

**THE SHAPING OF JOHN NELSON DARBY'S ESCHATOLOGY**

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## Abstract

The Albury and Powerscourt prophetic conferences saw the birth of a new form of premillennial dispensationalism that has shaped evangelical eschatology ever since. It owed its debut to John Nelson Darby, who espoused the centrality of the “two peoples of God.”

Dispensationalism affirmed three cardinal doctrines: first, a sharp dichotomy between the two peoples of God—national Israel and the church; second, God's glory rather than the covenant of grace defining His purpose in history; and third, the hermeneutical principle of a literal interpretation of Scripture.

This dispensationalism was indeed revolutionary, displacing the traditional historicist hermeneutic, with its system of date-setting, in favour of futurism, with its doctrine of imminency. This forced Darby to deal with the problem of what to do with the church so that God could fulfil his redemptive plan regarding national Israel. He resolved this by providing for a rapture of the church and by inserting a gap of an indeterminate number of years in the last part of Daniel's seventy-week prophecy.

The question that arises over this new doctrine of premillennial, pretribulational dispensationalism concerns its provenance, since Darby is widely credited as its originator. There is good reason for this. His influence can be seen in C. I. Scofield's *Reference Bible*, as well as such popular novels as Hal Lindsey's *The Late, Great Planet Earth* and Timothy LaHaye's *Left Behind* series. There are two dominant schools of thought regarding Darby and the origin of dispensationalism. One traces his dispensationalism back to the Patristic Writings, and the other sees Darby as “inventing” his system. Both are incorrect, as I will demonstrate by tracing his eschatology to earlier thinkers to show that Darby “adapted” extant doctrines to form his unique system.

This dissertation will establish a much more coherent picture of Darby and his contribution to the field of eschatology by identifying the sources that were available and were adapted by him to form his premillennial dispensationalism. This will also provide a greater understanding of the modern “revisionist” and “progressive” forms of dispensationalism.

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## 1. Introduction

### The thesis of the study

This study will show John Nelson Darby's dispensational system within the broader system of premillennialism. Prior to Darby, there was a rudimentary concept of God working with humankind within defined periods, properly termed "periodization." These defined periods contained "a test of conformity to the plan of God." The failure of the test necessitated that God provide a new dispensation or period. Darby took these earlier forms of periodization and used them as building blocks to construct his unique system that we term "dispensationalism." He then added to these forms a number of other adaptive ideas to create his own system. These adaptive ideas included "the two peoples of God, the ruin of the church, the gap theory, and the secret rapture."

This overview will assist the reader in forming a better understanding of Darby's contribution to eschatology in light of the plethora of erroneous views surrounding how he constructed his dispensational system. The study will also show how Darby's system has stood the test of time and how in many cases his dispensationalism has been further adapted to meet the needs of modern biblical scholarship.

Darby's influence and position in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is central to this thesis. Historically in the 19<sup>th</sup> century he is best viewed as peripheral to mainstream British Christianity. His was a separatist movement embracing an eschatology that for most people was novel and innovative, but it was hardly reflective of the Established Church. Neither was he alone in his doctrines, and this thesis will highlight other thinkers that embraced similar eschatological and prophetic interpretations. By the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century Darby's eschatology had been exported to America, where it moved from being peripheral to being central. Starting from a private conference in New York City in 1868, regular conferences were held until 1897, when the venue was set at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. This was the beginning of the

Niagara conferences.<sup>1</sup> According to Sandeen, “. . . the Niagara conference represented J. N. Darby’s concept of the church adapted to the American environment.”<sup>2</sup> Aside from the Niagara conferences, Darby and other Plymouth Brethren gave Bible readings in private homes. This became highly successful and influenced many Bible expositors, including D. L. Moody, James H. Brookes, and C. I. Scofield.

Darbyite dispensationalism is one form of premillennialism that took shape in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and has endured into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Its greatest success occurred in America, where it formed a strong, self-perpetuating subculture within Protestantism. It was first popularized in C. I. Scofield’s annotated Bible. In more recent years, it has made inroads into the popular culture through bestsellers like Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth*<sup>3</sup> and the *Left Behind* novel series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins.<sup>4</sup> It has also made headlines through a number of political action and lobbying groups that promote strong ties between the U.S. and Israel.<sup>5</sup> This study will explain the origins of dispensationalism in the early nineteenth century.

### The basis of the study

Darby’s reticence to provide source material in his writings may be due to the fact that he did not construct his dispensational system in a vacuum,

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<sup>1</sup> Sandeen, Ernest Robert. 1970. *The roots of fundamentalism; British and American millenarianism, 1800-1930*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 134.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Lindsey, Hal, and Carole C. Carlson. 1970. *The late great planet earth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>4</sup> LaHaye, Tim F., and Jerry B. Jenkins. 1995. *Left behind: a novel of the earth's last days*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>5</sup> Boyer, Paul S. 1992. *When time shall be no more: prophecy belief in modern American culture*. Studies in cultural history. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Fineman, Howard, and Tamara Lipper. “A Very Mixed Marriage. Evangelical Christians lining up to fight for Israel may be an unmovable obstacle to Bush's 'Roadmap.'” *Newsweek*, June 2, 2003.

Sizer, Stephen. 2004. *Christian Zionism: road map to Armageddon*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity.

Wagner, Donald E. 2003. *Dying in the land of promise: Palestine and Palestinian Christianity from Pentecost to 2000*. London: Melisende.

Weber, Timothy P. 2004. *On the road to Armageddon: how evangelicals became Israel's best friend*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

but it was also conventional at the time. He was also influenced by the eschatology of those contemporary with him as well as earlier thinkers.

After presenting a biographical sketch of Darby and his family, I will turn my attention to those persons, organizations, and conferences that inspired and shaped his eschatological system in the formative years. In chapter two, I will show how Darby's system first took shape while at Trinity College, Dublin. This was a highly complex phase of Darby's life as he wrestled with the future direction of his life. Having trained in law, he found his deep religious convictions drawing him to the priesthood of the Church of Ireland.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, he felt at odds with the Established Church and sought solace in Bible studies with those of like mind at Trinity College. These Bible studies, discussions, and the breaking of bread were the basis of a new emerging church called the Plymouth Brethren. Darby was not alone in seeking a form of Christianity more in line with the New Testament church. A religious revival had taken hold of many other individuals as they had studied biblical prophecies and had become excited about the prospect of Christ's Second Coming. In this chapter, I will present the key revivalists, together with two prophetic conferences that met for a number of years, and I will show how these helped to shape Darby's thinking.

In chapter three, I will address one of Darby's key doctrines, "the ruin of the church." This will in part answer the question of why he vacillated at the same time between being a priest in the Established Church and a functionary in the emerging Plymouth Brethren. The doctrine is important in understanding some of Darby's other central ideas, such as the "rapture of the church" and just who would be included in the rapture.

Chapter four addresses Darby's doctrine of the "two peoples of God," namely, national Israel and the Church. This doctrine is absolutely essential to Darby's dispensational system and its main defining feature. Since Darby believed that the Abrahamic Covenant was "unconditional," it followed that Israel—today's Jews—represents God's chosen people in perpetuity. Darby was then faced with the dilemma of reconciling the two people groups within

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<sup>6</sup> Also known as the United Church of England and Ireland.



God's redemptive plan. His dispensationalist system had to take into account the nature of national Israel in the past and present and at the future Second Coming, as well as the destiny of the church.

Chapter five addresses Daniel's seventy-week prophecy. By assuming, as many other interpreters had done, that this period of 70 weeks was really "weeks of years" and by using a "day for a year" principle, Darby posited that the prophecy concerned 490 literal years. He had already formulated his "two peoples of God" doctrine and concluded that though the parenthetical church began with the stoning of Stephen, it would be completely fulfilled at the Second Coming, when the church is raptured away. Obviously this required more than 490 literal years. He resolved the problem by incorporating a gap of an indeterminate number of years between Stephen's stoning and the Second Coming of Christ. Thanks to the "gap theory," Darby was absolved of calculating a date for the Second Coming, as so many historicists had tried and failed to do. Thus Darby rejected a historicist approach to biblical prophecy in favour of a relatively new approach—futurism, which allowed for no date-setting and taught that Christ's Second Coming could be at any moment. Neither futurism nor the gap theory was a new doctrine since, contrary to popular belief, they had existed prior to Darby. I will show the earlier usage of these doctrines and present them in the light of Darby's own interpretation; this will shed more light on his dispensationalist system.

Chapter six deals with the pre-tribulational rapture of the church, a doctrine that was required by Darby's other doctrines of the two peoples of God and the gap theory. Put simply, the church occupies the "great parenthesis" of prophetic time between the stoning of Stephen and the rapture. As long as God concentrated on his heavenly people, the Church, in the great parenthesis, his dealings with national Israel remained "on hold." Thus God must first remove the Church, hence the need for the pre-tribulational rapture.

Since Darby's dispensationalist system is convoluted and highly confusing, in chapter seven I put the pieces together to show how his system works by considering the whole rather than the parts. After summarizing his system, I will evaluate the two arguments for the origins of Darby's

eschatology, and I will show why they are both erroneous and why the “adaptive” approach is the more scholarly answer to the continuing debate over Darby’s originality.

### The methodology of the study

While the study of Darby’s dispensationalism is exciting and challenging,<sup>7</sup> it is at the same time problematic. Just a cursory perusal of his writings is enough to convince the reader that Darby’s thoughts and doctrine are haphazard and disorganized. His prose style is tortuous, to say the least. Yet here was a churchman whose dispensationalism has done much to shape and mould premillennialism from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to our modern day. His writings are best described as a jigsaw puzzle, unorganized and in many unrelated pieces, but with apparent related colours and shapes. This then is the challenge that I plan to tackle, to assemble out of the disorganized mass of doctrinal pieces the final assembled picture that truly represents Darby’s dispensational millenarianism. Once the pieces are assembled it will be possible to understand how he formulated his system by adapting much earlier eschatological thinking.

Anyone who has ever assembled a particularly complex jigsaw puzzle with many pieces usually has a picture to act as a guide to the finished product. With Darby the analogy breaks down, since there is no picture to guide the assembler. The reason for this is simple: Darby never cites his sources. The challenge that I am faced with is twofold: to assemble the puzzle, that is, Darby’s dispensationalist system, and to provide the picture derived from thinkers prior to Darby. Put simply, I have to show the sources that more than likely influenced Darby as he constructed his complicated system. In the past, this would have been an almost impossible task. However, with the very recent digitization of much bibliographic material, the task is easier and more

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<sup>7</sup> This is not to accord any academic credibility to Darby. His writings are best considered as banal, bizarre, and outside the realm of academic respectability. However, since his writings have done much to influence American evangelicalism, it is both “exciting and challenging” to uncover the sources that would have influenced Darby and thus understand in greater detail the more modern forms of dispensationalism and, indirectly, the teaching of much of American evangelicalism.

systematic. This then was my methodology: to examine a large number of books extant prior to the time of Darby and to assemble the strands of thought that match Darby's. In short, I have read both Darby's writings plus pre-Darbyite works to form a coherent picture of the origin of his system of dispensationalism.

### The outcomes of the study

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, modern scholars had expressed radically different views of Darby's dispensationalism, especially on the question of its origins. There has been a strong tendency among non-dispensationalist scholars to accuse Darby of inventing his system, of creating it out of thin air. Clearly, those who charged him with novelty sought to discredit dispensationalism. Modern followers of Darby have argued the opposite: that he simply articulated a later version of a dispensational system that could be traced back to patristic times. Such an argument clearly attempted to establish historical and theological credibility for the movement, even as defenders found it necessary to modify it in light of more recent biblical scholarship and for the sake of greater clarity. My study will attempt to clarify these different perspectives. I will show that neither point is correct by presenting my "adaptive" view. Darby took earlier concepts and put his unique spin on his own system of dispensationalism.

### Darby: biography and lasting influence

John Nelson Darby was the youngest son of John Darby of Markley, Sussex, and Leap Castle, King's County, Ireland. He was born in London on 18 November 1800, educated at Westminster School and Trinity College, Dublin,<sup>8</sup> where he graduated with a B.A. in 1819 as gold medalist.<sup>9</sup> Darby died at Bournemouth on 29 April 1882.<sup>10</sup> Grayson Carter adds that his mother, Anne, was the daughter of the wealthy London merchant Samuel Vaughn and

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<sup>8</sup> I will expand on Darby's education and early Bible study meetings at Trinity College in the subsequent chapter.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, George, Leslie Stephen, Robert Blake, Christine S. Nicholls, and Edgar T. Williams. 1888. *The dictionary of national biography: from the earliest times to 1900 14 Damon - D'Eyncourt*. London u.a: Smith & Elder u.a., 43.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 44

that Darby's second name, Nelson, celebrated "... the arrival in England in the month of his birth of the great admiral under whom his uncle, Sir Henry D'Esterre Darby, served with distinction at the Battle of the Nile in 1798."<sup>11</sup> Other authors state that Darby was actually related to Lord Nelson: "It is not generally known that Mr. Darby was a nephew to the great Lord Nelson, and was said to possess the 'Nelson eye,'—the eye of a leader of men."<sup>12</sup> According to Frank Turner, "... John Nelson Darby [was] the son of well-to-do parents and godson to Lord Nelson . . ."<sup>13</sup> Hugh Partridge also notes that "Darby received his middle name from Admiral Lord Nelson."<sup>14</sup>

Darby came from a large family. He was the sixth son and eighth child.<sup>15</sup> After he graduated from Trinity College and after about a year's law practice, he abandoned law in favour of the church and was ordained as a deacon in the Church of Ireland in 1825 and as a priest in 1826. He ministered to his poor parishioners but became troubled over the direction that his church was taking, particularly with issues regarding Archbishop Magee. Darby records this period of his life:

As soon as I was ordained, I went amongst the poor Irish mountaineers in a wild and uncultivated district, where I remained two years and three months, working as best I could. I felt, however, that the style of work was not in agreement with what I read in the Bible concerning the church and Christianity; nor did it correspond with the effects of the action of the Spirit of God. These considerations pressed upon me from a scriptural and practical point of view; while seeking assiduously to fulfil the duties of the ministry confided to me, working day and night amongst the people, who were almost as wild as the mountains they inhabited. An accident happened which laid me aside for a time; my horse was frightened and had thrown me against a door-post. During my solitude conflicting thoughts increased; but much exercise of soul had the effect of causing the scriptures to gain complete ascendancy over me. I had always owned them to be the word of God. . . . The careful reading of the Acts afforded me a practical picture of

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<sup>11</sup> Carter, Grayson. 2001. *Anglican evangelicals: Protestant secessions from the via media, c. 1800-1850*. Oxford theological monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 210.

<sup>12</sup> *Prophetic News and Israel's Watchman, The*. January 1882. London: S. W. Partridge, 223.

<sup>13</sup> Turner, Frank M. 2002. *John Henry Newman: the challenge to evangelical religion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 48.

<sup>14</sup> Partridge, Christopher H. 2002. *Encyclopedia of new religions: New religious movements, sects and alternative spiritualities*. Oxford: Lion Hudson Plc., 35.

<sup>15</sup> Carter, Grayson. 2001. *Anglican evangelicals: Protestant secessions from the via media, c. 1800-1850*. Oxford theological monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 210.

the early church; which made me feel deeply the contrast with its actual present state; though still as ever beloved by God.<sup>16</sup>

As a result of a horse riding accident, Darby moved around on crutches for a while and was unable to attend any worship service. Apparently it was during this period that he began to formulate his ideas of the church.

It then became clear to me that the church of God, as He considers it, was composed only of those who were so united to Christ, whereas Christendom, as seen externally, was really the world, and could not be considered as “the church” . . .<sup>17</sup>

In 1825, Darby struck up a friendly relationship with others of like mind at Trinity College, and the ideas that he had begun to formulate during his convalescence bore fruit in the Bible studies that eventually led to the formation of the Plymouth Brethren.

The influence that Darby has exerted upon evangelicalism is profound. Richard Hughes provides the following insightful summary:

The life and work of conservative Protestant giants like Dwight L. Moody (1837-99) and Reuben A. Torrey (1856-1928) show the influence of Darby, as do also the ministries of Nathaniel West, William J. Erdman, James H. Brookes, Henry M. Parsons, Arthur T. Pierson, and many others. . . . Perhaps the most influential single force in millions of homes has been the Reference Bible prepared by one of Moody’s young followers: C. I. Scofield (1843-1921). By red-lettered passages and footnoted commentaries, the Reference Bible explains how the various texts appertain to the several periods (“dispensations”) of holy history. The Scofield Bible was published by Oxford University Press in 1909 and has been a best-seller ever since. . . . The popular influence of dispensationalism, which cuts across denominational lines, can be judged by the fact that Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* has sold over twenty million copies since 1970 and is still going strong. Every crisis in the Middle East launches a new flood of popular books on Bible prophecy.<sup>18</sup>

Darby’s lasting influence was developed in the crucible of the failed historicism of advent movements such as the Millerites.<sup>19</sup> Darby avoided date-

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<sup>16</sup> Darby, John Nelson. *My dear brother*, 297.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Hughes, Richard T. 1995. *The primitive church in the modern world*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 66-67.

<sup>19</sup> The Millerites were not the first to experience failed dates, especially for the years 1843 and 1844. Early historicism can be traced to the Fifth Monarchist Movement, circa July 4, 1653. William Miller’s 1844 prediction, according to Hiram Edson’s “vision,” was

setting and firmly placed apocalyptic fulfilment in the future. However, it is *how* this “fulfilment” would take place that clearly separated him from the historicists. Apocalyptic fulfilment for Darby and the futurists entailed the imminent Second Coming, but without a specific date or time. Fulfilment involved the “two peoples of God” and hence the need for the “secret rapture” to ensure that the church was removed so that God could continue his work with his earthly people, the Jewish nation. This eschatology was radically different from the historicist hermeneutic centered very much on the “one people of God,” the Church. In summary, Darby ushered in a new and radical way of thinking about the end of the world, a view that has modified the eschatological hermeneutic of an influential segment of American evangelicalism. It is the understanding of how he shaped his eschatology that makes his contribution so relevant to understanding his “system” today.

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fulfilled to the letter, with the exception that Christ did not come to earth, as expected, but entered the “heavenly sanctuary.” In other words, the date was correct but the hermeneutic was wrong. Correct or not, many members of the Millerite movement were incensed at the failed dates, thus providing fertile ground for the new Darbyite futurism, as the following comment illustrates: “Portland, November 10, 1843. To the people called Millerites:- This is to show that I am in want of help. I have been a believer, and spent all my money in promulgating the doctrine. I did as I thought would be for the best good of the cause; some of the brethren thought I was giving too fast, but *I did not*. The end of the world looked so near to me that I was afraid to have any money - so I got rid of it as fast as my wife would let me. She was opposed to my doing as I did, and is now at work in a Lowell Factory. She thinks that she should have some of the money back, which I gave away while *not in my right mind; and those that took it* thought I was not. . . . The end of the world has not come - *but the end of my money has come.*” Reuben H. Brown. *The Western Midnight Cry*. E. Jacobs, ed., Vol. II, No. 2. Cincinnati, December 16, 1843, 13.

## 2. The Premillennialist Revival: Origins, Leaders, and Groups

In this chapter I intend to discuss Darby's role in the formative years of the Plymouth Brethren, even while he was a cleric with the Church of Ireland. This will involve consideration of Dr. Magee's charge and its relationship to Darby's secession from the Established Church. I will then discuss the Albury and Powerscourt prophetic conferences, with an emphasis on the content and outcomes of these two seminal events, drawing conclusions from both.

There were three Albury conferences, in 1826, 1827, and 1828, and three Powerscourt conferences, in 1831, 1832, and 1833. A number of minor and subsequent conferences were not held at Lady Powerscourt's residence but at different venues. The Plymouth Brethren arose out of initial meetings in Dublin circa 1825, having been initiated by Anthony Norris Groves, brother-in-law to George Müller<sup>20</sup> and a personal friend of both John Nelson Darby and Edward Bickersteth.

### The Plymouth Brethren

In discussing the Plymouth Brethren, I will set out to establish that the roots of the movement can be located at Trinity College, Dublin in 1825, when Anthony Norris Groves, John Nelson Darby, and George Bellett gathered in the drawing room for an informal Bible study. Other key contributors, including Benjamin Wills Newton, will also be discussed. I will examine the revivalist and separatist doctrines of the Brethren, as they were later to be called.

In 1814, Anthony Norris Groves opened a dentist's office in Plymouth, shortly after graduating from studying chemistry and dentistry in London. He was now nineteen and successful in establishing a thriving dental practice. But dentistry occupied only part of Mr. Groves's attention. He showed a keen interest in the church and became an active participant in the local religious life. He developed strong Christian connections that would influence his life in the days ahead. Joseph Richards and a Mr. Hitchins were instrumental in

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<sup>20</sup> Also known as George Mueller.

bringing Groves into the church, and Miss Paget, a Christian lady, became a spiritual mother to him.<sup>21</sup> Edward Bickersteth developed into a trusted friend and close confidante who would visit Groves on regular occasions. In a letter addressed to William Caldecott—who was about to become a curate of the Church of England in Claybrook—Groves related the fact that Bickersteth had planned to visit him in a month’s time and that he, Groves, was looking forward to the meeting for an opportunity to establish his future.<sup>22</sup> The friendship with Bickersteth inspired Groves to develop a passion for a Christian ministry to the Jews. His first converts were a Mr. Alexander, a young man of about twenty-five years of age and a former Jewish rabbi, together with his wife. Groves was pleased to announce to Caldecott that, following a series of Bible studies together, they were being baptized that day, June 22, 1825.<sup>23</sup> In another letter dated January 21, 1826, Groves was pleased to inform Caldecott that two more Jews had been baptized on Christmas day and he hoped that they would become “members to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”<sup>24</sup>

In 1825, Groves at the age of thirty decided that the time had come for him to take holy orders, and with this in mind he entered Trinity College, Dublin to study further, with a view to eventually taking holy orders with the Established Church.<sup>25</sup> It wasn’t long before he had struck up an acquaintance with John Nelson Darby, who had begun studies at Trinity College at the age of fifteen and had graduated as a Classical Gold Medalist when little more than eighteen, in the summer of 1819.<sup>26</sup> He had trained as a barrister and was called to the bar in 1822, but it appears that he never practised this profession. Being a churchman, he found that his interest lay elsewhere, in bringing the light of God’s Word to a lost world.

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<sup>21</sup> Groves, Anthony Norris. 1869. *Memoir of Anthony Norris Groves, compiled chiefly from his journals and letters; to which is added a supplement, containing recollections of Miss Paget, and accounts of missionary work in India, etc.* London: James Nisbet, 3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 12, concerning a letter dated June, 22nd, 1825, to Mr. Caldicott.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>25</sup> *Littell’s Living Age*. Fifth Series, Volume LII. Boston: Littell and Co., 1885; 348.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*



Beginning in 1825, Darby and Groves, together with George Bellett, gathered in the drawing room at Trinity College to study God's Word, and the following account by Miss Paget suggests that this was possibly the start of a group that would later become the Plymouth Brethren.

Mr. Bellett, a dear friend of Mr. Groves, said to her [Miss Paget], "Groves has just been telling me, that it appeared to him from Scripture, that believers, meeting together as disciples of Christ, were free to break bread together, as their Lord had admonished them; and that, in as far as the practice of the apostles could guide, every Lord's day should be set apart for thus remembering the Lord's death, and obeying his parting command." This suggestion of Mr. Groves was immediately carried out by himself and his friends in Dublin. . . . This was the beginning of what has erroneously been termed, "Plymouth Brethrenism."<sup>27</sup>

George Bellett was the younger of two sons, born in Frederick Street, Dublin.<sup>28</sup> In 1821, he graduated from Trinity College, was ordained, and later became vicar of St. Leonard's Bridgnorth from 1835 to 1870.<sup>29</sup> Both George Bellett and his brother John Gifford Bellett were intimately acquainted with Sir Edward Denny, a keen expositor of biblical prophecy, and Edward Cronin, M. D.<sup>30</sup> Dr. Cronin was a homeopathic doctor who was born near Cork in 1801 and died on February 1, 1882.<sup>31</sup> His residence became the second meeting place following the initial gathering between Darby, Groves, and

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<sup>27</sup> Groves, Anthony Norris. 1869. *Memoir of Anthony Norris Groves, compiled chiefly from his journals and letters; to which is added a supplement, containing recollections of Miss Paget, and accounts of missionary work in India, etc.* London: James Nisbet, 38-39. Note: A similar account is to be found in Littell's *Living Age*, 348.

<sup>28</sup> Bellett, L. M., and J. G. Bellett. 1895. *Recollections of the late J.G. Bellett.* London: A.S. Rouse, n.p.

<sup>29</sup> Kirk, John Foster, and S. Austin Allibone. 1897. *A supplement to Allibone's Critical dictionary of English literature and British and American authors: containing over thirty-seven thousand articles (authors), and enumerating over ninety-three thousand titles.* Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 127.

<sup>30</sup> "Sept. 21. Dr. Cronin came home from an evening prayer-meeting just in time to draw his wheel-chair (which had been my mother's) into his room. . . . Soon after Dr. C. left my uncle [George Bellett] returned (he had gone home for Sunday) and Sir E. Denny came from London to see my dear father [John Gifford Bellett]. As they were both sitting with him he looked sweetly at my uncle, and said he should like not to have been so weak this evening that he might have talked a little. While Sir E. Denny sat opposite to him he said, 'I love to look at you,' and at parting threw his arms around his neck." Bellett, L. M., and J. G. Bellett. 1895. *Recollections of the late J.G. Bellett.* London: A. S. Rouse, n.p.

<sup>31</sup> *Homeopathic world: a monthly journal of medical, social, and sanitary science.* 1882. London: Homœopathic Pub. Co, 125-126.

Bellett at Trinity College. The narrative of this and subsequent meetings is as follows:

About 1827 an ex-Romanist, the late Edward Cronin gathered some sympathizers ultimately at his residence in Lower Pembroke Street, Dublin, for “breaking of bread” every Sunday morning. Shortly afterwards another company was formed, which Cronin joined, at 9 Fitzwilliam Square: in this group nucleus of the Brethren, the most prominent figure was the Rev. J. N. Darby.<sup>32</sup>

Dr. Cronin was formerly of the Roman Catholic persuasion but converted to the Protestant faith, as narrated in his obituary.

Dr. Cronin was brought up in the Roman Catholic Church, but left it and became a Protestant. About the year 1829 he became acquainted with the Honourable John Parnell, now Lord Congleton, and Mr. Frank Newman, better known to the world as Professor Newman, and Dr. Kitto. These gentlemen, and the subject of this notice, were much dissatisfied with the then existing state of things in the Established Church, and hence separated from it, and met together to study the Scriptures. Thus began the body of Christians now generally known as the Brethren, or the Plymouth Brethren.<sup>33</sup>

On October 10, 1826, Dr. Magee, Archbishop of Dublin, delivered a Charge at his Triennial and Metropolitan Visitation in St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Dublin.<sup>34</sup> Darby was particularly incensed with the Archbishop’s Erastian<sup>35</sup> tone, and this prompted him to respond vigorously to the charge, embarking on a publishing endeavour that would become a lifelong enterprise. His first

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<sup>32</sup> Herzog, J. J., Philip Schaff, and Samuel Macauley Jackson. 1889. *A Religious encyclopaedia: or dictionary of Biblical, historical, doctrinal, and practical theology. Based on the Real-Encyklopädie of Herzog, Plitt, and Hauck*. New York: Christian Literature Co. Vol. III: 1856.

<sup>33</sup> *Homeopathic World*, 125.

<sup>34</sup> Daunt, William J. O’Neill. 1844. *Saints and Sinners: a tale of modern times*. Dublin: J. Duffy. Note: The “charge” referred to has reference to: A Charge delivered at his Triennial and Metropolitan Visitation in St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Dublin, in Oct. 1826. By William Magee D. D. &c. Archbishop of Dublin. *The British Critic Quarterly Theological Review*. Vol. II. London: C. & J. Rivington, 1827, 131: “In his episcopal charge of 1826, Magee dismissed with contempt the notion that a religious establishment possessed any interest distinct from the State as ‘a sort of incorporated craft, seeking its own ends through the power of its temporal associate.’ He decried the claim that religion was a concern between the individual and his God . . . The bold Erastian claims contained in Magee’s episcopal charge outraged Darby, who believed that the archbishop had failed to address the historical origins and political traditions of Anglicanism, and had opened the door for unwarranted State intrusion.” Carter, Grayson. 2001. *Anglican evangelicals: Protestant secessions from the via media, c. 1800-1850*. Oxford theological monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 212.

<sup>35</sup> The view that the State is supreme over ecclesiastical affairs.

unpublished work, written in 1827 and entitled *Considerations addressed to the Archbishop of Dublin and the Clergy, who signed the petition to the House of Commons for Protection*, was sent privately to the Archbishop and clergy. The issues raised in Magee's charge and Darby's reaction to the charge are important if we are to understand why Darby eventually resigned from the Church of Ireland, becoming a major functionary in the formation of the Plymouth Brethren. The importance of Magee's charge and the response by Darby are both central to an understanding of the formation of the Plymouth Brethren, and this will subsequently be treated in greater detail. In 1828, Darby, again prompted by Magee's charge, published a pamphlet entitled *Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ*. The result of this tract was that it "disturbed many minds in the Protestant churches, and swelled the Brethren's ranks; so that in 1830 a public 'assembly' was started in Aungier Street, Dublin."<sup>36</sup>

George Russell discusses the move from the small house churches to Aungier Street.

John Parnell, afterwards second Lord Congleton, played an important part among the Brethren. He had transferred the religious gatherings in which Bread was broken from a private house to "a large auction-room in Aungier Street, Dublin and by 1830 this meeting had become the recognized centre of the movement. . . . 1830 may be taken as the year from which Brethrenism, as a permanent institution dates."<sup>37</sup>

John Parnell had joined the Brethren in 1829, establishing the meeting room in Aungier Street a year later in May 1830.<sup>38</sup> Hence, what Darby had discussed in his 1828 tract<sup>39</sup> about establishing a visible union of believers and what Groves had posited in 1825, that believers in Christ were free to break bread together as their Lord had admonished them, had been realized in the founding

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<sup>36</sup> Herzog, J. J., Philip Schaff, and Samuel Macauley Jackson. 1889. *A Religious encyclopaedia: or dictionary of Biblical, historical, doctrinal, and practical theology. Based on the Real-Encyklopädie of Herzog, Plitt, and Hauck*. New York: Christian Literature Co., III:1856.

<sup>37</sup> Russell, George William Erskine. 1903. *The household of faith: portraits and essays*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 258.

<sup>38</sup> Smith, George, Leslie Stephen, Robert Blake, Christine S. Nicholls, and Edgar T. Williams. 1895. *The dictionary of national biography: from the earliest times to 1900* 43 Owens - Passellewe. London u.a: Smith & Elder u.a., 345.

<sup>39</sup> *Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ*.

of the Aungier Street institution.<sup>40</sup> The sacrament of the Lord's Supper as a common rite among all true Christians, together with the preaching of the gospel and the separating out from apostasy, would become hallmarks of this emerging church named the Plymouth Brethren.

Groves hardly found time to be with the early Brethren at Aungier Street. On Friday, June 12, 1829, just one month after opening the meeting hall, Groves, together with John Parnell and others, set sail for St. Petersburg aboard Parnell's yacht, the *Osprey*. They reached their destination on July 9, and while Parnell returned with his boat back to England, Groves pressed on to reach Baghdad, where he began the Plymouth Brethren's first foreign mission.<sup>41</sup> Less than a year later, on September 18, 1830, a second party left Dublin by steamer to join Groves in Baghdad. That party consisted of Mr. Parnell, "Mr. Cronin, Mrs. Cronin (mother of the former), and her daughter Miss Nancy Cronin, and Mr. F. W. Newman (now known as Emeritus Professor), together with a Mr. Hamilton [who] returned to England before reaching Bagdad [*sic*]." <sup>42</sup>

With representation in both Dublin and Baghdad, the Brethren were now ready to establish a mission on British soil. This was achieved by J. N. Darby making contact with Benjamin Wills Newton in Oxford.

