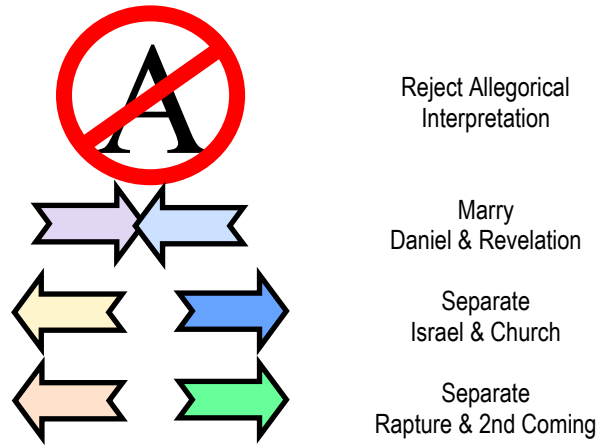


# Darby's 4 Principles

for understanding

Biblical Prophetic Literature

Phil Myers



A dispensational understanding of the book of The Revelation

“God wanted dispensationalism known from the start (*it's in the NT*), and key elements of dispensationalism did exist for the first 3 centuries (*premillennialism and literal vs allegorical interpretation*). Other elements of dispensationalism were also "uncovered" or known prior to Darby, such as different economies or stewardships for different people groups for different time periods. It's just that these elements didn't coalesce into a system of thought until Darby. But it's just that they never gained traction among the majority of the professing "church" until Darby's day with the Brethren movement spreading this view across the globe, and because prior to the 1830s allegorical interpretation of prophecy.”

Ralph “Yankee” Arnold

## A. Darby Addressed Four Major Hermeneutical Errors

*Four common errors which dominated theological thinking since the third century*

Darby applied standard interpretative principles and methods to the four common pivotal errors of interpretation the Church had long held, both Catholic and non-Catholic.

**#1. The first interpretive key was the major hurdle of discarding the predominant allegorization of prophetic Scripture. It was hard for many Church Fathers [*notably the heretic Origen, 180-250*] of early ages to set it aside as erroneous. This esoteric view of Bible interpretation had bloomed among Jewish scholars who practiced the Kabbalah-like interpretations during the 2nd century and was warmly embraced by Christian theologians in the 3rd & 4th centuries.**

**#2. The second key to this prophetic Gordian Knot was seeing the connection between Daniel's prophecies and John's statements in the Revelation. Darby synchronizes these beautifully.**

**#3. The third key was in differentiating clearly the dramatic difference between the Church and the nation of Israel, I Corinthians 10.32**

**#4. Lastly, Darby recognized a separation between the “catching away” of the Church [*for His saints*] and the Second Coming of Christ [*with His saints*].**

- Reject** - allegorical approach to Revelation
- Marry** - the books of Daniel and Revelation to each other
- Separate** - Church & nation of Israel
- Separate** - Rapture & Second Coming

Praise the Lord for Darby who unraveled these complex pictures in the NT. When all three precepts were applied to Scripture, the fog lifted. The distinctives of Dispensations came into focus about 1830.

I Thessalonians 4.13-18 played an important role because it so clearly pictures what takes place at the Lord's Rapture.

## **B. Four THEOLOGICAL VIEWPOINTS of The Future**

a synopsis

**Preterist View** [the whole book of the Revelation is explained by past persecution as revealed in the Seven Churches] popular from 100 AD

By using certain incorrect assumptions and principles of interpretation, early pastors concluded that everything in the book of The Revelation took place in the first century or shortly thereafter. This type of interpretation had never been applied to Bible understanding in OT times and was only [primarily] used to interpret Revelation.

They concluded that the "wars" took place between the Church and Roman government because they were looking through a lens of the present persecution under emperor Domitian. But John says 7x that he is writing prophecy.

**Historical View** [the whole book of the Revelation is explained by viewing the Seven Churches as historical snapshots of the Church's past [AD 29-300] situation. The Jesus' sermonettes to each one revealed the spiritual temperature of each time period in the life of the universal Church. This view gained significant following from 300 AD onward.

By using a set of unfamiliar interpretive principles which they never previously applied to Scripture, the next generation of "Preterist" pastors concluded that the "history" lessons of Revelation were a panoramic view which stretched all the way from the first century until their present times. For different eras of the Church, this would include the rise of the Roman Church, Islam, the Protestant Reformation, the 20th century world wars, etc. Again they were developing new ideas for interpreting the Bible.

This error must have caught on because the pastors saw similarities and parallels in the Seven Churches [chap 2,3] of the first century Church throughout several centuries of existence. The basic thought of the Preterist view had been expanded to include all of the history of the Church. Each era of the Church, for hundreds of years, more or less saw itself as the group that would be living in the time immediately prior to Christ's return. The difference is that they felt as though the Seven Churches came in succession. They believed it was prophetic scripture, but it had already been fulfilled.

**Apocalyptic or Spiritual or Allegorical View** [AD 200]

\* allegorization method of interpretation became popularized by Origen, [AD 185-254]

\* method became lynchpin of heretics and warped most aspects of predictions which were yet unfulfilled.

Along with the growth of the Church came an embracing of the allegorical method of interpretation. This system is based on the Gnostic idea that new revelations can be received by every person through esoteric communication [direct spiritual contact with God]. They believe that interpretation is not based on sound principles of understanding, but that there are [at least] three levels of comprehension: (1), literal [least reliable], (2), moral [application truth only], and (3), allegorical [based solely on one's spiritual level—definitely the most reliable if you are a super-devotional, monk-like, on par with Paul, etc.]. However, only a few are expected to reach this Dalai-Lama-like height.

Everything in the book of Revelation is best understood as symbolic. Nothing should be taken literally. There are no prophetic aspects. The whole book is a picture of the spiritual conflict between good and bad, God and Satan, yin & yang.

