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December 2011

The History of American Pretribulationism

A widely cited 2004 *Newsweek* poll found that 55% of Americans believe in the rapture.¹ How did such a majority arise? It has now been 150 years since the pretribulation doctrine of the rapture came to the United States through the teaching of Anglo-Irish Bible teacher and evangelist John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). This paper seeks to answer the question “how did Darby’s understanding of pretribulationism become a widely-recognized part of the American religious and cultural experience?” The study is a blend of chronological and thematic representations of the rapture in American theology, culture, and politics. Its purpose is to look at the rapture as theological and cultural idea in American history. I am not arguing for the veracity of the doctrine (though I accept it), but, rather, looking at the doctrine with a view to understanding how it gained prominence in American thought and in the experience of many Christians in the United States. This is a broad study and as such there are limitations to the depth of the individual components—each worthy of detailed study (some of which has been accomplished by others in theses, dissertations, and books).

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¹ Cited in Colleen O'Connor, *The Denver Post*, “Revelation Relevancy” *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, April 14, 2005, http://www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20050414/news_lz1c14revelat.html accessed November 06, 2011.

However the topic as a whole has yet to receive a book dedicated to it (the closest being Paul Boyer's now-dated 1992 work *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*; an excellent work but not dedicated *en toto* to the rapture in America).²

The development of doctrine is rarely pristine and lineal from revelation to articulation and application.³ This is certainly true in the realm of eschatology and the many orthodox and heterodox interpretations of the doctrine of last things through the centuries—especially when those views are widely disseminated and accepted (popularity foments aberration). Popular religious beliefs come from many sources. Some are grounded in Scripture and in theology. Sometimes beliefs derive from tradition and history. On other occasions beliefs may be primarily grounded in cultural practices and values. At other times beliefs may have their origins in literature, music, or other manifestations of a culture. Finally, theological ideas may be an amalgamation of any or all of the above. Because theological ideas are also often religious convictions and not simply abstract musings the process of untangling the many strands of a doctrine and belief can be a tedious study.

Values have consequences. So too, do beliefs. Personal, cultural, historical, and theological ideas converge daily in the lives of individuals as they face the trials, traumas, and tragedies of life and its many uncertainties. Thus it is that one charge often cast against those who hold to belief in a pretribulational rapture is that it is simply spiritual,

² For a briefer history see also, Richard R. Reiter, "A History of the Development of the Rapture Positions," in Gleason Archer, Jr. et al *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984, 9-44.

³ For an overview of the history of Christian doctrine, see John D. Hannah. *Our Legacy: The History of Christian Doctrine*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001. See also, Maurice Wiles, *The Making of Christian Doctrine: A Study in the Principles of Early Doctrinal Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

theological, or psychological escapism wherein the adherent consciously or subconsciously eschews the realities of the present world for the dreams of the world to come. However, such charges are intellectually dishonest and those who present them often fail to fully understand the biblical, theological, and historical underpinnings of pretribulationism. Beliefs are simple but the doctrines that are the foundation of those beliefs are complex and to fully understand them requires study—first of the Bible (II Tim. 2:15), and then of theology and history.

No idea arises in a vacuum. Whether social, political, theological, economic, or historical, every concept, dream, and desire (biblical or non-biblical) emerges in the midst of a culture and history. It is what social and cultural historians as well as theologians and philosophers term *Zeitgeist* (literally “spirit of the age”). Every doctrine has a history of its interpretation. This is for the development of eschatology in general and pretribulationism in specific.⁴ Thus, when F. F. Bruce, the Brethren scholar of the New Testament stated that the concept of the rapture of the Church espoused by John Nelson Darby was not an aberration of thought, but connected with ideas that were “in the air in the 1820s and 1830s among eager students of unfulfilled prophecy,” he illustrated the role of culture in shaping religious ideas.⁵ Every biblical doctrine is interpreted and applied in the midst of human history. Bruce illustrated the concept of *Zeitgeist*. It is a concept that can be very useful to the fields of historical theology and

⁴ See Hannah, *Our Legacy*, 303-38.

⁵ F. F. Bruce, Review of *The Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin* in *Evangelical Quarterly* 47 (January-March 1975): 58. For recent interpretation of Darby’s cultural environment, see Mark Sweetnam and Crawford Gribben, “J. N. Darby and the Irish Origins of Dispensationalism,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52:3 (Sept. 2009): 569-77. The fullest analysis to date is Paul Wilkinson’s *For Zion’s Sake: Christian Zionism and the Role of John Nelson Darby* (Studies in Evangelical History and Thought) Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, 2008.

systematic theology (especially eschatology). The same is true of articulation and dissemination of the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture during the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries. Acceptance of the pretribulational rapture is a belief that continues (with increasing criticism) in the present century as well.

Belief in the rapture was strong in American fundamentalism in the first half of the twentieth century, but that belief was contained primarily within the Christian community in the churches, Bible colleges, seminaries, and religious publications.⁶ It did not have a visible cultural presence in the greater society. However, in the aftermath of the Second World War and with the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, and especially after the June 1967 Six-Day War, evidence of belief in the rapture began to be manifested in the broader culture through books, films, radio, and the Internet. It is these individuals, events, organizations, and milestones that this presentation reviews.

The Rapture in American Theology

Premillennialism has a long history in the United States dating back to the colonial era through such clerics as Increase Mather and Cotton Mather, but it was not

⁶ The literature on the early years of fundamentalism and evangelicalism is considerable and growing. Two bibliographies worth consulting are Edith Blumhofer and Joel A. Carpenter, *Twentieth Century Evangelicalism: A Guide to the Sources*. New York: Garland Publications, 1990 and Robert H. Krapohl and Charles H. Lippy, *The Evangelicals: A Historical, Thematic, and Biographical Guide*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999. The standard work on the history of fundamentalism and evangelicalism during this era is George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980, rev. ed. 2006. See also, Ernest R. Sandeen's earlier work, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-193*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970; Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875-1982*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983, enlarged edition 1987; and Douglas W. Frank, *Less Than Conquerors: How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986. On evangelicalism from the 1920s forward, see Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

until after the American Civil War that pretribulationism became prevalent.⁷ Historian John Hannah summarizes this emergence stating:

Premillennialism began to show evidence of some impact within American Christianity in the 1840s but received negative press through the apocalyptic fervor created by the disappointing Adventist movement, which set a specific date for the Lord's return. After the Civil War, a type of premillennialism emerged that eschewed date setting but insisted on the imminent return of Christ. Revelation was interpreted as largely futuristic, so the problem of date setting was avoided. The teaching of the any-moment return of Christ in a secret Rapture accomplished the same purpose in that it created expectancy.⁸

While the genealogy of the rapture in the United States finds Darby as its progenitor, there is evidence of belief in the rapture in the United States before Darby.

Pre-Darby American rapture belief is found in the thought of Morgan Edwards (1722-1795), a Welsh-born Baptist pastor and educator who emigrated to America, and in May 1761, became pastor of the Baptist Church in Philadelphia.⁹ After the Revolutionary War, Edwards became an educator and the premier Baptist historian of his day. His major work *Materials Toward A History of the Baptists* (1770) is an important work outlining early American Baptist history. Edwards along with other Rhode Island clerics such as Ezra Stiles (1727-1795) was one of the original trustees in the founding of what would become known today as Brown University.

In an essay written by Edwards between 1742-1744, before he emigrated, there is clear belief in a rapture event. In the essay, published in Philadelphia in 1788 entitled *Two Academical Exercises on Subjects Bearing the following Titles; Millennium, Last-*

⁷ For an overview see, Timothy J. Demy, "Marching to Zion: Social and Political Foundations of Nineteenth-Century Christian Zionism," paper given at Pre-Trib Study Group, December 2009 available online at <http://www.pre-trib.org>. See also Demy's "Historical and Theological Foundations of American Evangelical Support for Israel, 1875-1925," Unpublished thesis, University of Cambridge, 2007.

⁸ Hannah, 335.

⁹ "Edwards, Morgan" in John McClintock & James Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981 [1867-87]), XII vols, III:69.

Novelties Edwards argues for a rapture event that he identifies with 1 Thessalonians 4:17 followed by a 3 ½ year tribulation.¹⁰ The only distinction between Edwards and later pretribulationists is the duration of the tribulation that he sets at 3 ½ years rather than 7. Part of the historical significance of Edwards is that it diminishes the charge of novelty in the thought of Darby with respect to his eschatology.

Dispensationalism as a Transatlantic Theology

One cannot in any meaningful manner discuss the history of rapture in America without understanding that its broader context is almost always that of dispensationalism and that dispensationalism historically is inextricably linked to John Nelson Darby and the transatlantic movement and influence of evangelical leaders in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In the words of John Hannah, dispensationalism is “an inseparable twin of modern premillennialism.”¹¹ Also surprising to many is that there are strong Calvinist and Presbyterian connections with dispensationalism in America.¹² To be sure, there are strands and expressions of dispensationalism and pretribulationism found in Baptist (cf. GARB), Holiness, Pentecostal, and other denominational venues, but as a theological system and in its historical lineage, pretribulationism in the United States is linked most strongly to Brethren and Presbyterian theologies. Geographically, it entered the United States in the north and then moved west and south where in the 1890s it became part of Baptist, Holiness, and Pentecostal churches as well as southern

¹⁰ The essay of Edwards can be found at <http://www.pre-trib.org/data/pdf/Edwards-TwoAcademicalExercises.pdf>. See especially page 7. See also Thomas Ice, “Morgan Edwards: Another Pre-Darby Rapturist,” *Pre-Trib Perspectives* 11:4 (Sept.-Oct. 1995), 1-3.

