

John Darby Did Not Invent the Rapture

- By Gene Lawley –

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One of the issues being promoted by a rising belief system of theology is that a pre-tribulation Rapture of the church is not Bible truth. It is claimed that such doctrine is a fabrication of one John Nelson Darby of Ireland (1800-1882).

Therefore, we are being taught that any such references to the Rapture are just garbage and without merit. Any Scripture that makes such a reference is said to be presenting aspects of Christ's Second Coming. Much has been written and published on the Internet, easy to find if one wants to know about this issue.

Darby was apparently an active and well-known figure in the mid-1800 theological circles, having supported Calvin's views. He wrote favorably of Calvin's analysis of Election and Predestination. At a conference in 1832, he presented his views on the pre-tribulation Rapture doctrines. His biographer, William Kelly (1821-1906), wrote of Darby, "*A saint more true to Christ's name and word I never knew or heard of.*"

But well before Darby, there was a strong belief in a pre-tribulation Rapture. After the times of the Apostles, there were writers expounding belief in the "*imminence*" of Christ's return, which finds its basis in a pre-tribulation Rapture—that is, "*nothing stands in the way of His coming at any time.*" This, of course, is still held by many today, although we know that Jesus never made a promise or prophecy that He did not intend to fulfill.

Clement of Rome (35-101) and Ignatius of Antioch (died 110) were of this frame of mind. Apparently, Irenaeus of Lyon (120-202) was a pre-tribulation believer, and he was a disciple of Polycarp, a disciple of the Apostle John. He wrote of his views in that arena of thought in his book, '*Against Heresies*'.

So we see briefly a few of the many examples of the belief that a pre-tribulation Rapture is biblically true and has been articulated steadily well before John Darby is said to have "*invented*" that doctrine.

Many books and articles are being written today that attempt to explain the Scriptures, and believers rush to find out what this new author has to say. But wait a minute! What does the Bible say about it? (And here I am, writing an article to explain what the Bible says!)

Nevertheless, tracing the whole counsel of God on an issue is bound to produce God's viewpoint, given the awesome truth of Proverbs 9:10b. "***And knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.***"

No wonder Jude, the brother of James and half-brother of Jesus, was brought to urge believers to ***“earnestly contend for the faith that was ONCE FOR ALL given to the saints.”*** (Capitals used for emphasis.) “Contend” means to fight for it, and “once for all” means there are to be no changes to it, and it is for everyone. Jude wrote this possibly just before the 70 A.D. destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

So, you ask, where did the Rapture doctrine begin?

An example of it was in the experience of Enoch, the early man of faith who ***“walked with God and he was not, for God took him”*** (Genesis 5:24). Then, there is the taking away of Elijah in a blazing chariot from heaven, as told in 2nd Kings 2:1-3.

But the actual workings of the Rapture are first introduced by Jesus Christ and told in John 11:25-26. It is the time of the death of Lazarus, and his sisters were weeping over his death. Martha said to Jesus, ***“Had You been here, my brother would not have died.”***

Jesus said to her, ***“Your brother will rise again”*** (John 11:23). Martha replied, ***“I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”*** (Here, she changed the context from the present to the future time of Lazarus’ resurrection.)

And Jesus makes this statement of that future event, later called the Rapture: ***“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die”*** (John 11:25-26).

Lay these two verses beside 1st Thessalonians 4:16-17, and you have an exact comparison: ***“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”***

Can you see how these Scriptures fit together to complement each other? They come under the broad classification of ***“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God”*** and its inclusive instruction. Both letters to the Thessalonians deal extensively with this undeniable event called the Rapture.

One of the troubling expectations of many Christians is that Jesus will return surprisingly at any time, even this afternoon, because He is said to come ***“like a thief in the night,”*** that is, unsuspectedly. Paul, though, told the Thessalonians, ***“But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day....”*** (1 Thessalonians 5:4-5a).

Yet, we do not know the day nor the hour of His coming, specifically. The meaning of this is answered as we look at the next revelation in the Scriptures regarding the ingathering of the Rapture.

Why did God have seven special festivals or feasts set up on the Jewish calendar? They were not feasts that came out of Israel's historical activities. They were given to Moses to be placed on their calendar every year in the future. They are laid out in Leviticus 23 according to their agricultural seasons that have to do with the times of harvest. (When I first realized the significance of these feasts, I wrote and posted an article entitled *"Amazing Truths Hidden in Israel's Feasts."* It bears repeating, at least simplified, for its importance to this article's conclusion.)