To promulgate his views, Darby in 1830 visited Paris, afterwards Cambridge and Oxford. At the last place he met with B. W. Newton, at whose request he went to Plymouth. "On arriving," Darby writes, "I found in the house Capt. Hall, who was already preaching in the villages. We had reading-meetings, and ere long began to break bread." Their first meeting-place was called "Providence Chapel;" the Brethren, accordingly, "Providence People;" but, preaching in country places, they were spoken of as "Brethren from Plymouth;" hence elsewhere, "Plymouth Brethren." The largest number ever in regular communion at Plymouth was a thousand or less. Amongst those that here embraced the "testimony" was the late S. P. Tregelles.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> "Accordingly, the outward symbol and instrument of unity is this partaking of the Lord's Supper. . ." Groves, Henry Charles. 1884. *Memoir of Lord Congleton*. London: John F. Shaw & Co., 16.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>43</sup> Herzog, J. J., Philip Schaff, and Samuel Macauley Jackson. 1889. *A Religious encyclopaedia: or dictionary of Biblical, historical, doctrinal, and practical theology*.

The question over who founded the Plymouth Brethren is commonly raised. When B. W. Newton invited Darby to the Providence Chapel, there were a sizable number of members in the congregation. This may have been an independent congregation or part of a larger brotherhood, since there were other Providence Chapels which were fairly well established at this time. The Rev. William Huntington was a minister of the Gospel at Providence Chapel, Gray's Inn Road, London, as recorded in his book dated 1814.<sup>44</sup> Previously he was minister at Providence Chapel, Little Tichfield Street and the City Chapel, both in London. He records two other Providence Chapels, at Monkwell Street and Richmond Surrey.<sup>45</sup> John Ashton comments on the Rev. Huntington: "Though self-styled as William Huntington, his proper name was Hunt and the S. S. after his name referred to 'sinner saved' as he liked to call himself.<sup>46</sup> He was a revivalist preacher."<sup>47</sup> The first Providence Chapel was built by Rev. Huntington in 1788 in Margaret Street, London,<sup>48</sup> followed by the chapel in Gray's Inn Road.<sup>49</sup> It is uncertain whether or not the Huntington's chapel was connected with that in Plymouth, or whether members from London also set up a similar chapel in Plymouth. We do know that they both bore the name of Providence Chapel.

The Providence Chapel in Plymouth was built in 1831, as recorded by Timothy Stunt:

When, later in the same year, the enthusiastic George Wigram, who had just returned from Ireland, arrived in Plymouth at Newton's invitation, he soon began work with Hall. Early in December 1831, Wigram, for whom it will be recalled, there were few financial

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*Based on the Real-Encyklopädie of Herzog, Plitt, and Hauck. New York: Christian Literature Co., III:1856.*

<sup>44</sup> Huntington, William. 1813. *Gleanings on the Vintage; or Letters to the spiritual edification of the Church of Christ*. Part VI. London: Huntington.

<sup>45</sup> Huntington, William. 1808. *The law established by the faith of Christ, a sermon preached at Providence Chapel on January 1, 1786*. London: Printed by T. Bensley.

<sup>46</sup> "As I cannot get a D.D. for want of cash, neither can I get an M.A. for want of learning, therefore I am compelled to fly for refuge to S.S., by which I mean Sinner Saved." Statement by Rev. Huntington. Royal Numismatic Society (Great Britain). 1892. *The numismatic chronicle and journal of the Royal Numismatic Society*. London: B. Quaritch, 318.

<sup>47</sup> Ashton, John. 1890. *Social England under the regency*: Ward and Downey, 175.

<sup>48</sup> Also given as Tichfield Street, Oxford Market, which in 1810 was burned to the ground. Royal Numismatic Society (Great Britain). 1892. *The numismatic chronicle and journal of the Royal Numismatic Society*. London: B. Quaritch, 318.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

restraints, bought for £750 the recently completed Providence Chapel in Raleigh Street, and a week later the building was licensed for public worship.<sup>50</sup>

According to Stunt, “Newton recalled that for ‘the first few weeks (three I think) it [Providence Chapel] was used, on Mondays, but that on Sundays he and Darby attended, somewhat irregularly, Established places of worship.”<sup>51</sup> This would accord with Darby’s account: “By invitation I went to Plymouth to preach. My habit was to preach wherever people wished, whether in buildings or in private houses. More than once, even with ministers of the national church, we have broken bread on Monday evening after meetings for christian [sic] edification . . . Some months afterwards we began to do so on Sunday morning, making use of the same liberty, only adding the Lord’s supper . . .”<sup>52</sup> According to Darby, Anglican ministers (of the Established Church) were present at the Lord’s Supper on Monday nights.<sup>53</sup>

Darby records his sentiments from this period: “. . . and at Plymouth; there you should stay. I feel daily more the importance of the Christians at P.”<sup>54</sup> Writing from Dublin on July 24, 1834, Darby notes: “The Lord has shewn me many pleasant services; still, the opening out to so much brotherly kindness, and love, and fellowship was, I believe, first at P; and my heart continually turns there with the fondest recollection of it, though a better place is still before us.”<sup>55</sup>

What does appear highly likely is that Darby found an already independent Providence Chapel congregation at Plymouth and became

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<sup>50</sup> Stunt, Timothy C. F. 2000. *From awakening to secession: radical evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain, 1815-35*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 290. Note: The author cites: Embley, ‘Early Development’, 219, with the following comment: “The chapel had been built in early 1831 for the growing congregation of an independent minister, Mr. Cawcott, but, possibly owing to his death, had been put up for sale (*Plymouth and Devonport Weekly Journal* (20 Jan., 3 Feb. 1831). Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 292.

<sup>52</sup> Darby. *My Dear Brother*, 304.

<sup>53</sup> “. . . there is no reason to question Darby’s claim that Anglican ministers took part in their meetings. Indeed an important element in the aspirations of the reluctant seceders was the hope that they could establish a supra-denominational fellowship which would give some visible recognition to an evangelical unity which transcended their ecclesiastical labels.” Stunt, Timothy C. F. 2000. *From awakening to secession: radical evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain, 1815-35*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 292.

<sup>54</sup> Darby. *Dearest brethren and sisters at Plymouth*, 18.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 24. Note: P. is Darby’s shorthand for Plymouth.

accepted as one of the leaders, bringing into the congregation those teachings that had been formulated at Trinity College, Dublin, in 1825. Thus the Providence Chapel, Plymouth effectively became an extension of Aungier Street, Dublin. This view finds support in this comment by Robert Howard:

The “Brethren,” . . . as they preferred to be called, existed as a society first at Dublin, and then at Plymouth, between the years 1820 and 1830. They were known for a long time, from the fact of their meetings at Providence Chapel in this latter town, as “Plymouth Brethren.” . . . But the principal founder of the “Brethren,” as a select group, was a clergyman who had been a barrister, by name Darby.<sup>56</sup>

#### Dr. Magee’s Charge

John Nelson Darby addressed his issue concerning Dr. Magee’s Charge in a letter dated 1827, sent privately to the Archbishop and clergy. The letter was not published but was made available thirty-eight years later by Darby, under the title, “*Considerations addressed to the Archbishop of Dublin and the Clergy who signed the petition to the House of Commons.*” Darby’s central argument in this letter was that Magee’s Charge, given at his Triennial and Metropolitan Visitation in St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Dublin, on October 10, 1826, amounted to a clear case of Erastianism. A secondary argument, while not related, should be considered if we are to understand Darby’s notion of the Established Church: it involved an attack upon Magee over the authority to translate Scripture.

The charge of Erastianism is quoted by Darby directly from Magee’s Charge, as follows: “The Sovereign cannot prescribe in favour of a system that maintains a spiritual supremacy independent of the civil government.”<sup>57</sup> Darby responded that the church was not a department of the State; consequently, the clergy were not civil servants beholden to the State but were answerable directly to the risen Christ and therefore had supremacy independent of the civil government. Darby is emphatic in his reply to Magee’s assertion:

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<sup>56</sup> Howard, R. J. 1885. *The Church of England and other religious communions : a course of lectures delivered at the parish church of Clapham*. London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, 131.

<sup>57</sup> Darby, John Nelson. *Considerations addressed to the Archbishop of Dublin and the Clergy who signed the petition to the House of Common*. n.p., n.d., 7. Note: This has reference to pp. 29, 30 of Magee’s Charge.

There is a spiritual supremacy independent of civil government, the spiritual supremacy of Christ, of which the Clergy are ministers - not an earthly dominion, but the very contrary. But when our Lord was brought before Pilate and charged with being a king, He did not affirm the harmlessness of His religion, by stating its amalgamation of interests with the State, or that it was merely “another aspect of the same body,” but unqualifiedly assented to the position “witnessed a good confession,” that it *was* a king, but not of this world. The statement of the Charge is in plain hostility to the view of our Lord . . .<sup>58</sup>

It has been suggested that Darby took issue with the “impending emancipation of the Roman Catholics.”<sup>59</sup> It appears that an issue regarding Roman Catholicism was central to the Charge being given in the first place, but whether the word “emancipation” is the right word is debatable. Trying to understand the Charge from Darby’s somewhat convoluted letter of reply is far from easy but can be construed from the following events.

Archbishop Magee sensed a growing encroachment of Roman Catholicism in Ireland. This much can be understood by Darby’s remark that “Roman Catholics were becoming Protestants at the rate of 600 to 800 a week. The Archbishop [Magee] imposed, within the limits of his jurisdiction, the oaths of allegiance and supremacy; and the work instantly ceased.”<sup>60</sup> Magee’s imposition of the Act of Supremacy upon converted Catholics appears to have been a cautionary measure fully in line with his Charge in that the Papacy was indeed a “spiritual supremacy independent of the State.” Therefore, while the State was free to choose between Protestantism and Catholicism, according to Magee, only the former is the correct choice, since to choose the latter amounts to the State giving spiritual power to an ecclesiastical body that sees itself above and separate from the State.<sup>61</sup> But in effect this was Darby’s whole argument—that the church should not be answerable to any state, only to Christ.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> *Contemporary Review, The*. Volume XLVIII, July-December, 1885. London: Isbister and Company, 1885, 537.

<sup>60</sup> Darby, *Considerations addressed to the Archbishop of Dublin and the Clergy*, 1.

<sup>61</sup> “It amounts to a claim on behalf of the Established Church to protection from the civil Sovereign, founded on these two position - that the civil Sovereign is bound and has accordingly the right to choose the best religion for his people, and that the Established Church has every character on which such a choice ought to depend.” Darby, *Considerations addressed to the Archbishop of Dublin and the Clergy*, 4.



A secondary argument by Darby equates Magee's right to interpret Scripture with that of Roman Catholicism.

The Sermon of the Archbishop, as reported, speaks of "the scriptures as rightly interpreted." This, I conceive, is an unperceived acquiescence in Popery; for if there must be an interpreter, he must, if anything, be an authorised one; which is Popery. The assertion of an interpreter is exactly contrary to the testimony of the Spirit, manifested in scripture and asserted by Protestantism . . .<sup>62</sup>

Darby's response to Magee's charge is highly problematical in that Darby charged Archbishop Magee with Erastianism while being a priest under Magee's jurisdiction. When Darby was initially presented with a copy of the charge, he dismissed it as being unimportant.<sup>63</sup> That Darby can state the charge to be "unimportant" yet secede from the Church of Ireland a few years later in order to be a functionary with the emerging Plymouth Brethren highlights his highly convoluted ecclesiology.

The reaction to Magee's charge reflects more of Darby's own mindset of being highly confused and a reactionary against authority. This goes a long way to understanding that, while Darby was incensed at Magee for being an authority in the interpretation of Scripture (a charge he labelled as popery), he too saw himself as an authority on Scripture, particularly with those in disagreement with him.

The problem with Darby's response to the charge can be traced back to his studies at Trinity College, Dublin, where he trained as a lawyer. As such, he was patently aware of the nature of "Establishment and the Supremacy Act." The nature of church establishment had been documented in a work published in 1597 by Richard Hooker, entitled, *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*.<sup>64</sup> Darby was acutely aware of Hooker's work, citing him often. "But

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>63</sup> "The Archbishop (Magee) imposed within the limits of his jurisdiction, the oaths of allegiance and supremacy . . . I remember Mr. R. Daly, since a prelate of the Establishment, saying to me after receiving it, You ought to become a Dissenter. I said, No; you have got into the wrong, and you want me there but that you will not do. I attach no importance to the paper, which I have never read since . . ." Ibid., 2.

<sup>64</sup> "The same conformity is not less opposite unto reason first - , inasmuch as contraries must be cured by their contraries, and therefore Popery being Antichristianity, is not healed but by establishment of orders thereunto opposite." "A declaration of the proceedings of the Church of England for the establishment of things as they are." Hooker, Richard. 1888. *The laws of ecclesiastical polity, books I-IV*. London: G. Routledge, pp. 239, 231.

we are told of absolute law, and referred to Hooker. Hooker, as is known, pleaded the cause of Episcopalian Establishment against Travers . . .”<sup>65</sup> Darby, however, did not agree with Hooker. In reference to the authority of Scripture, he comments that “Hooker uses them to vindicate those things in the English Establishment, for which there is no warrant in scripture . . . but the doctrine of Hooker is low and dangerous.”<sup>66</sup> “I have read some of Hooker, too; but (he was) one whose mind rested in human order, and not on scripture, but a reverend, godly man; but while a standard work with the clergy it is really intrinsically not worth reading.”<sup>67</sup> Darby’s *Collected Writings* were written much later than Magee’s charge and it could be argued that his reading of Hooker was also much later. However, it is hard to conceive, from a reading of Darby, how he could have had such an intimate knowledge of *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* and at the same time find him “low and dangerous and not worth reading.” It appears more plausible that Darby had read Hooker while at Trinity College as required reading. In any case, it reveals a sinister side of Darby as a person who had a problem with authority and was willing to excommunicate those in disagreement with him. It also portrays a person with a troubled mind who, while fully aware of the nature of Establishment, consented to becoming a priest under Magee only to secede a short time later to form the Plymouth Brethren.

The response by Darby to Archbishop Magee’s Charge, together with the challenge that Magee himself claimed to be the authority to interpret Scripture, may provide an answer to the question as to why Darby, being deeply religious, gave up a law profession to take holy orders with the Church of Ireland, only to leave shortly thereafter to help form a separatist movement, the Plymouth Brethren.<sup>68</sup> This raises the issue regarding Darby’s involvement

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<sup>65</sup> Darby, John Nelson. *Collected Writings*, vol. 10: *Doctrinal No.3*, 99.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, *My Dear Brother*, 70.

<sup>68</sup> Note: Henry Groves gives a fuller explanation with the following regarding a letter written by J. G. Bellett: “He [Bellett] mentions how, in 1827, a charge given by the then Archbishop of Dublin to his clergy had stirred up the mind of the then curate of Enniskerry, J. N. Darby, leading him to write a pamphlet condemning the principles contained in the charge. This charge gave a great shock to Mr. D’s opinions in regards to the Establishment, for of him Mr. B. says, ‘I remember him at one time a very exact clergyman.’ But it is this very exactness that characterises an honest mind, that holds what

with the Established Church while at the same time facilitating the formation of a separatist movement. To address this issue, I now turn to Darby and his relationship with the Established Church.

### Darby's relationship with the Established Church

A question arises concerning J. N. Darby being on the one hand an ordained minister of the Church of Ireland, having been ordained deacon in 1825 “and in February, 1826, priest, by the celebrated Dr. Magee, Archbishop of Dublin . . .”<sup>69</sup> while on the other hand he was meeting with Groves and Bellett at Trinity College in 1825, meetings that would eventually result in the formation of a separatist movement. Grayson Carter provides a further understanding of Darby's somewhat convoluted ecclesiology with the following narrative:

During his legal studies in 1820 or 1821, Darby passed through some kind of religious conversion. Against his father's wishes, he then abandoned the law in order to prepare for a career in the Church. He was ordained in August 1825 to serve as curate in the parish of Calary, near Enniskery, County Wicklow. In December of the following year he was injured in a riding accident. While convalescing at the home of his sister, Susanah Pennefather, he underwent something akin to a second spiritual conversion, experiencing (as he later referred to it) a ‘deliverance from bondage’ and a powerful sense of the reality of his ‘union with Christ.’<sup>70</sup>

Shortly after the publication of Darby's tract,<sup>71</sup> rumours began to circulate that he might be on the verge of seceding from the Church. Later that same year, he simply resigned from his curacy without formally seceding, while continuing to wear his clerical robes and engaging in both Anglican and non-Anglican ministry. When a puzzled Robert Daly inquired of him: ‘Well, John, have you left us: what church have you joined?’, he received a characteristic reply: ‘None whatever; I have nothing to do with the Dissenters, and am as yet my own church.’ Darby made it clear to one and all that he had neither resigned his holy orders nor abandoned the practical care of

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it holds tenaciously, and when it can no longer do that, it gives up.” Groves, Henry Charles. 1884. *Memoir of Lord Congleton*. London: John F. Shaw & Co, 13. Note: “Mr. D” refers to Darby and “Mr. B” refers to Bellett.

<sup>69</sup> *Littell's Living Age*, 345.

<sup>70</sup> Carter, Grayson. 2001. *Anglican evangelicals: Protestant secessions from the via media, c. 1800-1850*. Oxford theological monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press., 211. Note: Carter gives further information on the Pennefathers as follows: “The Pennfathers lived at Temple Carig, Delgany, Co. Wicklow and at 20 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin.” *Ibid*.

<sup>71</sup> *Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ* (1828).

souls. Like Wesley a century earlier, he had taken the world as his parish. Initially, it appears that Darby was reluctant to join those, like Groves and Bellett, who began ‘breaking bread’ informally, either in Dublin or in Plymouth. . . . The question of whether Darby ever formally seceded from the Church (and, if so when) remains unanswered. His rather anomalous relationship with the Irish Establishment seems to have continued until 1832, when the introduction of a new system of education brought about something close to a complete rupture between the two.<sup>72</sup>

If we take the initial Bible study meetings between Darby, Groves, and Bellett in 1825 to be beginnings of the Plymouth Brethren, then we are left with the following historical narrative. In 1825, the Plymouth Brethren meetings began at Trinity College. On August 7, 1825, Darby was ordained a deacon and on February 19, 1826, a priest. In October 1826, Archbishop William Magee gave his Charge that was to arouse hostility with Darby and his response by letter both to the Archbishop and clergy. Meetings began in 1827 to “break bread” at Dr. Edward Cronin’s house in Lower Pembroke Road, to be followed by those at 9 Fitzwilliam Square, which was in close proximity to Darby’s sister, Susannah Pennefather, living at 20 Fitzwilliam Square. In 1827, Darby wrote an unpublished letter to the Archbishop and clergy in response to the Archbishop’s Charge. In 1828, Darby published his first pamphlet entitled, *Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ*. In May 1829, the Aungier Street institution was established.

The question “When did J. N. Darby resign as a curate of the Church of Ireland?” has provided fertile ground for many an active imagination. A number of sources give the date as 1827. An encyclopaedic entry records the following: “In 1827 John Darby resigned his charge and in 1828 adopted the non-conformist attitude of the men listed above,<sup>73</sup> prompted by the Erastianism of a petition by Archbishop Magee . . .”<sup>74</sup> *The Churchman’s Guide* supports this date: “J. N. Darby, who, resigning his curacy, in 1827

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<sup>72</sup> Carter, Grayson. 2001. *Anglican evangelicals: Protestant secessions from the via media, c. 1800-1850*. Oxford theological monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press., 215-216.

<sup>73</sup> Anthony Norris Groves, John Vessey Parnall (second Lord Congleton), and John Gifford Bellett.

<sup>74</sup> *The new Schaff-Herzog encyclopedia of religious knowledge* 12. 1912. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 95.

. . .”<sup>75</sup> The Rev. Thomas Croskery, who had written a monumental work on the Plymouth Brethren<sup>76</sup> and thus possessed a reasonable knowledge of the Brethren, gave a date circa 1830. “It was about the year 1830 when Darby resigned his curacy to become the leader of a new movement outside of all churches.”<sup>77</sup> Floyd Elmore favours the year 1831. “By 1831, he had left the Church of England and had joined others in Plymouth, England.”<sup>78</sup> A later date of 1833 had also been proposed, but the accuracy has to be questioned when the writer, T. Escott, provided the wrong initials for Darby. “In 1833, an English clergyman at Plymouth, J. L. Darby, left the National Church and founded the sect of ‘Brethren’, who take their name from the Western seaport where he had officiated.”<sup>79</sup>

The one available authoritative source is Lord Congleton (John Parnell), who was intimately associated with the Brethren and who facilitated the first Plymouth Brethren’s overseas mission in Baghdad. Henry Groves quotes John Parnell as follows: “In the close of 1828 . . . while I [Parnell] was still going to Sanford Chapel, and J. N. Darby was still in County Wicklow as a clergyman. . . .”<sup>80</sup> If Darby was still a clergyman in late 1828, as Parnell suggests, then there is every good reason to place the date when Darby left the Church of Ireland circa 1829 to 1830, and the latter date given by Thomas Croskery appears to be the most probable. In the final analysis, Grayson Carter’s assertion that the question of when Darby left the Established Church bears merit, the question “remains unanswered.” Carter concludes his synopsis of Darby with the following account:

Though for some time Darby continued to regard the Established Church as an effective prophylactic against popery, the rise of the Oxford Movement convinced him that Anglicanism had become for

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<sup>75</sup> Reynolds, Arthur. 1912. *The churchman's guide: a handbook for all persons, whether clerical or lay, who require a work of reference on questions of church law or ecclesiology*. New York: Longmans, Green, 252.

<sup>76</sup> Croskery, Thomas. 1879. *Plymouth-Brethrenism; a refutation of its principles and doctrines*. London: W. Mullan.

<sup>77</sup> Croskery, Thomas. 1882. “John Nelson Darby” In *The Catholic Presbyterian*, W. G. Blaikie, ed. London: James Nisbet & Co., 441.

<sup>78</sup> Floyd Elmore. “Darby, John Nelson.” *Dictionary of premillennial theology*, 1997, Mal Couch ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 82.

<sup>79</sup> Escott, T. H. S. 1897. *Social transformations of the Victorian age: a survey of court and country*. New York: C. Scribner's, 404.

<sup>80</sup> Groves, Henry Charles. 1884. *Memoir of Lord Congleton*. London: John F. Shaw & Co, 15.

many the road *to* Rome instead of the road *from* Rome.<sup>81</sup> Despite these various protestations, there is no evidence that Darby ever renounced his Anglican orders or formally seceded. In April 1832, the Plymouth papers were still referring to him as ‘the Revd Mr Darby’. In the following year, Darby admitted that he was still ‘no enemy to episcopacy abstractedly, if it be real and done from the Lord’.<sup>82</sup> During 1834 Bellett claimed that he had by now become ‘*all but detached* from the Church of England’.<sup>83</sup>

### The ecclesiology of the Plymouth Brethren

In discussing the ecclesiology of the Plymouth Brethren, we will consider those doctrines held in general by the Plymouth Brethren in their formative years. This will prove useful in our attempt to determine Darby’s ecclesiology, the degree to which his belief system was adopted by the Plymouth Brethren, and furthermore how much was original to Darby. The section will examine the Brethren movement under the following categories: The Brethren and the nature of the church, The Brethren and the mission of Christ, The Brethren and soteriology, The Brethren and the work of the Holy Spirit, and The Brethren and eschatology.

#### *The nature of the church*

According to James Grant, an acquaintance of Edward Irving,<sup>84</sup> the Plymouth Brethren were exclusive with regard to the church. Grant has very few good words to say regarding the Brethren as a whole and commented on the “persecuting spirit of the Darby section . . . [and that] The Plymouth Brethren have no feeling whatever, either of humanity or justice . . .”<sup>85</sup> Grant then affirmed that the group “recognizes no other denomination, whether the Church of England, or either of the Nonconformist denominations, as a Church of Christ.”<sup>86</sup> Thomas Croskery provides further insight into the

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<sup>81</sup> Darby, ‘The Notion of a Clergyman’, CW i.36-51.

<sup>82</sup> *Letters of John Nelson Darby*, ed. J. A. Trench, i.17.

<sup>83</sup> Carter, Grayson. 2001. *Anglican evangelicals: Protestant secessions from the via media, c. 1800-1850*. Oxford theological monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 217. Authors note: See Embley, ‘The Origins and Early Development of the Plymouth Brethren’. 66 (italics added).

<sup>84</sup> “It was my privilege to be personally acquainted with Mr. Irving . . .” Grant, James. 1875. *The Plymouth Brethren: their history and heresies*. London: William Macintosh, 1.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* Note: Grant further discusses Darby’s personal view: “Mr. Darby has again and again said in print, as well as written in private, that those who belong to his party in the

exclusivist nature of the Brethren in his reference to the “unity of the church.” “The Brethren hold that they—and they only—are gathered simply as members of the one body, without respect to the distinctions which prevail among the sects. . . . They say the churches have no divine unity. The unity of the Anglican Establishment is the unity of the creed; the unity of Dissent is a unity of difference . . .”<sup>87</sup> Croskery also discusses the Brethren’s view of the invisible nature of the church as God sees it and the visible nature of the church as man sees it and the fact that these are not two churches, but one.<sup>88</sup> William Blair Neatby observes that the claims that “they alone were the exclusive visible church” were repudiated by the Darbyite leaders.<sup>89</sup> However, the author then qualifies that statement with the following insightful remark:

The credit that we might be disposed to give to Darbyism for its moderation in not claiming to constitute *the* Church of God on earth must be seriously qualified by the extraordinary circumstance that it claimed the power to exclude from the Church of God by excluding from its own ranks. The theory was that any acknowledged Christian, though he had nothing to do with the Brethren, was inside the Church of God; but that the Brethren had the disciplinary power of the Church of God committed to them because they alone met “on Scriptural ground.” Consequently, any person on whom they pronounced sentence of excommunication was by that act cast forth outside the Church of God on earth.<sup>90</sup>

That Darby was familiar with both discipline and excommunication is evident in his writings:

2 Thessalonians 3, like 2 Timothy 3, does not contemplate church discipline, but private duty. If no one else so acted I ought. The Church might for a time, neglect its duty, be in so low estate to carry it out; but I am to act on the Apostle’s precept if it be so. I add excommunication by the church is not the only discipline exercised, towards saints.<sup>91</sup>

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metropolis constitute the only Church of Christ in London. In fact, the Plymouth Brethren are as intolerant as Popery itself. They will have no communion with any but those who belong to their own body.”

<sup>87</sup> Croskery, Thomas. 1879. *Plymouth-Brethrenism; a refutation of its principles and doctrines*. London: W. Mullan, 24.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>89</sup> Neatby, William Blair. 1901. *A history of the Plymouth Brethren*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 99.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 99-100.

<sup>91</sup> Darby, John Nelson. *Collected Writings*. Vol. 13c. Critical, 373.

W. B. Neatby discusses Darby's method of discipline and excommunication that in the 1860s was meted out from a Central Meeting held in London, remarking that discipline and excommunication were related to his thesis of the "church in ruins."<sup>92</sup> It was at these meetings that considerable discipline was exercised on those in disagreement with Darby. "In 1860 the Priory meeting in Islington . . . excommunicated Alexander Stewart, a former minister of a Presbyterian Church and a man of considerable pulpit gifts. The ostensible ground of excommunication was that Stewart had 'grievously violated the Lord's presence at His table . . .'"<sup>93</sup> Because a Mr. Spurr was a member of an excommunicated church in Sheffield, Darby "would not so much eat with a man who remained contumacious in the presence of the fiat of his Central Committee."<sup>94</sup>

A central figure in the Plymouth Brethren who was deeply influenced by Darby was Charles Henry Mackintosh.<sup>95</sup> He has been described as one of the best of Plymouth Brethren writers<sup>96</sup> and one of the best known leaders.<sup>97</sup> He discussed the "ruin of the professing church"<sup>98</sup> and the corollary that God had an assembly on the earth, namely, the Plymouth Brethren. For Mackintosh the answer was simple: flee the church in ruins and become a member of the Plymouth Brethren. "Why should the regenerated seek any ground beyond, or different to, that of the Assembly of God? Is not that sufficient? Assuredly. Should they rest satisfied with aught else? Assuredly not. We repeat, with emphasis, *'Either that or nothing.'*"<sup>99</sup> Rev. Field Flowers Goe, Rector of St. Georges, Bloomsbury, London, puts it more bluntly: "Whither, then, shall I

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<sup>92</sup> Neatby, William Blair. 1901. *A history of the Plymouth Brethren*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 109.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 110. Note: A letter referencing the disciple with Mr. Spurr is lodged at Ryland's Library under the following: 4472 DARBY (John Nelson) 93 1 discipline enacted in London, with replies on behalf of Sheffield brethren. Sheffield, S.W.Spurr, (1866). 36p. 8.5". (G59879) ELLIS (Benjamin) A T CBA DISCIPLINE ENACTED IN LO93 1.

<sup>95</sup> Grant maintained that Mackintosh was Darby's disciple. Grant, James. 1875. *The Plymouth Brethren: their history and heresies*. London: William Macintosh, 48.

<sup>96</sup> *Notes and Queries: Literary Men, General Readers, Etc.* London: John C. Francis, 1905, 97.

<sup>97</sup> Rogers, J. Guinness. 1881. *The church systems of England in the nineteenth century. The sixth Congregational Union lecture*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 518.

<sup>98</sup> Mackintosh, Charles Henry. 1900. *The assembly of God: or the all-sufficiency of the name of Jesus*. Treasury of truth, no. 121. New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 11.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.



fly?’ asks the distracted and terrified occupant of some chamber in Christendom, as he gazes through Plymouth spectacles at its rent walls and tottering gables. ‘Whither shall I fly?’<sup>100</sup>

Both Neatby and Mackintosh have raised the issue of the “ruin of the professing church,” a subject that will be discussed subsequently. It is sufficient to note that the ruin of the church was a central doctrine held by the Plymouth Brethren, and Thomas Croskery credits this view with the “peculiar attitude toward [other] churches . . .”<sup>101</sup> It was because of the general apostasy of the other churches within this dispensational period that members of these churches were challenged to “at once withdraw from them and join the communion of the Brethren.”<sup>102</sup> Thus, by separating from existing churches in ruin the Brethren could maintain their purity of the gospel, or at least of the gospel as they understood it.

### *Christology and the mission of Christ*

The Brethren’s view of the divinity and humanity of Christ is unusual; in part this may be due to reliance on lay persons with very limited theological training, who were expounding Christology. Croskery’s discussion of C. H. Mackintosh and his interpretation of Galatians 4:4 is a case in point.<sup>103</sup> According to Plymouth Brethren member William Kelly, the Brethren affirmed that “the humanity of Christ was not that of man, fallen or unfallen, but ‘the glorified resurrection-humanity of the redeemed.’”<sup>104</sup> Kelly further states: “It is a blunder to suppose that the reality of the incarnation involves the condition of either Adam fallen or of Adam unfallen. . . . There are thus three distinct phases of humanity here below—innocent, fallen, and holy. Christ’s manhood was in the condition of Adam neither before nor after the

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<sup>100</sup> Goe, F. F. *The Validity of the Ministry Itself, with Reference to the theories of the Plymouth Brethren*. Published in The Islington Clerical Meeting, 1878. London: William Hunt and Company, 17.