¹¹ Hannah, *Our Legacy*, 335.

¹² On this, see Thomas Ice, “The Calvinistic Heritage of Dispensationalism,” <http://www.pre-trib.org/data/pdf/Ice-TheCalvinisticHeritag.pdf> (accessed 07 November 2011)

Presbyterianism.¹³ For the Holiness-Pentecostal movement, this was then reinforced in the early 1900s following the famous Azusa Street revival of 1906 and premillennialism (though not always pretribulationism) has remained part of the eschatology of groups such as the Church of God (and subsequent branches) and the Assemblies of God.¹⁴ Emphasis on the rapture in groups such as those mentioned above historically is traced to leaders in the English and American Keswick theology movement who were also active in the Bible Conference movement in the United States. Men such as G. Campbell Morgan, A. B. Simpson (founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance) strongly influenced Holiness leaders such as Martin W. Knapp, B. F. Haynes, N. J. Holmes, J. M. Pike, Mattie Perry, J. O. McClurken, and S. C. Todd.¹⁵

In the aftermath of the American Civil War there was renewed interest in prophetic studies and a resurgence of premillennialism emphasizing futurism as opposed to historicism. Historicism as advocated earlier by William Miller and others emphasized the fulfillment of prophecy, especially the events of Revelation, throughout history since the first century. In contrast, futurism (dispensationalism) placed prophetic fulfillment in the future and did not try to tie biblical prophecies to historical periods or events.

Dispensationalism's appeal in America was very strong and became a widespread and popular viewpoint disseminated partly through Darby's many trips to America, through a

¹³ On the spread into Holiness and Pentecostalism, see Randall J. Stephens, *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 163-66

¹⁴ Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 195-98, 233-35, 270-71, 358-59 n. 8 and n. 9.

¹⁵ Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 144-45, 162-65. On the rise of premillennialism in the Holiness movement, see Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987 and D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 77-114. See also, William Kostlevy, *Holy Jumpers: Evangelicals and Radicals in Progressive Era America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 30-33.

series of annual Bible conferences held at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, and through prophecy conferences held in major cities in the United States. Boyer notes: “Amid the convulsive social transformations of the years from Appomattox to World War I, Darby’s version of premillennial prophecy belief gained many adherents among American evangelicals who found this system a valuable if sobering source of meaning.”¹⁶

Similarly, Ariel writes:

The 1860s to the 1920s were the formative years for the shaping of dispensationalism in the United States. During this period, the new eschatological conviction became a united and stable movement that influenced millions of Americans. Evangelists, publications, prophetic conferences, and teaching institutions were instrumental in spreading the new messianic hope in America. They made the dispensationalist outlook on the Jewish people and its role in the events of the end of the age part of the creed for many evangelical Protestants in this country.¹⁷

Brethren leader John Nelson Darby is credited with being the individual most responsible for systematizing dispensational theology and promoting it throughout Great Britain.

Charles Ryrie, writes of dispensationalism’s origins: “Neither Darby nor the Brethren originated the concepts involved in the system, and even if they had that would not make them wrong if they can be shown to be biblical.”¹⁸ Darby’s understanding of eschatology was not something he invented, but was the collating and organizing of ideas already circulating in nineteenth-century British theology. Ariel notes, “Darby did not construct dispensationalism out of thin air. His contribution was, in large part, the shaping and crystallizing of earlier ideas concerning the Second Coming of Jesus.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 90.

¹⁷ Yaakov Ariel, *On Behalf of Israel: American Fundamentalist Attitudes Toward Jews, Judaism, and Zionism, 1865-1945* (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1991), 25.

¹⁸ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 67.

¹⁹ Ariel, *On Behalf of Israel*, 13.

Darby's eschatology was different because it placed an emphasis on interpreting prophecy from a futurist rather than historicist perspective. Futurism is one of four possible interpretations regarding the role of timing in Bible prophecy. It addresses the interpretive question, "When will a prophecy be fulfilled in history?" The four views are: past (preterism), present (historicism), future (futurism), and timeless (idealism). Of the views, historicism and futurism have been the most dominant in church history.

Until Darby's time, many Protestants believed that most prophecy was being fulfilled in the present age (i.e., since the inception of the Christian era). Biblical references to a time of tribulation and a person known as the Antichrist were often associated with Roman Catholicism, various popes, and the flow of European history. Events such as the Protestant Reformation, defeat of the Spanish Armada, and the French Revolution were frequently understood to have biblical and prophetic significance. During the nineteenth century, American groups such as the Millerites and Latter-day Saints followed historicist interpretations.

Darby's dispensationalism and futurism rejected historicism, arguing instead that not all prophetic events will occur in the current era but in a future time period that entails the prophetic events of the tribulation, the second coming of Christ, and the millennium. Also part of these future events are the rapture (the physical translation of Christians to heaven prior to the tribulation) and the conversion of many Jews to Christianity after the establishment of a Jewish state in the Middle East.²⁰ Through Darby's transatlantic travels and connections, dispensationalism and the doctrine of the

²⁰ For detailed historical and theological studies of Darby's thought see Larry V. Crutchfield, *The Origins of Dispensationalism: The Darby Factor*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992 and Paul Richard Wilkinson, *For Zion's Sake: Christian Zionism and the Role of John Nelson Darby*. Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2007.

pretribulational rapture came to the United States and gained prominence and popularity.

Darby in America

John Nelson Darby was born in London of Irish parents and educated as a lawyer at Trinity College in Dublin, graduating in 1819. He was converted to evangelical Christianity while practicing law and shortly thereafter abandoned a legal career and was ordained a deacon in the Anglican Church of Ireland. In the early 1830s he separated from Anglicanism and joined the emerging Brethren movement in Plymouth in which he became a key leader. He traveled continuously throughout Europe, the United States, and New Zealand on behalf of the Brethren and published extensively on biblical and theological topics. Of particular interest to Darby was the study of prophecy.

Between 1862 and 1877, Darby made seven trips to Canada and the United States teaching biblical prophecy with a cumulative duration of seven years. His initial contacts in the United States were with emigrant Brethren, but this later expanded as non-Brethren religious leaders in New York, Detroit, San Francisco, Chicago, Boston, and St. Louis received him. It was in Chicago, Boston, and St. Louis that he spent most of the time and these cities became early centers of dispensationalism.²¹ Pastors James Hall Brookes (1830-1897) of Walnut Street Presbyterian Church, St. Louis and A. J. Gordon (1836-1895) of Clarendon Street Baptist Church, Boston were to become key leaders in rise of spread of dispensationalism America. Their various ministries and early teaching of the rapture and dispensationalism was the model for the spread of rapture thought in the early decades—through the ministry of the church and prophecy conferences.

²¹ Wilkinson, *For Zion's Sake*, 242.

In Chicago, Darby met with American evangelist Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899), and it was probably through Darby's influence, along with that of other Brethren writers, that Moody came to advocate premillennialism. Later in his own transatlantic ministry, Moody strongly supported and encouraged Anglican and Nonconformist premillennialists in Britain.²²

Darby's belief in the imminent return of Jesus Christ and the rapture was steadfast. He declared: "There is no event between me and *heaven*."²³ Through his personal interactions, writings, and travels the doctrine of the rapture became part of American theology as early as the mid-1860s. But also significant for the spread of pretribulationism was Darby's method of dissemination. Moorhead writes that Darby "introduced the concept of interdenominational meetings where men would come together to examine doctrinal issues in retreat setting."²⁴

In the first sixty years of the rapture in America as a religious belief, the teaching of it was spread by pastors through the pulpits, publications, and Bible conferences in which there was a strong emphasis on inductive Bible study. The emphasis on inductive Bible study by the early proponents of dispensationalism makes it difficult to trace Darby's influence from the autobiographical statements of the proponents since the proponents often stated that their arrival at a position of premillennialism was an act of

²² Ian S. Rennie, "Fundamentalism and Varieties of North American Evangelicalism," in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990*. eds. Mark A., Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 335-36. See also, James F. Findlay, Jr. *Dwight L. Moody: American Evangelist, 1837-1899* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 126-29, 250-52.

²³ J. N. Darby, *Letters of J. N. D.*, 2nd ed. (London: G. Morrish, 1886), 1: 130-31. On Darby and the rapture, see Crutchfield, 173-92.

²⁴ Moorhead, "Jesus Is Coming," 26.

personal Bible study. However, on a social and historical level there is clear evidence of interaction and shared belief (and materials) among the proponents.²⁵

Prior to the mid-1920s, dispensationalists in America had adherents whose roots were in the reformed tradition and in nineteenth-century revivalism. Proponents of dispensationalism were well represented among the Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Holiness-Pentecostals, and Congregationalists, though sparsely among Episcopalians and Lutherans. Although dispensationalism's acceptance in the first decades was slow, "it eventually gathered strength and became a conviction accepted by millions and a stable movement whose impact on American religious life has lasted over a hundred years."²⁶

Among the early prominent proponents of dispensationalism in America were James H. Brookes (1837-1897), William E. Blackstone (1841-1935), A. J. Gordon (1836-1895), Arthur T. Pierson (1837-1911), Rueben A. Torrey (1856-1928), Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899), Arno C. Gaebelain (1861-1945), Billy Sunday (1862-1935), James M. Gray (1851-1935), Willaim Bell Riley (1861-1947), and C. I. Scofield (1843-1921). Each of these leaders (and others) embraced dispensational premillennialism and did much to spread the teaching of the rapture. Research material on these leaders and of the years prior to 1920 is vast but a summary view of several of the rapture proponents will show the flow of the idea in the pre-World War I years.