**Futurist View, DISPENSATIONALISM**, a literal view [1830s]

- \* This view uses the most consistent principles of interpretation, of all 4 views.
- \* We embrace the literal, historical, grammatical nature of Scripture.

We believe that prophecy in Revelation as well as the OT, is one of the *normal* genre of Scripture. It is instructional literature designed for the typical believer to comprehend. In the first chapter, John specifically mentions that he will be dealing with events yet to come just as some OT writers such as Daniel did. The illustrations, the symbolic language, and the word pictures he uses are presented to inform and to reveal, not conceal, or create confusion.

Although there are many word pictures and figures of speech, the truths are [*literally*] real, yet future.

God is certainly limited in presenting concepts in human language, for example: First century Greek had no words [*like TV or internet*] which could describe how the whole earth could see the death of the Two Witnesses, yet our generation today has no difficulty understanding how this can be. Prophecy is history which God already knows. Give Him credit, He is doing His best to explain the future, given the limitations of our human language.

This view is called dispensational truth which means certain information is doled out by God in different time periods as necessary. "Only the futurist interpretation is seen in the book's construction and chronology. The Bible teaches that the end time prophecies will not be understood until the time comes for the predicted events to take place."

*David Reagan*

We don't know whether all of the prophets had a clear picture of how the tapestry they were weaving looked at the end. Certainly Daniel didn't.

Dan 12.9 "I heard but I understood not, the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end" KJV  
Jer 23.20 "in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly" KJV  
"you will understand it clearly" ESV, NASB, NIV, Darby  
Jer 30.24 "in the latter days ye shall consider it" KJV

- \* Luther even felt Revelation was non-canonical because it was so confusing.
- \* There was much apocalyptic literature on the market in Luther's day.

### **C. SALVATION: THE DELINEATING FACTOR OF DISPENSATIONALISM**

Periods of biblical history in which the content God's message of salvation was made more clear. God added information to Abraham's understanding. Moses' had more complete comprehension of sacrifices - blood - holiness - sin - & atonement. The Church has yet a fuller and clearer explanation of justification, redemption, substitutionary atonement, and eternal life.

Every dispensation was fully characterized by Grace. Adam lived under grace, and Seth, Noah, Melchizedek, too. Salvation is only by grace. Holy living is by grace, not works. There is no separate age of grace, however, we live to day in the Age of the Church, which has often inappropriately been called The Age of Grace. It is true, however, that we probably have a greater understanding of grace.

The four great shifts in the "content" of the salvation message.

*Dispensations are periods of biblical history in which:*  
*a. the content God's message of salvation*  
*b. was made more clear*  
*c. and the person of Christ became more prominent.*

- #0. Adam understood disobedience, sin, blood sacrifice for a covering, & God's holiness.
- #1. God added information to Abraham's understanding that Adam didn't receive, such as substitutionary sacrifice, and faith.
- #2. Moses' had more complete comprehension of sacrifices, blood, holiness, sin, & atonement than was available to Abraham.
- #3. The Church has yet a fuller and clearer explanation of justification, redemption, substitutionary

atonement, and eternal life. The Messiah's role in our personal salvation. And the message "not of works."

#4. I fully expect that those in the Tribulation and Millennial periods will have a better grasp on several doctrines than we have today as God opens their understanding just as He has helped us to see some things better than John the Baptist, Moses, or Noah could.

*Every dispensation was fully characterized by Grace. Adam lived under grace, and Seth, Melchizedek, kings, and apostles, too. Salvation is only by grace. Holy living is by grace, not works. There is no separate age of grace, however, we live to day in the Age of the Church, which has often inappropriately been called The Age of Grace, however, it is true that the Church probably has the greatest understanding of grace.*

## APPENDIX #1 **The problem of incomplete understanding**

I fully expect that those in the Tribulation and Millennial periods will have a better grasp on several doctrines than we have today as God opens their understanding just as He has helped us to see some things better than John the Baptist, Moses, and Noah could.

Will it be easier for saints in the Tribulation & Millennium to understand the passages pertaining to the elders, AC, dragon, etc?      Yes, *pjm*

The prophecies pertaining to the first coming of the Christ fit together better to the eyes of those of us who live after Jesus' first coming than they did even to the writers of Scripture: Isaiah, Daniel, Jeremiah, and others. They tell us that they did not completely comprehend all that they wrote.

In the same way, I believe the multitudes of verses which speak of Jesus' second coming will make more sense to Tribulation saints and the Millennial saints than they do to us who are living in the Church Age. We understand unclearly, but they will see all these events firsthand. We'll be watching from a Heaven. The cobwebs will disappear from our heads.

Historically, the universal Church came to understand the trinity more clearly after the first six "Church Councils" which met during the first three centuries. The best of godly Bible scholars met to wrangle over the biblical meaning of some of the hard verses in the Word, such as: hypostatic union, divine and human natures of Jesus, impeccability of the Savior, personality of the Holy Spirit, and several other crucial doctrines. They got it right, but it took a lot of hard thinking. We benefit today, from those intense sessions and the erroneous teachings which were discarded.

In a similar way, we who live closer to the Lord's second coming are better able to grasp the significance of dispensational teaching because of the recent system which J.N. Darby elucidated and Larkin illustrated in the early 1800s. Paul and John had clearly stated what the end times would bring forth, but it took a couple thousand years of hard thinking, miscalculations, and illumination by the Holy Spirit to arrive at the understanding we have today.

*Personal opinion: I believe the Holy Spirit delayed His illumination until the Church was closer to the Rapture of the believers, yet there is not one word of Scripture which demands that Jesus comes to snatch away His bride anytime within the next 500 years. There are no signs of His coming.*