<sup>101</sup> Croskery, Thomas. 1879. *Plymouth-Brethrenism; a refutation of its principles and doctrines*. London: W. Mullan, 35.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Mr. Mackintosh speaks of the ‘Divine Man,’ and of ‘His heavenly humanity,’ as though the Holy Ghost had introduced Divine elements into His human nature.” Ibid., 84.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

fall.”<sup>105</sup> Croskery explains that “The Brethren base their doctrine on 1 Corinthians xv, 47: ‘The first Adam was of the earth, earthy; the second man was from heaven.’ (Greek.) But this refers to our Lord’s person, not to His humanity. Brethren confound the two. It is not said that the Second Man, as to His humanity, was from heaven.”<sup>106</sup>

James Grant states that much of the dispute between Darby and Wills centred on the humanity of Christ.<sup>107</sup> Peter Mearns echoes thoughts similar to Croskery’s regarding the humanity of Christ. “The Brethren do not admit that our Saviour possessed a human nature altogether like ours, sin only excepted. They speak indeed, of His human nature somewhat like ours. He was ‘the divine man,’ ‘the heavenly man;’ and some deny that His body received anything of the substance of his mother.”<sup>108</sup> That Christ received nothing of his mother’s substance is precisely the point that Mackintosh made with the following remark: “‘The first Man is from heaven.’ (1 Cor. xv.47) The first Adam, even in his unfallen condition, was ‘of the earth;’ but the second Man was ‘the Lord from heaven.’”<sup>109</sup> Since Mackintosh was a disciple of Darby, as James Grant has maintained, this raises the question of whether he was merely reiterating Darby’s own Christology or had formulated his thesis independent of Darby. This chapter does not allow that question to be answered, but it will be addressed subsequently.

In closing this section on the Christology of the Plymouth Brethren, it is worth quoting the remarks of Dr. James Carson, who is credited with being an expert on understanding the Brethren:

Many parties imagine, because the Plymouths have no Confession of Faith, that they have no regular system of belief, but this is a great mistake. They not only have a very complete system, but they are as tyrannical as Rome in keeping their followers to it. Although the Christian public cannot divine what their system is, it is all perfectly

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<sup>105</sup> Kelly, William. 1871. *Christ tempted and sympathising*. London: R.L. Allan, 17, 13.

<sup>106</sup> Croskery, Thomas. 1879. *Plymouth-Brethrenism; a refutation of its principles and doctrines*. London: W. Mullan, 85

<sup>107</sup> Grant, James. 1875. *The Plymouth Brethren: their history and heresies*. London: William Macintosh.

<sup>108</sup> Mearns, Peter. 1874. *Christian truth viewed in relation to Plymouthism*. Edinburgh: William Oliphant, 68-69.

<sup>109</sup> Mackintosh, Charles Henry. 1880. *Notes on the book of Leviticus*. New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 38.

understood by those who are thoroughly initiated into it. The great difficulty of getting at it, arises from the fact that it is always put forth in a completely Jesuitical form. It is entirely to this it owes its success. It is so thoroughly “guarded,” that Mr. Darby seems to be surprised I was able to unfold it . . .<sup>110</sup>

That both Kelly and Mackintosh reflected similar Christological doctrines would appear to give credence to Carson’s reflection on the Plymouth Brethren as having been “thoroughly initiated into it.” If Christ was not of the same nature as fallen man and received nothing of the substance of his mother, this raises another major soteriological problem: If Christ did not have a thoroughly human nature, how could he redeem man? This question will be addressed in the following section.

### *Soteriology*

The Brethren’s understanding of Christology—that Jesus Christ did not have the fallen nature of man—is further complicated in that justification was seen “not on the ground of Christ’s righteousness, but on the ground of His death and resurrection. They deny that God imputes to believers the righteousness of Christ, but say that God imputes righteousness when He accounts a believer righteous on the ground of Christ’s death and resurrection. . . . He was not, in fact, a sin-bearer in life: and even all His sufferings on the cross were not vicarious.”<sup>111</sup> Carson is thus in agreement with Croskery in affirming that the Plymouth Brethren “admit the imputation of righteousness, but deny there is such a thing at all of the righteousness of Christ . . . their total denial of the righteousness of Christ as a doctrine.”<sup>112</sup> This denial receives further explanation in a review of a pamphlet written by the Rev. Duncan Macintosh regarding the doctrines of the Brethren.<sup>113</sup> The following reference concerns the imputed righteousness as taught by Charles Stanley, a leading

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<sup>110</sup> Carson, James C. L. 1883. *The heresies of the Plymouth Brethren*. London: Houlston & Sons, preface.

<sup>111</sup> Croskery, Thomas. 1879. *Plymouth-Brethrenism; a refutation of its principles and doctrines*. London: W. Mullan, 87.

<sup>112</sup> Carson, James C. L. 1883. *The heresies of the Plymouth Brethren*. London: Houlston & Sons, 45.

<sup>113</sup> *The Special Teachings, Ecclesiastical and Doctrinal, of Brethren, or Plymouth Brethren; compiled from their own writings. With Strictures*. By the Rev. Duncan Macintosh, Dalkeith. Edinburgh: James Kerr.

member of the Brethren: “The Righteousness of Christ—The Scriptures never use the expression the righteousness of Christ, or the imputed righteousness of Christ, but always the righteousness of God, as in Romans iii. 26; and the righteousness of God is evidently the righteousness of His Godhead, an essential attribute of Deity. The thought of Christ’s having kept the law for us for righteousness would be utterly wrong.”<sup>114</sup>

According to Carson, it is the “righteousness of God” as a divine attribute rather than “the righteousness of Christ” that makes the sinner right with God, a doctrine he attributes to Darby. “Now, inasmuch as they [the Plymouth Brethren] hold the imputation of the righteousness of God, if this righteousness be, as Mr. Darby says ‘the *quality* or character that is in God Himself,’—if it thus be one of the *attributes* of the Almighty, I demand to know how this attribute of the Godhead is to be *imputed* to man.”<sup>115</sup> That Darby denied the righteousness of Christ is reinforced by Croskery. “Mr. Darby says: ‘If the righteousness imputed to the believer is Christ’s fulfilment of the law, it is after all human, legal righteousness, by whomsoever done.’”<sup>116</sup>

Darby’s soteriology, like his Christology, was a radical departure from that of the Established Church. The next section will be concerned with the Plymouth Brethren and the work of the Holy Spirit. This will prove useful in understanding Edward Irving and the gifts of the Spirit, as well as Darby and the work of the Holy Spirit.

### *Eschatology*

The subject of the rapture will be treated in greater detail subsequently when considering Darby’s notion of the “secret rapture.”<sup>117</sup> William Reid provides an insightful understanding of the Plymouth Brethren’s view of the secret rapture by quoting a passage from Dr. Tregelles, “one who had the best

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<sup>114</sup> *Quarterly Journal of Prophecy*. Vol. XXV. London: James Nisbet and Co. 1873, 182.

<sup>115</sup> Carson, James C. L. 1883. *The heresies of the Plymouth Brethren*. London: Houlston & Sons, 49.

<sup>116</sup> Croskery, Thomas. 1879. *Plymouth-Brethrenism; a refutation of its principles and doctrines*. London: W. Mullan, 95.

<sup>117</sup> Darby. *The Rapture of the Saints*.

means of knowing their views, owing to his many years' association with them, and intimacy with their leaders."<sup>118</sup> Says Dr. Tregelles:

"The doctrine held and taught by many is," says Dr. Tregelles, "that believers are concerned not with a public and manifested coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory - not with His appearing when every eye shall see Him, and when He shall sever the wicked from among the just, but with a secret or private coming, when the dead saints shall be secretly raised, the living changed, and both caught up to meet the Lord in the air; that the shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God, do not indicate anything of publicity, for the ear of faith alone shall hear them; that the Church shall meet the Lord, not at His visible coming, but in order to remain with Him, at least for years, before His manifested advent; that after *this* secret coming there shall be in the earth a full power of evil put forth amongst both Jews and Gentiles; that there shall be a time of unequalled tribulation and great spiritual perils (with which the Church has nothing to do) and that this condition of things shall end by the *manifest* coming of the Lord . . . In 1863 I heard it publicly and definitely maintained that the secret coming is the *second* coming promised in Scripture, and that the manifest appearing is His *third* coming."<sup>119</sup>

The Plymouth Brethren distinguished between the coming of Christ and the day of the Lord. Rather than seeing similarity in the two terms, they differentiate between the two, the former referring to the secret coming *for* his saints and the latter with the public coming in glory *with* his saints. Benjamin Wills Newton was clearly opposed to the doctrine of the secret rapture, which would possibly explain his antipathy for Darby. In a lengthy article entitled, "The Second Advent of our Lord not secret but in manifested glory," Newton maintains the following: "We have not the test of Truth except the Scripture. Nevertheless, a doctrine so truly new as the *secret coming* of the Lord, and the *secret* removal of His saints, must by its very novelty, awake suspicion, and should therefore be jealously tested by the Scriptures of Truth."<sup>120</sup> In speaking of 1 Thessalonians 4:16, Newton commented, "Can we, after reading these words, affirm that the coming of the Lord will be secret? Do such expressions

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<sup>118</sup> Reid, William. 1880. *Plymouth Brethrenism unveiled and refuted*. Edinburgh: W. Oliphant, 186.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>120</sup> Newton, Benjamin Wills. 1861. *Occasional papers on Scriptural subjects*. London: Houlston and Wright, 45.

as ‘shout,’ ‘voice of the archangel,’ and the ‘trump of God,’ imply secrecy?”<sup>121</sup>

*The Gospel Magazine* of 1866 provides an interesting understanding of the secret coming in relation to Edward Irving with the following remarks: “Certain recent developments of Millenarianism are calculated to startle all but the most bigoted advocates of this theory. It is now common for Millenarians to believe what is called a secret coming of Christ, and a secret rapture of the saints . . . Until the time of Edward Irving it was, so far as my acquaintance with Millenarianism extends, wholly unknown. But, through his preaching and writings, it made no inconsiderable progress in his day.”<sup>122</sup> The doctrine of the secret rapture, accepted by the Plymouth Brethren and by Edward Irving but vehemently denied by B. W. Newton, underscores the complexities of revivalist doctrine in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In order to understand these complexities and such leaders as Edward Irving, I now turn my attention to the other great revivalist movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Albury and Powerscourt prophetic conferences.

#### The Albury prophetic conferences

There were three Albury conferences, in 1826, 1827, and 1828. While all three were important, the focus will be on the 1826 conference and the personalities involved, together with the ecclesiology arising out of these meetings. This section will provide a biographical sketch of the members in attendance. This will necessitate being brief with regard to those members who neither contributed much to these revivalist movements nor provided further insight into Darby’s ecclesiology. For members such as Edward Irving the sketch will be in far greater depth. Subsequent to the biographical sketches I will focus on the issues that were dealt with at 1826 Albury conference.

Henry Drummond, writing in 1828, recounts conversations that he and a number of friends had concerning the “future destinies of the Church, their

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>122</sup> *Gospel Magazine and Protestant Beacon, The*. Vol. X. London: W. H. Collingridge, 1866, 649.

country, and the world.”<sup>123</sup> He observed that they felt it expedient to unite themselves to other brethren that had published or were interested in the prophetic Scriptures. This resulted in the first Albury prophetic conference, held in 1826. Sandeen records the following:

Although publication of the Albury conference proceedings was withheld by common consent, Henry Drummond did publish three volumes entitled *Dialogues on Prophecy* which summarized, to some extent, the substance of those meetings. Since Drummond chose to present this material in the form of dialogues between personae identified only by pseudonyms and seems to have exercised considerable editorial freedom, it would be rash to treat these volumes as a kind of stenographic report of the conferences.<sup>124</sup>

Though we are lacking conference proceedings, we do have two lists of the subject matter discussed at Albury, 1826. The first is provided by Drummond in his *Dialogues* and the second by Irving in his preface to his translation of *The Coming of Messiah*, by Lacunza.

According to Drummond, a list of six subjects for discussion was drawn up, and this found universal acceptance, as follows:

1. That the present Christian dispensation is not to pass insensibly into the millennial state by gradual increase of the preaching of the Gospel; but that it is to be terminated by judgments, ending in the destruction of this visible Church and polity, in the same manner as the Jewish dispensation had been terminated.
2. That during the time that these judgments are falling upon Christendom, the Jews will be restored to their land.
3. That the judgments will fall principally, if not exclusively, upon Christendom and begin with that part of the Church of God which has been most highly favoured, and is therefore most deeply responsible.
4. That the termination of these judgments is to be succeeded by that period of universal blessedness to all mankind, and even to the beasts, which is commonly called the Millennium.
5. That the second Advent of Messiah precedes or takes place at the commencement of the Millennium.
6. That a period of 1260 years commenced in the reign of Justinian, and terminated at the French Revolution; and that the vials of the Apocalypse began then to be poured out; that our blessed Lord will

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<sup>123</sup> Drummond, Henry. 1828. *Dialogues on prophecy*. London: Nisbet, preface.

<sup>124</sup> Sandeen, Ernest Robert. 1970. *The roots of fundamentalism; British and American millenarianism, 1800-1930*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 20-21.

shortly appear, and that therefore it is the duty of all, who so believe, to press these consideration on the attention of all men.<sup>125</sup>

Sandeen notes that the *Dialogues* were written by Drummond in 1828 possibly “after the third conference in 1828. The six points appear to be conclusions rather than prerequisites for participating.”<sup>126</sup> Edward Irving, writing from the Caledonian Church on January 17th, 1827, provides what appears to be the impetus for the first prophetic conference: “There arose, in the beginning of last summer, amongst certain students of prophecy in London, a desire to compare their views, with respect to the prospects of the Church at this present crisis. . . .”<sup>127</sup> Irving does not inform us as to what this “present crisis” referred, but stated that “about twenty men of every rank and church and orthodox communion . . . met at Albury Park, in Surrey.”<sup>128</sup> There were six subjects to be discussed at the 1826 Conference, with a day devoted to each subject.

1. The doctrine of the Holy Scripture concerning the times of the Gentiles.
2. The duties of Christian ministers and people, growing out thereof towards the Gentile Churches.
3. The doctrine concerning the present and future condition of the Jews.
4. The duties growing out of the same towards the Jews.
5. The system of the prophetic visions and numbers of Daniel and the Apocalypse.
6. The scripture doctrine concerning the future advent of the Lord. Lastly, the duties to the church and the world arising out of the same.<sup>129</sup>

It will be noted that there is a considerable difference between the two lists. However, Irving does inform us that “These things I write from

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<sup>125</sup> Drummond, Henry. 1828. *Dialogues on prophecy*. London: Nisbet, ii, iii.

<sup>126</sup> Sandeen, Ernest Robert. 1970. *The roots of fundamentalism; British and American millenarianism, 1800-1930*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970, 22.

<sup>127</sup> Lacunza, Manuel, and Edward Irving. 1827. *The coming of Messiah in glory and majesty*. London [England]: L.B. Seeley. I:123.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. Note: Ernest Sandeen provides a list of nineteen of these participants. Henry Drummond, Edward Irving, Lewis Way, Joseph Wolff, Charles S. Hawtreay, William Cuninghame, James Hatley Frere, George Montague (Lord Mandeville), Revd. William Marsh, Revd. Hugh McNeile, Revd. Daniel Wilson, John James Strutt (later Baron Rayleigh), Spenser Percival, Revd. Robert Story, Revd. James Haldane Stewart, Revd, James Stratton, Revd. Edward Vaughn, John Bayford, and John Tudor. Sandeen, Ernest Robert. 1970. *The roots of fundamentalism; British and American millenarianism, 1800-1930*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 20.

<sup>129</sup> Lacunza, Manuel, and Edward Irving. 1827. *The coming of Messiah in glory and majesty*. London [England]: L.B. Seeley. I:123. Note: The list is presented in a tabulated form to make an easy comparison with the list by Drummond.



recollection, not caring to use the copious notes which I took, for it was a mutual understanding that nothing should go forth from the meeting with any stamp of authority, and that the church might not take offence, as if we had assumed to ourselves any name or right in the church.”<sup>130</sup> While the content of the meetings is sadly lacking, Edward Irving in his preliminary discourse to the work of Ben-Ezra, dated 1827, entitled *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty*, provides a limited insight into the discussions. An identical transcript appeared four years later as an anonymous entry in *Millennial Tidings*, but appearing with an epistle by Joseph Wolff, the Jewish delegate to the 1826 Conference, together with a declaration that the glorious Advent would occur in 1847.<sup>131</sup>

There is clearly a dearth of factual information arising out of the prophetic conferences because of the “common consent that nothing should go forth from the conference with any stamp of authority.” In other words, there were no notes or proceedings taken. However, we do have four sources available to us. First, the outside sources and biographies that provide commentary on the conferences. Second, the evidence of a change in the ecclesiology of the churches subsequent to the conferences. An example of the second point occurs in Drummond’s *Dialogues* concerning a discussion regarding postmillennialism, with the following comment by Sophron: “I once thought that Messiah’s second advent did not take place till the end of the millennium, but as soon as that opinion was brought to the test of Scripture, I found it perfectly untenable.”<sup>132</sup> Why Sophron should find postmillennialism “untenable” is that Anastasius had earlier commented on the advantages of premillennialism: “One of these intervening things is a reign of blessedness for a thousand years; whereas I conceive, it is very evident from Scripture, that this reign of blessedness succeeds, and not precedes the second coming of the Lord.”<sup>133</sup> If premillennialism was dominant at Albury, it should be supposed that this eschatology would take hold of the churches subsequent to Albury.

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<sup>130</sup> Lacunza, Manuel, and Edward Irving. 1827. *The coming of Messiah in glory and majesty*. London [England]: L.B. Seeley. 1:124.

<sup>131</sup> *Millennial Tidings*. No. 1. Philadelphia: Harriet Livermore, publisher, 1831, 27 f.

<sup>132</sup> Drummond, Henry. 1828. *Dialogues on prophecy*. London: Nisbet, 182.

Drummond's *Dialogues* could be considered a third source of information arising out of Albury 1826, but the content and pseudonyms make a factual record less than available. A fourth source is the writings of those that attended the Albury conference.

The outside sources and biographies, while not primary documentation, do throw considerable light on the nature of the conferences themselves. Daniel Taylor's treatise, dated 1882, is a work edited by H. L. Hastings; the preface, however, is dated 1855, which is reasonably close to the Albury conferences and thus provides a valuable insight into their scope:

The assembling together of Christian ministers and laymen in large numbers, without regard to denomination, for the purpose of studying the sacred Scriptures, and conferring with one another concerning the prophetic word, the signs of the times, the nature of the solemn future, and the pre-millennial and near advent of our blessed Lord, was perhaps never witnessed until the present century. In 1826, the first conference of this kind was called, and held in the county of Surrey, England at the residence of Henry Drummond, Esq., then the high sheriff of the county, subsequently a member of the British Parliament. Ministers of all denomination were invited, and twenty persons, men of every rank and church and orthodox communion in the realm, met in session for eight days.<sup>134</sup>

Taylor's summary is insightful and agrees with several of the main points, including the twenty laymen and clergy that attended Albury 1826. That he mentions the "pre-millennial and near advent of our blessed Lord" agrees with Drummond point 5 and Irving point 6. The "prophetic word" agrees with Drummond point 6 and Irving point 5. Taylor has more to say regarding Albury 1826. "The times of the Gentiles, the destiny of the Israelites, the doctrine of the future and last advent, and the duties of the ministry and church as related thereto, were the themes discussed."<sup>135</sup> "The times of the Gentiles" received extensive discussion in Drummond's *Dialogues*,<sup>136</sup> as did the "destiny of the Israelites"; these both correspond to Drummond point 2 and Irving point 3. The "future and last advent" corresponds to Drummond point 5

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 159-160.

<sup>134</sup> Taylor, Daniel T., and H. L. Hastings. 1882. *The reign of Christ on earth: or, The voice of the church in all ages, concerning the coming and kingdom of the Redeemer*. London: S. Bagster & Sons, 346.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 347.

and Irving point 6. The doctrine of imminence was universally accepted: “There was a great agreement, sweet charity, and a strong conviction that the end of the gospel dispensation and return of the Bridegroom ‘was,’ writes Irving, ‘hard at hand.’”<sup>137</sup> Taylor notes that “No full report of this remarkable gathering was ever made at the time; the believers disclaimed putting the stamp of authority upon their conclusions.”<sup>138</sup>

George Russell, another secondary source, provides a general overview of all of the Albury conferences:

The first of these Prophetical Conferences was held at his [Drummond’s] house at Albury, in Advent, 1826, and the same gathering was repeated annually for five years. Forty-four people in all took part in these conferences, of whom nineteen were English clergymen, three were Dissenting ministers, four were ministers of the Scotch Kirk, eleven were lay-members of the Church of England, and seven were laymen of various denominations. . . . The general conclusions at which the conferences arrived may be summarized thus:—The Christian Dispensation was shortly to be terminated by Divine judgments, ending in the destruction of the visible Church and polity. These judgments were to be succeeded by that period of universal blessedness which is called the Millennium.<sup>139</sup> The last of the Prophetical Conferences was held in July, 1830. The Reform Bill, the cholera, and the Revolution in Paris were regarded as heralding the end of the world.<sup>140</sup>

Of interest is the author’s mention of a number of factors that “were regarded as heralding the end of the world,” including the July Revolution of 1830. According to John Hair, Charles Hatley Frere, who was to become Irving’s prophetic mentor, saw the July Revolution to be pivotal in his prophetic interpretation. “With Frere everything in Daniel and the Apocalypse and even in Second Esdras, led up to Napoleon. The great Continental revolutions marked the expiration of the times of the Gentiles, and

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<sup>136</sup> Drummond, Henry. 1828. *Dialogues on prophecy*. London: Nisbet, 12, 55, 160.

<sup>137</sup> Taylor, Daniel T., and H. L. Hastings. 1882. *The reign of Christ on earth: or, The voice of the church in all ages, concerning the coming and kingdom of the Redeemer*. London: S. Bagster & Sons, 347.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> “A great period of 1,260 years commenced in the reign of Justinian, and terminated at the French Revolution; and the vials of the Apocalypse began then to be poured out. Our Blessed Lord will shortly appear, and therefore it is the duty of all who believe to press these considerations on the attention of all men.”

there was immediately impending the Advent of our Lord and the winding up of human affairs.”<sup>141</sup> This appears to reflect a historicist rather than a futurist hermeneutic as evidenced by a comment on the views of Edward Irving. After discussing a chance meeting between Frere and Irving, the biographer notes the following: “An accidental walk in the fields with this gentleman had put Mr. Irving in possession of his [Frere’s] views, and subsequent study determined his adoption of them. Compressed into a single sentence, they may thus be stated—the visions of Daniel and St. John authorize the belief that with the French Revolution a new epoch in the providential government of the world was opened, and that the millennial period will commence about the year of our Lord 1868, a visible, decisive struggle between the powers of good and evil occupying the latter portion of the intervening years.”<sup>142</sup>

That Irving was considered the leader “of the school of Albury prophets,”<sup>143</sup> coupled with his close association with Frere, suggests a tension between the Frere/Irving historicist interpretation and the rising futurist view of imminence. This argument finds support from Bernard McGinn. “But the historicists continued to be strong with such figures as Edward Irving (1792-1834) and Henry Drummond (1786-1860).”<sup>144</sup> However, asserting that Irving was a historicist is problematical, according to Daniel Almonz, who observes: “Irving’s views would probably have to be classified as a combination of the continuous-historical school and the rapidly increasing quantity of futurism in the continuous-historical approach which was already partially an integral and basic part of that position as presented by some.”<sup>145</sup> Already, seeds of division can be observed between the predominantly historicist view at Albury and the

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<sup>140</sup> Russell, George William Erskine. 1903. *The household of faith: portraits and essays*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, pp. 265-266.

<sup>141</sup> Hair, John. 1899. *Regent Square: eighty years of a London congregation*. London: James Nisbet, 62,

<sup>142</sup> *Lives of the illustrious (the Biographical magazine)*. 1852. London: J. Passmore Edwards, 321.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> McGinn, Bernard. 2000. *Antichrist: two thousand years of the human fascination with evil*. New York: Columbia University Press, 245.

<sup>145</sup> Almonz, Daniel E. 2008. *The Apocalyptic Rapture Exodus*. Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 73.

predominantly<sup>146</sup> futurist view, particularly of Darby, at Powerscourt—  
“futurism rejecting the idea that historicism’s identified events are the  
exhaustive fulfillments of the Scriptural predictions.”<sup>147</sup>

*The Christian Observer* (1863), though concerned very much with the beauty of the surroundings of Albury, does provide useful information: “The autumn of 1826, the year in which Irving had taken an enforced rest, saw a knot of able men, students of prophecy, collected under the roof of Henry Drummond.”<sup>148</sup> Of interest is the comment regarding Edward Irving that “The belief that our Lord’s second advent was near, coloured his thoughts. He saw in the Church a community soon to be led, like the Israelites, by a present Deity; he saw in the State a body to be separated from the world by outward tests, and to stand out as the visible impersonation of the right and just and good.”<sup>149</sup>

*The London Review* (1861) chronicles the account from James Haldane Stewart’s biography. Stewart attended Albury 1826. “In October, 1826, he made a short journey to Hereford, Gloucester, Worcester, &c., for the Jews’ Society; and in the beginning of December, he attended the meetings held at Albury, by the invitation of Mr. Drummond, for the consideration of several questions relating to unfulfilled prophecy.”<sup>150</sup> After reiterating that twenty persons attended Albury 1826, Stewart then provides his list of subjects discussed:

1. The Gentile dispensation and the practical results of the scriptural doctrine respecting it.
2. The present and future dispensations of the Jews.
3. The prophetic chronology.
4. The Second Advent of Christ.<sup>151</sup>

Stewart declined to attend subsequent conferences at Albury, and there is a hint that he viewed premillennialism with suspicion, remarking that he

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<sup>146</sup> I say “predominantly” since certain historicists did populate Powerscourt, as for example Edward Bickersteth.

<sup>147</sup> Almonz, Daniel E. *The Apocalyptic Rapture Exodus*. Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2004, 125.

<sup>148</sup> *Christian Observer, The. For the Year 1863*. London: Hatchard and Co., 1863, 411.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 412.

<sup>150</sup> *London Review volume xv, The*. Published in October, 1860 and January, 1861. London: Hamilton, Adams and Co., 1861, 279.

“afterwards associated much with the Pre-Millennialists; it taught him to hold his views on the subject in subordination to others, in regard to which greater certainty was attainable.”<sup>152</sup>

Robert Story, while not present at the first Albury conference, did attend subsequent ones. “He was a member of the Prophetic Conference held at Albury Park under the auspices of Mr Henry Drummond, and a close associate of Mr Campbell of Row, his nearest neighbour, whom he defended in elaborate speeches before the Presbytery.”<sup>153</sup> Story first attended the 1827 Albury conference, which appears to have been held in November.<sup>154</sup> He says very little about the conferences, considering them speculative and of such a nature that they “do not seem to have produced a very salutary effect on the religious thought of England and Scotland, and have too often run into most foolish and profane extravagances.”<sup>155</sup> That Robert Story perceived the Albury conferences as having little effect upon English and Scottish religious life might be attributed to the fact that he was an ordained minister of the Church of Scotland, but his views were not universally held. An observation by Daniel Taylor demonstrates the very reverse, that indeed there was clear evidence of a change in the eschatology of the churches subsequent to the conferences. In the absence of conference proceedings, it is this change in eschatology that forms my second approach for evidence of what must have been debated at the conferences. According to Taylor’s elaboration of the changes, the post-Albury effect was profound:

At this time, the comprehension of the advent of Christ had died out in many hearts, and its *imminence* was scarcely dreamed of. Few were watching for the Coming One; most of the pulpits were silent on the theme, and there was but little *pre-millennial literature* in circulation. But henceforth the Lord’s advent was to take a front place on human lips, and in thoughtful hearts; a great cry went forth that was never to cease. Pulpits rang with the alarm, pens were busy, the awakening was

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> *United Presbyterian Magazine, The*. New Series, vol. VIII. Edinburgh: William Oliphant and Co., 1864, 198.

<sup>154</sup> Story, Robert Herbert. 1862. *Memoir of the life of the Rev. Robert Story ...: including passages of Scottish religious and ecclesiastical history during the second quarter of the present century*. Cambridge [England]: Macmillan, 109.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 102.

wide and great. In 1829, 1830, 1831, 1833 and 1834, no less than six prophetic journals were established at London, Dublin and Edinburgh, conducted by able pens and cultured minds. Between the years 1828 and 1834, some forty or fifty different volumes on prophecy were issued in Great Britain. Besides these, over thirty well-known and godly men put forth full sixty works in defense of the *pre-millennial advent*. The agitation of the grand question was intense. Irving wrote a dozen books on prophecy, and discoursed with rare eloquence to audiences estimated at 6,000 and even 12,000 persons, in the open air, in the towns of England and Scotland. Wolff fearlessly uttered the advent cry in the wide East, and McNeile thundered the message from his pulpit in great London. Within fifteen years after the first conference at Albury, three hundred ministers of the Church of England alone were proclaiming the speedy end and the historian Macaulay asserted that the believers in the ancient faith, looking for the appearing and kingdom, equaled in number the entire population of the Jews in Great Britain. . . . Since the day of these Albury conferences, *pre-millenarian* views have spread very much.<sup>156</sup>

The author makes a major claim to the effects of the fifteen years subsequent to the Albury Conference, drawing from a number of sources to substantiate his claims. One of his primary sources was *A Dictionary of Writers on the Prophecies*,<sup>157</sup> one of whose contributors was the Rev. E. Bickersteth, a member of the Plymouth Brethren and close associate of Darby.<sup>158</sup> The *Dictionary of Writers on the Prophecies* catalogues numerous writers and periodicals dealing with prophecy and the pre-millennial advent. Taylor based his analysis of the years between 1828 and 1834 on the sources cited below.<sup>159</sup> The same contributor to the *Dictionary* (namely Bickersteth)

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<sup>156</sup> Taylor, Daniel T., and H. L. Hastings. 1882. *The reign of Christ on earth: or, The voice of the church in all ages, concerning the coming and kingdom of the Redeemer*. London: S. Bagster & Sons, 347-348, emphasis supplied.

<sup>157</sup> Brooks, J. W. 1835. *A dictionary of writers of the prophecies, with the titles and occasional description of their works. Also an appendix containing lists of commentators, annotators, etc., on the Holy Scriptures*. London: Simpkin, Marshall.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, preface.

<sup>159</sup> Authors together with publication dates included: 1828 - G. H. Ewaldus, John Fry, Edward Irving, Thomas Keyworth, August F. Lilienstern, J. W. Niblock, John Riland, John Woodhouse; 1829 - Alfred Addis, John Hooper, T. Parkin; 1830 - John Jones, Samuel Lee, William Ward, J. King; 1831 - James Begg, H. T. Burne, Caisson, Erwin, I. Houghton, Ernst W. Hengstenberg, Philip Hirschfield, Alex M'Caul, Pierre Mejanel, Wm. A. M. Pym, Joseph Tyso, Philip Herschell; 1832 - John Cox, Henry Gipps, Hewlett, T. Milner, F. Nolan, Platt, I. E. Sabin, Matson Vincent; 1834 - George Faber, James Hatley Frere, Henry Girdlestone, John Hambleton, Fred Sergeant, Ann Sherwood, Ridley Herschell; 1834 - Wm. Anderson, M. Habershon, Emanuel Lacunza, S. R. Maitland, G. S. Porter, T. T. Biddulph. Prophetic journals included: *The Christian Herald*, a quarterly magazine, chiefly on

also became a close confidante to Anthony Ashley Cooper, Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, thus bringing the doctrine of premillennialism into the political arena, as Finlayson narrates:

Ashley became increasingly preoccupied with such matters<sup>160</sup> in the second half of the thirties, and of great importance in this respect was his meeting with Edward Bickersteth in 1835. A former secretary of the Church Missionary Society, Bickersteth had become ordained and was a leading evangelical; he firmly belonged to the pre-Millennial school. His book a *Practical Guide to the Prophecies*, first published in 1823 and re-issued as an enlarged edition in 1835, set out his ideas on the Second Coming, in addition to various other prophetic matters. Ashley became very friendly with Bickersteth, whose teaching had a great influence on him, and he, too, became a convinced pre-Millenarian.<sup>161</sup>

Ashley's connection to Lord Palmerston, English statesman and Prime Minister, occurred with the marriage of Palmerston to Lady Cowper on December 16, 1839. Thus, Lady Palmerston became the mother-in-law to Lord Ashley.<sup>162</sup>

Recent scholars agree with Daniel Taylor on the spread of premillenarianism following Albury. "Between 1827 and 1833 it was Irving, Albury and the *Morning Watch* that determined the essential doctrinal tenets of pre-millenarianism that Darby received, creatively adapted, and disseminated. . . In the end, and at the very least, Irving must be considered the paladin of pre-tribulational premillennialism and the chief architect of its cardinal formulas."<sup>163</sup>

A third source of information regarding the Albury conferences is Drummond's *Dialogues*; however, as previously mentioned,<sup>164</sup> the content and pseudonyms used make a factual record less than acceptable. The only

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subjects connected with prophecy, *The Watchman*, a monthly periodical published in Paris, and *The Christian Record and Monthly Expositor*.