James Hall Brookes (1830-1897)

The doctrine of the rapture was a transatlantic idea that captivated many students of the Bible in both the United Kingdom and the United States in the last half of the

²⁵ Jonathan David Moorhead, "Jesus Is Coming: The Life and Work of William E. Blackstone (1841-1935)," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2008, 32-34.

²⁶ Ariel, *On Behalf of Israel*, 26.

nineteenth century. Brought to America by Darby, the idea was then promulgated by him and a circle of like-minded pastors and Bible teachers. Much of this early growth came as a result of the preaching, teaching, and publications of Presbyterian minister James Hall Brookes (1830-1897), who well deserves the title of Father of American Dispensationalism.²⁷ From his pulpit in St. Louis, his participation in the annual Niagara Bible Conference, and his prolific pen that produced religious best sellers, Brookes became a nationally recognized proponent of dispensational premillennialism and the pre-trib rapture. Brookes was one of the first to prominently teach the pretribulational rapture.

Although he was well known as a preacher, it was largely through his writings and conference ministry that Brookes gained national recognition. Beginning his writing career by authoring tracts for wounded Civil War soldiers, he went on to pen more than 200 tracts and 16 books. In 1874 he published *Maranatha*, a massive volume on eschatology that was to be one of his most popular works.²⁸ Other books on prophecy included *Israel and the Churches*, *Bible Reading on the Second Coming*, and *Till He Come* (later retitled *I Am Coming*).

In 1875, Brookes began to edit a monthly periodical called *The Truth* that eventually had a circulation of more than 40,000. He continued to serve as the editor until his death, and through this publication he encouraged Christians in evangelism, issues of daily sanctification, Bible study, and the study of prophecy. After his death, the

²⁷ For a complete study on Brookes, see Carl E. Sanders II, "The Premillennial Faith of James Hall Brookes," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1995 (subsequently published by University Press of America in 2001 under the title *The Premillennial Faith of James Brookes: Reexamining the Roots of American Dispensationalism*).

²⁸ Sanders II, "The Premillennial Faith of James Hall Brookes," 1-2, n. 2.

periodical merged with *The Watchword* and became known as *The Watchword and Truth*; however, it was the pretribulational journal *Our Hope*, first published by A. C. Gaebelien in 1894 and enthusiastically endorsed by Brookes, which ultimately came to be seen as the ideological successor to *The Truth*.

Brookes was one of the most prominent and fervent students of prophecy of his era. In an 1896 article in *The Truth*, “How I Became a Premillennialist,” Brookes claimed he came to his premillennial eschatology through his own reading and study of Revelation and Daniel after entering the pastorate and after many years of the neglect of prophecy. This independent study, along with some influence in the years after the Civil War from Darby and the Plymouth Brethren, provided the historical background of his beliefs. Brookes denied that he was the direct recipient of Plymouth Brethren eschatology, although he did acknowledge an appreciation of their eschatological enthusiasm. As early as 1871, Brookes was publishing and teaching views similar to dispensationalism. By 1874 his system was well developed, and it was Brookes who would introduce C. I. Scofield to the teachings of dispensational premillennialism. It would be through Scofield and his study Bible that Brookes would have his most lasting influence.

William E. Blackstone (1841-1935)

Darby made five visits to Chicago and it is possible that he met with Blackstone, though there are no extant documents to confirm such a meeting. However, a comparison of Darby’s thought with Blackstone’s shows a clear influence of Darby upon Blackstone.²⁹

²⁹ Moorhead, Jonathan David, “Jesus is Coming: The Life and Work of William E. Blackstone (1841-1935),” Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2008, 26, n. 11.

Blackstone was born in New York and converted to Christianity at age ten or eleven during an evangelistic meeting. During the American Civil War he served with the United States Christian Commission, a religious service organization ministering to soldiers, and worked with troops at General Ulysses S. Grant's headquarters. After the war, he married and settled in Illinois, where he became wealthy in the construction and insurance businesses. He also had strong family and business ties to the expanding railroad industry. Throughout his life he was an active lay worker in the Methodist Episcopal Church and other Christian organizations.³⁰

Through his Christian activities, Blackstone became associated with some of the leading proponents of dispensational premillennialism in the United States such as Dwight L. Moody, James H. Brookes, and Horatio G. Spafford (founder of the American Colony in Jerusalem in 1881). Blackstone adopted Darby's eschatology and used his extensive business travel as an opportunity to network with other dispensationalists.³¹

In 1877, Blackstone asked Brookes to write a religious tract about the return of Christ that Blackstone could distribute on trains. In turn, Brookes, a St. Louis, Missouri, Presbyterian minister, ardent dispensationalist, and Darby's American host, encouraged Blackstone to write the pamphlet. Blackstone wrote two tracts that were later combined and published in a 96-page booklet titled *Jesus is Coming* (of which more will be said below). Eventually expanded to more than two hundred and fifty pages, it remains in

³⁰ David A. Rausch, *Zionism Within Early American Fundamentalism 1878-1918: A Convergence of Two Traditions* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), 262.

³¹ James A. Saddington, "Prophecy and Politics: A History of Christian Zionism in the Anglo-American Experience, 1800-1948," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Bowling Green State University, 1996, 101.

print to the present day. Blackstone was also active in the Bible Conference movement and was a tireless advocate for a national homeland for the Jews in Israel.

Blackstone is very clear in separating the rapture from the second coming (what he calls “the Revelation of Christ.”³² He succinctly writes: “He certainly must come for them before He can come with them.”³³ A layperson who dedicated his life, energy, and resources to the advancement of the teaching of the rapture and the creation of a Jewish homeland, his work and writings along with that C. I. Scofield gave the teaching of the rapture its most visible presence in the United States before World War I.

C. I. Scofield (1843-1921)

Kansas attorney C. I. Scofield converted to Christianity at age 36 and later while in St. Louis, it was under the ministry and influence of James Hall Brookes that C. I. Scofield came to embrace dispensationalism and the pretribulational. Through Scofield’s writings the doctrine of the rapture permeated much of American Protestantism for more than half of the twentieth century. Much has been written on Scofield’s life and ministry from both critics and admirers.³⁴ Scofield’s work built upon Darby’s dispensational

³² William E. Blackstone, *Jesus Is Coming* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1898), 75-82.

³³ Blackstone, *Jesus Is Coming*, 75-76. For details of Blackstone’s rapture views, see Sanders, 51-54 and William E. Blackstone, “Pre-Tribulation Rapture.” *Jewish Era: A Christian Quarterly* 12 (15 January 1903): 11-15.

³⁴ On responses to critics, see especially John D. Hannah, “A Review of *The Incredible Scofield and His Book*,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147: 587 (July 1990): 351-64. For biographical sketches of Scofield, see John D. Hannah, “Scofield, Cyrus Ingerson,” in Mal Couch, ed. *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996): 389-93 and also Hannah’s “Scofield, Cyrus Ingram” at *American National Biography Online* at <http://www.anb.org/articles/08/08-01906.html> (accessed 08 November 2011). A cursory glance at the internet regarding Scofield yields many instances of vitriolic language and misinformation and shows that Scofield remains a hated figure by many (and shows significant conspiracy ideas and anti-Semitism. For example, one site claims “[Samuel] Untermeyer introduced Scofield to numerous Zionist and socialist leaders, including Samuel Gompers, Fiorello LaGuardia, Abraham Straus, Bernard Baruch and Jacob Schiff. . . . The Scofield Bible is the standard reference work in virtually all Christian ministries and divinity schools. . . . Scofield served as the agent by which the Zionists paralyzed Christianity, while they prepared America for our final conquest.” <http://www.sweetliberty.org/issues/hoax/scofield.htm> (accessed 08 November 2011). For a balanced evaluation of Scofield and the impact of his Study Bible see R. Todd Mangum and Mark S. Sweetnam, *The*

model but it was not, as some have asserted, an unqualified acceptance of it. Crutchfield writes, “If there is one thing that begs refutation it is that Scofield and those who followed him borrowed wholesale—jot and tittle—from Darby.”³⁵ Scofield’s thought more closely followed that of Brookes, who guided Scofield in his spiritual development after Scofield’s evangelical conversion in 1879. The dispensational teachings of friends James Gray and A. C. Gaebelein were also influential. Yet there was basic agreement between Darby and Scofield.³⁶

Scofield’s belief in the rapture, what he terms “The Taking Away of the True Church” is based on his understanding of John 14:3; I Corinthians 15:51-52, and I Thessalonians 4:16-17.³⁷ Through Scofield’s many writings such as *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* (1885), the *Scofield Correspondence Course* (est. 1890), and the publication of the *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909, republished 1917) did much to popularize dispensationalism and the rapture.

That Scofield believed in the rapture is clear from writings such as *Rightly Dividing the Word of God, Prophecy Made Plain*, and notes in the editions of the *Scofield Reference Bible*. However, Scofield is not always clear as he might have been in distinguishing between the rapture and the Second Coming.

Arno C. Gaebelein (1861-1945)

For more than half a century evangelist, author, journalist, and Bible expositor Arno C. Gaebelein passionately proclaimed the prophetic truths of the Bible and daily

Scofield Bible: Its History and Impact on the Evangelical Church (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster, 2009).