The first one was the Passover festival, celebrating the time of Israel's escape from Egypt's bondage. At least, it was a reminder of that great work of God in their midst. But the feasts all were called "convocations" or rehearsals for future events. It turns out that they celebrate seven high-level events of the then-coming Christian era!

The first three, beginning with Passover about the middle of March in the Gentile calendar. They are the death, burial and resurrection of Christ where He, the Passover Lamb, was slain. Here He becomes the ***"first fruits of the resurrection."*** The Scriptures are careful to establish that title for Jesus, as noted in Matthew 27:53. Jesus had died, an earthquake had shaken the city, and the vail in the temple's Holy Place was torn from top to bottom: ***"And coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many."***

The second feast, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, depicts the death and burial of Jesus in the tomb for three nights and three days ***"in the belly of the earth."*** We are told of what He did there, in the spirit, ***"taking captivity captive"*** (closing Paradise into heaven?) and ***"speaking to the spirits in prison"*** (Ephesians 4:8-9, Psalm 68:18, and 1 Peter 3:19 while His body lay in the tomb for those three nights and days.)

The third festival, the Feast of First Fruits, celebrates His resurrection, possibly twelve hours into that third night and day, early on Sunday morning, the first day of the week. Thus, the Lord of the Sabbath brought with Himself that Day of honor and delight in the Lord to the first day of the week and no longer on the last day of the week.

In the agricultural context, these first three feasts correspond to the sowing of the seed for eventual harvest, as John 12:24 depicts it: ***"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain."***

Fifty days later, a gigantic change took place, and the Spirit of God came upon the small band of believers who were waiting, as told to do, and the power of God was displayed in them. Called the Feast of Weeks, the Early Harvest, it corresponded to the barley harvest time for the farmers. At the preaching of Peter, three thousand became new believers from among those of many tongues who had come to celebrate the festival. It is called Pentecost since that time, a clear and definite Christian era event being celebrated by the Jews, not knowing what they really are identifying.

The fifth feast, called the Feast of Trumpets or Rosh Hashanah, comes in the fall of the year, depicting the final harvest of the season. It is called the **“ingathering”** in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, and every description of it seems to shout “Rapture.” One must ask whether or not God will fulfill this event in the order it is placed on the calendar or at some isolated place and time elsewhere. My understanding of the nature of God is that He will not be inconsistent with His formatted plan as depicted for all these centuries.

The tenth day after Rosh Hashanah is the date of the Feast of Atonement when the **“abomination of desolation”** of Daniel’s prophecy occurs. The Jews discover their true Messiah is Jesus Christ, not this one who has befriended them with a seven-year peace covenant and permission to rebuild their temple (Daniel 9:27).

John writes of their discovery being prophesied in John 19:37: “And again another Scripture says, **‘They shall look on Him whom they pierced.’**” He was referring to Zechariah 12:10, thus confirming that event’s expected fulfillment.

That evil one cancels their offerings and temple sacrifices and declares himself God, demanding all to worship him as God (2nd Thessalonians 2:3-4).

Then, the fifth day after that sixth festival, the Feast of Tabernacles occurs on the calendar, also called the Feast of Booths, to illustrate the coming of the Lord to the earth to establish His Millennial Kingdom based in Jerusalem, the city of Zion. Zechariah 14:4 tells us about His feet being planted on the Mount of Olives **“on that day,”** and the Mount is split into two sides with a valley in between.

It will be a very dramatic event and not anything like that return of Jesus described by the two angels in Acts 1:11: **“This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”**

Therefore, *“as we see the Day approaching, we who believe and proclaim the whole counsel of God say, **“even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly”** and put to rest those naysayers who so self-confidently twist the Scriptures to fit their truthless theories.*

Large passages of Scripture are disregarded as meaningless, along with prophecies of the last days in their design for the end times, but God does not follow their plan. You can count on His sovereignty by His Word.

The **“ingathering”** of the final harvest of the church age so fits the annual timing of the seasons of the year, is it likely that God would not fulfill that high point of the church age at that time and put it somewhere else of an insignificant location? What, then, is the fulfillment of that fifth Feast of Trumpets? Why have the Jews been celebrating it for centuries if it has no significance?

Paul admonished Timothy to **“study to show yourself approved of God, a workman not ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth”** (2 Timothy 2:15). We, here in the

21st century, will do well to follow that directive, for we know that God is, and who He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

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Blessings,

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