the same way that we did, can they?" (Act 10:45-47)*

*When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. (Act 15:2-3)*

Paul approached Peter in Antiochian because he didn't want to eat with the Gentiles and a conflict arose. They came to Jerusalem and made the first apostolic creed: Therefore, I have decided that we should not trouble these gentiles who are turning to God. Instead, we should write to them to keep away from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from anything strangled, and from blood<sup>33</sup>.

*from every nation, tribe, people, and language. They were standing in front of the throne and the lamb and were wearing white robes, with palm branches in their hands. (Rev 7:4-9)*

## 5.2 Old testament

*Now if some of the branches have been broken off, and you, a wild olive branch, have been grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not boast about being better than the other branches. If you boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. Then you will say, "Branches were cut off so that I could be grafted in." That's right! They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you remain only because of faith. Do not be arrogant but be afraid! For if God did not spare the natural branches, he certainly will not spare you, either. (Rom 11:17-21)*

*"It will come about in the last days that the mountain that is the LORD's Temple will be established as the highest of mountains and will be raised above the hills; all the nations will stream to it. Many groups of people will come, commenting, "Come! Let's go up to the Temple of the God of Jacob, that they may teach us his ways. Then let's walk in his paths." (Isa 2:2-3)*

*"I let myself be sought by those who didn't ask for me; I let myself be found by those who didn't seek me. I said, 'Here I am! Here I am!' to a nation that didn't call on my name. (Isa 65:1)*

*And I will bless them that bless thee and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. (Gen 12:3)*

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<sup>33</sup> Act 15:1-20 /Gal2. 11-14

### 5.3 What arguments do the Dispensationalists have?

Often these verses can easily confuse people because they take such verses out of the context to prove what they believe. Therefore, it is important that we look at these verses in their respective context and take time to read the whole passage or even the whole book. People have to understand who is writing to whom in what time and why.

*I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Gen 12:3)*

*The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, shall bless us. God shall bless us; let all the ends of the earth fear him! (Psa 67:6-7)*

*"Comfort! Yes, comfort my people," says your God. (Isa 40:1)*

*Who has ever heard of such a thing? And who ever sees such things? Can a country be born in a single day, or can a nation be brought forth in a single moment? Yet no sooner was Zion in labor than she delivered her children. (Isa 66:8)*

*"Therefore you are to say, 'This is what the Lord GOD says, 'Although I've removed them far away to live among the nations, and although I've scattered them throughout the earth, yet I've continued to be their sanctuary, even for the short time that they will be living in the lands to which they've gone.' "Therefore you are to say, 'This is what the Lord GOD says, "I'm going to gather you from among the nations, assembling you from the lands among which you have been dispersed. I'll give you the land of Israel. When they return from there and cast away all of their loathsome things and detestable practices, then I'll give them a united heart, placing a new spirit within them. I'll remove their stubborn heart and give them a heart that's sensitive to me. When they live by my statutes and keep my ordinances by observing them, then they'll be my people and I will be their God. But to those whose hearts delight in loathsome things and detestable practices, I'll bring the consequences of their behavior crashing down on their own heads," declares the Lord GOD.'" (Eze 11:16-21)*

*I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul. "For thus says the LORD: Just as I have brought all this great disaster upon this people, so I will bring upon them all the good that I promise them. (Jer 32:41-42 )*

*I will gather all nations, bringing them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. I will set out my case against them there, on behalf of my people, my heritage Israel, whom they scattered among the nations, apportioning my land among themselves. (Joe 3:2)*

*"Now learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branches become tender and it produces leaves, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see these things taking place, you will know that the Son of Man is near, right at the door. I tell you with certainty, this generation will not disappear until all these things take place. (Mar 13:28-30)*

*"In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, (Amo 9:11)*

## 6 Replacement theology<sup>34</sup>

Replacement or supersessionism theology is a widespread Christian doctrine, which opposes people who don't believe in the doctrine of a special role of Israel in the future. These people often see other Christians as false prophets.

Often, Christians who do not accept the theory of Darby are seen as anti-Semites and are named believers of replacement theology. Whoever does not explicitly bless or support Israel will be cursed. There is often no other option for dispensationalists. Either you are a dispensationalist or a supersessionalist. This is a very narrow view on reality and pushes people to accept dispensationalism or at least not reject it, because they don't want to be seen as anti-semitic.

## 7 Conclusion

In this paper, we looked at two strands of thought from the last 150 years - Zionism and Dispensationalism. It seems that these have something to do with one another.

Zionism is a political movement of Jews, who want to rebuild Israel as a nation in Palestine. They conclude that when Israel has its own state, anti-Semitism would end. There is nothing wrong with this intention, but it seems wrong to connect Zionism to Christianity.

Many passages in the Bible are interpreted too freely in order to support Zionism. Therefore, Christians should not conflate secular Israel with the biblical Israel and should not try to interpret the current events in Israel with the Bible. Also, they don't have to treat the people of Israel differently than any other people or nation.

*For a person is not a Jew because of his appearance, nor is circumcision something just external and physical. No, a person is a Jew inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, brought about by the Spirit, not by a written law. That person's praise will come from God, not from people.<sup>35</sup>*

It seems theologically based Zionism creates a division between Jews and non-Jewish, which Jesus Christ clearly took away. According to the Bible, there is no difference between ethnic Jews and other nations.

Also, Herzl did not justify his theory with religious motives, but with the Jewish claim to self-determination. According to the Bible true Israelites are not ethnic Jews, but those who are circumcised in their heart. This means that the ethnic Jews have, according to the Bible, no claim to the nation of Israel. The Christian-based Zionism must therefore be rejected.

The other theory that we looked at, is the theory of dispensationalism. It seems that dispensationalism functions only with the idea of a nation Israel promised in the future. However, this is not proven by the Bible, so this theory of dispensationalism is weak. Darby invented the doctrine of the Rapture to separate the church and the Jewish people. Also, all these speculations about the end-times and the tribulation seem to be freely interpreted from the Bible. One time they interpret the Bible literally then they interpret it spiritually.

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<sup>34</sup> Wikipedia, Substitutions theology

<sup>35</sup> Rom 2:28-29

This movement led Christians to long for a new literal translation. But by reading the Bible only literally a lot was lost. The reformers needed a translation so that people could understand it. That is why the Bible was translated into their own language and the mass was no longer held in Latin. The important thing was not the literal translation, but a translation which made sense for the people of their time.

However, since the Bible uses a poetic language in many parts, a literal translation makes no sense. The Bible is not a scientific book, but a personal letter with images and symbolism. One would never regard a work by Goethe as science. It is poetic like the Revelation and many other parts of the Bible.

It seems that Darby interpreted the Bible whichever way he wanted. Therefore, it seems to me that the doctrine of Darby cannot be tenable on the basis of the Bible. It suggests that Darby was so taken by Zionism that he wanted to convince Christians to accept it. Did Darby use the Bible simply to spread Zionism among Christians?

The question remains whether a more moderate kind of dispensationalism could be accepted biblically. This cannot be discussed here in detail. In principle, however, it is clear that Darby laid the foundations of these theories. Darby's theory of future promises to the Jews have to be rejected and for this reason the moderate dispensational doctrines must also be critically questioned or even rejected.

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