³⁵ Larry V. Crutchfield, *The Origins of Dispensationalism: The Darby Factor* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1992), 206.

³⁶ Crutchfield, *The Origins of Dispensationalism*, 171.

³⁷ Crutchfield, *The Origins of Dispensationalism*, 171.

lived with the hope of their fulfillment.³⁸ With a ministry that bridged two centuries and endured two world wars, Gaebelein never doubted the relevance of the study of prophecy for spiritual growth and for interaction with the chaos of culture. In the midst of the thundering storms of World War I, he encouraged Christians not to despair, for the trials of this world would one day give way to the triumph of Christ. In 1915 he wrote:

The Lord Jesus Christ is coming back! He may be here at any moment! He may come today! Now this is not a foolish assertion that He will come today. Nor is it the setting of a specific time for Him to come, which would be equally foolish and wrong; yet many do it. It is the sober statement of a fact, to arouse souls from their carelessness and indifference, and point them to the clear testimony of God's only Word that the Lord Jesus is coming again, and may be here today.³⁹

Born in Germany on in 1861, A. C. Gaebelein emigrated to the United States in 1879. He settled in Lawrence, Massachusetts, among other Germans immigrants and began attending worship services at a German Methodist fellowship and in 1881 became an assistant to the pastor of a German Methodist congregation in New York City and thereafter filled several other pulpits before entering evangelistic ministry among Jewish immigrants.

Gaebelein began to preach in a Jewish mission and developed a passion for Jewish evangelism. This new work forced him to reevaluate his views on prophecy, and he became an ardent premillennialist. In 1893 he began publication of *Tiqweth Israel--The Hope of Israel Monthly*. Gaebelein was soon joined in his work by Ernst F. Stroeter, a college professor from Colorado, and in 1894 they began publication of English and German editions the journal *Our Hope*. Devoted to reports on the work of The Hope of

³⁸ For a fuller study of Gaebelein's prophetic views, see Michael D. Stallard, *The Early Twentieth Century Dispensationalism of Arno C. Gaebelein*. New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003.

³⁹ Arno C. Gaebelein, *Meat in Due Season: Sermons, Discourses and Expositions of the World of Prophecy*. By the author, n.d., 64.

Israel Mission as well as the study of prophecy, the journal did much to advance evangelistic and social work among the Jewish people. Edited initially by Stroeter, and by Gaebelein after 1896, *Our Hope* provided conservative Christians worldwide information sympathetic to Zionism, Jewish affairs, and prophetic studies. Historian David Rausch noted: “*Our Hope*, was a key periodical in the fundamentalist movement of the twentieth century, through this periodical, Gaebelein brought the teaching of biblical prophecy to the forefront of the movement and coupled it to in-depth, scholarly biblical studies.”⁴⁰ The journal continued publication until 1958, when it merged with *Eternity*.

Toward the turn of the century, focus began to shifted from Jewish evangelism to a Bible teaching and conference ministry. He had become a premillennialist in 1887, after reading a French book, *La Future D'Israel* by Pasteur Guers. Through contacts with men such as James H. Brookes, James M. Gray, and C. I. Scofield, Gaebelein began to write and speak extensively on prophecy. When Brookes died in 1897, *Our Hope* came to be seen as the ideological successor to Brooks' *The Truth*, and it became an instrument for proclaiming prophetic teaching nationwide. Gaebelein believed that Israel was the key not only to biblical prophecy but also to all history, and he sought to understand current events through careful teaching and application of prophecy.

In the years between 1900 and 1915, Gaebelein gained a reputation as a Bible teacher and his prominence grew significantly. In 1901 he began the annual Sea Cliff Bible Conference on Long Island. It was there that C. I. Scofield first mentioned his desire to publish a study Bible and asked for Gaebelein's assistance in the project. Both

⁴⁰ David A. Rausch, *Arno C. Gaebelein 1861-1945: Irenic Fundamentalist and Scholar* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), 19.

men were fervent dispensationalists, and Scofield asked Gaebelein to provide the prophetic portions of the *Scofield Reference Bible*. So great was his admiration of Gaebelein, that Scofield wrote him saying, “By all means follow your own views of prophetic analysis. I sit at your feet when it comes to prophecy and congratulate in advance the future readers of the Reference Bible on having in their hands a safe, clear, sane guide through what to most is a labyrinth.”⁴¹

The events and tragedy of World War I troubled Gaebelein but he cautioned his readers not to identify the war as Armageddon and exhorted them to trust God and turn to the Bible for comfort and guidance. He closely watched the events of the war and when British forces captured Jerusalem he claimed it as the most significant event of 1917. In the years after the war, Gaebelein became a vocal and prolific defender of fundamentalism, inerrancy, and premillennialism from a pretribulational perspective.

When war came again, late in 1944 and 1945 Gaebelein rejoiced in Hitler's demise but was greatly grieved over the Holocaust. While he saw the end of the war, he did not live to see either the return of the Jews to Israel or the return of Jesus Christ in the rapture, as had been his hope. He died in his home on Christmas Day, 1945. In 1942, Gaebelein had written a letter he wanted published in case he died before the Lord's return. In it he proclaimed his lifelong faith and hope: “Only He knows the exact time when the crowning event in the history of the Church, the gathering of the saints of god to meet Him in the air will take place. Perhaps in His infinite mercy He may still tarry to add more members to His Body, His own fullness, which filleth all in all.”⁴²

Throughout his ministry Gaebelein shunned prophetic date-setting and those who

⁴¹ Arno C. Gaebelein, *Half a Century: The Autobiography of a Servant* (New York: Our Hope, 1930), 94.

⁴² Quoted in Rausch, 182.

practiced it arguing that our hope and interest must not be in the Antichrist but, rather, in Jesus Christ. With the storm clouds of war gathering once again in 1939, Gaebelein wrote words that applied not only to his readers then, but to us as well: “We look at the approaching storm precipitating all into an abyss of hopelessness. We look again and see a marvelous sunrise. The Morningstar appears, the herald of the Day and the Sun in all His glory. Even so Come, Thou Hope of the hopeless, Thou Hope of Israel, Thou Hope of the World, all Nations, and Creation. Even so, Come Lord Jesus.”⁴³

Teachers and Institutions of the Interwar Years

During the interwar years fundamentalism as a social phenomenon had a very visible history and presence in the United States and while there were denominational and institutional losses to theological modernism and liberalism, in individual churches dispensationalism and the doctrine of the rapture remained strong. It was in this environment that new Bible institutes (e.g. Southern Bible Institute, 1927), Bible colleges, and evangelical seminaries (e.g. Dallas Theological Seminary in 1924 and Grace Theological Seminary in 1937) arose adding to the numbers of earlier institutions such as Moody Bible Institute (1886), Gordon Bible Institute (1889), Bible Institute of Los Angeles (1908), and Philadelphia College of the Bible (1913). Leaders such as Arno Gaebelein (mentioned above), Reuben A. Torrey (1856-1928), H. A. Ironside (1876-1951), Wilbur M. Smith (1894-1976), Alva J. McClain (1888-1968), James M. Gray (1851-1935)⁴⁴ and a host of others consistently taught the pretribulational rapture. These leaders along with hundreds (and perhaps thousands) of pastors throughout the nation

⁴³ Quoted in Rausch, 150.

⁴⁴ See John D. Hannah, “James M. Gray 1851-1935: His Life and Work,” Unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1974. Gray also wrote the lyrics (1905) for the well-known hymn “Only a Sinner”

were instrumental in creating an understanding of the rapture and its relevance in the lives of Christians. One of the most significant of these men with respect to the ongoing propagation of the doctrine of the rapture was Lewis Sperry Chafer.

Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952)

Born in Ohio, Presbyterian Bible teacher Lewis Sperry Chafer was involved in evangelistic ministry from 1901-1914 and came under the teaching influence of C. I. Scofield who became his mentor and participated in the annual Northfield Bible Conference in Northfield, Massachusetts. In Scofield's later years he assisted Scofield in ministry endeavors in New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas. After Scofield's death, Chafer became pastor of the Congregational church in Dallas of which Scofield had been minister. Once in Dallas, Chafer began to create plans for a seminary that would bring the Northern-style Bible conference ethos and teaching of premillennialism and dispensationalism along with the study of every book of the Bible into the South.⁴⁵ In 1924 he was instrumental in founding Dallas Theological Seminary (originally named the Evangelical Theological College). Earlier, in 1915, he published *The Kingdom in History and Prophecy*, a work endorsed by Scofield that was a defense of pretribulationism and dispensationalism. In 1926, he published *Major Bible Themes* (revised in 1974 by John F. Walvoord) and in 1948, he published his largest work, the eight-volume *Systematic Theology*, a work thoroughly pretribulational and dispensational. Of this work Hannah writes:

In addition to institutionalizing the Bible conference movement, Chafer systematized its unique theological emphases with the publication of his *Systematic Theology* (8 vols.) in 1948, the first major attempt to set forth the

⁴⁵ On Chafer's early career and ties with Scofield and others see, John D. Hannah, "The Early Years of Lewis Sperry Chafer" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144:573 (January 1987): 3-23. See also Hannah's entry "Chafer, Lewis Sperry" *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, 67-70.

teaching of dispensational premillennialism within the rubric of traditional systematics. What Scofield's notes delineated in a dispensational approach to the Bible, Chafer's theology book simply enlarged. The work reflects Chafer's attachment to Scofield and the notes of the *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909, 1917). The work became the definitive statement of dispensational theology.⁴⁶

Chafer's influence on a generation of Bible teachers and pastors was enormous. Through his classes, writings (including the acquisition 1933 of the oldest theological journal in America, *Bibliotheca Sacra*) Chafer passed the teaching of the pretribulational rapture to a multitude of readers, students, teachers, and pastors. In so doing he was able to multiply exponentially the teaching of the rapture, furthering the work of Scofield through his study Bible. This then would be directly multiplied again through the dispensational teaching of theologians J. Dwight Pentecost (1915-present), Charles C. Ryrie (1925-present), and John F. Walvoord (1910-2002).