<sup>160</sup> The millennium and the Second Coming.

<sup>161</sup> Finlayson, Geoffrey B. A. M. 1981. *The seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, 1801-1885*. London: Eyre Methuen, 104.

<sup>162</sup> Battiscombe, Georgina. 1974. *Shaftesbury: A biography of the seventh earl, 1801-1885*. London: Constable, 119, 120.

<sup>163</sup> Hunt, Stephen. 2001. *Christian millenarianism: from the early church to Waco*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 115.

<sup>164</sup> That "Drummond chose to present this material in the form of dialogues between personae identified only by pseudonyms . . ." Sandeen, Ernest Robert. 1970. *The roots of*



pseudonym that has any real significance is *Basilicus*, and when Drummond states that “the most enlarged view of those unfulfilled prophecies which pervade the whole Bible, is Mr. Lewis Way, in his Letters under the signature of Basilicus,”<sup>165</sup> it must be assumed that both Lewis Way and Basilicus of the *Dialogues* are one and the same person.<sup>166</sup> However, even if this were true, there are at least sixteen other pseudonyms to unravel, and there are no clues as to their identity. Keeping in mind the comments by Sandeen, there are still pearls of wisdom to be gained from the *Dialogues*, as suggested by a discussion between Anastasius and Aristo in reference to Luke 21:24, that “it would appear that the fulfilment of the times of the Gentiles is also the time for the restoration of the Jews.”<sup>167</sup>

Much could be written on the subject of the “times of the Gentiles,” but such a study would be outside the scope of this thesis. In speaking of the “times of the Gentiles,” Pentecost does have an interesting comment on the subject that relates to the mid-tribulation interpretation: “In Luke 21:24 the Lord indicates that Jerusalem will continue in Gentile dominion ‘until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.’ Zechariah 12:2; 14:2-3 indicate that this will not be until the second advent, when the armies of the Beast are destroyed by the Lord, as He is seen to do in Revelation 19:17-19.”<sup>168</sup> Pentecost then comments that a correct understanding of the various texts makes a midtribulation “view untenable.”<sup>169</sup> The discussion by Aristo<sup>170</sup> of the parable of the tares amongst the wheat finds in Matthew 13 a fuller discussion in relation to the events following the rapture. Postmillennialism appears to be denied by Evander, and the doctrine of imminence supported, in his comment that “the end of this dispensation is revealed, as to be brought about suddenly,

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*fundamentalism; British and American millenarianism, 1800-1930*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 21.

<sup>165</sup> Drummond, Henry. 1828. *Dialogues on prophecy*. London: Nisbet, 3.

<sup>166</sup> Way, Lewis. *Thoughts on the Scriptural expectations of the Christian church*. Catholic Apostolic Church collection. London: Printed for A. Panton, 1826. Note: This work is also known as the *Thoughts on the scriptural expectations of the Christian Church by Basilicus*.

<sup>167</sup> *Dialogues*, I, 12.

<sup>168</sup> Pentecost, J. Dwight. 1964. *Things to come: a study in Biblical eschatology*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 213.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>170</sup> *Dialogues*, I, 24.

which is entirely opposed to the idea of a gradual improvement.”<sup>171</sup> Anastasius also rejects postmillennialism when he says that “this reign of blessedness succeeds, and not precedes the second coming of our Lord.”<sup>172</sup> The comments by Aristo into the ways in “which the church has at present fallen” finds a comparative view in the “ruin of the church,” and he lists these points of failure as follows: “First, that there are to be no judgments at the period when the times of the Gentiles are said to be fulfilled. Second, that a period of great blessedness is about to be brought in immediately, and third, that the millennial state is to be brought about by natural means: such as the diffusion of knowledge, commerce, peace, civilization, improved views of political justice, jurisprudence, political economy, arts, &c. &c.”<sup>173</sup> Crito discusses the nature of being “caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” and sees this to be the deliverance of the church from destruction.<sup>174</sup>

The topics in the *Dialogues* are many and varied, and the few that have been cited do demonstrate extremely scattered thoughts; nothing can be attributed to any particular person or assumed that the thoughts pertain to Drummond alone. As Sandeen has commented, the *Dialogues* are perhaps useful reading but shed little light on the agenda of the Albury prophetic conferences. It is then to the fourth source that I now turn in order to derive an insight into the Albury conferences, namely, those who were in attendance. First we will present James Hatley Frere, mentor to Edward Irving.

### *James Hatley Frere*

Harriet Livermore, amidst tears of joy, rapturously voiced her reaction: “When my eyes surveyed his declaration concerning the glorious Advent of King Jesus in 1847, I was filled with sensible rapture, and sincerely echoed to the tidings ‘Come Lord Jesus,’ come in triumph, and reign in great power and glory.”<sup>175</sup> With these words, she was indirectly providing the link between Joseph Wolff, James Hatley Frere, Edward Irving, and the 1826 Albury

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>175</sup> *Millennial Tidings*. No. 1. Philadelphia: Harriet Livermore, publisher, 1831, 3.

prophetic conference. Ms. Livermore also established a historicist interpretation of the three by emphasizing that “1847 is the very period declared by Joseph Wolff”<sup>176</sup> and by quoting a letter from Wolff that “appeared to me [Harriet Livermore] at that time more precious than all the mines of Peru, as it contained the proclamation of my Redeemer’s second advent in 1847.”<sup>177</sup> That Ms. Livermore received the prophesied date from Wolff is without doubt; however, the date ostensibly came not from Wolff but from Frere. Harriet Livermore’s certainty regarding the date of Christ’s Second Advent presupposes that Wolff’s knowledge evidenced more than a mere passing interest in prophecy.<sup>178</sup> However, Wolff’s interest lay in missionary endeavours, particularly amongst the Jews rather than in a highly complex system of prophetic interpretation.

By researching the person of James Hatley Frere, I will set out to establish that the prophetic interpretation regarding 1847 belonged primarily to Frere, not Wolff. Edward Irving was requested to preach for the Continental Society in 1825, and through this speaking engagement he chanced to meet Frere. The latter saw in Irving a ready disciple for his prophetic methodology and encouraged him to study prophecy. Frere’s importance is due not merely to the large numbers of prophetic books that he published,

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 45

<sup>177</sup> *Millennial Tidings*. No. 2. Philadelphia: Harriet Livermore, publisher, 1839, 14. Note: Harriett Livermore provides numerous pages citing the year 1847, including this cryptic remark. “In the summer of 1831, I read the glad tidings of our Lord’s second Advent to take place in the year 1847, according to a chronology of Jewish dates, elicited by that eminent Hebrew Christian and scholar, JOSEPH WOLFF, Missionary of the holy cross to Jews, Mahomedans, Pagans and Christians, of every name under heaven.” *Millennial Tidings*. No. 3. Philadelphia: Harriet Livermore, publisher, 1838, 3. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>178</sup> Kennedy provides interesting insight into the character of Harriet Livermore that would suggest that Joseph Wolff made a considerable impact on her. “She made four of five trips to Jerusalem, the first in 1836. In 1841 she was living in part of a house owned by a Gibraltar Jew, near Hezekiah’s Pool. She was given food by the Protestant missionaries. Dr. Selah Merrill, American Consul in Jerusalem in 1883 (who got his information from those who had known her there), wrote that ‘she was very irritable and exacting, and would often insult people in their houses or in the streets.’ She was well known to be crack-brained, and was not allowed to preach in Jerusalem. Dr. Van Dyke, who was living in Jerusalem, says she told him one day that she had spent the previous Sunday in an olive-tree on the Mount of Olives. She also thought that she and Joseph Wolff were the two witnesses of Revelation XI., and identified Bonaparte with Mehemet Ali.” Kennedy, William Sloane. 1892. *John G. Whittier, the poet of freedom*. New York [etc.]: Funk & Wagnalls Co., 32-33.

nor for the depth of his interpretation, but for the simple reason that he has been considered Edward Irving's mentor. To understand Frere is to throw light on the prophetic method of Irving. Thus, while Alexander J. Scott in 1828 became Irving's mentor in spiritual gifts,<sup>179</sup> Frere earlier in 1825 became Irving's mentor in prophecy.<sup>180</sup> Couched between those dates was the Albury conference of 1826, where Frere, Wolff, and Irving were to meet, and it is highly likely that Wolff's knowledge of the 1847 prophecy came from Frere at this meeting. However, Wolff's connections with the Frere family were far more involved. James Hatley Frere had a brother, John Hookham Frere, who was born on May 21, 1769. In his diary, Joseph Wolff records an event that happened in 1822. "One of the most interesting acquaintances we made was the Right Honourable John Hookham Frere, late British Ambassador in Spain."<sup>181</sup> Wolff then related the story of a little girl of about three years of age who was found in an oven and concluded that this event "was in the year 1822."<sup>182</sup> Years later, on January 29, 1835, Wolff wrote a dedication that would appear in a book entitled *Researches and Missionary Labours*. In this dedication to the Right Honourable J. H. Frere, Wolff makes the following comment: "A complete stranger to you, I came to your house and you not only granted me the rites of hospitality . . . and during the time of my absence you, your sister and Miss Jane Frere treated me with utmost kindness."<sup>183</sup> Thus John Hookham Frere received Wolff into his house in 1822, establishing a relationship between Wolff and the Frere family. That Wolff was intimate with James Hatley Frere's brother John and sister Jane suggests that there was communication between Joseph Wolff and James Hatley Frere quite a few years prior to the 1826 Albury conference; thus the knowledge of the 1847 prediction pointing to Frere rather than Wolff becomes more plausible.

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<sup>179</sup> Brown, David. *Personal Reminiscences of Edward Irving*. Published in *The Expositor*. No. XXXIII, September 1887. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 219.

<sup>180</sup> Oliphant, Mrs. 1862. *The life of Edward Irving, minister of the National Scotch church, London. Illustrated by his journals and correspondence*. London: Hurst and Blackett, 221.

<sup>181</sup> Wolff, Joseph. 1838. *Journal of the Rev. Joseph Wolff...in a series of letters to Sir Thomas Baring, Bart. containing an account of his missionary labours from the years 1827 to 1831: and from the years 1835 to 1838*. London: J. Burns, 78.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> Wolff, Joseph. 1837. *Researches and missionary labours among the Jews, Mohammedans, and other sects*. Philadelphia: O. Rogers, v.

James Hatley Frere remained an enigmatic figure. “He was born in 1779. He seems to have been a gentleman of independent fortune who devoted his time to the study of prophecy. The *Dictionary of National Biography* says very little about him beyond a list of his publications. He died in 1866.”<sup>184</sup> In 1826, the same year as the first Albury conference, J. H. Frere published a seminal work entitled “A Combined View of the Prophecies of Daniel, Ezra and St. John.” This was first published in 1815 and contained 476 pages, as contrasted with the 1826 publication containing 508 pages. In this later book the author added the following note: “A corrected Edition.—The Author having availed himself of the advantages for perfecting the subject, which have been afforded by the expiration of a second grand prophetic period, the ONE THOUSAND TWO HUNDRED AND NINETY years of Daniel.”<sup>185</sup> It is in this work that Frere developed his historicist interpretation of the year 1847, with a novel twist relating to the Islamic faith. “. . . [T]he grounds of an opinion, formerly given, that Daniel’s vision of the Ram and the He-goat, relating to Mahometanism, would terminate in the year 1847.”<sup>186</sup>

Returning to the first Albury conference, it is significant that Joseph Wolff and another participant, William Cuninghame, together with Frere, were in a prophetic discussion well before 1826. Frere’s 1815 publication had the following appended to the title of the book: “—together with critical remarks upon the interpretation of preceding commentators, and more particularly upon the systems of Mr. Faber and Mr. Cuninghame.” In his 1826 publication he again discusses extensively the prophetic works of Cuninghame: “Again, Mr. Cuninghame observes, that Mahometanism was ‘an *opposing superstition WITHOUT the Church*, and cannot therefore be an *abomination of desolation IN the Church*.’”<sup>187</sup> As for Wolff, Mahometanism<sup>188</sup> would become part of his

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<sup>184</sup> Hunt, John. 1896. *Religious thought in England in the nineteenth century*. London: Gibbings & Co., 371.

<sup>185</sup> Frere, James Hatley. 1826. *A combined view of the prophecies of Daniel, Ezra, and St. John: shewing that all the prophetic writings are formed upon one plan, accompanied by an explanatory chart, also, a minute explanation of the prophecies of Daniel*. London: Printed for J. Hatchard, frontpiece. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, Postscript.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 296. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>188</sup> The term is spelt variously as Muhammadan, Mahommedan, Mahomedan, or Mahometan and pertains to the Islamic faith.

life's endeavours, as the title of his 1837 publication implies: *Researches and Missionary Labours Among the Jews, Mohammedans, and Other Sects*. It is highly plausible that just as Frere met Irving in 1825 and became a mentor to him in the area of prophetic interpretation, so Frere became the mentor to Joseph Wolff at a time prior to the 1826 Albury conference.

There is a similarity of thought between Frere and Darby regarding the nature of the church in relation to the Second Advent, and this will have considerable import when researching the eschatology of John Nelson Darby. Frere held to the "Church as a Spiritual Establishment . . . So the Holy Place or INNER COURT of the Temple, mentioned in chap. xi. of the Revelations, also represents the Spiritual Church on Earth . . ." <sup>189</sup> The true believers in Christ constitute the church which is visible, <sup>190</sup> spiritual, <sup>191</sup> and illuminated by the Holy Spirit. <sup>192</sup> At the Second Advent "the Jews are particularly spoken of, as repenting and turning to Christ." <sup>193</sup>

In electing the date of 1847, Frere was espousing the view that the 2300 days of the prophecy in Daniel 8:14 had proved incorrect. <sup>194</sup> Taking the longer view, he combined this with a start date of 553 BCE, as he explains: ". . . or the 'sanctuary will be cleansed,' at 2400 years from the year A.C. 553 [*sic*], being the 'third year of Belshazzar,' king of Babylon; in which year the vision was seen; which answers to the future year 1847, when some event must be supposed to occur of such a decided nature, as shall precisely mark the expiration of this long period . . . Which event there is no reason to think, can be no other that the restoration of true and spiritual worship in Jerusalem, and perhaps in the re-edified Temple . . ." <sup>195</sup> It could be argued that the reason

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<sup>189</sup> Frere, James Hatley. 1826. *A combined view of the prophecies of Daniel, Ezra, and St. John: shewing that all the prophetic writings are formed upon one plan, accompanied by an explanatory chart, also, a minute explanation of the prophecies of Daniel*. London: Printed for J. Hatchard, 7.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>194</sup> "The common version of our Bible reads 2300 years, the Septuagint 2400: the course of events has proved incorrect: the latter corresponds with the other periods of Daniel, dividing his last period of 45 years' Progress of the Kingdom of Christ into two periods of 25 and 20 years each. *Ibid.*, 43 (footnote entry).

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-44.

he chose a longer period of 2400 years was simply to accommodate a failed prophecy based upon the 2300 years. There were certainly divergent and conflicting views regarding the two periods, as Maitland points out: “. . . Mr. Cuninghame makes the period 2300 years, Mr. Faber and Mr. Frere make it 2400.”<sup>196</sup>

John Waugh, in discussing prophetic interpretations, provides a non-cited source that he attributes to Edward Irving: “. . . I shall before I dismiss the subject, advert once more to the date of 2400 days . . . But the question being of the vision generally, without any such interposition of a commencing time, must, as hath been said, be taken from the time then present: that is, from the time at which the vision was seen - that is, before Christ 553. From which, reckoning 2400 years, we arrive at the year after Christ, 1847, at which time the angel declares, ‘The temple shall the sanctuary be cleansed.’”<sup>197</sup> Thus, Irving mirrors very much the prophetic historicist interpretation of James Hatley Frere, and it is to Edward Irving that I now turn to review his contribution to the revivalist movement of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### *Edward Irving*

Edward Irving was born in 1792 and died in December of 1834. His lifelong friend was Thomas Carlyle, both being born within a few miles and a couple of years of each other. It was, however, not until May 1808 that they met for the first time. Carlyle documents much of Irving’s childhood and family history in his *Reminiscences*.<sup>198</sup> David Brown, who on January 3, 1830, would replace Alexander Scott as Assistant to Edward Irving at the Regents Square Church, provides further insight regarding Carlyle and Irving. “It was in Kirkcaldy that their close intimacy began. They were both teachers, but Irving had been two years there before Carlyle . . . Carlyle, as well as Irving entered the Divinity Hall, with a view to the ministry of the Church of

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<sup>196</sup> Maitland, Samuel Roffey. 1834. *The twelve hundred and sixty days: in reply to the strictures of William Cuninghame, Esq.* London: Printed for J.G. & F. Rivington, 31.

<sup>197</sup> Waugh, John S., and William Cuthbertson. 1833. *Dissertations on the prophecies of sacred scripture which relate to the Antichristian powers.* Annan, [UK]: Printed for the author by Wm. Cuthbertson, 71.

<sup>198</sup> Carlyle, Thomas, and James Anthony Froude. 1881. *Reminiscences.* New York: C. Scribner's Sons.

Scotland; but he soon tired of it and gave it up—from incipient dissatisfaction . . .<sup>199</sup> Carlyle comments that Irving was at this time “licensed—probably through Annan Presbytery . . . From the first Irving read his discourses, but not in a servile manner; of attitude, gesture, elocution there was no neglect. His voice was fine; melodious depth, strength, clearness, its chief characteristics . . . We were all taught at the time by Coleridge, etc. . . .”<sup>200</sup> It was while in Edinburgh that Irving was invited to preach at Dr. Andrew Thomson’s church, St. George. Present in the congregation on that day was Dr. Thomas Chalmers, who was in need of an assistant for his church in Glasgow and extended an invitation for Irving to preach for him in Glasgow.<sup>201</sup> Margaret Oliphant dates the preaching of this sermon to August 2, 1819.<sup>202</sup>

Irving was accepted as Dr. Chalmers’ Assistant and began his ministry in October 1819.<sup>203</sup> It was two years later, in the winter of 1821, that Irving was to receive a call to minister to a small church in Hatton Garden, London. According to Irving, “The Caledonian Church had been placed under the pastoral care of two worthy ministers, who were successively called to parochial charges in the Church of Scotland; and by their removal, and for want of a stated ministry, it was removed to a great and hopeless state.”<sup>204</sup> Irving decided to visit the chapel with a view to ministry the day before Christmas 1821.<sup>205</sup>

The Caledonian Chapel had originally been formed to minister to the orphan children of soldiers and sailors, and Irving found to his dismay that he was required to preach in the Gaelic tongue. In a letter to the gentlemen connected with the Chapel, Irving agreed to fulfil this requirement. “I pledge myself to study Gaelic; and if I cannot write it and preach it in six months, I

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<sup>199</sup> Brown, David. *Personal Reminiscences of Edward Irving*. Published in *The Expositor*, ed. W. Robinson Nicoll. No. XXXIII, September 1837. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

<sup>200</sup> Carlyle, Thomas, and James Anthony Froude. 1881. *Reminiscences*. New York: C. Scribner’s Sons., 115, 119.

<sup>201</sup> Brown, David. *Personal Reminiscences*, 224-225.

<sup>202</sup> Oliphant, Mrs. 1862. *The life of Edward Irving, minister of the National Scotch church, London. Illustrated by his journals and correspondence*. London: Hurst and Blackett, (First Edition), 92.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*



give them my missive to be burdensome to them no longer.”<sup>206</sup> Fortunately for Irving and for the landed gentry of London, the requirement was waived, due in part to the intervention of the Duke of York. Irving’s ministry at the Caledonian Chapel flourished in a powerful way. In fact, it was not long before Irving became the talk of the town and the Chapel was populated with dignitaries. David Brown, who would become an assistant to Irving, had the opportunity in 1827 to visit the Caledonian Chapel. He recorded the experience as follows: “Admission to his humble place of worship (Caledonian Chapel, Cross Street, Hatton Garden) was by ticket only—a step to which his office-bearers reluctantly resorted to prevent worse consequences, and even ticket-holders had to come long before the hour of service if they would find a seat. . . . Coming early the first day, I found the whole of the street lined with carriages, and the church even then filling rapidly.”<sup>207</sup>

The life of Edward Irving reads like a tragedy. His ministry in Glasgow with Dr. Chalmers was nothing out of the ordinary. In the words of Chalmers, “When Irving was associated with me at Glasgow he did not attract a large congregation, but he completely attached to himself, and to his ministry, a limited number of persons, with whose minds his own was in affinity.”<sup>208</sup> At the Caledonian Chapel, Irving’s style of oratory captured an audience that included “the Duke of Sussex, Mr. Canning, Lord Brougham, Sir James Mackintosh, and others of aristocratic look . . .”<sup>209</sup> Two events were to transform his ministry radically and eventually led to Irving’s being ousted from the Caledonian Chapel. The first was his meeting with James Hatley Frere in 1825, and the second was his meeting with and hiring of Alexander J. Scott in 1828. These two individuals, together with the first Albury prophetic conference in 1826, shaped Irving’s entire theology, bringing his premillennial views very much into alignment with those of John Nelson Darby. The formation of the Catholic Apostolic Church was to complete his transition from a Presbyterian ministry with the Caledonian Chapel into a prophetic,

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<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 138. This letter, signed by Edward Irving, was dated February 21, 1822.

<sup>207</sup> Brown, David. *Personal Reminiscences*, 216.

<sup>208</sup> Hanna, William, and Thomas Chalmers. 1857. *Memoirs of the life and writings of Thomas Chalmers, D.D., LL. D.* New York: Harper, 275-276.

premillennialist ministry, focused very much on speaking in tongues. As a result, he became a key functionary in the Albury conferences and the revivalist milieu of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Much has been said about James Hatley Frere and his prophetic interpretation and the fact that Irving's invitation to preach for the Continental Society in 1825 led to his meeting with Frere. However, he had previously developed a communication with Henry Drummond that a year later would materialize into the first Albury conference. In the words of Oliphant, "This Society was held up and maintained from its commencement by the nervous strength of Henry Drummond, a man already known to the preacher, over whose later course he was to exercise so great an influence."<sup>210</sup> It was perhaps Irving's great weakness that he was open to new and innovative aspects of eschatology; therefore, his chance meeting with Frere was to develop in him a hankering after prophetic interpretation and premillennialism. Oliphant continues:

Mr. Hatley Frere, one of the most sedulous of those prophetic students . . . had propounded a new scheme of interpretation, for which, up to this time, he had been unable to secure the ear of the religious public . . . When Irving, all ingenuous and ready to be taught, was suddenly brought into contact with him, the student of prophecy identified him by an instant intuition. - "Here is the man!" he explained to himself . . . and the result was that Mr. Frere gained a disciple and expositor; and that an influence fatal to his future leisure, and of the most momentous importance to his future destiny . . . took possession of Irving's thoughts.<sup>211</sup>

Edward Irving's publication *Babylon and Infidelity Foredoomed of God* was published in 1828. In the Preface, Irving stated that "we are within forty years of the millennium."<sup>212</sup> He dedicated his book to his "beloved friend and brother in Christ, Hatley Frere . . . ashamed at my [Irving's] own ignorance,

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<sup>209</sup> Brown, David. *Personal Reminiscences*, 216.

<sup>210</sup> Oliphant, Mrs. 1862. *The life of Edward Irving, minister of the National Scotch church, London. Illustrated by his journals and correspondence*. London: Hurst and Blackett, (Second Edition), 220.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 221-222.

<sup>212</sup> Irving, Edward. 1828. *Babylon and infidelity foredoomed of God: a discourse on the prophecies of Daniel and the apocalypse, which relate to these latter times*. Philadelphia: Church Missionary House, preface. Note: This work was extracted from a larger work in two volumes containing a dedication to James Hatley Frere.

and again resolved to consider the matter; after which I had no rest in my spirit until I waited upon you and offered myself as your pupil, to be instructed in prophecy according to your ideas thereof.”<sup>213</sup>

If Hatley Frere was Irving’s mentor in prophecy then Alexander J. Scott can be considered his mentor in spiritual gifts. A critique of A. J. Scott presents a considerable problem. Margaret Oliphant discussed him extensively in the “First Edition” of her work *The Life of Edward Irving*, dated 1862. That same year she published a “Second Edition,” with a retraction in the Preface and the narrative on Scott removed. The Preface to the First Edition was dated April 1862 and that of the Second Edition October 1862. Mrs. Oliphant explained the reason for the deletion of the narrative pertaining to Scott. “I was not conscious that I had said anything of Professor Scott of Manchester, which might not be said of a public man with offence or wrong; but as it appears that many competent judges think otherwise, I take the earliest opportunity of withdrawing every expression of my own opinion of his character from these pages.”<sup>214</sup> Such a retraction would be understandable for a biographer to make were it not for a similar incident that occurred in the *Expositor*.

David Brown, who succeeded Mr. Scott as Assistant to Irving at Regents Square Church, wrote an article in the *Expositor* entitled: “Personal Reminiscences of Edward Irving.” This article was dated September 1887, and it too referenced the work of Margaret Oliphant regarding Scott.<sup>215</sup> However, it must be supposed that as the replacement for Scott who worked intimately with Irving, he would have had firsthand knowledge of Scott. In the subsequent issue of the *Expositor*, Brown also made a retraction of what he had said about Scott.<sup>216</sup> The text that had aroused so much opposition regarding his character was as follows:

Alexander Scott, now of Manchester, the son of Dr. Scott, of Greenock, a licentiate of the Scotch Church—man whose powerful,

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<sup>213</sup> Oliphant, Mrs. 1862. *The life of Edward Irving, minister of the National Scotch church, London. Illustrated by his journals and correspondence*. London: Hurst and Blackett, (Second Edition), 226.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.* Preface to the Second Edition.

<sup>215</sup> Brown, David. *Personal Reminiscences*, 219.

<sup>216</sup> Brown, David. *The Expositor*. Vol. VI. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1887, 472.

willful, and fastidious mind has produced upon all other capable minds and impression of force and ability which no practical result has yet carried out. A Scotch probationer, but character recalcitrant and of accordance with every standard but his own, this remarkable man, then young, and in a position in which any great thing might be prophesied of his visible powers, attracted, I cannot tell how, notwithstanding his total dissimilarity and accordance, the regard of Irving.<sup>217</sup>

In the summer of 1828, Irving made a trip to Scotland and preached a sermon in the town of Row. There he met Alexander J. Scott, who impressed him immensely. Irving invited Scott to join him in his ministry in London “entirely unfettered by any pledge as to doctrine . . .”<sup>218</sup> Scott’s doctrine that was to remain “unfettered” was that the charismata of the early church had not died but should be enjoyed by the church of all ages. Irving would date his introduction into the ministry of the gifts of the Spirit to 1828 and his meeting with Scott: “And as we went out and in together, he used often to signify to me his conviction that the spiritual gifts ought still to be exercised in the Church; that we are at liberty, and indeed bound, to pray for them as being baptized into the assurance of the ‘gift of the Holy Ghost,’ as well as of ‘repentance and remission of sins.’”<sup>219</sup> Scott became Assistant to Irving. However, “Mr. Scott’s influence did not end here,” continued Mrs. Oliphant.<sup>220</sup> Mr. Campbell of Row had developed a considerable ministry in Scotland and through this ministry had come in contact with a “young woman who was lying ill of a consumption, from which afterward, when brought to the very door of death she was raised up instantaneously by the mighty hand of God. . . . By this young woman it was that God, not many months after, did restore the gift of the speaking with tongues and prophesying in the church.”<sup>221</sup> Irving explained that he was present with Scott on this occasion and was witness to the events that occurred at that time. Thus, Edward Irving

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<sup>217</sup> Oliphant, Mrs. 1862. *The life of Edward Irving, minister of the National Scotch church, London. Illustrated by his journals and correspondence*. London: Hurst and Blackett, (First Edition), 312.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

<sup>219</sup> *Facts connected with recent Manifestations of Spiritual Gifts*, published in *Fraser's Magazine* for January, 1882, quoted by Oliphant. 1862. *The life of Edward Irving, minister of the National Scotch church, London. Illustrated by his journals and correspondence*. London: Hurst and Blackett, 363.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

embraced the ministry of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including speaking in tongues, through the meeting with Scott in 1828 and this occurrence through Campbell's ministry in Scotland. Though there is no record of Irving himself speaking in tongues, this decisive turn in his ministry would eventually lead to his expulsion from the Caledonian Chapel in London.

Irving's ecclesiology had become moulded by those he had put his trust in, but some of these very persons had themselves been deluded over the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In speaking of the prophets and prophetesses that had informed and influenced Irving's doctrine, "Mr. Baxter and Miss Hall soon retired, and pronounced that they had been under a delusion."<sup>222</sup> Miss Hall had first "sung in the Spirit" on April 30, 1831, at the home of a Mr. Cardale<sup>223</sup> and then at the Caledonian Chapel on Sunday, October 16, 1831, leading to "the confusion in the congregation of some 1500 or 2000 persons, as they listened to the 'sudden doleful, and unintelligible sounds' . . . the news of the scene in the church in the morning ran rapidly through London. In the evening, a large crowd assembled, and, on the opening of the doors, rushed into the church."<sup>224</sup> This new ministry with an emphasis on the apostolic gifts was to lead to the expulsion of Irving by the London Presbytery on May 2, 1832.<sup>225</sup> However, Irving was also ordained by the Church of Scotland in Annan, and on March 13, 1833, the Annan Presbytery revoked his ordination. Mrs. Oliphant records the two events:

Before the hasty and reckless Presbytery of London he had defended himself against the imputation of having suffered unauthorised persons to speak in his church. The Presbytery of Annan, who had ordained

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Miller, Edward. 1878. *The history and doctrines of Irvingism: or of the so-called Catholic and Apostolic Church*. London: C. Kegan Paul, 75.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 69-70.

<sup>225</sup> "On May 2, 1832, sentence of expulsion was pronounced on Irving by the Presbytery of London, partly on a charge of heretical doctrine, partly on account of the manifestations which he had allowed in his church, and on the following Sunday the doors of his church in Regent Square were closed against him by the trustees. For a time his adherents found a refuge in a room in Gray's Inn Road, where Robert Owen had been used to lecture. Soon they removed to a more commodious building in Newman Street, which was opened on October 24, 1832, as the first Irvingite Church, and continued to be their head-quarters till the dedication of the magnificent edifice in Gordon Square on Christmas Eve, 1853." *Church Quarterly, The*. October 1878 - January 1879. Vol. VII. London: Spottiswoode & Co., 1879, 39.

him, now called him to their bar to answer the charge of holding heretical doctrine: viz., the sinfulness of our Lord's humanity.<sup>226</sup>

Mrs. Oliphant also records in her biography of Irving that with the exception of Dr. Duncan, "a man of universally acknowledged eminence and high character,"<sup>227</sup> the Annan Presbytery was made up of "homely old men, half farmers, half ministers . . . without a single qualification for deciding any question which required clear heads and practiced intelligence. . . ."<sup>228</sup> Irving, allowed to defend himself against the charges brought against him, delivered a lavish speech quoting from the 40<sup>th</sup> Psalm, but the Presbytery had already reached their verdict that he was guilty of heresy.