Rapture Proponents of World War II and Beyond

From the late 1930s to the late 1940s a new generation of fundamentalist and evangelical leaders arose who created new institutions (e.g. Detroit Bible Institute, 1945), organized evangelistic ministries, capitalized on the loosening grip of the liberal religious establishments grip of the national radio airwaves and other media, and increased the number of parachurch ministries. Part of this entailed the fracturing, realignment, and reenergizing of social and theological concerns of conservative Christians.⁴⁷ In these years one also finds the rise of Baptist pastors and evangelists such as John R. Rice (1895-1980), W. A. Criswell (1909-2002), and Jerry Falwell (1933-2007) who preached

⁴⁶ John D. Hannah, "Chafer, Lewis Sperry," in Mal Couch, ed. *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology* (Kregel Publications, 1996), 69-70.

⁴⁷ See for example, George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995; Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997; and John D. Hannah, *An Uncommon Union: Dallas Theological Seminary and American Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.

and taught a pretribulational rapture.

John F. Walvoord (1910-2002)

The preeminent theologian of the rapture in the twentieth century was John F. Walvoord, the president of Dallas Theological Seminary from 1952-1986. Walvoord followed Chafer as president of the seminary and did much in the classroom and through books, journal articles, and speaking engagements to articulate the doctrine of the rapture as an integral part of dispensationalism and premillennialism. Walvoord and others of his generation provided a strong publishing continuum for pretribulationism. Regarding the strengthening of pretribulationism during the interwar years and shortly thereafter, Reiter observes:

While pretribulationism gained a broader base of popular support, it also received exegetical and theological development after 1930 from a new generation of scholars. They were trained in recently-established seminaries doctrinally committed to dispensationalism. For example, Charles L. Feinberg and John F. Walvoord, students under and colleagues of Chafer at Dallas Theological Seminary, promoted a change in exegetical argumentation about key theological terms for the Second Coming.⁴⁸

Walvoord (and others) would continue this exegetical and theological development into the 1990s through a score of articles in *Bibliotheca Sacra* and books. Hannah writes of Walvoord's influence in eschatology, "Walvoord has made a significant contribution to the delineation and defense of dispensational premillennialism. A perusal of his writings makes it clear that his focus was not upon modern dispensationalism as a system, but upon its eschatological implications."⁴⁹

Among Walvoord's many writings were ones that dealt specifically with the rapture either in their entirety or in part. These were books such as: *The Return of the*

⁴⁸ Reiter, "A History of the Development of the Rapture Positions," 30.

⁴⁹ John D. Hannah, "Walvoord, John Flipse," in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, 421.

Lord (1955), *The Thessalonian Epistles* (1956), *The Rapture Question* (1957, revised 1979), *The Church in Prophecy* (1964), *Jesus Christ Our Lord* (1969), *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis* (1974, revised in 1990, updated posthumously by Mark Hitchcock 2005 as *Armageddon, Oil, and Terror*), *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation* (1976), *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (1990), and *Major Bible Prophecies* (1991). Each of these works in addition to others such as commentaries on Daniel and Revelation focused on exegetical, biblical, and theological exposition of the pretribulational rapture.

More will be said of the importance of Walvoord's *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis* below, but it is important to understand not only Walvoord's role in spreading and intensifying teaching about the rapture, but also, his attitude toward other views. On this matter, he wrote in his autobiography:

I'm often asked what I think about posttribulational, midtribulational, or prewrath views on the Rapture. All of these positions in some way violate sound hermeneutics and contextual rules. I've found that most who advocate a position against a pretribulational Rapture do so for personal reasons rather than from scriptural interpretation. . . . Views that are not pretribulational come and go. . . . Many people who propose different views simply haven't thought them through. If one believes that prophecy is to be understood consistently and literally, one will not long hold to a wrong view. Theological brushfires won't stop, however until the Lord Jesus returns.⁵⁰

Firm in convictions, clear in expression, and charitable in spirit, Walvoord's promotion of the pretribulational rapture lasted for half a century deeply embedding the position in twentieth-century American evangelicalism.

Charles C. Ryrie (1925-Present)

A triumvirate of biblical scholars emerged from the teaching of Lewis Sperry Chafer to promote the pretribulational rapture within the classroom at Dallas Seminary

⁵⁰ John F. Walvoord with Mal Couch, *Blessed Hope: The Autobiography of John F. Walvoord* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2001), 125, 126

and in publications and other ministries. Along with John F. Walvoord, and J. Dwight Pentecost (*Things to Come*, 1958 and *Prophecy for Today*, 1961), Charles C. Ryrie has consistently presented the pretribulation rapture in popular and academic print. Ryrie's fullest statement of the rapture in book form is his work *What You Should Know About the Rapture* (1981), but this builds on many other books, including his first theological work *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (1953) and his volume *Dispensationalism Today* (1965, revised as *Dispensationalism*, 1995). These works, along with the *Ryrie Study Bible* (1978, expanded 1995) further buttressed pretribulationism in evangelicalism as his writings along with others became standard texts in Bible institute, Bible college and seminary classrooms. In his exposition of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Ryrie argues that there are five aspects of the rapture to be understood: "There will be a *return* of Christ (v. 16) There will be a *resurrection* (v. 16) There will be a *rapture* (v.17) There will be a *reunion* (v. 17) There is *reassurance* from this doctrine (v. 18)."⁵¹ This clear, concise, and memorable presentation of the rapture illustrates Ryrie's effectiveness as a theologian and communicator. In part, it is this style that has made his name and works standard references among proponents of pretribulationism.

The leaders surveyed above were far from the only ones defending a pretribulation rapture in the twentieth century. As the years progressed the numbers grew and solidified often geographically around particular churches, educational institutions, or other ministries. Yet, the influence of leaders such as those mentioned above should not to be underestimated. Their views were (and are) fervently held, carefully studied, and tirelessly proclaimed from podiums, pulpits, and in print. Spanning

⁵¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *What You Should Know About the Rapture* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 29-31.

a century and a quarter of American history, they made the rapture an integral part of American fundamentalism and evangelicalism.

Bible Conferences and Institutions

It was not individuals alone who promoted rapture belief in the United States. They needed to have a venue disseminate the view. Much of the early impetus for pretribulationism in America came from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bible Conference movement that brought together theologically like-minded people from different denominational backgrounds. Historian Timothy P. Weber notes: “No better example of conservative cooperation can be found than the Bible conference movement.”⁵² In the summer 1875, a small group of evangelical leaders met for a conference on the study of prophecy. These meetings grew over the coming years, gathering in several locations until settling at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario where the conference was known as the Niagara Conference (1883-1897).⁵³ Weber writes: “The new premillennialists were at the Niagara Conferences from the beginning and eventually became the dominant force in their leadership.”⁵⁴ Through these and similar conferences, dispensational advocates and leaders were able to establish and sustain a network with far-reaching social and ecclesiastical ramifications that would last through the first quarter of the twentieth century. For the greater history of fundamentalism and evangelicalism it is important to note that its beginnings were not those of the oft-portrayed caricature of rural southern uneducated Protestants. The movement was a

⁵² Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, 26.

⁵³ For a full history of the Niagara conferences, see Larry Dean Pettigrew, “The Historical and Theological Contributions of the Niagara Conference to American Fundamentalism,” Unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1976.

⁵⁴ Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, 26.

northern urban and educated one that also drew many prominent business leaders into its fold. In addition to teaching on the rapture, throughout the conference lectures and writings of participants, there was a steady presentation of belief in future national restoration of the Jews to Palestine. Rhetoric surrounding this belief intensified during World War I and in the wake of the Balfour Declaration and British capture of Jerusalem.⁵⁵ Throughout all of the early history of dispensationalism, premillennialism, and pretribulationism in United States, there was (and continues to be) a strong connection, theologically at first, and later also politically, with the idea of a Jewish national homeland. This has always been part of American religious history, intensified in the years after 1875, and continues in the present.⁵⁶

The strong (but not unanimous) pretribulationist representation within the Bible conference movement coupled with the release in 1909 of the *Scofield Reference Bible* nurtured an ever-growing population of pretribulationists. Posttribulationism was adhered to by some premillennialists, but the numbers were dwarfed by pretribulationism proponents. Historian of the era Richard Reiter observes:

By way of contrast, posttribulationist theology in the generation after Niagara lacked the leadership, the institutional bases, and the extensive literature to match its premillennial counterpart. Furthermore, there was far less personal contact and interaction than existed within the fellowship of Niagara.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ See Ernest J. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930*. Reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 132-61 and David A. Rausch, *Zionism Within Early American Fundamentalism 1878-1918: A Convergence of Two Traditions* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), 79-146.

⁵⁶ The history of this relationship has received much attention. For an overview see Timothy J. Demy, "Historical and Theological Foundations of American Evangelical Support for Israel, 1875-1925." Unpublished thesis, University of Cambridge, 2007.

⁵⁷ Reiter, "A History of the Development of the Rapture Positions," 24-25. Reiter correctly observes that relationships between posttribulationists and pretribulationists were at times stormy and less than charitable.

Similarly, but later, with the 1941 publication of *The End: Rethinking the Revelation* by Norman B. Harrison, midtribulationism arose a position on the timing of the rapture, but it even more than posttribulationism failed to gain a substantial following.⁵⁸ As a social movement, the evangelicalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would transform into the Fundamentalist movement in the 1920s. This occurred for a variety of reasons, and further altered the landscape of American Protestantism. However, theological commitment to dispensational premillennialism grew within the new movement. As fundamentalists withdrew or were forced out of denominational schools, publishing outlets, and churches, they created new ones, independent of denominational control. Dispensationalism became a defining theological position in these new entities.

Space does not permit a full exploration of the rise of educational institutions in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries that championed pretribulationism but there were many, some still in existence such as Moody Bible Institute, Dallas Theological Seminary, Grace Theological Seminary and others that no longer survive (e.g. Dallas Bible College). Throughout the twentieth century and in the present there are also schools, some independent and some denominational that have fluctuated in their acceptance of pretribulationism or who have had strong proponents of pretribulationism even though it was not an official stance of the school or denomination.

What began as a position espoused in Chicago, St. Louis, and the East Coast gradually spread so that by the end of World War II, pretribulationism was strongly

⁵⁸ Reiter, "A History of the Development of the Rapture Positions," 31-32. See also David L. Larsen's excellent work, *The Company of Hope: A History of Bible Prophecy in the Church* (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2004), 394-408 on midtribulationism and 439-53 on posttribulationism, especially with reference to George E. Ladd.

represented throughout the United States. Although it would wax and wane regionally or in specific denominations and population pockets, overall its numbers were increasing.

The Rapture in American Culture

Belief in the rapture has never been confined solely to the pulpits and pews of American churches. Throughout the years it gradually moved beyond walls of the church, colleges, and seminaries, and into the larger landscape of American culture. This was accomplished through several technologies (print, radio, television, film, Internet), music, evangelistic crusades, and parachurch ministries. New ministries such as the Navigators (1933), Word of Life Fellowship (1940), Youth for Christ, Young Life (1941), and Campus Crusade for Christ (1951) arose to evangelize wartime and postwar military service members, students, and youth. In each of these there were strong proponents of the rapture (e.g. Young Life founder Jim Rayburn started the organization while studying at Dallas Theological Seminary). Although the organizations were not always pretribulationist in their doctrinal statements, the presence of rapture adherents in the organizations along with the emphasis on Bible study, discipleship, and evangelism did much to spread the idea of the rapture. Among evangelistic associations, ministries such as Bible Believers' Evangelistic Association (1970) focused on the rapture as an evangelistic tool through brochures such as "A Bible Map" (1974) and "A Tribulation Map" (1974). In the last two decades of the twentieth century there was an increase in evangelistic and Bible-teaching ministries focused on Bible prophecy. Also not to be overlooked was embrace of film as a medium for communicating the rapture (see for example the 1941 C. O. Baptista film *The Rapture*).⁵⁹ Examples of this are the popular

⁵⁹ <http://www.archive.org/details/RAPTURE> (accessed 12 November 2011). See also, John Walis, "Evangelical End-Time Films: From 1941 to the Present" in Crawford Gribben and Mark S.

1970s and 1980s films of Russ Doughton such as *A Thief in the Night* (1972), *A Distant Thunder* (1978), *Image of the Beast* (1980), and *Prodigal Planet* (1983).

The evangelical presence in American religious life in the second half of the twentieth century was extremely visible and vocal (especially from the 1970s onward). As mainline Protestant denominations began a fifty-year decline, evangelical denominations and nondenominational churches flourished. Evangelicals increasingly participated in all aspects of public life and their presence was felt in politics and public debate as well as in the pulpit. One area in which there was exponential growth for evangelicals was in the mass media. Communications professor Quentin J. Schultze writes:

Evangelicalism has shaped the American system of mass communication. Evangelicals were often at the forefront of developing and using new media technologies, from the printing press to communications satellites. The American media, in turn, have influenced American religion, especially evangelicalism. This interaction between evangelicalism and the media continues to influence all aspects of American culture, including business, religion, the popular arts, government, and education.⁶⁰

Among the more prominent of the broadcasters and programs were Charles E. Fuller's "The Old Fashioned Revival Hour" (1937), M. R. DeHaan's "Radio Bible Class" (1938), and later, J. Vernon McGee's "Thru the Bible Radio Network" (1967). There was prewar representation on the airwaves (e.g. "Southwest Radio Ministries," 1933) but initially these were limited to local and regional listening audiences. Many of the individuals and organizations (e.g. *WMBI*) that capitalized on the mass media opportunities held to a pretribulation perspective. Linking the technology and the message exponentially increased

Sweetman, ed. *Left Behind and the Evangelical Imagination: Apocalypse and Popular Culture* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011): 84-94.

⁶⁰ Quentin J. Schultze, ed. *Evangelicals and the Mass Media: Perspectives on the Relationship Between American Evangelicals and the Mass Media* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 13.

the audiences who heard the idea of the rapture (e.g radio and television broadcasts of Billy Graham crusades). In the twentieth century, probably the most visible means of rapture's gaining of cultural awareness and prominence through has been through publication of books and study Bibles.

The Rapture in Print

Comment earlier was made regarding James Hall Brookes' 1874 volume *Maranatha*. This volume set the stage for later works, minor and major, and many of which eclipsed earlier volumes in sales, distribution, and public awareness. Some of these works went beyond fundamentalist and evangelical reading audiences and did much to make the idea of the rapture part of the American vocabulary and consciousness even when the idea was ridiculed or rejected. There also arose publications such as *Moody Monthly* (renamed from the earlier *Christian Workers Magazine*). In addition to *Maranatha*, two of the early influential works were *Jesus is Coming* (1870) by William E. Blackstone and the *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909).⁶¹

Jesus is Coming

Stemming from his early involvement in the Bible Conference movement, William E. Blackstone became convinced of the need for a short book that would be evangelistic in nature and expound on the rapture and second coming. In 1877 he suggested to James Hall Brookes that Brookes write such a volume and Brookes countered that Blackstone should write it himself and that he, Brookes, would then

⁶¹ Also not to be overlooked are writings such as those of Clarence Larkin (1850-1924), whose volume *Dispensational Truth* (1918), did much to help Bible prophecy students understand premillennialism through his charts. Larkin had graduated from college as a mechanical engineer and worked as a professional draftsman.

publish it.⁶² Blackstone also received encouragement for the project from his friend H. G. Spafford (lyricist for the well-loved hymn “It is Well with My Soul”) Blackstone wrote the book and it became a publishing sensation and steady seller that remains in print to the present. Moorhead writes of its reception: “Blackstone constantly received letters from readers explaining the impact the book had on their lives and even met people around the world that had been converted to premillennialism because of the book. The endorsements contained in *Jesus Is Coming* reads like a who’s who of the proto-fundamentalist movement.”⁶³ Among those endorsing the book were: R. A. Torrey, J. Wilbur Chapman, A. T. Pierson, James M. Gray, and A. B. Simpson. It received wide distribution. At one point in its early history each graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary was given a copy after commencement exercises was every graduate of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. Further, in 1917, Moody Bible Institute sent copies of the work to ministers, missionaries, and theological students around the world.⁶⁴

By 1927, shortly after Blackstone’s death, more than 800,000 copies had been sold and distributed in thirty-six languages, including a Hebrew edition.⁶⁵ *Jesus Is Coming* was evangelistic in style and argued that the prophesied Second Coming of Christ made urgent the need of salvation. It promoted pretribulationism and premillennialism. Also part of the book’s message was the restoration of Jews to Palestine and reestablishment of

⁶² For a publishing history of the book, see Moorhead, “Jesus Is Coming,” 36-44.

⁶³ Moorhead, “Jesus Is Coming,” 39.

⁶⁴ Moorhead, “Jesus Is Coming,” 42.

⁶⁵ Carl F. Ehle, Jr., “Prolegomena to Christian Zionism in America: The Views of Increase Mather and William E. Blackstone Concerning the Doctrine of the Restoration of Israel,” Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1977, 236-37. See also Ariel, 58-60.

the biblical Davidic kingdom in the land of Israel.⁶⁶ Blackstone's works had enormous influence in evangelical circles of the day. Rausch states Blackstone's writing "was a lasting impetus to the political efforts of Christian Zionists."⁶⁷ The book went through several editions, and by its 1908 edition, after the rise of Zionism, Blackstone argued that even though the Zionist leadership was often agnostic, Zionism was fulfilling part of God's prophetic plan.⁶⁸ The ideas presented by Blackstone in the work were not original but were a summary of American dispensational thought and paralleled those of his friend C. I. Scofield.⁶⁹ Blackstone's theological convictions soon led him to social and political activism on behalf of Jews. While many people within Christianity and Judaism viewed attempts to convert Jews as offensive, Blackstone and dispensationalists understood their efforts as a sign of concern and goodwill for Jews.⁷⁰ Moorhead notes: Currently the book has been translated into forty-eight languages, has sold millions of copies, and has been recognized as one of the most influential books on dispensational premillennialism."⁷¹ Historian of evangelicalism Joel A. Carpenter concurs stating of its early influence "Only the *Scofield Reference Bible* . . . can compare to its influence in spreading dispensational premillennialism."⁷²

⁶⁶ Ariel, *On Behalf of Israel*, 60-61.