Irving had moved his family into a house on Newman Street, London, and this became the centre for his new church,<sup>229</sup> which was to bear the title of the Catholic Apostolic Church. Irving's Christology was radically different from that of the Plymouth Brethren, who held that "the humanity of Christ was not that of man, fallen or unfallen." According to Edward Irving, "Christ took our fallen nature."<sup>230</sup> Christ, in becoming man, "submitted Himself to the very condition of a sinner,"<sup>231</sup> taking "Himself the substance of fallen Adam . . ."<sup>232</sup> "But if, on the other hand, Christ took not our substance in its fallen, but in its unfallen state, and brought this unto glory, then nothing whatever hath been proved with respect to fallen creatures such as we are."<sup>233</sup> Christ took on our fallen nature, yet did not sin. "But Peter is not ashamed to say of the man Jesus Christ, 'He did no sin.'"<sup>234</sup> According to Irving, Christ took on the sinful flesh of the sinful nature of Adam and lived within sinful humanity to redeem humankind.

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<sup>226</sup> Oliphant, Mrs. 1862. *The life of Edward Irving, minister of the National Scotch church, London. Illustrated by his journals and correspondence*. London: Hurst and Blackett, II:339.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>229</sup> Oliphant, Mrs. 1862. *The life of Edward Irving, minister of the National Scotch church, London. Illustrated by his journals and correspondence*. London: Hurst and Blackett, (Second Edition), 316.

<sup>230</sup> Irving, Edward and Edward Irving. 1865. *Miscellanies from [his] collected writings*. London: A. Strahan. 115.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

Irving's eschatology was premillennial, with a "personal reign of Christ" during the millennium. He explained: "And an earlier father, I think Justin Martyr, says, that those in his time who were altogether orthodox believed in the Millennium, during which Christ's kingdom was to be set up, and Christ personally to reign on earth. Papias, also, to whom the opposers of the orthodox doctrine of Christ's personal reign are pleased to trace what they call the absurdity of Millenarianism. . . ." <sup>235</sup>

### The Catholic Apostolic Church

The formation of the Catholic Apostolic Church occurred as follows. In 1832, "as a result of the 'prophetic revelations,' certain men were regarded as called to the office of apostle. Others were added from time to time, until, in 1835, twelve in all had been chosen, corresponding to the original Apostolate. . . . Among them were men of some prominence, including Henry Drummond, Esq., a banker and distinguished member of Parliament; the Rev. Nicholas Armstrong, a clergyman of the Church of England, . . . and Mr. Percival, son of a prime minister of England." <sup>236</sup> The *Church Quarterly Review* of 1878-1879 provides the full list of the Apostles of the Catholic Apostolic Church; it is worth noting that Drummond, Tudor, and Percival all attended the 1826 Albury conference and that Thomas Carlyle was Irving's boyhood friend from Annan, Scotland.

"The following is a list of the Apostles <sup>237</sup> and of the districts to which they were called, answering to the twelve tribes of Israel." <sup>238</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Irving, Edward. 1829. *Exposition of the book of Revelation, in a series of lectures*. Catholic Apostolic Church collection. London: Baldwin and Cradock, 28-29.

<sup>236</sup> Religious Bodies: 1906. Department of Commerce and Labor Bureau of Census. Part II. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910, 180.

<sup>237</sup> "The restoration of the office of apostle was the characteristic feature of the movement. After many unsuccessful attempts they [the Catholic Apostolic Church] succeeded by the divine illumination of the prophets in calling twelve apostles, as chief rulers, and stewards of the church, evangelists and pastor (or angels, Rev. ii. 1, 8, etc.) were ordained in accordance with Eph. iv. 11; and subordinate to the pastors, there were appointed six elders and as many deacons, so that the office bearers of each congregation embraced thirteen persons, after the example of Christ and His twelve disciples." Kurtz, J. H., and John Macpherson. 1890. *Church history*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, III, 440.

<sup>238</sup> *Church Quarterly, The*. October 1878 to January 1879. Vol. VII. London: Spottiswoode & Co. 1879, 39.

John Bates Cardale, Esq.	England & Wales	Judah
Henry Drummond, Esq.	Switzerland & Scotland	Benjamin
John Tudor, Esq.	India & Poland	Ephraim
Spencer Percival, Esq.	Italy	Manasseh
Rev. John Armstrong, Esq.	Ireland & Greece	Zebulon
Rev. H. Dalton	France	Asher
Francis Sitwell, Esq.	Spain & Portugal	Naphtali
William King Church, Esq.	Denmark & Holland	Issachar
Thomas Carlyle, Esq.	North Germany	Simeon
Francis V. Woodhouse, Esq.	Austria	Reuben
Rev. W. Dow	Russia	Dan
David Dow, Esq.	Norway & Sweden	Gad

The Catholic Apostolic Church embraced the gifts of the Holy Spirit in line with Irving's ministry and the role of the apostle as the chief ruler was to authenticate the gifts. According to Columba Flegg, "... the Catholic Apostolics accepted the words spoken ecstatically by their prophets and authenticated by their apostles to be directly inspired by the Holy Spirit. Two particular forms of ecstatic speaking were a regular feature of the Catholic Apostolics in their early days: speaking in unknown tongues, and interpretation of tongues and of passages of Scripture; both were regarded as an activity of the Holy Spirit."<sup>239</sup> By what authority and qualification the apostles were able to validate the gifts of the Holy Spirit has to be questioned, since they were called upon to keep records of all "words spoken ecstatically."<sup>240</sup> As Flegg remarks, the "majority of the apostles and other writers had had a secular training rather than a theological one."<sup>241</sup> One is left with the impression that the apostle had an onerous task in that, while not being either theologically or linguistically trained, they were required to record the speaking of tongues, which by definition were unknown phenomena in records containing known phenomena. Such confusion is reflective of the ministry accepted and perpetuated by Irving.

The strong Jewish tendency is manifested not only in the twelve apostles who mimic the twelve tribes of Israel but also in the Eucharist, since

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<sup>239</sup> Flegg, Columba Graham. 1992. "Gathered under apostles": a study of the Catholic Apostolic Church. Oxford [England]: Clarendon Press, 30.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 29. Flegg qualifies the nature of "secular training" as being well versed in the Classical languages, as well as being familiar with contemporary theology.



the “Elements are kept in Tabernacles, with a light burning in front . . . [and] Tithes is, as a moral duty, rigidly enforced. Each member is expected to contribute one-tenth of his income to the purposes of the Church.”<sup>242</sup>

The limited amount of factual information that proceeded from the 1826 Albury conference precludes our having any definitive understanding of the exact nature of what was discussed and the tone of the meetings. However, much can be understood of the content of the meetings through the ecclesiology of the attendees. Regarding Edward Irving, he did leave his ministry with the Caledonian Chapel and hence the Church of Scotland, but this cannot be said to be a mark of secession. The action of the London Presbytery and the revocation of his ordination by the Annan Presbytery necessitated his leaving their ministry. For all his gifts of ministry, Irving must be considered somewhat naive, particularly in his relationship with Alexander J. Scott. Should Irving, in choosing Scott to be his assistant, have given him free reign with regard to his doctrines? Would Irving’s ministry have continued to expand and be mightily used by the Lord had he not been introduced to the spiritual gifts through Scott? His greatness in oratorical skills and his charisma as a person, together with his education, won him an enormous and powerful congregation at the Chapel. Did this create in his mind the idea that God was working powerfully through his ministry to the point that he could embrace novel ecclesiology that included speaking in tongues and a prophetic dispensational millenarianism? The evidence suggests that this was the case. While Irving may be considered naive and infatuated with his ministerial success, he did not voluntarily secede from the Established Church.<sup>243</sup> Unlike Darby, he was not a secessionist.

The 1826 Albury conference can best be understood in the context of the ecclesiology and eschatology of Edward Irving, who was present. The

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<sup>242</sup> Miller, Edward. 1878. *The history and doctrines of Irvingism: or of the so-called Catholic and Apostolic Church*. London: C. Kegan Paul, 324, 325.

<sup>243</sup> James Morgan expands on this thought. In speaking of Edward Irving, he remarks: “He was delivering mighty and majestic discourses on the great doctrines and duties of the Gospel; but, whether intoxicated by popularity, or only following his erratic though noble genius, he began to drift away from the full channel of truth, and got in among many dangerous shoals and breakers.” Morgan, James. 1874. *Recollections of my life and times; an autobiography, with selections from his journal*. Belfast: William Mullan, 21.

eschatology embraced the prophetic and historical timing and chronology of the Second Advent, meticulously worked out in fine detail and adjusted, as in the case of the 2300 or 2400 years, by Irving's mentor, James Hatley Frere. But Frere had been in dialogue with William Cunninghame, the former choosing a 2400-year period and the latter, 2300 years. Henry Drummond, the banker and supporter of Irving, would become one of the apostles, representing the tribe of Benjamin in the Apostolic Catholic Church. The future condition of the Jews was one of the subjects discussed at Albury. The Reverend Hugh McNeile echoed a common thought: "To the study of prophecy, we are thus indirectly indebted for the re-examination of many important doctrines which had been allowed to fall into comparative neglect."<sup>244</sup> Irving presented a similar argument regarding spiritual gifts: ". . . just as the verdure and leaves and flowers and fruits of the spring cease in winter, because, by the chill and wintry blasts which have blown over the Church, her power to put forth her glorious beauty hath been prevented,"<sup>245</sup> so spiritual gifts may have gone through winter in the church, but summer would come when these gifts would be revived.<sup>246</sup> Tragically for Irving, he thought that summer had indeed come for speaking in tongues. For McNeile, winter and summer pertained to prophecy, while for Irving the metaphor applied to the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The 1826 Albury prophetic conferences were important in their own right, but they gave birth to others, including the Powerscourt prophetic conferences that were to reflect very much the ecclesiology of the Plymouth Brethren and John Nelson Darby.

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<sup>244</sup> McNeile, Hugh. 1840. *Prospects of the Jews; or, A series of popular lectures on the prophecies relative to the Jewish nation*. Philadelphia: O. Rogers, preface.

<sup>245</sup> Irving, Edward and Edward Irving. 1865. *Miscellanies from [his] collected writings*. London: A. Strahan, 421.

<sup>246</sup> "The Church of Christ is recovering from a long sleep . . ." Oliphant, Mrs. 1862. *The life of Edward Irving, minister of the National Scotch church, London. Illustrated by his journals and correspondence*. London: Hurst and Blackett, (Second Edition), 148.

### The Powerscourt prophetic conferences

Lady Theodosia Anne Powerscourt was a deeply religious person. Her letters<sup>247</sup> reflect little of her own life but demonstrate a simple reliance upon the Bible. Baroness Nairne was very much impressed with *The Letters and Papers of the Late Theodosia A. Powerscourt*, remarking: “We read a letter of Lady Powerscourt daily, and generally a hymn of Miss Fry’s. She [Baroness Nairne the writer] liked these books because of the boundless love to His people, His choice of them from all eternity, and the certainty of forgiveness of sin . . .”<sup>248</sup>

Lady Powerscourt was born of an aristocratic family. Her father was Hugh Howard (Viscount Wicklow), and she herself was the second wife of Richard Wingfield, the fifth Viscount Powerscourt. Her marriage was on June 29, 1822, and she died a widow in Dublin on December 31, 1836.<sup>249</sup> Thus the Powerscourt prophetic conferences occurred toward the latter part of her life. By nature Lady Powerscourt was highly eclectic. Her minister and biographer was the Rev. Robert Daly, Rector of Powerscourt and later Bishop of Cashel; however, she later seceded from the Established Church, becoming a member of the Plymouth Brethren at Aungier Street.<sup>250</sup> She was deeply immersed in biblical prophecy, looking for the end of the world and the restoration of the Jewish nation. A year before her death, she wrote her missive entitled *Lady Powerscourt’s Questions for 1835*. The narrative included the following rather precise remarks: “Monday, 5 o’clock, September 7th, 1835.—What will be the history of the remnant after the return of the Jews? what the measure of renovation of the earth in the millennium? . . . Wednesday.—Does each dispensation end in apostasy only? or, is the dispensation revived in a remnant, the rejection of which consummates the apostasy?”<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Powerscourt, Theodosia A., and Robert Daly. 1845. *Letters and papers of the late Theodosia A., viscountess Powerscourt*. London: Seeley, Burnside, and Seeley.

<sup>248</sup> Nairne, Carolina Oliphant, Caroline Oliphant, and Charles Rogers. 1905. *Life and songs of the Baroness Nairne: with a memoir and poems of Caroline Oliphant the younger*. Edinburgh: J. Grant, 77.

<sup>249</sup> Howard, Joseph Jackson, and Frederick Arthur Crisp. 1897. *Visitation of Ireland*. [London]: Priv. print, 57.

<sup>250</sup> Madden, Hamilton. 1875. *Memoir of the late Right Rev. Robert Daly, D. D., Lord Bishop of Cashel*. London: J. Nisbet & Co, 157.

<sup>251</sup> *British Magazine, The*. Vol. X. London: J. G. & F. Rivington, 1836, 481-482.

What prompted Lady Powerscourt to establish an Irish prophetic conference appears uncertain. One source states that she attended an Albury conference: “Among the devout and honourable women who attended the Albury conferences in great numbers, was the Countess of Powerscourt. She was so delighted with them that she established a similar series of meetings at Powerscourt House . . .”<sup>252</sup> Unfortunately, there are questions as to the reliability of this source. The author puts the start date of the Albury conferences at 1827 instead of the correct year of 1826.<sup>253</sup> He also places “a great number of women” at this conference, when it has been established that there were only around twenty men in attendance. Hamilton Madden, the biographer for Robert Daly, presents a conflicting argument, stating that Lady Powerscourt attended one of the Albury conferences, but then adding that the first prophetic conference at Powerscourt House was in 1827.<sup>254</sup> It would be fair to say that Lady Powerscourt may have attended an Albury conference, but support for this argument is not conclusive.

It is generally agreed that the date for the first Powerscourt conference was October 4-7, 1831; this is on the strength of an article in the *Christian Herald* following the second conference from September 24-28, 1832. On October 15, Darby wrote a letter from Ireland to a brother in Plymouth,<sup>255</sup> in which he says, “It will be impossible to give you any sketch of the matter here . . .”<sup>256</sup> The consensus view is that “here” has reference to the second Powerscourt conference, which was followed by a letter addressed to the editor of the *Christian Herald* that is understood to be from Darby. The letter

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<sup>252</sup> *Littell's Living Age*. Fifth Series, Volume LII. Boston: Littell and Co., 1885, 348.

<sup>253</sup> “Thus in the year 1827 a series of prophetic meetings were established at Albury Park in Surrey . . .” *Ibid*.

<sup>254</sup> “An interesting account is given in the memoir of the Rev. Edward Irving of some meetings which were held in the year 1826, at Albury, the seat of Henry Drummond, Esq. Lady Powerscourt was present at these meetings, as appears from a letter to Mr. Daly, of which the following is an extract: ‘I am going to the prophets’ meeting at Mr. Drummond’s . . . No arguments are to me stronger than yours, so much so that I always conclude I have strong grounds for an opinion if it is not shaken by your arguments to the contrary.’ They appear to have suggested to her the idea of holding similar ‘discussions’ at Powerscourt House, which she did in the autumn of the year 1827 . . .” Madden, Hamilton. 1875. *Memoir of the late Right Rev. Robert Daly, D. D., Lord Bishop of Cashel*. London: J. Nisbet & Co, 150.

<sup>255</sup> Darby, John Nelson. *Writings, letters*, Vol. 1. Number 2.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid*.

certainly reflects the tone of a prophetic meeting, and there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the dates given for the conferences. However, there is a conflict with another letter dated October 13, 1830, and sent from London by Edward Irving to his sister. In this letter Irving states that he had just been to Ireland and stayed with Lady Powerscourt. “When the Countess of Powerscourt, after her noble and Christian entertainment of us, thought it good to bring us in her own carriage to the waterside at Kingstown . . .”<sup>257</sup> Since Irving wrote a letter to his wife from Albury on July 2, 1830, we conclude he was with Lady Powerscourt between July 2 and October 13, 1830. While with Lady Powerscourt, Mrs. Irving wrote an undated letter to her sister in which she discussed her husband: “On Wednesday he attended a clerical meeting; upward of thirty clergymen, some laymen, and a few ladies present.”<sup>258</sup>

If the view generally held by most scholars was that the first Powerscourt conference was held October 4-7, 1831, Irving’s letters demonstrate that he was at Powerscourt a year earlier, in 1830. Either the first Powerscourt conference was held not in 1831 but in 1830, or Irving and his family were merely on holiday in Ireland in 1830 staying with Lady Powerscourt. The evidence suggests that the latter is more plausible, for a number of reasons. In the letter sent from Powerscourt by Mrs. Irving to her sister, she makes the following comments:

We landed about 10 P.M. on the Dublin quay; so we went to a hotel for the night, and next forenoon proceeded to Powerscourt. Here we met a kind, hearty welcome . . . Next morning we drove out a few miles to visit a waterfall . . . On our return at three o’clock, there was a great gathering to hear Edward preach. After dinner, Lady Powerscourt and Edward set out to a Mr. Kelly’s, near Dublin, where he met many clergymen. On Sabbath he preached twice in Dublin; on Monday he again preached twice, and came here to a late dinner; there were several clergymen to meet him. Tuesday he preached at Bray. On Wednesday he attended a clerical meeting; upwards of thirty clergymen, some laymen, and a few ladies present. . . . On Thursday

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<sup>257</sup> Oliphant, Mrs. 1862. *The life of Edward Irving, minister of the National Scotch church, London. Illustrated by his journals and correspondence.* London: Hurst and Blackett, (Second Edition), 152.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

morning we went together and attended a meeting of the Bible society at Wicklow. Edward preached thirteen times in eight days.<sup>259</sup>

That there was a clerical meeting is quite obvious, but it is also apparent that Irving was not attending a four-day conference at Powerscourt, but was simply going out to preach each day. Since the conferences occurred for two successive years, the dates 1831 and 1832 are sustainable.

Returning to the question of why Lady Powerscourt initiated an Irish prophetic conference, it appears highly likely that Edward Irving was acquainted with her prior to 1830.<sup>260</sup> Already enraptured with the prophesied nearness of the end of the world and encouraged by Irving's thirteen preaching engagements, Lady Powerscourt then felt the need to develop a prophetic conference along the lines of Albury. As for Irving, motivated by his successful speaking engagement in the fall of 1830, he returned the following year and attended the first Irish Powerscourt conference October 4-7, 1831. Mrs. Irving's letter records that Edward preached twice in Dublin in 1830. This appears plausible since Powerscourt House, situated in Bray, was little more than ten miles from Dublin, the location of the Aungier Street Brethren assembly. Did Irving preach at Aungier Street, and if so did he meet Darby? With the expansion of the Plymouth Brethren, along with Irving's successful preaching tour in 1830, it seems natural that these would be followed by a prophetic conference in 1831 similar to Albury. It is to the content of that first prophetic conference that I now turn.

The Powerscourt conferences were organized much like the Albury conferences. They were attended by clergy and laity, as well as dissenters. Irving, Darby, Bellett, C.V. Wigram, Percy Hall Henry Craik, Mr. Synge of Glanmore Castle, Mr. Müller, and Edward Denny were among the members

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Mrs. Hamilton Madden makes the following comment: "An interesting account is given in the Memoir of the Rev. Edward Irving of some meetings which were held in the year 1826, at Albury, the seat of Henry Drummond, Esq. Lady Powerscourt was present at these meetings, as appears from a letter to Mr. Daly, of which the following is an extract: - 'I am going to the prophets' meeting at Mr. Drummond's . . . No arguments are to me stronger than yours, so much so that I always conclude I have strong grounds for an opinion if it is not shaken by your argument to the contrary.' They appear to have suggested to her the idea of holding similar 'discussions' at Powerscourt House . . ." Madden, Hamilton. 1875. *Memoir of the Right Rev. Robert Daly*, 150.

that attended one or more of the conferences. At the first Powerscourt conference, which appears to have been organized in 1831, the moderator was Robert Daly, who took the chair. "A subject was arranged for consideration each day, and a copy of the proceedings given to each person. The meetings were begun and concluded with prayer."<sup>261</sup> The subjects that were discussed included the soon-expected Second Advent, the nature of the Antichrist, unanimously regarded as "a personal antichrist,"<sup>262</sup> the nature of the Jewish nation, the restoration of spiritual gifts, and prophetic interpretation, with particular emphasis on Daniel and to a lesser extent Revelation. The views of Edward Irving were held in high esteem, particularly his prophetic contribution to the understanding of the impending Second Advent. He strongly opposed dissent, favouring support of the Established Church.<sup>263</sup> His views of the restoration of spiritual gifts, however, were divisive. Daly was particularly vociferous concerning his doctrines and expressed his concerns in a letter to a Christian friend sent from Dublin, dated April 20: "I feel a great deal for the state the Lord's Church is in, yet I cannot think that really Christian people will be long left in the fundamental errors of Irvingism. . . . I ought first to know your doctrines before I enquire even into your pretensions to gifts."<sup>264</sup> The same sentiment was shared by the article that has been attributed to J. N. Darby: "There was but one individual who introduced anything which could have given pain to any on these subjects; and that was a reference to the reception of 'the gifts' and the principles connected with it."<sup>265</sup>

The second Powerscourt conference that convened September 24-28, 1832, tended to be more divisive. Robert Daly's speech given at the end of this conference hinted at extreme controversy, with reference made to the Plymouth Brethren: "I must say in truth that I do feel my mind so harassed

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> *Christian Herald, The*. 1831.

<sup>263</sup> Morgan, James. 1874. *Recollections of my life and times; an autobiography, with selections from his journal*. Belfast: William Mullan, 21. Note: The author adds the following comment regarding Irving and members at the first Powerscourt conference: "They found his views on Baptism and the Lord's Supper kindred to their own. He went much farther than many of them did or yet do." Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Madden, Hamilton. 1875. *Memoir of the Right Rev. Robert Daly*, 152.

with all that has passed, that instead of saying anything more, I think it best to ask forgiveness for all the evil that has crept in among us through our defilement and infirmity . . . and if, in the various observations which have been made (this evening particularly), there have been great differences of opinion upon what appear to be fundamental points of doctrine . . . when I see before me the prospect of such divisions in the Church, when I think of those being separated upon earth . . . Better to depart and be with Christ.”<sup>266</sup> The Rev. Peter Roe, rector of Odogh and St. Mary’s Kilkenny, found that “. . . the consideration of prophetic subjects . . . upon the whole was unprofitable. Many of the subjects were evidently difficult to be understood.”<sup>267</sup>

The record of the third and last conference to be organized at Powerscourt House<sup>268</sup> is covered in greater detail in the letters of Henry Craik (1805-1866). Born in Scotland, Craik was associated with George Müller and the early Brethren movement and was a tutor for the family of Anthony Norris Groves. Henry Craik’s diary entries for the third Powerscourt conference, which convened September 23-28, 1833, are far more illuminating and are given here in full:

*Monday, 23rd September.*—Arrived at Powerscourt from Glanmore about 1, and met for the breaking of bread. . . . In the evening, we considered the difference between the Everlasting Covenant and the Covenant of the Lord. *Tuesday, 24 September, 1833.*—Is the visible Christian Church founded on the basis of the Jewish: What is the nature of the ministry and ordinances of the former? Are the promises to either, or both, conditional? *Wednesday, 25th September, 1833.*—The analogy between the close of this dispensation and the former. What is Mystic Babylon? Is the call out of her to be a Divine call at a set period, or is it a perpetual call? *Thursday, 26th September, 1833.*—What is the connection between the present and the future dispensation? *Friday, 27th. September, 1833.* The Temptations of Satan. *Saturday, 28th. September, 1833.*—Heard Brother Muller expound in the morning, after which we had the Lord’s Supper at Lady Powerscourt’s. Took leave and came to Dublin.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> *Christian Herald, The.* 1831.

<sup>266</sup> Madden, Hamilton. 1875. *Memoir of the Right Rev. Robert Daly*, 154.

<sup>267</sup> Madden, Samuel. 1842. *Memoir of the life of the late Rev. Peter Roe ... with copious extracts from his correspondence, diaries, and other remains.* Dublin: W. Curry, Jun. and Company; [etc.], 445.

<sup>268</sup> Subsequent to this date a number of conferences were held at another venue.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 168, 169.



It now remains to draw conclusions from the two conferences.

### Conclusions from the Albury and Powerscourt conferences

One of those that attended Albury 1826 was S. R. Maitland. Such delegates as Frere, Irving, and Drummond were still maintaining historicism; however, as David Bebbington points out:

[In] 1826 there appeared a book arguing strongly for a futurist interpretation of Revelation in order to undermine all millenarian notions. The unintended effect of this work by S. R. Maitland, the future historian, was to inspire an alternative tradition of millennial thought. At Albury, Maitland's theory that Revelation was yet to be fulfilled, was already being canvassed, and by 1843 half a dozen other writers had taken the field in favour of the same principle. . . . But the most significant figure to adopt a form of futurist premillennialism was J. N. Darby . . . He steadily elaborated the view that the predictions of Revelation would be fulfilled after believers had been caught up to meet Christ in the air, the so called 'rapture.'<sup>270</sup>

Irving himself was greatly influenced by his translation of Lacunza's *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty* (1827) and shifted his view from historicism to futurism.<sup>271</sup> Thus at Albury there was a tension and division along two distinct lines of interpretation, namely, historicism and futurism. Powerscourt tended to follow more along the line of futurism, as explained by George Eldon Ladd: "It was in these Powerscourt meetings that some of the characteristic doctrines of 'Darbyism' can be discovered for the first time. Out of this revival of interest in prophetic truth came two new interpretations: futurism and 'Darbyism.'<sup>272</sup> Ladd is also in agreement with Bebbington in ascribing futurism to Maitland: "The rediscovery of futurism is

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<sup>270</sup> Bebbington, D. W. 1989. *Evangelicalism in modern Britain: a history from the 1730s to the 1980s*. London: Routledge, 85, 86.

<sup>271</sup> "After this the family tree of the futurist view is easy to follow. Edward Irving (1792-1834) was the man who translated Lacunza's book into English. He was a Church of Scotland minister, he was involved in the Albury Park prophecy conferences. He taught extensively the ideas found in Lacunza's book. The Plymouth Brethren supported these views and one of their leaders, J.N. Darby (1800-1882), further promoted these ideas with a splash of his own ideas added." Molles, Brad. 2004. *The Beast and the Bride. Interpreting Revelation in the light of history*. Raleigh, NC: Lulu Press, 8. "Edward Irving, an influential pastor within the Church of Scotland . . . Unfortunately, he accepted Ribera's futurism and even translated the of book of a Spanish Jesuit Scholar." Weber, Martin. 2002. *Desecration, danger, deliverance: what the Bible really says about the Rapture*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Association, 47.

<sup>272</sup> Ladd, George Eldon. 1956. *The blessed hope*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 37.

associated with the names of S. R. Maitland, James Todd, and William Burgh.”<sup>273</sup> Bebbington adds his thoughts to those of Ladd: “But the most significant figure to adopt a form of futurist premillennialism was J. N. Darby, the fertile mind behind another adventist sect, the Brethren.”<sup>274</sup> Herbert Douglass offers insight into futurism at Powerscourt: “Hard as it is to believe, several scholars of the famous Powerscourt meetings (much to the protest of their colleagues) advocated this new position as an important ingredient in their developing outline of a brand new premillennialism. It seemed to be the incentive that two other struggling ideas needed: (1) futurism, the concept that the seventieth week of Daniel 9 and the prophecies of Revelation 4 to 22 were yet future events to be completed during the seven years immediately preceding the return of Jesus in judgment and (2) Darby’s dispensationalism.”<sup>275</sup> David Faust, quoting from the *Dictionary of Premillennialism*, states that “The Powerscourt Conferences of 1831 to 1833 most probably moved Darby from his earlier historicist premillennialism to futurist premillennialism.”<sup>276</sup>

Whereas Ladd prefers to use the phrase “new interpretations: futurism and ‘Darbyism,’” Richard Landes understands Darby more in the light of *promoting* futurism. “Besides promoting these standard futurist doctrines, Darby’s main accomplishment was the introduction of a new method of dividing history into ‘dispensations,’ or eras marked by changes in God’s revelation to humanity, and analyzing scripture and prophecy within the framework of the dispensations.”<sup>277</sup>

The subject of spiritual gifts in general was highly controversial especially speaking in tongues, which was divisive. Edward Irving, mentored by Alexander C. Scott, popularized the matter of gifts, maintaining that they were part of the New Testament church but had lain dormant only to be

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Bebbington, David W. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain. A History from the 1730’s to the 1980’s*. New York: Routledge, 1989, 85.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Faust, J. D. 2002. *The Rod: Will God Spare It?* Hayesville, N.C: Schoettle Publishing Co., 361. Note: see also: Floyd Elmore. “Darby, John Nelson.” *Dictionary of premillennial theology*, 1997, Mal Couch, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 83.

resurrected in latter times. The divisiveness ultimately fractured Irving's ministry with the presbytery of the Caledonian Chapel and led to the establishment of the Catholic Apostolic Church. There is no record of any contention over spiritual gifts at the first Albury conference, partly attributable to the fact that Irving received support from Henry Drummond, Spencer Percival, and John Tudor, three of the attendees at Albury 1926 who would later become Apostles in the Catholic Apostolic Church. The gifts of the Spirit and speaking in tongues caused far more reaction at the first Powerscourt conference and among churchmen in general. Robert Daly and J. N. Darby were particularly critical of Irving at Powerscourt. Peter Roe met Irving in London in September 1830 and recorded his sentiments in his journal: "He [Irving] expressed his decided opinion that the miraculous gifts which were conferred upon the Apostles would never have been taken from the Church, but for her unfaithfulness. . . . How a man of education, understanding, and piety, could sanction such enthusiasm appears very strange."<sup>278</sup> Roe, in another journal entry dated December 31, 1831, with an obvious reference to Irving, commented on tongues and miracles which were so distracting: "I believe the whole to be a delusion, and a work highly approved by the Prince of Darkness."<sup>279</sup>

In a letter to a Lady dated November 12, 1831, Roe is particular and to the point: "I have no hesitation in saying, that the miracles so called, and the boasted gift of tongues, are the result of an awful delusion . . . I have no hesitation in saying, that the proceeding in Mr. Irving's Chapel are dishonouring to the Christian name and character. . . . The whole from beginning to end, is a delusion."<sup>280</sup> Edward Irving defends his view of spiritual gifts: "Therefore it is nothing to be doubted that tongues are a great instrument for personal edification, however mysterious it may seem to us; and they are on that account greatly to be desired, altogether independently of their being a

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<sup>277</sup> Landes, Richard Allen. 2000. *Encyclopedia of millennialism and millennial movements*. Routledge encyclopedias of religion and society. New York: Routledge, 348.