⁶⁷ David A. Rausch, *Fundamentalist-Evangelicals and Anti-Semitism* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1993), 32.

⁶⁸ William E. Blackstone, *Jesus is Coming* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1908), 240.

⁶⁹ Ariel, *On Behalf of Israel*, 60.

⁷⁰ Saddington, "Prophecy and Politics," 106.

⁷¹ Moorhead, "Jesus Is Coming," 43.

⁷² Joel A. Carpenter, ed., *The Premillennial Second Coming: Two Early Champions* (New York: Garland, 1988), 7. See also Virginia Lieson Brereton, *Training God's Army: The American Bible School, 1880-1940* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 16-17.

Scofield Reference Bible

In the early twentieth century the wide propagation of the rapture as a theological idea embedded came from the writings of Scofield and publication of *The Scofield Reference Bible* in 1909 by Oxford University Press.⁷³ Boyer writes of the influence of Scofield's study Bible:

Scofield's continuing reputation rests on his Reference Bible (1909), which more than any other single work solidified the premillennial movement. . . . The Scofield Reference Bible has been a major conduit for disseminating premillennial dispensationalism throughout the world.⁷⁴

After the 1909 publication of *The Scofield Reference Bible*, dispensational theology grew enormously in the number of American advocates and continued to do so with the 1917 and 1967 revisions. Although the theology of Scofield's study Bible differed in details from Darby's scheme, there is broad agreement in their perspectives and a shared heritage. Ryrie notes, "Although we cannot minimize the wide influence of Darby, the glib statement that dispensationalism originated with Darby, whose system was taken over and popularized by Scofield, is not historically accurate."⁷⁵ Dispensationalism historian Larry Crutchfield also supports this perspective on the Darby-Scofield relationship, contradicting historian Ernest Sandeen's widely promulgated views and statement that "Americans [specifically Scofield] raided Darby's treasuries and carried

⁷³ On the history of the reference Bible, see R. Todd Mangum and Mark S. Sweetnam, *The Scofield Bible: Its History and Impact on the Evangelical Church*. Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2009.

⁷⁴ Boyer, 97-98.

⁷⁵ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 69.

off his teachings as their own.”⁷⁶ Crutchfield shows that Scofield and other Americans benefited from Darby, but not without major differences.⁷⁷

Dispensational thought has never been monolithic in either the interpretation of biblical passages or their application to current events. While there is agreement on the general flow of history and biblical prophecy, specific details have received varying emphases. Proponents and critics of dispensationalism recognize these distinctions but see in them different meanings.⁷⁸ For the critic, the distinctions are seen as weaknesses and inconsistencies of a flawed hermeneutic. For proponents, the distinctions are evidence of a flexible and nuanced hermeneutic that continues to develop. Regardless of one’s stance within dispensationalism, “the basic unifying issue for all dispensationalists is that Israel is not the church.”⁷⁹

The Late Great Planet Earth

In the second half of the twentieth century belief in the pretribulational rapture moved into wider American culture. In print, this was due first to the writings of Dallas Theological Seminary graduate Hal Lindsey, especially the 1970 publication of the *The Late Great Planet Earth* (with C. C. Carlson) and later through the phenomenal success of the the *Left Behind* series of Christian novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins.

⁷⁶ Ernest J. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930*. Reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 102.

⁷⁷ Larry V. Crutchfield, *The Origins of Dispensationalism: The Darby Factor* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1992), 206-13.

⁷⁸ See for example, critic Stephen Sizer’s categories of Messianic, apocalyptic, and political dispensationalism in Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 255-56 and an overview of dispensationalism’s history in Craig A. Blaising and Darrell Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1993), 9-56.

⁷⁹ Herbert W. Bateman IV, “Dispensationalism Tomorrow,” in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 307.

The phenomenal success of *The Late Great Planet Earth* assisted in reshaping the religious publishing industry and popularized evangelical eschatology (especially pretribulationism) for an entire generation of Vietnam-era Americans. Apart from making Lindsey the then best-selling author in religious publishing history, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (hereafter *Late Great*) popularized the rapture to such an extent that it became a recognized concept in popular culture as well as in religious circles. He wrote of the rapture:

It will happen! Some day, a day that only God knows, Jesus Christ is coming to take away all those who believe in Him. He is coming to meet true believers in the air. Without benefit of science, space suits, or interplanetary rockets, there will be those who will be transported into a glorious place more beautiful, more awesome, than we can possibly comprehend. Earth and all its thrills, excitement, and pleasures will be nothing in contrast to this great event. It will be the living end. The ultimate trip⁸⁰.

Lindsey's concepts about the rapture and the events surrounding it were not new. However, his presentation to a nonreligious audience enabled the doctrine to spread in popular culture. The rapture and evangelical eschatology subsequently became the subject of numerous books, films, posters, paintings, and bumper stickers in popular religious culture. As an author, speaker, and representative of American evangelicalism, and specifically pretribulationism, Lindsey had unsurpassed stature in the popular arena. His writings are not technical or academic, and many within evangelical academia distance themselves from some of his theological generalizations and speculation. He did however, on the popular front, won the hearts and minds on many readers.

In the four decades following publication of *Late Great*, Lindsey has continued to be a prolific and lasting presence in evangelical publishing. After the success of *Late*

⁸⁰ Hal Lindsey with C. C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 137.

Great, he left Campus Crusade for Christ and became engaged in several other parachurch ministries while at the same time continuing to write. In 1973, he published a second best seller, *There's a New World Coming* and followed this with a third title in 1974, *The Liberation of Planet Earth*. Each of these best sellers, as well as subsequent titles, has met with remarkable publishing success and many were picked up by secular publishers such as Bantam Books. Especially pertinent in this paper is his 1983 work *The Rapture*. None however, has matched the popularity of *The Late Great Planet Earth*.

Lindsey's prolific pen has generated more than a dozen and numerous popular articles and video scripts. In addition to the three best sellers above, he has published: *Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth* (with C. C. Carlson, 1972), *The Promise* (1974), *The Terminal Generation* (1976), *The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon* (1980), *The Rapture: Truth or Consequences* (1983), *A Prophetic Walk through the Holy Land* (1983), *Israel and the Last Days* (1983), *Combat Faith* (1986), *The Road to Holocaust* (1989), *Planet Earth—2000 A.D.[sic]* (1994), *Amazing Grace* (1995), *The Final Battle* (1995), and *Blood Moon* (1996) and others. The popularity of Lindsey's writings was grounded in his ability to relate prophecy to current events and speak to the spiritual and social unrest of an entire generation in a popular format. Weber writes:

The significance of Lindsey's book is not so much its thesis. . . . his interpretive approach has been around for a long time. Rather, the book is noteworthy because it has been able to reach many people who are outside of those groups traditionally receptive to its message. Previously, books on prophecy could be found only in Christian (i.e. evangelical) or Bible bookstores. But *The Late Great Planet Earth* began showing up in drugstores, supermarkets, and "secular" bookstores, right alongside gothic romances, cheap westerns, and books on the latest fads: dieting, organic gardening, the personal lives and loves of Hollywood celebrities, and UFOs.⁸¹

⁸¹ Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, 5.

In short, Lindsey's writings made dispensational theology commonplace and part of popular American culture.

Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis

Belief in and support for a national homeland for Jews and subsequent support for the nation of Israel has always been part of dispensational theology. After World War II as political and military events in the Middle East unfolded and intensified so too did premillennial support for Israel, especially in the aftermath of the June 1967 Six-Day War. When the oil crisis of 1973-74 arose, there was a religious as well as secular concern over events in the Middle East, especially in light of the October 1973 Yom Kippur War. It was in this cultural and political environment and at the height of the Cold War⁸² that John F. Walvoord's *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis* (with John E. Walvoord) was released in 1974 (and revised twice since then) proclaiming belief in the pretribulation rapture. This work gave an unprecedented audience to a theologian of pretribulationism quickly selling 750,000 copies.⁸³ In 1990, prior to the First Gulf War, a revised edition would sell more than a million copies and catapult Walvoord into the national media spotlight.⁸⁴ In his 2001 autobiography Walvoord wrote humorously of the history and seriously of the significance of the work:

The book was half finished when the 1973 Yom Kippur War broke out. I sent the first half to Zondervan and asked them if they wanted to print it. I got a letter back that said, "We've got the type set on what you sent. Where's the rest of the book?" My son John, who is a pretty good writer, jumped in and helped me finish

⁸² Space limitations do not permit a fully study of the popularity of the rapture or ideas about it in relation to the Cold War, but there is an enormous amount of primary and secondary material on the rapture and the nuclear age especially with respect to what was at the time expected by many to be a possible U.S.—U.S.S.R. nuclear conflict that might or might not have direct ties to the biblical and prophetic battle of Armageddon.

⁸³ Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 327.

⁸⁴ Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 329.

that project. . . . Not long ago, I was speaking at a private school commencement in Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas when a woman about forty years of age stopped me in the aisle. She said, “I read your book *Armageddon* and got saved!” Just like that! I felt so gratified because my goal was to explain prophecy to the unsaved.⁸⁵

Walvoord’s witness of the power of prophecy in evangelism is a longstanding affirmation of rapture proponents.

***Left Behind* (and subsequent series)**

Prophecy as a means of evangelism has been proven in thousands of individual lives through the *Left Behind* series by authors Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. What Lindsey and Walvoord did in popular apocalyptic nonfiction, LaHaye and Jenkins multiplied in fiction. The 1995 publication of *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth’s Last Days* and more than a dozen sequels as well as children’s books and other spinoff items catapulted pretribulationism into late twentieth-century American consciousness at a level not previously experienced by any rapture book. In this sense, Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* was merely a literary preview of coming attractions. Books in the series were a religious and secular publishing sensation such that for at least one week in 1998, the first four books of the series simultaneously held the top four positions in the *New York Times* best-seller list and there are now more than 65 million copies in print of the books from the series.

In addition to fiction on the rapture, LaHaye, like Walvoord, Lindsey, Ryrie, and others has been a consistent author of nonfiction works pertaining to the rapture. Among the more than a dozen prophecy-specific titles are: *The Beginning of the End* (1972), *Revelation: Illustrated and Made Plain* (1973), *No Fear of the Storm* (1977), and

⁸⁵ Walvoord with Mal Couch, *Blessed Hope*, 94.

Charting the End Times (with Thomas Ice, 2001). He has also edited and co-edited several reference works on prophecy and a prophecy study Bible. As with many of LaHaye's writings, there is an evangelistic thrust in each of his prophecy writings that is consistent with earlier authors.

Writing of the influence of prophecy fiction in American, rapture critic Crawford Gribben observes:

Left Behind is now a vital component in the way in which evangelicals imagine their future. However we account for their popularity, therefore, prophecy fiction novels are much more than ephemeral entertainment consumed by marginal believers. They demonstrate the changing identity and increasing cultural power of evangelical America.⁸⁶

Gribben is correct. Prophecy fiction (and nonfiction) changed the American evangelical landscape. In so doing, it also influenced and changed the broader American culture.

The Rapture in Music

Lyrics for hymns and other music pertaining to the rapture are often blurred with the second coming. Sometimes the two themes are distinct and sometimes they are not. At times, rapture lyrics are also based upon the misinterpretation of biblical texts (though well-intentioned) as in the case of Larry Norman's 1970 song "I Wish We'd All Been Ready" released on his 1972 album "Only Visiting This Planet." A musician with enormous influence in the secular and emerging Christian music recording industry, Norman's lyrics on this song and others proclaimed a belief in the rapture that was not uncommon in the counterculture movement of the "Jesus People" in which end-times evangelism was a common theme and important part.⁸⁷ This music as well as other

⁸⁶ Crawford Gribben, *Writing the Rapture: Prophecy Fiction in Evangelical America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 170.

⁸⁷ See Michael McFadden, *The Jesus Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 36-45. For other sources on the movement historically and theologically, see Preston Shires, *Hippies of the Religious*

medium of the movement such as the newspaper “The Hollywood Free Press” did much to promulgate rapture belief among participants in the movement and its influence in during the 1960s and 1970s should not be underestimated.⁸⁸ When coupled with California ministries that were heavily engaged with those in the counterculture movement such as Chuck Smith’s Calvary Chapel and Ray Stedman’s Peninsula Bible Fellowship there was a strong rapture advocacy as part of the evangelism and discipleship.

Perhaps more influential than the popular Christian music of the Vietnam years and beyond (much of it written as a response to and as part of counter culture movement in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s) are the more familiar lyrics of the music of American hymns, most written before 1950 (and as early as the 1890s), affirming belief in the rapture. Illustrative of expressions of belief in the rapture found in such well-loved hymns (again, sometimes blurred in doctrinal soundness) is James H. Black’s 1921 hymn “When the Roll is Called up Yonder” in which are found the lyrics:

“When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound,
And time shall be no more,
And when the morning breaks eternal bright and fair,
When the save on earth shall gather,
Over on the other shore,
And the roll is called up yonder, I’ll be there.”⁸⁹

More recently, one finds the words of Jerry Goff’s, “I’ll See You in the Rapture” which state in part:

Right. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007 and David Di Sabatino, *The Jesus People Movement: An Annotated Bibliography and General Resource*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1966.

⁸⁸ See <http://www.hollywoodfreepaper.org/archives.php> and <http://one-way.org/jesusmovement/> (accessed 10 November 2011).

⁸⁹ James H. Black, “When the Roll is Called up Yonder.”

“If we never meet again,
On this earth my precious friend,
If to God we have been true,
And we’ve lived above all sin,
Then for us there'll be a greeting,
For there’s going to be a meeting,
I'll see you in the Rapture some sweet day.”

CHORUS

“I'll see you in the Rapture,
See you in the Rapture,
See you at that meeting in the air.
There with our blessed Savior,
We'll live and reign forever,
I'll see you in the Rapture some sweet day.”

There are earlier hymns that express belief in the second coming and which sound like rapture lyrics but are not due to the date of their writing (before the rapture was articulated in Anglo-American theology). However, one early hymn with rapture lyrics is the well-loved hymn *It is Well with My Soul*, by Horatio Spafford (1873). In the third stanza (which is not very well known), Spafford states that he is waiting for Christ to come back. He states that this coming will be with the trump of the angel and the voice of the Lord (cf. 1 Thess. 4:16):

REFRAIN

“And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.”

The Rapture in the Cold War

Space limitations do not permit a fully study of the popularity of the rapture or ideas about it in relation to the Cold War, but there is an enormous amount of primary and secondary material on the rapture and the nuclear age especially with respect to what

was at the time expected by many to be a possible U.S.—U.S.S.R. nuclear conflict that might or might not have direct ties to the biblical and prophetic battle of Armageddon.

The Rapture in American Politics

As with the Cold War (and also worthy of separate study), so also has the rapture been part of American politics both in leaders such as Presidents Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush who affirmed belief in it, and in voting citizens.

As American evangelicals in the 1970s began to coordinate their activities applying religious views to the political arena eschatology inevitable became part of the mixture, usually either in relation to the Cold War or United States support for Israel.⁹⁰

As early as 1914 and the beginning of World War I, some pretribulationists saw prophetic significance in contemporary military events.⁹¹ This has continued with each succeeding military conflict to the present (e.g. Louis S. Bauman, *Light From Bible Prophecy As Related to the Present Crisis*, 1940; Charles Dyer with Angela Elwell Hunt, *The Rise of Babylon: Sign of the End Times*, 1991, and Walvoord's update with Mark Hitchcock *Armageddon, Oil, and Terror*, 2007).

Pretribulationism has never lacked for critics (though that is a subject for another paper). Sometimes this criticism has been deserved as proponents of the rapture have failed to let the Bible speak for itself and sought instead to sensationalize their eschatology. Some criticism has been thoughtful, but many times critics have been inaccurate and unfair in their representations of pretribulationists and have failed to interact objectively with the biblical text, the process of doctrinal development and refinement (and differences) within dispensationalism, the historical record, or the

⁹⁰ On rise of Christian Zionism see Demy, "Historical and Theological Foundations," 96-111.

⁹¹ Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 100-104.

statements and writings of pretribulationists. Such attacks will remain part of the history of evangelicalism and eschatology until the end of the age and should not deter a clear, calm, and reasoned presentation of the rapture.

Nearly twenty years ago, in the June 1982 edition of *The Atlantic Monthly*, William Martin wrote a concise summary of the dispensational eschatology of American evangelicals. In this cover story article, Martin provided a thought-provoking analysis of dispensationalism. As he closed his article, he suggested that as strange as dispensationalism might appear to those outside evangelicalism, it merits earnest consideration.

As I trust this account of pre-millennial thought has shown, a sizable subculture exists in this country, for whom the past, present, and future are interpreted in a manner radically different from the way they are presented to us in secular media and institutions. Alien as it may appear to those unacquainted with it, this interpretation is bedrock and touchstone to millions of fundamentalist Christians, including some of the most studious and thoughtful of that increasingly important aggregate. Because it is of a long intellectual tradition with extensive and systematic content, it deserves to be accorded serious examination, not to be dismissed as nonsense.⁹²

Martin should be commended for his words. Belief in the rapture is part of American history and American culture. Its presence during nearly 150 years of the American experience has brought comfort and hope to thousands and perhaps millions of American citizens. Its proclamation has been multifaceted and it has become part of the vocabulary of both Christians and non-Christians. As Paul Boyer noted at the end of his work: “When all is said and done, we are confronted with the remarkable endurance of this ancient way of understanding the world. Prophecy belief, and specifically

⁹² William Martin, “Waiting for the End” *The Atlantic Monthly* (249: 6, June 1982), 36.

premillennialism, not only survived the “secular” twentieth century but exhibited vigorous signs of renewal as the century ended.”⁹³

In conclusion, the history of the rapture in America is one that involves ideas, individuals, and institutions interwoven through decades of preaching, proclamation, and publishing. It has used every new technology that has become available from print, to radio, to television, to cinema, and the Internet. It has been conveyed through words, music, and visual images. Declaration of belief in it has been found on bumper stickers, buttons, and billboards. For its advocates though, it is, at its core, neither abstract nor academic. It is intensely personal; it is a comfort, a hope, and a motivation to evangelism and godly living. Shortly before his death, John F. Walvoord, the most ardent proponent of the rapture in the twentieth century, summarized it well: “I was just thinking this morning, what if today were the day. The Rapture is a precious truth to me, and I think that it should be constantly in our minds that He could come today.”⁹⁴ Walvoord’s words are a succinct witness to what many have believed about the rapture in America in the last 150 years. He prayed for it, he hoped for it, and proclaimed to all who would listen that Jesus could come today. Perhaps it will be so.

⁹³ Boyer, *When Time Shall be No More*, 338.

⁹⁴ Walvoord with Mal Couch, *Blessed Hope*, 114.