<sup>278</sup> Madden, Samuel. 1842. *Memoir of the life of the late Rev. Peter Roe ... with copious extracts from his correspondence, diaries, and other remains*. Dublin: W. Curry, Jun, and Company; [etc.], 443.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 444.

sign unto others. . . . It is not material to the question whether these tongues were tongues of men or of angels . . . ”<sup>281</sup> Others too are defensive of the use of spiritual gifts. E. P. Barrows in speaking of Irving asked why we should be so “perplexed with the Pentecostal gift of tongues . . . [since this] enabled his apostles to speak in foreign tongues, both as a sign of their Divine commission, and as a help in the work of propagating the Gospel.”<sup>282</sup> Unfortunately for Irving, tongues, far from being a help in “propagating the Gospel,” was detrimental to his ministry with the Caledonian Chapel. Because J. N. Darby did not subscribe to the gifts of tongues, this became one of the main dividing factors between the two. Darby had debated with Irving both on the nature of spiritual gifts and whether there was continuance in the church today, as Irving had maintained. Darby’s response was succinct and to the point:

There are two kinds of gifts entirely distinct; I said so thirty years ago to Irving. Those in 1 Corinthians 12 are gifts of power, so much so that often when there was positive power nobody was to use it; it was all under the rule and authority of Christ’s order in the house. And so, therefore, I get no promise of the continuance of gifts; but when I come to Ephesians 4, I get no gifts that are signs at all; but, after the foundation of apostles and prophets, I get evangelists, pastors and teachers, those which the Lord uses to build up His church, “until we all come.”<sup>283</sup>

As Witness Lee notes, not only Darby but many other regenerated saints did not speak in tongues, including Martin Luther, D. L. Moody, C. H. Spurgeon, and Hudson Taylor. “All these great men, although they did not speak in tongues, were regenerated.”<sup>284</sup> However, whether or not one speaks in tongues is really not the issue. Both Irving and Darby parted company with the church but for different reasons. Irving was ousted by both the London and Annan presbyteries because of his acceptance of speaking in tongues by others, whereas Darby’s secession was due to his understanding of the ruin of

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Irving, Edward and Gavin Carlyle. 1865. *The collected writings of Edward Irving*. London: A. Strahan & Co., 548.

<sup>282</sup> Barrows, E. P. *The Indivisible Nature of Revelation*. Bibliotheca Sacra. Vol. X. Andover: W. F. Draper and Brother, 1858, 769.

<sup>283</sup> Darby, John Nelson. *The Acts of the Apostles*, 94.

<sup>284</sup> Lee, Witness. 1986. *The divine economy*. Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 101.

the church. Scott Gibson, in speaking of both Darby and Irving, supports this thesis: “Irving was the rejected Church of Scotland minister who advocated premillennial views and the regaining of apostolic gifts of tongues . . .”<sup>285</sup> While there was much ecclesiology that found mutual acceptance between Irving and Darby, the apostolic gift of tongues remained a source of division. In speaking of the rapture of the saints, Martyn Lloyd-Jones comments: “Only J. N. Darby and certain of his followers accepted it, though they entirely disassociated themselves from Edward Irving when he began to talk about the tongues, the visions, the apostles and so on.”<sup>286</sup>

The views of the apostasy of the church tended not to be divisive at Albury 1826, and the creation of the Catholic Apostolic Church was more contingent on Irving’s trial and his dismissal from the Caledonian Chapel, ostensibly for his acceptance of spiritual gifts within his ministry. Powerscourt was different, and the secessionists were allied to the Plymouth Brethren. The anonymous contributor to an article in the *Millennial Harbinger* is in error when stating that Irving seceded from the Church of Scotland.<sup>287</sup> The same erroneous sentiment is shared in *The Life of Benjamin Jowett* that “J. Campbell of Row . . . had been ousted from the Church of Scotland on account of his opinions shortly after the secession of Edward Irving.”<sup>288</sup> Washington Wilks provides a more informed analysis: “At the same time, the cast of his intellect and the fervour of his patriotism made him averse to secession from the National Church . . .”<sup>289</sup> In his discussion of Irving, James Morgan supports the view of Wilks: “His denunciations of Dissent and applauding of

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<sup>285</sup> Gibson, Scott M. 2001. *A.J. Gordon: American premillennialist*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 30.

<sup>286</sup> Lloyd-Jones, David Martyn. 2003. *Great doctrines of the Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 138.

<sup>287</sup> “Who has not heard of Edward Irving - the eloquent, the gifted, the pious, the erratic Irving? It was my fortune while in London frequently to hear him preach, both before and after his secession from the Church of Scotland; and never shall I forget the man, his matter, and his manner.” *Millennial Harbinger: Series III. Vol. II Article entitled Edward Irving*. Bethany: 1845, 500.

<sup>288</sup> Jowett, Benjamin, Evelyn Abbott, and Lewis Campbell. 1897. *The Life and Letters of Benjamin Jowett, M.A. Master of Balliol College Oxford*. Vol. 1. London: John Murray, 266.

<sup>289</sup> Wilks, Washington. 1854. *Edward Irving: an ecclesiastical and literary biography*. London: W. Freeman, 9.

Established Churches had naturally strong attractions for them.”<sup>290</sup> These sentiments are shared by Irving himself: “But they should be careful to give no provocation to the ruling powers, lest they should drive them headlong into error; to establish no principle of secession or dissent, but simply to build up the church of Christ in the land . . . and wait for the Lord’s coming.”<sup>291</sup>

The topic of the apostasy of the church and secession will be examined more fully in the chapter devoted to Darby’s views of the church. Suffice it to say at this juncture that it was at the Powerscourt conferences that the seeds of dissent were sown, the first fruits of that harvest being Lady Powerscourt herself who, seceding from the Church of Ireland, joined the Plymouth Brethren at Aungier Street.

There was a general agreement both at Albury and Powerscourt that the Second Advent<sup>292</sup> was, if not imminent, certainly within the lifetime of those that attended the conferences. There was a clear tension between the historicists and the futurists, the former being dominant at Albury and the latter at Powerscourt. However, with the Second Advent near, it was obvious that it had to occur at the commencement rather than the conclusion of the millennium; hence, premillennialism was the one doctrine that found common agreement. The literal interpretation of prophecy naturally led to a literal rather than a figurative hermeneutic applied to the millennium. Post-millennialists were still to be found outside of Albury and Powerscourt, as in the case of a Mr. Wardlaw, a well-known anti-millenarian,<sup>293</sup> but this eschatological positioning had by 1830 become a minority view. Of importance was the nature of the Second Advent, whether it was to be spiritual, figurative, or literal. Irving, while acknowledging the variety of interpretations, admits to the confusion surrounding the subject: “. . . and whether there be such a thing as the coming of the Lord in glory and majesty,

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<sup>290</sup> Morgan, James. 1874. *Recollections of my life and times; an autobiography, with selections from his journal*. Belfast: William Mullan, 21.

<sup>291</sup> Irving, Edward. 1831. *Exposition of the book of Revelation, in a series of lectures*. Catholic Apostolic Church collection. London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1053.

<sup>292</sup> Or the “appearing,” which will be discussed subsequently.

<sup>293</sup> Madden, Samuel. 1842. *Memoir of the life of the late Rev. Peter Roe ... with copious extracts from his correspondence, diaries, and other remains*. Dublin: W. Curry, Jun. and Company; [etc.], 441.

mentioned in all the Scriptures; and whether there be ever such a thing as a spiritual coming of the Lord (which I confess I never heard of, or read of, till within these half-dozen years . . .)”<sup>294</sup> The *Millennial Harbinger* attempted to bring understanding to the subject: “Conjecture is let loose with law, lines, or landmarks to define this spiritual coming, its manner, design, or time—varying with every imagination, dubious, indefinable, and baseless . . . with spiritualizers originated the doctrine of this figurative coming . . .”<sup>295</sup> The subject of the Second Advent will find further treatment in a discussion of the conferences and prophecy, as well as the eschatology of John Nelson Darby.

The restoration and conversion of the Jewish nation was central to the eschatology of both Albury 1826 and the Powerscourt conferences. The topics set for Albury included “the present and future conditions of the Jews [and] the duties growing out of the same towards the Jews.” The topics for Powerscourt 1833 focused on the nature of the Christian church, whether it was founded on Judaism and the conditionality of the promises.<sup>296</sup>

Joseph Wolff, who attended Albury 1826, was paradoxical. He has been described as an “eccentric, enterprising, ambitious and conceited man,”<sup>297</sup> yet he proved invaluable at Albury. “No appeal was allowed but to the scriptures, of which the originals lay before us, in the interpretation of which, if any question arose, we had the learned eastern scholar perhaps in the world to appeal to, and a native Hebrew, I mean Joseph Wolff.”<sup>298</sup> Wolff’s father was a rabbi with a strict Jewish education, but he was also schooled in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and German.<sup>299</sup> Wolff was converted to Christianity at the age of twelve and suffered severe persecution from his family and the

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<sup>294</sup> Irving, Edward. 1850. *The last days: a discourse on the evil character of these our times, providing them to be the "perilous times" of the "last days"*. London: J. Nisbet, 340.

<sup>295</sup> *Millennial Harbinger*. Vol. VI., Alexander Campbell, ed. Bethany: Campbell, 1835, 583.

<sup>296</sup> Craik, Henry, W. Elfe Tayler, and George Müller. 1866. *Passages from the diary and letters of Henry Craik*. London: J.F. Shaw & Co. , 168.

<sup>297</sup> *Christian Examiner, The*. Volume LXXI, Edward Everett Hale, ed. Boston: J. Miller, 1861, 422.

<sup>298</sup> Lacunza, Manuel, and Edward Irving. 1827. *The coming of Messiah in glory and majesty*. London: L.B. Seeley. I:125.

<sup>299</sup> Wolff, Joseph, and John Bayford. 1824. *Missionary journal and memoir of the Rev. Joseph Wolf: missionary to the Jews*. New York: E. Bliss & E. White, 1, 2, 7.

Jewish community. Only his uncle stood by him in his new faith.<sup>300</sup> Central to Joseph Wolff's ecclesiology was the restoration and conversion of the Jews.<sup>301</sup> Other members of Albury 1826 besides Wolff, who made the restoration and conversion of the Jewish nation central to their eschatology, included Lewis Way,<sup>302</sup> Edward Irving,<sup>303</sup> William Cuninghame,<sup>304</sup> Hugh Mc Neile,<sup>305</sup> and James Hatley Frere.<sup>306</sup> Wolff, like Frere, was a historicist, as LeRoy Froom explains: "Whether I [Wolff] am right or wrong in regard to my literal interpretation of prophecy must be determined, not by any letter written at Calcutta . . . but the corresponding physical, historical and literal meaning."<sup>307</sup>

The restoration of the Jews was a pivotal doctrine of the Catholic Apostolic Church and the twelve Apostles of this church. Henry Drummond, John Tudor, and Spencer Percival all attended Albury 1826. The restoration and conversion of the Jewish nation was a central theme at Powerscourt, as typified by Edward Bickersteth<sup>308</sup> and the Plymouth Brethren.<sup>309</sup> As the latter embraced the eschatology of J. N. Darby, this will be the focus of further analysis in the following chapter. Given the emphasis on the restoration and conversion of the Jewish nation prior to the Second Advent, it must be asserted that the general consensus at both Albury and Powerscourt was the

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>301</sup> Wolff, Joseph. 1838. *Journal of the Rev. Joseph Wolff...in a series of letters to Sir Thomas Baring, Bart. containing an account of his missionary labours from the years 1827 to 1831: and from the years 1835 to 1838.* London: J. Burns, 94. 96.

<sup>302</sup> Wolff, Joseph, and John Bayford. 1824. *Missionary journal and memoir of the Rev. Joseph Wolf: missionary to the Jews.* New York: E. Bliss & E. White, 111.

<sup>303</sup> Irving, Edward. 1828. *Sermons, lectures, and occasional discourses.* London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1094.

<sup>304</sup> Cuninghame, William. 1817. *A dissertation on the seals and trumpets of the Apocalypse and the prophetic period of twelve hundred and sixty years.* London: Printed for J. Hatchard, 266.

<sup>305</sup> McNeile, Hugh. 1828. *The times of the Gentiles.* London: J. Hatchard and Son, 30.

<sup>306</sup> "In the later editions of Scott's widely-circulated Commentary, the restoration of the Jews occupies a prominent place in the notes on the prophets. *Faber, Cuninghame (Lainshaw), Frere, Irving, Fry, Mc Neile, Bickersteth, Burgh, Brooks, Birks, Elliott, Brown, Bonars, Wood, Milyneux,* and others, all make the conversion and restoration of the Jews one of the main turning-points in transition of the world from its present to its millennial state." *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review, and Quarterly Record of Christian Literature.* Vol. IV. Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1855, 167.

<sup>307</sup> Froom, Le Roy Edwin. 1948. *The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers: the historical development of prophetic interpretation.* Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 480.

<sup>308</sup> Bickersteth, Edward. 1841. *The restoration of the Jews to their own land: in connection with their future conversion and the final blessedness of our earth.* London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside.



unconditionality of the Abrahamic Covenant, which meant that the land of Palestine belonged to the Jewish nation in perpetuity.

Since both Albury and Powerscourt were prophetic conferences, any consensus would rest ultimately on the prophetic hermeneutic applied by the attendees. But there were dissenting views of prophecy, as for example Robert Daly at Powerscourt, who felt that whereas the whole subject of prophecy was interesting and perhaps edifying, it was the last thing to be spouted from the pulpit.<sup>310</sup> Daly also noted that there was considerable disagreement over minor points of interpretation, and indeed this was the case with Charles Hatley Frere's long historicist prophecy of the 2400 days to mitigate errors in William Cunninghame's short prophecy of 2300, as adopted by Albury 1826. This was considered "The system of the prophetic visions and numbers of Daniel and the Apocalypse,"<sup>311</sup> which also occupied the prophetic discussions at Powerscourt. How this was interpreted by John Nelson Darby remains for analysis in the subsequent chapter.

Of central importance is the way that the Albury and Powerscourt conferences shaped Darby's eschatology. The main character at Albury was Irving, and while a direct dependence of Irving upon Darby cannot be demonstrated, both Irving and the Albury conference were efficacious in the development of the Powerscourt conference. There is considerable debate as to whether Lady Powerscourt ever attended Albury; however, she was well acquainted with Robert Daly, rector of Powerscourt; Daly's biographer, Mrs. Hamilton Madden, does state that Lady Powerscourt attended Albury.<sup>312</sup> It has also been demonstrated that Irving stayed with Lady Powerscourt in 1830 when he was on his preaching tour, this being a year before the first conference. It therefore appears highly likely that Irving and Albury moved Lady Powerscourt to convene a similar conference at her home in Ireland. Since the Powerscourt conferences were dominated by Darby and the

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<sup>309</sup> *Eclectic Review, The*. January - June 1841. Vol. IX. London: Jackson and Walford, 296.

<sup>310</sup> Madden, Hamilton. 1875. *Memoir of the Right Rev. Robert Daly*, 20.

<sup>311</sup> Lacunza, Manuel, and Edward Irving. 1827. *The coming of Messiah in glory and majesty*. London: L.B. Seecley. I:123.

<sup>312</sup> Madden, Hamilton. 1875. *Memoir of the Right Rev. Robert Daly*, 150.

Plymouth Brethren, it can be argued that Irving and Albury were causal factors in the establishment of the Plymouth Brethren and hence Darby's eschatology. In the formative years of the Brethren, when George Bellett, Anthony Norris Groves, and Darby had gathered in the drawing room to have Bible studies together, Irving's doctrines were well known. Both George Bellett and his father found Irving's doctrines divisive.<sup>313</sup> Groves too appears to have been familiar with Irving's doctrines in his mention of "miraculous gifts" and conversion.<sup>314</sup> If Irving is to be seen as divisive in his embracing of miraculous gifts and the use of speaking in tongues in particular, he was not a secessionist like Darby. Divisive doctrines aside, Irving, Darby, Groves, and Bellett all turned to the primitive church as the ideal and for the Brethren. This included the breaking of bread every Sunday as a rite instituted by Christ and not a political test of conformity. Equally important for all was the subject of unfulfilled prophecy and the soon-to-be-expected Second Coming of Christ. Albury prepared the way for a new generation of "believers" to be immersed in an eschatology of premillennialism, prophecy, and futurism, thus enabling Powerscourt to communicate eschatological values to an already prepared audience. Thus, the influence of Irving and hence Albury can be seen to have had a direct influence on Darby and the Plymouth Brethren in the formative years, when a small group of "believers" were seeking direction and identity in being in line with the New Testament church. There was also a negative side to both conferences, in that sound biblical scholarship gave way to speculative prophetic interpretations, in which the overt preaching style of

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<sup>313</sup> "I do not remember hearing what effect his [Bellett's] preaching had on his first going to Bridnorth. As he tells us, he found his parish sadly upset by the new doctrines of Irving, and his first work was to try and undo the mischief of his predecessor who had imbibed these false notions, and had done his best to draw his people into the like snare." Bellett, George, and Samuel Bentley. 1889. *Memoir of the Rev. George Bellett: autobiography and continuation by his daughter*. London: J. Masters and Co., 99.

<sup>314</sup> "Many minds are still exercised about the miraculous gifts being the necessary warrant to go and preach to the heathen or Mohammedan nations. I cannot but feel the help they might be; but that they are not *needed is plain*; for all who have been converted during the last 1500 years, have been converted without them. I have had a kind note from an Irvingite friend, condemning us for disorderly walking; and yet, surely, those of his views are examples of the same." Groves, Anthony Norris. 1857. *Memoir of the late Anthony Norris Groves, containing extracts from his letters and journals*. London: James Nisbet, 313-314.

Irving and the dogmatism of Darby excelled.<sup>315</sup> Thus much of modern American speculative eschatology can be traced back to the Albury and Powerscourt conferences.

In summary, both Albury and Powerscourt paved the way for a new and revolutionary eschatology, shifting the balance from post- to pre-millennialism, from historicism to futurism, and factoring in the importance of national Israel as precursory to the Second Advent. Thus, Albury and Powerscourt can be seen as the battleground where the old historicist and post-millennialist hermeneutic waged war with the new and innovative ideas of an imminent Second Advent, rooted in pre-millennialist futurism. This futurist premillennialism would be further developed by Darby to incorporate his notion of the secret rapture and to form an eschatological framework for dispensationalist millenarianism that has shaped and moulded eschatology up to the modern period of the church.

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<sup>315</sup> “Try these meetings by this test - can such a character, (and such, on the very lowest estimate is essential to those who meet to examine the mysterious subjects proposed,) can such a character be affirmed of the Powerscourt meetings for prophetic discussion? . . . Is it, in a meeting where the rapid talker, the imaginative speculatist, the bold affirmer, must always have, from its constitution, an apparent triumph, and the dogmatist may, nay, must produce an impression perhaps the most injurious, and which, from the number present, and their ignorance, it is impossible the sober and thinking can remove? Inquiry implies competency, and time and sobriety . . .” Church of Ireland. 1835. *The Christian examiner and Church of Ireland magazine*. Dublin, Ireland: W. Curry, Jun. and Co., 639.

### 3.      **Secession and the Ruin of the Church**

In this chapter I will address Darby’s complex doctrine of the “ruin of the church.” After a brief introduction to the subject, I will present this notion within a historical narrative to answer the question of how and why Darby chose to use this particular phrase and what sources he might have drawn upon. I will then briefly look at the ruin of the church with respect to eschatology, unity, and revelation before presenting Darby’s understanding of the term. Subsequently I will demonstrate that his application of the “invisible church” in association with the “ruin of the church” completely overturned the commonly held doctrine of the church invisible.

The nature of the church is central to an understanding of Darby. His ecclesiology is profound—though at times highly confusing—but devastating in its application, and it explains why there was a divide between the anti-secessionists at Albury and the secessionists at Powerscourt. Dominant at Powerscourt were the Plymouth Brethren who had become infected with Darbyite ecclesiology regarding the state of the church. Darby’s ecclesiology provides at least one explanation as to why Lady Theodosia Powerscourt departed with all haste from her church and her minister Robert Daly, to join the Brethren at Aungier Street, Dublin.

In the years between leaving Trinity College and the formative years of the Plymouth Brethren movement, Darby proclaimed a national apostasy which he termed the “ruin of the church,” together with a way out of apostasy namely, the Brethren movement. Various opinions are offered for his seemingly unusual ecclesiology. According to A. H. Newman, “Darby maintained that just as the old economy had fallen by the unfaithfulness of the covenant people and as a whole had apostatized, so Christians wholly apostatized in the apostolic age. The whole Christian system depended upon continuance in God’s goodness. Failure in this involved the ‘ruin of the church.’”<sup>316</sup> A similar view is shared by Johann Herzog: “If Christendom

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<sup>316</sup> Newman, Albert Henry. 1903. *A manual of church history*. Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 711.

depart from the divine path for this dispensation, his goodness is abandoned. This is the ‘ruin of the church.’”<sup>317</sup> Grayson Carter offers his understanding of the term by comparing the ecclesiology of Irving and Darby:

Though in some ways Darby’s ecclesiology resembled that of the Irvingites, it contained several important differences. Most especially, he opposed the close association of the visible and invisible church so prominent in Irvingism. The ‘true’ church was not visible and worldly, he argued, but invisible and spiritual: a mystery of which only Paul speaks; Christ’s mystical body will be completed only at the ‘rapture’. Those converted before Christ’s first coming, or after his second, are not part of the true church: ‘the assertion this his mystical body is the universal family of the redeemed is unscriptural; all the declaration is founded on this gross and unscriptural terror, that all the saved belong to the church.’ The church, therefore, is in ruins, the Advent still impending.<sup>318</sup>

Joel Carpenter understands Darby’s notion of “the ruin of the church” to be an “alienating power,” and what “dispensationalists meant by this was that in the years immediately preceding Christ’s second coming, deviations from orthodox Christian belief would infect the major branches of Christianity. Thus corrupted, these churches would become the chief promoters of the false religion that was to accompany the rise of a satanically inspired ruler, the Antichrist.”<sup>319</sup> These are strong words to insinuate that post-Reformation Christianity had departed from the gospel, but these same sentiments are shared in the publication *131 Christians Everyone Should Know*: “Echoing the lamentations of Protestant reformers three centuries earlier, he [Darby] believed that the Church of England had lost any notion of salvation by grace and that it had forsaken biblical ideas of what church should be. For Darby it was time to start afresh with a new church and prepare for Jesus’ imminent Second Coming.”<sup>320</sup> George Marsden understands that the

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<sup>317</sup> Herzog, J. J., Philip Schaff, and Samuel Macauley Jackson. 1889. *A Religious encyclopaedia: or dictionary of Biblical, historical, doctrinal, and practical theology. Based on the Real-Encyklopädie of Herzog, Plitt, and Hauck*. New York: Christian Literature Co., IL: 1856.

<sup>318</sup> Carter, Grayson. 2001. *Anglican evangelicals: Protestant secessions from the via media, c. 1800-1850*. Oxford theological monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press., 220.

<sup>319</sup> Carpenter, Joel A. 1999. *Revive us again: the reawakening of American Fundamentalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 38.

<sup>320</sup> Galli, Mark, and Ted Olsen. 2000. *131 Christians everyone should know*. Holman reference. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 98.

term “the ruin of the church” had little effect in America and that “John Nelson Darby was puzzled by this when he first brought his teaching to America. Many Americans were interested in his approach to prophetic studies, yet few took seriously the Brethren teaching of the ‘ruin of the church.’ The reason for this lack of concern was no doubt related to American evangelicals’ characteristic lack of strong views about the nature and authority of the church.”<sup>321</sup> This lack of interest in the “ruin of the church” is paradoxical in light of a remark by Dana Robert that “Scofield followed Darby’s view of the ‘ruin of the church.’”<sup>322</sup>

### Pre-Darbyite notion of the ruin of the church

Though not necessarily used as a mark of national apostasy, the term “the ruin of the church” had a wide and diverse usage prior to the time of Darby, who had a habit of taking terms in common usage and then applying to them his innovative and novel understanding. For this reason, a brief glimpse into the secular usage of the term will shed light on the question of whether Darby was being adaptive or original. Historically, the secular use of the term can be dated at least to the year 1721, as seen in the following remark: “All in Diana’s Temple met, decreed The Ruin of the Church, and both agreed; Those by Possessions, these by potent Charms, To work the faithful flock destructive Harms: The Catechumens they with Ease surpriz’d . . .”<sup>323</sup> Darby relied very much on *Milner’s Church History*, as evidenced by the fact that he references his writings at least 179 times. It must be assumed that he read in Milner his account of the secular use of “the ruin of the church” in the sense of the destruction of the church at the hands of the enemy.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> Marsden, George M. 1980. *Fundamentalism and American culture: the shaping of twentieth century evangelicalism, 1870-1925*. New York: Oxford University Press, 70.

<sup>322</sup> Robert, Dana Lee. 2003. *Occupy until I come: A.T. Pierson and the evangelization of the world*. Library of religious biography. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 277.

<sup>323</sup> Ken, Thomas. 1721. *The works of the Right Reverend, learned, and pious, Thomas Ken, D.D. late Lord Bishop of Bath and Wells; ... Published from original manuscripts, by William Hawkins, Esq.* London: Printed for John Wyat, 35.

<sup>324</sup> “The interposition of Divine Providence is ever to be acknowledged in hastening the death of so formidable an enemy to his people, whose schemes seemed only to require length of time to effect the *ruin of the church*. But he was left to aim at too many objects at once, the restoration of idolatry, the *ruin of christianity*, the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and the conquest of Persia. That he should have pursued this last with such avidity, is an instance

The ruin of the church within the context of dispensationalism finds an early usage with Jean Claude in 1801. The work was then quoted by a number of other editors in various publications. The work by Claude contains the following statement: “Why so? because the apostle speaks here of an essential corruption of the gospel, which the false apostles aimed at in the churches of Galatia; they were annihilating the grace of Christ by associating it with the *Mosaic economy*; they aimed at the entire *ruin of the church* by debasing the purity of the gospel.”<sup>325</sup> The work *Composition of a Sermon* by Jean Claude was printed again in 1819 in a work entitled *The Young Preacher’s Manual*,<sup>326</sup> as well as in 1820 in a work entitled *The Christian Preacher*,<sup>327</sup> and in 1834 in *The Preacher’s Manual*.<sup>328</sup> It is worth noting that the subject of the ruin of the church within the context of the Mosaic dispensation was widely understood and used in the instruction of homiletics between 1801 and the 1850s, since Claude’s own work was reprinted in 1849.

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of the opposition of two parties to each other, both equally bent on the *ruin of the church*, a thing very common in history, by which the Lord frequently saves his people.” Milner, Joseph, and Isaac Milner. 1827. *The history of the church of Christ*. London: Printed by Luke Hansard & Sons, for T. Cadell, in the Strand, 140-141, emphasis supplied.

<sup>325</sup> Simcon, Charles. 1801. *Claude’s essay on the composition of a sermon ; with alterations and improvements*. Cambridge: Printed by M. Watson., 91, emphasis supplied. Note: the term *Mosaic economy* is widely used synonymously with the *Mosaic dispensation*, e.g., John Edwards (1637-1716). Darby uses the terms economy and dispensation interchangeably: “. . . that it is according to the will of God to re-establish the *economy* or *dispensation* on its original footing after it has failed” (*Collected Writings*, vol. 1: *Ecclesiastical No. 1*, 141). “If the *economy* or *dispensation* of God . . .” (*Ibid.*, 144.) “We apprehend that *dispensation*, or *economy*, for the words are identical in meaning, is generally used as a theological term, with greater latitude than the scripture application of it warrants.” (*Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 13c: *Critical*, 156). “Then came the Son, and the whole *economy* and *dispensation* of the law closed.” (*Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 26: *Expository No. 5b*, 181). “Are we under the Jewish *dispensation*? Is it not true that God has substituted the Christian *dispensation* for the Jewish *economy*, or the dispensation of the law?” (*Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 4: *Ecclesiastical No. 2*, 272).

<sup>326</sup> Porter, Ebenezer. 1819. *The Young preacher’s manual, or, A collection of treatises on preaching comprising Brown’s Address to students in divinity, Fenelon’s Dialogues on the eloquence of the pulpit, Claude’s Essay on the composition of a sermon, abridged, Gregory on the composition and delivery of a sermon, Reybaz on the art of preaching : with a list of books*. Boston: Published by Charles Ewer, and for sale at his bookstore, cf. 318.

<sup>327</sup> Williams, Edward. 1820. *The Christian preacher, or Discourses on preaching*. London: Printed for W. Baynes and Son, Paternoster-Row, cf. 219.

<sup>328</sup> Sturtevant, S. T. 1834. *The preacher’s manual, or, lectures on preaching: containing all the rules and examples necessary for every species of pulpit address*. London: Richard Baynes, cf. 358.

Because Jean Claude is not a well-known author, his writings might be considered of lesser importance; but this cannot be said of John Calvin and his treatment of the ruin of the church. The *Institutes of the Christian Religion* contain the fundamentals of Reformed theology and need no introduction. Calvin makes the following observation in the *Institutes*: “But as soon as falsehood has made a breach in the fundamentals of religion, and the system of necessary doctrine is subverted, and the use of the sacraments fails, the certain consequence is the *ruin of the Church*, as there is an end of a man’s life when his throat is cut, or his heart is mortally wounded.”<sup>329</sup> The text is from a chapter comparing the true and the false church, and in this respect there is some similarity with Darby’s notion of the apostasy of the church. Calvin returns to the subject of the sacraments, citing Augustine extensively on the nature of the sacrament, as seen, for example, in the following comment: “Hence that distinction, if it be well understood, which is frequently stated by Augustine, between a sacrament and the matter of a sacrament.”<sup>330</sup> Calvin then clarifies the relationship between the sacrament being taken by those of the faith and those not of the faith. “What is a sacrament, taken without faith, but the most certain ruin of the Church?”<sup>331</sup> For Calvin the sacrament has the power to impart both life and death: life to the man of faith but death to those not of the faith. “For the morsel of bread given by the Lord to Judas was poison; not because Judas received an evil thing, but because being a wicked man he received a good thing in a sinful manner.”<sup>332</sup> This then appears to be the usage by Calvin of the ruin of the church: the dual nature of the sacrament concerning the person of true faith, to whom the sacrament imparts life, and the person of unbelief, to whom the same sacrament imparts death.

#### The ruin of the church and eschatology

Having discussed the ruin of the church within the context of dispensationalism, homiletics, and the sacraments, we now turn to the context

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<sup>329</sup> Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Philadelphia: Philip H. Nicklin, 1816, 40, emphasis supplied.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.



of eschatology. John Jortin sees the ruin of the church as occurring with the reign of Antichrist. “They pretended that the desolation and ruin of the church was the genuine effect of ignorance, and that the reign of antichrist and the mystery of iniquity grew and prospered under the protection of darkness.”<sup>333</sup> James Thomson develops a similar but expanded theme in that the ruin of the church occurs when “. . . wickedness has reached its height . . . When Antichrist shall be finally destroyed, the Jews introduced into the Christian church, and the fulness of the Gentiles brought in . . . the visible church will then belong to the invisible.”<sup>334</sup>

The term “ruin of the church” had been widely used both prior to and during the life of J. N. Darby. As early as 1687 Peter Jurieu had made the statement that the “. . . ruin of the Church was to happen under these seven Trumpets. . . . The 144 thousand signify the Church, the pure Church under Antichrist’s reign.”<sup>335</sup> The title of Jurieu’s work, together with the prophetic and eschatological usage of the term “ruin of the church,” all antedated Darby by well over a century before he used the phrase. In fact, the term was used by Jonathan Swift in 1735,<sup>336</sup> John Strype in 1738,<sup>337</sup> James Peirce in 1717,<sup>338</sup> and numerous other writers of that period. Since it was extant in secular,

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<sup>333</sup> Jortin, John. 1805. *Remarks on ecclesiastical history*. London: Sold by Lackington, Allen, 206.

<sup>334</sup> Thomson, James. 1808. *Theological discourses on important subjects doctrinal and practical*. Paisley: Young, 297.

<sup>335</sup> Jurieu, Pierre. 1687. *The accomplishment of the Scripture prophecies, or, The approaching deliverance of the church proving that the papacy is the antichristian kingdom ... that the present persecution may end in three years and-half, after which the destruction of Antichrist shall begin, which shall be finisht in the beginning of the next age, and then the kingdom of Christ shall come upon earth*. London: [s.n], 56.

<sup>336</sup> Swift, Jonathan. 1735. *The works of J.S., D.D., D.S.P.D. in four volumes; containing, I. The author's miscellanies in prose ; II. His poetical writings ; III. The travels of Captain Lemuel Gulliver ; IV. His papers relating to Ireland, consisting of several treatises, among which are, the Drapier's letters to the people of Ireland against receiving Wood's half-pence; also, two original Drapier's letters, never before published*. Dublin: Printed by and for George Faulkner, printer and bookseller, 46.

<sup>337</sup> Strype, John, and Edward Symon. 1738. *Brief annals of the church and state under the reign of Queen Elizabeth: being a continuation of the annals of the Church of England and of the religion there established ... : and to which is added a supplement of several records suiting with the years of the former volumes*. London: Printed for Edward Symon, 176.

<sup>338</sup> Peirce, James. 1717. *A vindication of the dissenters: in answer to Dr. William Nichol's Defence of the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England. In three parts*. London: Printed for John Clark, 187.

eschatological, and dispensational writings, Darby would have adopted a similar sense of a familiar phrase in his reference to the ruin of the church.

#### The ruin of the church with respect to unity

The aspect of “unity” proved to be a central feature of the Plymouth Brethren, as previously noted by Thomas Croskery.<sup>339</sup> For Darby, this sense of unity, which is not found in the professing church but is found within the Plymouth Brethren, takes on fuller meaning when linked to the ruin of the church. “Now what do I mean by the ruin of the church? A simple question will answer this. Who will show me the manifestations of the *unity* of the body of Christ? I cannot find it; but I can find saints that will be saved.”<sup>340</sup> Darby asserts that the church has unity in its normal state, but not when it goes astray, as is the case with the ruin of the church.<sup>341</sup> The problem for Darby is that too often unity is maintained by organization and not through the work of the Holy Ghost, again leading to the ruin of the church.<sup>342</sup>

#### The ruin of the church with respect to revelation

Closely related to unity is the doctrine of revelation. Darby appears to suggest that just as a church in ruin cannot possess unity except through organization, so the professing church cannot possess revelation. “. . . [W]e have found our weakness, and the poverty and ruin of the church; but we have found marvellous and abundant light in the Lord . . .”<sup>343</sup> It is this revelation so important at the Second Advent that is lacking with the church in ruin, which he contrasts with the true church. “There is a positive revelation that the thing

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<sup>339</sup> Page 25.

<sup>340</sup> Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol. 32: *Miscellaneous No.1*, 399. Emphasis supplied.

<sup>341</sup> “Hence when I say that the church is ruined, or when I speak of the ruin of the church, it is saying that the church is not at all in its normal state; it is as if, for example, I said that the health of a man was ruined. Those who oppose this, not being willing to acknowledge the state of misery, in which we all are, yet feeling that if the Church in its unity was at the beginning the depository of the glory of Christ it is no longer, boldly deny that it ever was.” Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol. 3: *Doctrinal No.1*, 273.

<sup>342</sup> “There is an attempt to keep up unity by mere organisation. There was organisation at the first, but that too is a failure. . . . It has not stood. I believe in the ruin of the church, but I believe that where two or three are gathered together in His name.” Darby, *Dearest G. Gausby*, 334.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 14: *Ecclesiastical No.3*, 199.

that wakes them up is the testimony that the Lord is coming.”<sup>344</sup> It is the hope of the Second Advent that has been lost by the professing church. “The hope of the coming of Christ was the first thing lost in the ruin of the church, leading to the practical state of Christendom at present.”<sup>345</sup>

### The ruin of the church with respect to Darby

There is one oblique reference in which Darby states that he is the author of the phrase: “As to the ruin of the church, the theory came for me after the consciousness of it, and even now, the theory is but a small thing to my mind.”<sup>346</sup> However, in light of the historical narrative, the phrase had seen common usage for over a century, and the notion that Darby invented the term is in error.

Darby’s use of the term stems from his primary concern that the visible, professing church had failed, thus negating the Corinthian model of the church, which has ceased to exist along with the failed dispensation. Darby contrasts two different churches, namely, the true apostolic church and the professing church, which is purely an imitation of the true apostolic church.

Again, I fully recognize that there was an organisation in apostolic and scriptural times, but affirm that what exists now is not the scriptural organisation at all, but merely human invention, each sect arranging itself according to its own convenience, so that as an external body, the Church is ruined; and although much may be enjoyed of what belongs to the Church, I believe from scripture that the ruin is without remedy, that the professing Church will be cut off . . . The true body of Christ is not this. It is composed of all who are united to Christ by the Holy Ghost, who, when the professing church is cut off, will have their place with Him in heaven.<sup>347</sup>

Darby applied the term “ruin of the church” to the “visible” entity: “But besides this, the ruin of the visible church itself is contemplated.”<sup>348</sup> “They can enjoy, according to God, all that God has given them, without denying the state or ruin of the visible church—a state that has brought ruin on

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<sup>344</sup> Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol. 21: *Evangelical No. 2*, 250.

<sup>345</sup> Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol. 21: *Ecclesiastical No.4*, 249.

<sup>346</sup> Darby, *Dearest Brethren and Sisters*, 42.

<sup>347</sup> Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol. 14: *Ecclesiastical No.3*, 274, 275.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 15: *Doctrinal No.4*, 354.

every side . . .”<sup>349</sup> “I do affirm, that the church has been placed on earth to display, as a body, in a visible unity, the glory of its Head, by the Holy Ghost. This it no longer does; it is responsible for it, and regarded as a dispensation, it will be punished on that account. . . The fact that its ruin is an opportunity for marked faithfulness on the part of individuals . . .”<sup>350</sup>

The professing churches might argue that though the visible church may have failed, there still remained the invisible church. For the Calvinist these would be the elect, and for the Arminianist these would be those who had made a profession of faith. Darby recognized this distinction but argued otherwise: “The Lord knoweth them that are his. This supposes, in a great measure, at any rate, that the true church, the members of Christ, are invisible. The Lord knows them.”<sup>351</sup> “There is, therefore, an invisible church, I doubt not; but mark that when the true church is invisible, then the visible church is treated like the world.”<sup>352</sup>

Darby then draws a comparison between the visible and the invisible churches:

To escape from this anomaly, believers have sought to shelter themselves under the distinction between a visible and an invisible church. But I read in Scripture, “Ye are the light of the world.” Of what use is an invisible light? “A city set on a hill cannot be hid.” To say that the true church has been reduced to the condition of being invisible is at once to decide the question, and to affirm that the church has entirely lost its original and essential standing, and departed from the purpose of God, and the constitution that it received from Him.<sup>353</sup>

The tension that Darby poses regarding the “visible” and the “invisible” churches raises the question regarding the validity of the church itself. In simple terms, if the invisible church is the true called-out body of saints, then what happens when these saints interact? Do they not constitute a visible entity? William Reid addresses this dilemma directly: “We are also told by Mr. Darby that ‘*a member of a church is a thing unknown to Scripture.*”

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 4: *Ecclesiastical No. 2*, 280.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 1: *Ecclesiastical No. 1*, 236.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 14: *Ecclesiastical No. 3*, 274, 275.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 5: *Prophetic No. 2*, 335.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 1: *Ecclesiastical No. 1*, 140.

All Christians are members of Christ, and there can be no other membership' ('What the Christian has amid the ruin of the Church'). Now, all this is a simple play upon words. If we do not find in Scripture the phrase 'a member of a church,' we find there, that which the phrase designates. If any of the churches mentioned in Scripture did not consist of 'members,' of what did they consist?"<sup>354</sup>

Reid's argument is cogent, particularly with reference to the Plymouth Brethren, who would appear, according to Darby, to be a *visible* assembly of the saved. Reid continues: "And yet in the face of all this, we are expected to believe that the visible and invisible are identical! Of course the Brethren will deny to existing organisations, called churches, any right to be so recognized."<sup>355</sup> Reid discusses the book of Corinthians and asks: "To whom were the words addressed, 'Now ye are the body of Christ,' but to the church of Corinth?"<sup>356</sup> *The Quarterly Journal of Prophecy* (1855) in discussing the subject "Art. III - Is the Church in Ruins?" poses a question similar to Reid's: "We had maintained that, if this new *theory* were true, the Epistles to the Corinthians and other such were really useless."<sup>357</sup> The contributor to this article had received a twenty-page anonymous tract that might well have been disregarded were it not that, in discussing the "church in ruins," the tract appeared to attack the writer or writers of the *Journal*. As a rebuttal and with direct reference to the Epistle to the Corinthians, the following comment is made:

The writer of the above tract calls this a "hardy charge." He thus writes – "It has been supposed that the assertion of the failure of the Church forces us to say that we, in these last days, *cannot* have recourse to the Epistle to the Corinthians, &c.; and do fall back upon the promise - 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst.' The present pamphlet, of itself, is a sufficient answer to as hardy a charge as could well be made."<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> Reid, William. 1880. *Plymouth Brethrenism unveiled and refuted*. Edinburgh: W. Oliphant, 53.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>357</sup> *Quarterly Journal of Prophecy, The.*, vol. VII. London: James Nisbet and Co., 1855, 22.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*

The *Journal*, finding the argument perplexing, then quotes from a tract entitled *On the Present Ruin of the Church*, supposedly written by Darby:

Recent circumstances have forced on the attention of many saints the question of the competency of Christians, in these days, to form churches after the model of the primitive churches and whether such be now the will of God. Brethren respected, and personally beloved by those who differ from them, insist, that to form or organise a church, is the only way, according to the will of God, to find blessing in the midst of confusion which is recognised to exist. To others, this attempt seems altogether human. . . It cannot be denied that this fact, recorded as subsisting in Scripture, - for it is a fact and not a theory, - this fact has ceased to exist, and the question is, How is a Christian to judge, and what to do, when the state of things described in Scripture has ceased to exist?<sup>359</sup>

The *Journal* emphasizes the fact that the tract is stating very clearly that “the state of things described in Scripture *has ceased to exist*” and that the church is in ruins, “the dispensation has failed, and that we must not return to the primitive model. Thus he writes: ‘Your reply to me supposes two things. First, that it is God’s will to re-establish the dispensation after it has failed; and secondly, that you are able, and are sent to do it. I doubt both these assumptions.’”<sup>360</sup> However, Darby does discuss the church in the light of Corinthians with the following comment: “. . . as 1 Corinthians 12 bears witness, and that it has sunk down into popery, divisions and infidelity. No so-called church can pretend to be the body of Christ now; the one universal Church as described in scripture was then. They have no pretensions to be an unfallen body.”<sup>361</sup> Again: “The responsible church has totally failed. In 1 Corinthians 3 you get three cases: first, a wise master builder, who did his work well; then you get persons who build badly . . . and lastly, if a man corrupt the church of God, him will God destroy.”<sup>362</sup> “In 1 Corinthians it is different; God has put into the hands of man the responsibility of building, and this has failed like everything else.”<sup>363</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>361</sup> Darby. *Collected Writings*, vol. 14: *Ecclesiastical No.3*, 278.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 27: *Expository No.6*, 136.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., Matthew 16:13-28, n.p.

The question that naturally arises from Darby's assertion regarding the "ruin of the church" is the cause of the ruin. Darby offers a number of suggestions that have contributed to the "ruin." In fact, in his eagerness to show that the dispensation has failed, Darby does not hesitate to place blame on the twelve apostles themselves.

This was their special commission from Him, as risen and having all power in heaven and earth. The principle and value of the dispensation could not be altered. But where is the fulfilment of the twelve apostles? Scripture affords it not. There is no account of the twelve in Scripture going into all the world and preaching the gospel to every creature: nothing which Scripture recognises as the accomplishment of this command. This in itself would be sufficient to show the command on which the dispensation hung was, in the revealed testimony of God, unfulfilled by those to whom it was committed.<sup>364</sup>

A second reason that Darby offers for the "ruin of the church" is found in the existence of an ordained ministry, which he states is wrong and is a chief source of corruption. In a section entitled *The notion of a clergyman dispensationally: The sin against the Holy Ghost*, Darby comments as follows:

. . . the dispensational standing of the church in the world—a statement that depends wholly on the power and presence of the Holy Ghost, and the notion of a clergyman contradicts His title and power, on which the standing of the church down here depends.<sup>365</sup>

These are strong words from someone who was ordained in the Church of Ireland, but Darby is adamant that the existence of an ordained ministry has become "the lever of apostasy against the children of God."<sup>366</sup> Carl Olson adds this pertinent comment regarding Darby and the "ruin of the church." ". . . it was, he claimed, being destroyed by hierarchy, institutionalization, structure, ritual, ceremony, and the ordained clergy. So pessimistic was Darby . . ."<sup>367</sup>

Darby's answer to the "ruin of the church" is the Lord's admonition: "Wherefore, come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord,

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<sup>364</sup> Darby. *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 1: *Ecclesiastical No.1*, 128.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>367</sup> Olson, Carl E. 2003. *Will Catholics be "left behind"?: a Catholic critique of the rapture and today's prophecy preachers*. Modern apologetics library. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 158.

and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.”<sup>368</sup> “Separation is the first element of unity and union.”<sup>369</sup>

Darby clearly had in mind two facets of the gospel that embrace God’s purpose for the church and man’s testimony regarding the church. The former cannot fail, but the latter can do so. Should the Christian be content with a failed witness, a church in ruin, questions Darby? His answer is emphatically no, for to do so would deny the power of God and to suggest that God’s plan of redemption could be thwarted.<sup>370</sup> Thus the theological dilemma for Darby—that a true believer could be cut off because of the failure of the church in ruins, thus compromising the faithfulness of God—is resolved. The members of the remnant church, the true believers in Christ as opposed to the national apostasy of the church in ruin, will be raptured away before Christ returns with vengeance and judgment upon the wicked. The *Quarterly Journal of Prophecy’s* narrative concerning the tract that they attribute to Darby provides a succinct synopsis of his ecclesiology regarding the “ruin of the church.” But the writer enlarges upon the illustration:

Apply this to the Church - to the whole dispensation. While men slept, the enemy has sowed tares. It is a state of ruin, plunged and lost in the world; invisible, if you will, when it should hold forth, as a candlestick, the light of God. In a state of ruin. If it is not, I say to the dissenting and separating brethren, why have you left it? If it be, you must recognise this ruin - this apostasy, - this departure from its first estate. . . . First, to recognise this position, - to be conscious and humbled as to this state of ruin. And what then? To assume that we, who are guilty, can repair it all again? No! That would be a proof that we are not humbled. But to seek - humbly to seek what God has told us in his Word of such a state of things; and not as a child who has broken some precious vase, try to patch it together, or make it new, in order that the mischief may not be seen.<sup>371</sup>

The contributor to the *Journal* summarizes thus. “Strange teaching this! Our Lord predicts apostasy; the Church is not to hinder it! ‘The evil would not be remedied;’ *therefore it ought not to be remedied!* Antichrist is to arise; therefore we ought not to oppose him! We do not often meet with such sad

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<sup>368</sup> Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol. 1: *Ecclesiastical No.1*, 277.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.

<sup>370</sup> Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol. 32: *Miscellaneous No.1*, 393.

<sup>371</sup> *Quarterly Journal of Prophecy, The*, vol. VII. London: James Nisbet and Co., 1855, 25, 26.



perversions of the Word of God—such turning, not of the *grace*, but of the *judgements* of God into lasciviousness. Surely this is fatalism—and of the worst kind:- fatalism founding itself on the prophetic Word!”<sup>372</sup>

Darby’s concept of the “invisible church” differed considerably from what was commonly understood by the term. James Vaughan, who was an incumbent member of Christ Church, Brighton, England, summarizes his thought about the visible and invisible churches:

“The visible Church” means what we can see. Now I can see that you all come to church; I might have seen that you were all baptized; I might have seen that you read your Bibles. Then I see that you are a “visible Church”? Can I see whether you love God? No. Some in this church love God, and some do not: can I say for certain who these are? Nobody can say that. The heart is invisible. Whether you are, or are not, a real Christian, is an invisible thing. That is “the invisible Church,” - those who really love Christ.<sup>373</sup>

Keith Ward discusses the invisible church with respect to Reformed theology:

Calvin begins by making a clear distinction between the visible and the invisible church—a distinction familiar to Augustine. The invisible church is “the church as it really is before God”,<sup>374</sup> consisting of all those who are adopted as sons of God and sanctified by the Spirit the elect of God. “They are a small and despised number, concealed in a vast crowd.”<sup>375</sup> . . . There is also, however, a visible and external church, of which Calvin says, “beyond the pale of the church no forgiveness of sins, no salvation, can be hoped for.”<sup>376</sup> God’s redeeming love does not extend to the whole of the human race.<sup>377</sup>

Clearly, Calvinism and Arminianism both recognize that there is a distinction between the visible church, which is known by the physical building and the body of people that constitute Christ’s institution on earth, and the invisible church. For the Calvinist the invisible church is comprised of God’s elect, and for the Arminianist it is those that belong to Christ by grace and through the profession of faith.

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<sup>372</sup> Ibid., 28, 29.

<sup>373</sup> Vaughan, James. 1874. *Addresses to children delivered in Christ Church Brighton, on Sunday afternoons in 1873. Second series. Accurately transcribed from shorthand notes*, 164.

<sup>374</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, bi. 4, ch. I, para. 7, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), ii., 288.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid., 4.1.2 (ii., 282).

<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 3.24.12 (ii., 251).

<sup>377</sup> Ward, Keith. 2000. *Religion and community*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 268, 269.

Darby's view differed radically from both the Calvinist and Arminianist doctrines. Frank Turner traces Darby's notion of the invisible church to an early period in his ministry: "During the debates over Catholic emancipation, Darby abandoned briefly held high-church views, composed tracts championing the concept of the invisible church, and then in 1828 or 1829 resigned his curacy to become an itinerant clergyman."<sup>378</sup> The Calvinist view was rejected by Darby: "Darby did not believe, however, that the church was just a spiritual entity. He rejected the Augustinian distinction between the 'visible' and 'invisible' church. He rhetorically asked, 'What is the value of an invisible light?' Darby believed that the local assembly, as the habitation of God, still acted as an earthly vessel of truth, corporately manifesting the body of Christ with a full complement of the gifts of the Holy Spirit."<sup>379</sup> Darby expressed his views as follows: "Men have comforted themselves with the thought of an invisible church, forgetting that it is said, 'Ye are the light of the world.' Of what value is an invisible light? It is said, 'let your light so shine before men'; that is, let your profession of Christianity be so distinct 'that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which art in heaven.'"<sup>380</sup> Far from declaring the traditional Calvinist and Arminianist doctrine that the invisible church was the party of the "saved," Darby disagreed vehemently, stating that invisible church was the apostate church or the church in ruin.

What is the value of an invisible light? A church under a bushel? There is no community in the invisible church. That the church is become invisible, I admit fully; but I admit it as the fruit of man's sin.<sup>381</sup>

"I will build my church," says Jesus . . . This is yet unfinished, and still goes on; and though at first a public and evident body (the Lord adding daily to the church such as should be saved), it is become what is called the invisible church. It is invisible: though if it was to be the light of the world, it is hard to tell the value of an invisible light. If it is

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<sup>378</sup> Turner, Frank M. 2002. *John Henry Newman: the challenge to evangelical religion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 48.

<sup>379</sup> Utzinger, J. Michael. 2006. *Yet saints their watch are keeping: fundamentalists, modernists, and the development of evangelical ecclesiology, 1887-1937*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 114.

<sup>380</sup> Darby., *Collected Writings*, vol. 11: *Prophetic No.4*, 301.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 10: *Doctrinal No.3*, 12.

acknowledged to have fallen for ages into corruption and iniquity, a very Babylon in character, that has not been the light of the world.<sup>382</sup>

Darby felt fully justified in his unique doctrine of the “invisible church in ruin” since this had no biblical authority. “The church invisible is no scriptural or tangible idea. It is an invention particularly of St. Augustine, to conciliate the awful iniquity of the professing church with the truth and godliness necessary to the true Christian.”<sup>383</sup>

Darby’s contention was that the visible entity called the church had now become invisible since it no longer had the light of the gospel. The corollary was that salvation was possible with the Plymouth Brethren, albeit that they themselves could be classed as a visible church. But this too is problematical in that there still must be an invisible entity because the “saved” are known only to God; otherwise it must be assumed that Brethren subscribed to perfectionism. William Reid, commenting on Darby’s convoluted ecclesiology, remarked: “And yet in the face of all this, we are expected to believe that the visible and the invisible Church are identical.”<sup>384</sup> According to David Buschart, “Influenced by his experience with what he perceived to be the apostate institutional church, Darby came to view the genuine church as a heavenly, essentially invisible reality—thus distinct and separate from the corrupted earthly ‘church.’”<sup>385</sup>

In summary, the ruin of the church was for Darby a biblical understanding of a non-biblical and Augustinian notion of the invisible church, which he endeavoured to correct. Commenting on Matthew 16, Darby stated, “There was nothing established on earth when He said, ‘I will build my church;’ but he did establish a church on earth responsible in its place, which has failed altogether—that is why we speak of ruin.”<sup>386</sup>

Having probed the mind of Darby for what he understands by the invisible church in contradistinction to the visible church in ruins, it now

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 20: Ecclesiastical No. 4, 318.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> Reid, William. 1880. *Plymouth Brethrenism unveiled and refuted*. Edinburgh: W. Oliphant, 54.

<sup>385</sup> Buschart, W. David. 2006. *Exploring Protestant traditions: an invitation to theological hospitality*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 204.

remains to compare this true church, faithfully manifesting God's witness to the gospel and classed as God's heavenly church, with another group, God's earthly people.

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<sup>386</sup> Darby. *The spirit of Christ and spiritual intelligence*, n.p.

#### 4. The two peoples of God and dispensational theology

For Darby the problem of how to resolve the complex relationship between the Christian Church and the fate of the Jewish nation were both perplexing and paradoxical. His starting point that the Abrahamic covenant was inviolable and therefore unconditional meant for him that the Jewish nation was still God's chosen people. This presented a dilemma in that the Genesis narrative predicated three endearing factors that were inextricably linked to the Covenant. The ecclesiology that he needed to resolve concerned the nation of Israel and their relationship to a *land, a seed, and a blessing*, factors enunciated in the book of Genesis.

Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless. And I will establish My Covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly.<sup>387</sup>

Indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore.<sup>388</sup>

Darby now had to factor in the position of the Jewish nation in its relationship to the church. This was to test his ingenuity in deriving a seamless interpretation that embraced both Christianity and the Jewish nation. Darby was not new to this type of ecumenicity, as attested by his reaction to Dr. Magee's Charge of Erastianism and the issue relating to Catholicism. But to incorporate the Jewish nation into Christian ecclesiology and eschatology would test the skills of the most dedicated expositor, and this was the challenge that Darby faced. And face them he did: his interpretation became a powerful eschatology in American fundamentalism and Pentecostalism, thanks to the influence of the Scofield Reference Bible, which incorporated Darby's interpretive perspective.

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<sup>387</sup> Genesis 17:1, 2.

<sup>388</sup> Genesis 22:17.

### Darby's understanding of unfulfilled prophecy

Aside from the Abrahamic Covenant, there was a second factor central to understanding Darby's prophetic interpretation: that all unfulfilled biblical prophecy pertained not to the church but to the Jewish nation. Darby outlined his understanding of the role of prophecy: "It is on this account that the subject of prophecy divides itself into two parts: the hopes of the church, and those of the Jews."<sup>389</sup> While evangelicals may understand that Matthew 24 portrays the signs of the Second Coming, Darby insisted that the unfulfilled biblical prophecy of the Olivet discourse finds fulfilment not in the church but in the Jewish nation. "And as to the prophetic discourses in Matthew 24 and 25 it carries on its front and within its own compass, the clearest evidence of its distinctions. For in the early part the Lord speaks of the Temple and its destruction, of the abomination of desolation, with express reference to prophecy which professedly relates to the Jews and to the remnant up to the last days."<sup>390</sup> Darby further states: "Secondly, we shall equally fail in understanding prophecy if we forget that the Jews are the habitual object of the thoughts of God."<sup>391</sup>

Regarding Jesus' Farewell Discourse, this too is applied by Darby to the Jews: "'And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am you may be also,' John 14. This is not prophecy, which is concerned with the government of this world, and is connected with the Jews, who are the centre of prophecy."<sup>392</sup> Darby rejected the notion that unfulfilled biblical prophecy regarding the Jews applied to the church. "Prophecy refers to the government of this world, and the Jews are the centre of that; but as for the Christian, he is predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."<sup>393</sup>

Pauline theology regarding the nature of the Abrahamic Covenant as delineated in Galatians 3 has created two fairly distinct camps. One group of

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<sup>389</sup> Darby. *Collected Writings*, vol. 2: *Prophetic No. 1*, 372.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 11: *Prophetic No. 4*, 179. Note: Darby clarifies this elsewhere with the following comment: ". . . until the end of Revelation you never find the church revealed in prophecy, except in connection with Christ." *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 5: *Prophetic No. 2*, 151.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 32: *Miscellaneous No. 1*, 242.

scholars understands that Paul's use of "the seed" refers to the Christian church; while the other affirms the inviolability of the Covenant by creating "two peoples of God," the Christian church and national Israel.

### The Abrahamic Covenant and Galatians

The contentious issue that has divided scholars into various camps is found in Galatians: "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (KJV)<sup>394</sup> Commenting on Galatians 3, Darby states that the church comprises the children of God by faith,<sup>395</sup> and Israel were heirs to the promise through the flesh.<sup>396</sup> Darby asserts that the term "heirs" cannot apply to the church, only to Israel.<sup>397</sup> Charles Ryrie offers a slightly different interpretation. Commenting on the same text, Ryrie asserts: "It is quite obvious that Christians are called the spiritual seed of Abraham (v. 9)."<sup>398</sup>

J. Dwight Pentecost expands on the views of Darby and Ryrie: "In Romans 9:6-7 Paul drew a distinction between those who are related to Abraham by physical descent and those who are related to Abraham by faith."<sup>399</sup> Pentecost supports his argument by observing that in the Old Testament "the seed of Abraham" always "refers to the physical descendants of Abraham."<sup>400</sup> After discussing the fact that Israel can refer to those who are related to Abraham by "faith as well as physical descent,"<sup>401</sup> he then notes: "They are 'spiritual Israel' and would be considered seed of Abraham, but this

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid., *Notes and Jottings* b. 178.

<sup>394</sup> Galatians 3:29.

<sup>395</sup> "In the Christian system, faith, as it is here called, does not refer to a name, nor a party of any kind, but to Christ alone. They were Christians, and nothing else. Now if they were of Christ, the only true Seed of Abraham according to the promise, through whom the nations were to be blessed, they were of the seed of Abraham, and heirs according to the promise." Darby., *Collected Writings*, vol. 34: *Miscellaneous No.3*, 80.

<sup>396</sup> "The children of Israel were heirs of promise according to the flesh." Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 32: *Miscellaneous No.1*, 402.

<sup>397</sup> "The natural branches are looked at as having been in the position of heirs of promise down here on the earth, and God is able to graft them in again (these Jews who were broken off) into the position on earth as heirs of promise. It is impossible to apply all this to the church." Ibid., 404.

<sup>398</sup> Ryrie, Charles Caldwell. 1995. *Dispensationalism*. Chicago: Moody Press, 138.

<sup>399</sup> Pentecost, J. Dwight. 1995. *Thy kingdom come: tracing God's kingdom program and covenant promises throughout history*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 80.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

*spiritual* seed would be distinct from the physical seed. Paul referred to a third seed of Abraham in Galatians 3:29 and Romans 4:11. There he made reference to Gentiles who were not the physical seed of Abraham but possessed Abraham's *faith*.<sup>402</sup> According to Pentecost, apart from a vague notion of a third seed, there are just two seeds to consider: those who are the physical descendants and those who are either "spiritual" or of the "faith," thus combining the thoughts of Ryrie and Darby. John Walvoord echoes similar sentiments: "Again in Galatians 3:29 . . . these passages teach beyond doubt that there is a *spiritual* seed of Abraham, those like Abraham of old believe in God, and are children of *faith*."<sup>403</sup>

Conservative scholars like R. C. H. Lenski disagree with the notion of the "two peoples of God" and thus with Darby, Ryrie, Pentecost, and Walvoord. Lenski sees just one people of God, the redeemed through Christ; thus, the doctrine of supersession or replacement theology. Commenting on Galatians 3, Lenski observes: "God granted the inheritance to Abraham by promise (v. 17). So, then, as Abraham's seed we are heirs with Abraham, Abraham and we belong to Christ by faith alone."<sup>404</sup> Just to reinforce his interpretation, Lenski further comments that "the Mosaic law does not make sons of God, does not make us Abraham's seed, does not constitute us heirs. It is the promise alone which was fulfilled in Christ; it is faith and baptism and not works of the law. Here is the answer to the Judaizers."<sup>405</sup> Hank Hanegraaff, while sharing the views of Lenski, is far more vociferous and less constrained. Concerning John Hagee, Hanegraaff said, "As noted at the outset, Hagee's text-twisting tactics extend far beyond his Word of Faith message. As a leading Christian Zionist, he routinely castigates those who do not share his 'two-people of God' theory as 'Replacement theologians' who are 'carrying Hitler's anointing and his message.'"<sup>406</sup> Thus, there is a clear division between

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<sup>402</sup> Ibid., 80, emphasis supplied.

<sup>403</sup> Walvoord, John F. 1959. *The millennial kingdom*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, pp. 144, 145, emphasis supplied.

<sup>404</sup> Lenski, R. C. H. 1961. *The interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Philippians*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 190.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>406</sup> Hanegraaff, Hank. 2009. *Christianity in crisis: 21st century*. Nashville, Tenn: Thomas Nelson, p. 47. Note: Hanegraaff offers the following explanation: "In 1888 Scofield



Darby and his supporters on the one hand, and other scholars who disagree with Darby's notion of the two people of God on the other. The latter assert that there is only one people of God, the church, established through the redemptive work of Christ at the cross.

Darby's insistence that there are two peoples of God, not just one, became a foundational idea in the development of his dispensationalist system. According to Rodney Decker, "Although not exclusively a dispensational view, the two people-of-God position is perhaps best known from classic dispensationalism's contention of an earthly and a heavenly people with differing purposes and destinies."<sup>407</sup>

### Darby's understanding of the two peoples of God

Darby used his notion of the two peoples of God to argue that all the promises made to Abraham must be fulfilled by the patriarch's natural progeny so that the Second Advent can occur.<sup>408</sup> We are then left with two distinct covenants, the Abrahamic Covenant established with Abraham's physical descendants and the New Covenant established by faith with the church.<sup>409</sup> As Darby explained, the new covenant has been founded through the redemptive blood of Christ, the Mediator, and will be fulfilled when Christ returns to establish his earthly kingdom.<sup>410</sup>

The privilege of the church is to have its portion in the heavenly places; and later blessings will be shed forth upon the earthly people. The church is something altogether apart—a kind of heavenly

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published *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, which became a primary defense of Darby's two people of God theory." Hanegraaff, Hank. 2008. *The apocalypse code: find out what the Bible really says about the end times-- and why it matters today*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 46.

<sup>407</sup> Decker, Rodney. "The People of God." In *Dictionary of premillennial theology*, Mal Couch, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1997, 298.

<sup>408</sup> "He took up the cause of the seed of Abraham. This applies to us, we know, but in language which leaves application open to others too, who are according to flesh and faith." *Collected Writings*, vol. 15: *Doctrinal No.4*, 233.

<sup>409</sup> "This, then, is our portion in the new covenant, so far as we have any ordered interest in its being sealed in the blood of the Mediator. That Mediator, being gone into the heavens, into the holiest of all, has not accomplished the actual new covenant formerly with Israel and Judah, as it shall surely be fully and distinctly accomplished." *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 3: *Doctrinal No.1*, 52.

<sup>410</sup> "In all this, it will be evident that the church of God does not at all enter. The scene had for a time closed, in which these various principles were developed on earth, to be resumed in power when Christ returns there to whom all the title and blessings belong." *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 5: *Prophetic No.2*, 387.

economy, during the rejection of the earthly people, who are put aside on account of their sins . . . the Lord, having been rejected by the Jewish people, is become wholly a heavenly person.<sup>411</sup>

Darby's "two peoples" approach rejected the more commonly held view that God's covenant with Israel (i.e., Abraham's physical descendants) had been transferred to the New Israel (i.e., Abraham's spiritual descendants, the church) when Israel rejected Messiah Jesus at the first Advent. Such a view was known as "supersessionism." Darby was therefore a strong anti-supersessionist.<sup>412</sup> As Stephen Spector affirms:

Darby rejected the long-standing belief that God is finished with the Jewish people, that all of His promises of good to Israel have been transferred to the Church. Christian Zionists refer to that belief as "Replacement Theology" and they consider it a profound theological error. They believe that God's plan for the Jewish people is eternally valid and that to say otherwise is to assert that the Lord reneges on His promises.<sup>413</sup>

According to Gabriel Fackre, "Anti-supersession is the belief that with Israel God 'has commanded his covenant forever' (Psalm 111:9). 'Israel' is understood as the Jewish people. While land claims may be entailed, the covenant promise is not seen, as such, to include them. . . . anti-supersession runs the gamut from conservative evangelical to radical pluralist points of view. In each case, the noetic as well as the soteric role of the Jewish people is underscored by the declaration of a permanent place for Israel in Christian faith."<sup>414</sup> Thus, in researching the early usage of any terms relating to the two peoples of God, one must distinguish between extant terminology with a supersessionist interpretation and the use by Darby as an anti-supersessionist.

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<sup>411</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 2: *Prophetic no. 1*, 376.

<sup>412</sup> "Supersessionism is the belief that Christianity replaced Judaism as heir of the promise of God to Israel. . . . The most overt expressions of supersessionism include the following: the Jews rejected Jesus; The Old Testament shows the Jews as disobedient and unrepentant." Salmon, Marilyn J. 2006. *Preaching without contempt: overcoming unintended anti-Judaism*. Fortress resources for preaching. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 37. Darby was clearly opposed to this view in his hermeneutic of the two peoples of God, hence he was an anti-supersessionist.

<sup>413</sup> Spector, Stephen. 2008. *Evangelicals and Israel: the story of American Christian Zionism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 21.

<sup>414</sup> Fackre, Gabriel J. 1997. *The doctrine of revelation: a narrative interpretation*. Edinburgh studies in constructive theology. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 108, 109.

### Early usage of the terms relating to the two peoples of God

That the term had common usage prior to the time of Darby can be understood by referencing the work of John Barrington, who, in 1728, made the following insightful remark within his work on dispensationalism:

Though that *earthly* kingdom continued, and the Jews remain'd the subjects of it for near forty years after Christ's ascension to his throne; God affording them that time and opportunity to enter into his *spiritual and heavenly* kingdom . . . and then the idolatrous Gentiles to be his people, and subjects of this heavenly kingdom . . . and having a great part of that time been kept separate from God's people (or the people of his earthly kingdom) and the children of his family, by the ceremonial law, the wall of partition, which immur'd or enclos'd the Jews, and kept out the Gentiles from them, Gal. iii.23.<sup>415</sup>

Barrington is not alone in his use of the phrase “earthly and heavenly.” Henry Dodwell in 1706 drew a comparison between sons of Abraham’s flesh and those of his faith and averred that the latter “had the true seal of the circumcision, not of the flesh, but of the spirit.” In speaking of those of the faith, Dodwell continued: “They did not rival the Jews in their title to the Earthly, but the Heavenly Canaan; not the Earthly but the Heavenly Jerusalem.”<sup>416</sup> John Venn in 1820 noted: “Ours is the *heavenly* Jerusalem. The Jews were permitted to dwell in the *earthly* Jerusalem; but in the new dispensation every thing *earthly* becomes *heavenly*, every thing carnal is changed into spiritual.”<sup>417</sup> Archibald M’Lean, clearly a supersessionist, in 1823 observed: “Further, the *earthly* Jerusalem was peculiar to the Jews; they only could be free citizens and partakers of its privileges; but the *heavenly* Jerusalem is the mother of all God’s children, Gentiles as well as Jews, who are made fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God.”<sup>418</sup> It is

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<sup>415</sup> Barrington, John Shute. 1728. *An essay on the several dispensations of God to mankind, in the order, in which they lie in the Bible: or, a short system of the religion of nature and scripture: with a Preface, shewing the causes of the growth of infidelity, and the likeliest method to put a stop to it. And an Appendix, proving, that God adopted Abraham to the inheritance of eternal life, Gen. xii. 2, 3. xxii. 17, 18.* London: Printed for J. Grey, at the Cross Keys in the Poultry, 59, emphasis supplied.

<sup>416</sup> Dodwell, Henry. 1706. *An epistolary discourse, proving, from the scriptures and the first fathers that the soul is a principle naturally Mortal; ... By Henry Dodwell, A.M.* London: printed for R. Smith, 210.

<sup>417</sup> Venn, John. 1822. *Sermons.* Boston: R.P. & C. Williams, 345, emphasis supplied.

<sup>418</sup> M’Lean, Archibald. 1823. *Works; with a memoir of his life, ministry, & writings.* London: Jones, 199, emphasis supplied.

of interest that Edward Irving as early as 1831 made a comparison between the earthly and heavenly things in his *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*: “. . . in that *earthly* blessedness, every where prophesied of in the Old Testament which concerneth not earthly and natural, but spiritual and *heavenly* things, there were to be nothing distinctive of Jew from Gentile.”<sup>419</sup> Irving further noted the following: “And why? because the *spiritual* is above the *earthly*; and the church is the *spiritual* body of Christ, is the head of angels, and principalities, and powers.”<sup>420</sup>

In summary, the terms pertaining to an earthly and heavenly kingdom existed well before the time of Darby; therefore, he cannot be classed as original in their usage. The uniqueness of Darby’s doctrine was to apply an anti-supersessionist interpretation, and this much can be attributed to him. In this sense, he was adaptive in the use of an extant nomenclature, and by putting a unique spin on the terms, he created a new and revolutionary hermeneutic. Unlike supersessionism, which argued that God transferred the Covenant from the Jews to the church, dispensationalism taught that God never abrogated the Old Covenant, just suspended it, while he created a completely new people of God based on an entirely New Covenant.

#### Darby’s concept of “dispensations”: test, failure, and judgment

One of the major features in Darby’s dispensational system was the division of biblical and subsequent history into various periods. As we shall see, while he was not the first to use periodization, his use of “dispensations” was essential to the creation of his interpretation. Thus, two questions present themselves: How did Darby define the term “dispensation,” and how did he use it within his system of periodization?

#### *Darby defines “dispensations”*

Crutchfield proposed the following definition of the term “dispensation” as used by Darby:

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<sup>419</sup> Irving, Edward. 1831. *Exposition of the book of Revelation, in a series of lectures*. Catholic Apostolic Church collection. London: Baldwin and Cradock, 995, emphasis supplied.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*, 1012.

A dispensation, age or economy, is any order, state or arrangement of things established by the authority of God, whereby He governs or administers the affairs of humankind during a given period of time on the basis of distinct principles which place humankind in a specific relation of responsibility to Him. These dispensations, also called the ways of God and His government of the world, are marked off and distinguished by the declaration of some new principle, with an attendant new responsibility, which is distinctive to each.<sup>421</sup>

Darby uses the word “dispensation” some 1,490 times<sup>422</sup> throughout his entire works, but he also uses the words “age,” “economy,” and “period” interchangeably, as demonstrated below. He thus makes the total references to the subject of dispensationalism far higher than the figure above (emphasis supplied in the following passages): “. . . that it is according to the will of God to re-establish the *economy* or *dispensation* on its original footing after it has failed”<sup>423</sup>; “If the *economy* or *dispensation* of God . . .”<sup>424</sup>; “We apprehend that *dispensation*, or *economy*, for the words are identical in meaning, is generally used as a theological term, with greater latitude than the scripture application of it warrants.”<sup>425</sup>; “Then came the Son, and the whole *economy* and *dispensation* of the law closed.”<sup>426</sup>; “Are we under the Jewish *dispensation*? Is it not true that God has substituted the Christian *dispensation* for the Jewish *economy*, or the dispensation of the law?”<sup>427</sup>; “. . . and the characteristic features of the *period* which it designates . . . The Greek word, here rendered *dispensation*, literally signifies *stewardship* . . .”<sup>428</sup>; “Is it not then after all this *dispensation*, ‘the church *period*,’ the church *dispensation*?”<sup>429</sup>; “This will make the reader see why I enquired into these terms at the beginning, and the important effect of identifying the kingdom and the church, and this *age* or *dispensation*.”<sup>430</sup>; “. . . which is the end of this *dispensation* or *age*.”<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> Crutchfield, Larry. 1992. *The origins of dispensationalism: the Darby factor*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 47.

<sup>422</sup> The figure was arrived at by physically counting the term “dispensations” throughout Darby’s entire writings.

<sup>423</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 1: *Ecclesiastical No. 1*, 141.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 13c: *Critical*, 156.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 26: *Expository No. 5b*, 181.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 4: *Ecclesiastical No. 2*, 272.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 13c: *Critical*, 156.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 8: *Prophetic No. 3*, 122.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 8: *Prophetic No. 3*, 122.

Darby, in using the word dispensation interchangeably with a number of other words, is at the same time pedantic as to its etymology. With reference to his communication with a certain Mr. Oliver, Darby remarked: “Economy, or dispensation, he [Mr. Oliver] says, means law of the house; but economy means nothing of the kind. It signifies the administration of a house; and, taken in an extended sense, it means any order of things that God has arranged . . .”<sup>432</sup> This sense of the meaning of dispensation accords with Darby’s notion of stewardship. He relates his understanding of a dispensation to the Greek word *aionios* (αιωνιος): “I turn to the word ‘eternal.’ The word used in the Greek Testament, as it is well known to those familiar with it, is *aionios*, formed from *aion*. This latter word is used in classical Greek writers for ‘man’s life,’ and in scripture for ‘a dispensation’ (or course of events in this world ordered of God on some particular principle), as well as in the sense of ‘for ever.’”<sup>433</sup>

One thing seems clear: using the term “dispensation” is not equivalent to the system of ‘dispensationalism.’ As we shall see in chapter 7, many theologians before Darby utilized the term as a synonym for “ages and stages” without any of the other essential features of Darby’s intricate system.

I will continue to refer to the ordering of these ages and stages, or dispensations, as “periodization,”<sup>434</sup> leaving the word “dispensationalism” to the eschatological system unique to Darby that contains his doctrine of the two peoples of God, the secret rapture, and the ruin of the church.

#### *Darby’s reason for periodization*

Crutchfield points out that besides the primary characteristics of Darby’s dispensational philosophy, what I term periodization, there were three secondary characteristics, namely, the test, failure, and judgment.<sup>435</sup>

*The test.* According to Darby, “Every dispensation has some special deposit, so to speak, entrusted to it, by which its fidelity is tried.”<sup>436</sup> “It would

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<sup>431</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 2: *Prophetic No.3*, 300.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 1: *Ecclesiastical No.1*, 33.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 7: *Doctrinal No.2*, 41.

<sup>434</sup> Except for quotations wherein the author uses the term “dispensation.”

be extraordinary in a dispensation for man not to be subject to trial and temptations in the ways of God.”<sup>437</sup> “Then God who foreknows all that He purposes to accomplish, substitutes another dispensation in which man is placed in another kind of trial, and thus all the ways of God are manifested, and His manifold wisdom shines in its true brightness even in the heavenlies.”<sup>438</sup>

*The failure.* The sense of “failure” is central to Darby’s dispensationalism, as indicated by the following: “A dispensation is any arranged dealing of God in which man has been set before his fall, and having been tried, has failed, and therefore God has been obliged to act by other means. . . . There has always been a dispensation, and always immediate failure, and consequently there has necessarily been a remnant all through.”<sup>439</sup> “It is not my intention to enter into any great detail, but to shew simply how, in every instance, there was total and immediate failure as regarded man, however the patience of God might tolerate and carry on by grace the dispensation in which man has thus failed in the outset;”<sup>440</sup> “Man has failed in every dispensation of blessing from the hand of God.”<sup>441</sup>

*The judgment.* The failure of man leads to judgment by God; however, the believer is spared through the judgment, as Darby explains: “This dealing of God being on responsibility and in justice, it is according to the professing mass (the body at large of their leaders) that the judgment takes place; the security of the saints being untouched by it. Moreover, the refuge of the saints is out of the system judged, because an untoward generation; and their place of blessing, the dispensation that supervenes on the judgment of that from which they may have been delivered.”<sup>442</sup> “All is connection with the judgment of the Jews, which would close the dispensation . . .”<sup>443</sup> “At the end of the christian

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<sup>435</sup> Crutchfield, Larry. 1992. *The origins of dispensationalism: the Darby factor*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 58-60.

<sup>436</sup> Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol. 1: *Ecclesiastical No. 1*, 114.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 5: *Prophetic No. 2*, 93.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 1: *Ecclesiastical No. 1*, 29.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collectanea* (6 The Dispensations and the Remnants).

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 1: *Ecclesiastical No. 1*, 124.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 16: *Practical No. 1*, 102.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 1: *Ecclesiastical No. 1*, 116.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, 197 Luke, 229.

(sic) dispensation the faithful will be taken to heaven, and judgment will put an end to the system in which they were previously.”<sup>444</sup>

*Darby's dispensationalism and the two peoples of God*

Two central arguments have been presented by Darby. First is the test by God, the failure by man, and judgment, which necessitate God's obligation to act by other means, namely, a new dispensation. Second is what Darby terms “the confusion of the Jewish and Gentile dispensations.” It is this sense of failure in the case of Israel that, in rejecting Christ, necessitated the institution of the church to fill the parenthesis between the rejection and the appearing of Christ at the rapture.

I believe it to be the most important point for the church to consider now. Looked at as an earthly dispensation, it merely fills up, in detailed exercise of grace, the gap in the earthly order of God's counsels, made by the rejection of the Jews on the covenant of legal prescribed righteousness, till their reception again in the new covenant in the way of grace on their repentance; but, though making a most instructive parenthesis, it forms no earthly part of the regular order of God's earthly plans, but is merely an interruption of them to give a fuller character and meaning to them.<sup>445</sup>

You get the sixty-nine weeks, and then a long parenthesis in which Christ is set aside and the Jews on the earth “desolations being determined,” which goes on until the time of the Gentiles is fulfilled. During this period the church, the heavenly thing, is called.<sup>446</sup>

This radical distinction between the two peoples of God, national Israel and the church, is noted by Crawford Gribben: “Darby's dispensationalism differed from historic premillennialism in sharply contrasting the place and purposes of Israel and the church in its scheme of redemptive history.”<sup>447</sup>

Darby expands on this radical distinction in the following comments on 1 Thess. 4:13-18 and 1 Cor. 15:

The substance of 1 Corinthians 15 applies to believers only. There is, therefore, no ground of difficulty from the existence of death during

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<sup>444</sup> Ibid., *Dearest G. Gausby*, 94.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 1: *Ecclesiastical No. 1*, 94.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 11: *Prophetic No. 4*, 320.

<sup>447</sup> Gribben, Crawford. 2008. *Evangelical eschatology and the 'Puritan hope,'* in *The Advent of Evangelicalism*, eds. Michael Haykin, Kenneth Stewart and Timothy George. B & H Academic, 390.



the millennium, as to the application of the above cited passage. And it is remarkable that in the next page, the language of it is put into the mouths of the risen saints, as spoken on the day of first resurrection, to which in this page the writer says it is wholly inapplicable, because death remains. In fact, it appears to me a confusion of the Jewish and Gentile dispensations - the hinge upon which the subject and the understanding of Scripture turns.<sup>448</sup>

Thus we find, in the Jewish rejection of the apostles, the instantaneous cessation of derivative arrangement, and the whole dispensation, as carried upon earth, assuming a new character. This was the actual breaking of the earthly order, as the former scene with Stephen was the closing of the Jewish possibility of the dispensation. But a new scene now opens—the regular Gentile form and order of the dispensation in the hands of the apostle Paul, the apostle of uncircumcision, and the apostle of the Gentiles.<sup>449</sup>

This “new scene” that Darby refers to is the dispensation of the church that is parenthetical in nature and that fills the gap between the rejection of Christ by the Jews and the time of the rapture. At that time the church will be in heaven, leaving God to continue his work with the Jews. “It will be the same with the Gentile world; all those who have professed the name of Christ, except the elect, will be cut off—the others will be in heaven—and the dispensation of the promises upon earth will again take the Jewish form . . .”<sup>450</sup> The clear distinction between Israel and the church is at the heart of Darby’s dispensational system. However, he also uses a system of periodization, and this has led some scholars to assume that periodization and dispensationalism are synonymous terms, hence the need to define Darby’s understanding of each.

#### *Darby’s system of periodization*

Ehlert provides a periodization for Darby as follows:

- I. Paradisiacal state), to the flood
- II. Noah
- III. Abraham
- IV. Israel: (a) under the law; (b) under the priesthood; (c) under the kings
- V. Gentiles

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<sup>448</sup> Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol. 2: *Prophetic No. 1*, 17.

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 11: *Prophetic No.4*, 97, 98.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 1: *Ecclesiastical No.1*, 308.

VI. The Spirit  
(VII. The Millennium)<sup>451</sup>

1. The paradisiacal state—from Creation to the Deluge

According to Darby, since there was no rule or government, this cannot typically be called a dispensation.

But (to enter a little more into the succession of dispensations, and also into that which concerns the character of God in this respect) the first thing that we would remark is the deluge, because until then there had not been, so to speak, government in the world. . . . In Noah's time there was government in the world.<sup>452</sup>

I pass over the time before the flood whose general character offers a sad contrast to the time when righteousness dwells in the new heavens and the new earth, without a government to maintain it . . . Neither one nor the other can be properly called a dispensation. They are both another world from that in which we live.<sup>453</sup>

In comparing the antediluvian world with the new heavens and the new earth, Darby appears to draw a comparison between the two in that both did lack and will lack, a government, which is central to the notion of a dispensation.

2. The dispensation of Noah—from the Flood to the Call of Abraham

*Government is central* in this dispensation.<sup>454</sup> Features of this government included the nature of “rule by man,” as Darby explains. “There was no government before Noah. After the deluge, God makes a promise to bless the earth, and He sets man in power with the sword to rule and repress evil.”<sup>455</sup> According to Crutchfield, “In this new world which begins with Noah, says Darby, there are two great principles: *rule* placed in humanity's hands and *separation from the world* by God's call (the latter comes from Abraham).”<sup>456</sup> Darby discusses this notion of rule and the repression of evil

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<sup>451</sup> Ehlert, Arnold D. 1965. *A bibliographic history of dispensationalism*. BCH bibliographic series, no. 2. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 50. Note: Both Ehlert and Crutchfield are in agreement with Darby's seven dispensations and the names supplied to the dispensation; cf. Crutchfield, Larry. 1992. *The origins of dispensationalism: the Darby factor*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 9, 50-54.

<sup>452</sup> Darby. *Collected Writings*, vol. 2: *Prophetic No. 1*, 374, 375.

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid.*, 384.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 5: *Prophetic No.2*, 14.

<sup>456</sup> Crutchfield, Larry. 1992. *The origins of dispensationalism: the Darby factor*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 76.

with the following comment: “After the deluge, God makes a promise to bless the earth, and He sets man in power with the sword to rule and to repress evil.”<sup>457</sup> Darby also interprets Noah as a type of Christ. “The reader may, in passing, remark Adam as an image of Him who was to come, of the last Adam; and Noah, as also a figure of Christ, inasmuch as the government of the world and the repression of evil, were now entrusted to man.”<sup>458</sup>

*The test.* According to Crutchfield, the ability to rule by the sword was the test imposed by God. “Darby refers to the effective administration of this new government with its power of the sword as the ‘new trial’ under which humanity was placed. The implication is that God placed the power of the sword in the race’s hands to see if it could in fact govern effectively.”<sup>459</sup> Darby explains succinctly: “In Adam rule; in Noah, the sword; in Sinai; the law; in Aaron the priesthood . . .”<sup>460</sup>

*The failure.* Clearly, the fact that the law replaced the sword indicates that rule by the sword failed in the dispensation of Noah. Darby presents a catalogue of failures: “The first that Noah does is to get drunk. The children of Israel make a golden calf even before they had got the law, though they had just promised obedience. It was the same thing for the priests, Nadab and Abihu: they offered strange fire the first day; and then Aaron was forbidden to go into the most holy place in the garments of glory and beauty.”<sup>461</sup> “Noah gets drunk: this is not exercising authority. Afterwards comes in the wickedness of Ham . . .”<sup>462</sup>

*The judgment.* Crutchfield again explains: “God’s judgment descended upon humankind in the form of confusion of tongues. The projects of rebellious humankind were confounded and the people themselves were

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<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 5: *Prophetic No.2*, 14.

<sup>458</sup> Darby. *Collected Writings*, vol. 22: *Doctrinal No.6*, 340.

<sup>459</sup> Crutchfield, Larry. 1992. *The origins of dispensationalism: the Darby factor*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 77.

<sup>460</sup> Darby. *Collected Writings*, vol. 19: *Expository No.1*, 88.

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*

dispersed. . . . The second great principle to grow out of the judgment at Babel is the introduction of idolatry.”<sup>463</sup>

Darby discusses the judgment in term of the Abrahamic dispensation that was to follow that of Noah. “Israel had been the centre and keystone of the system that was established after the judgment upon Noah’s descendants for their pride at Babel.”<sup>464</sup> He summarizes this dispensation as follows: “Thus we have man (ha-Adam) and the end of all flesh—Noah, and the new world, and his failure—government of the world based on this failure by calling the judgment (on Ham’s family) . . . and then further—Babel and violent power, beginning the subsequent history and then the family of the owned seed. The call of Abraham begins all on a new basis.”<sup>465</sup> This dispensation ended with Abraham. The sign was the “covenant of the rainbow.”<sup>466</sup>

### 3. The dispensation of Abraham—his call by God

The substance of Abraham’s call is given in Genesis 12:1-2a: “Now the Lord said to Abram, Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great.” According to Darby, the call demanded faithfulness to God with separation from the idolatry of the world and from that of his family. The call specified that Abraham leave his country for a land that God would show him. It was also an unconditional covenant between God and Abraham that included a land, a seed, and a blessing; and it is here that Darby interjects the term “earthly blessings” in relation to Abraham and his seed.

It is the first time that we find God marking the existence of idolatry. When it first made its appearance, God calls Abraham; and thus for the first time, appears the call of God to an outward separation from the state of things here below.<sup>467</sup>

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<sup>463</sup> Crutchfield, Larry. 1992. *The origins of dispensationalism: the Darby factor*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 77-78

<sup>464</sup> Darby. 186 Proverbs, 16.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid., *Notes and Comments*, vol. 1: 123.

<sup>466</sup> Darby, John Nelson. 1849. *The hopes of the church of God; in connection with the destiny of the Jews and the nations as revealed in prophecy*. London: J. Nisbet., 69.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 2: *Prophetic no.1*, 347.

Let us begin our citations upon this subject out of Genesis 12. The chapter is the call of Abraham, who was in the midst of his idolatrous family. The terms of the promise are very general; but they contain earthly blessings as well as spiritual ones. The two kinds are found in the same verse equally without condition. The spiritual part of the promise is only once repeated (chap. 22) and that to the seed; not so the temporal ones. In chapter 15 we have a promise founded upon a covenant made with Abraham, also without condition. It is an absolute gift of the country.<sup>468</sup>

Calling is central to this dispensation,<sup>469</sup> and attached to that call is the unconditional covenant.

*The test.* The test was for Abraham to leave his country and family and to make the journey to the land that God was to show him.

*The failure.* Both the test and the failure are not entirely clear, according to Crutchfield, who comments on both:

Darby says nothing directly about a test during this period either. . . . In almost every categorical discussion of the failure of humanity under responsibility, Darby omits the name of Abraham. Yet if one digs long enough he will find that indeed there was failure on Abraham's part and by his descendants. According to Darby, Abraham's personal failure is seen in the fact that he went down into the land of Egypt and while there, he lied to the Pharaoh about Sarah's relationship to him.<sup>470</sup>

Darby discusses Isaac as a test of obedience, and in this sense there was no failure. "God had placed the promises in Isaac in a positive manner; and God puts Abraham to the test, to show whether he had such entire confidence in Him, that he would give up all the promises as possessed (raise up Isaac again, for in him God had said that the promises of a seed should be accomplished), and obey God in an express command . . ."<sup>471</sup>

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<sup>468</sup> Ibid., 348.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>470</sup> Crutchfield, Larry. 1992. *The origins of dispensationalism: the Darby factor*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 81.

<sup>471</sup> Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol. 6: *Apologetic No. 1*, 128. Note: It was Abraham's faithfulness and willingness to sacrifice Isaac that became the subject for Søren Kierkegaard's notion of the "teleological suspension of the ethical" in *Fear and Trembling*. Abraham was faced with a moral dilemma in that he was faced with two ethics. First, was the ethic of the father to his son that he should not kill, and second, the ethic that he should obey God. Kierkegaard's notion was that duty to God was a superior ethic to that between father and son, hence the latter was not abolished but found fulfillment in the higher ethic to God; hence his phrase the "teleological suspension of the ethical."

The judgment. Crutchfield comments that “Darby discusses the judgments pronounced upon humanity for its failures in this period only in an oblique way. With regard to Abraham’s untruth about Sarah, the families of the earth (in this case represented by the house of Pharaoh), which were to have been blessed because of him, are recipients instead of plagues (Gen. 12:17).”<sup>472</sup>

#### 4. The dispensation of Israel

This dispensation, which began with the Abrahamic Covenant and applies to Israel as a nation, was put “on hold” at the stoning of Stephen, but will be restored at the time of the “fullness of the Gentiles.” This dispensation is also termed by Darby the Jewish dispensation,<sup>473</sup> the dispensation of the Jew,<sup>474</sup> the dispensation of Judaism,<sup>475</sup> and a national dispensation.<sup>476</sup> Darby discusses three aspects of this dispensation: that under the law, under the priesthood, and under the kings, and one is at a loss to know whether Darby has in mind three separate dispensations or three aspects of one dispensation. Crutchfield offers the following explanation:

One is hard pressed to determine whether the period from Moses to Nebuchadnezzar is one dispensation or three in Darby’s analysis. Is it the single dispensation of Israel or the dispensations of Israel under the Law, Israel under the priesthood, and Israel under the kings? The rationale for the threefold division is the fact that all three periods have their own system under which Israel is placed with a different responsibility and subsequent failure. On the other hand, Darby tends to lump all three divisions together as the “Jewish Dispensation” or “Jewish System” when comparing Israel’s history to other dispensations.<sup>477</sup>

Jeffrey Thayer, while counting the paradisiacal state to the flood as a dispensation, agrees with Crutchfield that the fourth dispensation, namely Israel, encompasses the law, the priesthood, and the kings under one and not

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<sup>472</sup> Crutchfield, Larry. 1992. *The origins of dispensationalism: the Darby factor*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 82. Note: The author references Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol. 20: *Ecclesiastical No.4*, 331.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 1: *Ecclesiastical No.1*, 139, 181, 187, 208, 269.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*, *Notes and Comments*, vol. 7: 83.

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

three separate dispensations.<sup>478</sup> Floyd Elmore prefers to treat “Israel under the law (prophet),” “Israel under the priesthood,” and “Israel under the kings” as three separate dispensations rather than one, thus increasing Darby’s dispensations to a total of eight.<sup>479</sup>

*Israel under the law.* Darby discusses two principles: the first is the “government under Noah,” and the second is the “calling and election under Abraham.” Under “Israel and the law” these two principles are combined.<sup>480</sup> Darby elaborates on the subsumption of these two principles: “The history of the union of these two principles, whether under the responsibility of man or in the efficacy of the supremacy of God, is the history of the Jewish people. The law is the directing principle of it, as being the expression of actual terms of God’s government.”<sup>481</sup> In a true Hegelian dialectic, the synthesis both cancelled and preserved the two principles of government under Noah as calling and election; the thesis and the antithesis were subsumed under the Law. The handing down of the Law at Mt. Sinai is recorded in Exodus 19 and 20.

*The test.* Darby makes the following comment: “The law, says the apostle,<sup>482</sup> was ordained by angels in the hands of a Mediator. . . . That which was promised unconditionally to Abraham, was accepted at Sinai under condition of the people’s obedience. ‘Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people.’ Exod. 19:5.”<sup>483</sup> The test, according to Darby, was to keep the Law.

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<sup>477</sup> Crutchfield, Larry. 1992. *The origins of dispensationalism: the Darby factor*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 86.

<sup>478</sup> Thayer, Jeffrey. 2004. *ReGenesis, a Galilean manner of speech*. Raleigh, NC: Lulu Press, 358.

<sup>479</sup> Elmore, Floyd. “Darby, John Nelson.” *Dictionary of premillennial theology*, 1997, Mal Couch, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 84.

<sup>480</sup> “We have seen the principle of judgment and daily retribution introduced under Noah, as a constitution of the new world. This is the principle of government. We have also seen the principle of the calling of God marked out in the history of Abraham. This is the principle of grace, holiness, and the supremacy of God. But the union of these two principles is also presented to our view in the Scriptures . . .” Darby. *Collected Writings*, vol. 2: *Prophetic no. 1*, 135.

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>482</sup> Paul.

<sup>483</sup> Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol. 34: *Miscellaneous No.3*, 77.

*The failure.* According to Darby, the test, failure, and judgment go very much hand in hand. The people had sworn obedience to the covenant, yet even as the covenant was being ratified in the form of the Decalogue the people had made themselves a golden calf. “Then it was (Exodus 19:8) that they put themselves of their own will under the law. ‘All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.’ But they failed under this law as the sin of the golden calf (Exodus 32) witnessed.”<sup>484</sup>

*The judgment.* According to Darby, the sin of the golden calf demonstrated that the people turned away from God, thus abrogating the terms of the covenant.

Read Deuteronomy 4:23-31; chap. 8:19,20; chap. 28:63-68; chap. 29:28; chap. 30:17,18. All these passages show plainly that judgment has fallen upon Israel by reason of their sins. By this judgment the relationship formed between God and Israel under the law, these relationships, the existence of which depended expressly on the people’s obedience (Exod. 19:5), have been entirely interrupted and even terminated. The first covenant, that of Sinai, has been suppressed—abolished, as the Epistle to the Hebrews says, in order to give place to another.<sup>485</sup>

*Israel under the priesthood.* Under the priesthood, a different form of government was instituted, namely, rule by God through judges. In discussing Psalm 132, Darby remarks that it concerns “. . . the restoration of the ark of the covenant to its resting place . . . It is founded on David’s bringing the ark up to Zion.”<sup>486</sup> He then further commented on the Psalm: “The three principles of government had been brought out in Israel. First, direct responsibility to God under priesthood. That had failed under Eli, and that was Ihabod. It was over with Israel on the ground of their own responsibility. Then God intervened by a prophet.”<sup>487</sup> Darby expands on his theme: Israel under the priesthood with God as their king:

Under the priesthood (when God was their King, and there were only judges raised up from time to time to preserve them in their inheritance from the occasions of misery produced by their unbelief), they were connected with God through the medium of the priest. . . . Samuel was

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<sup>484</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 5: *Prophetic No.2*, 117.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 4: *Ecclesiastical No. 2*, 276.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid., *33 Psalms* (Introduction), 312.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid.



the representative of the prophetic line, a judge also, governing the people by the witness of God—a witness given as we have seen, against the actual state of the priesthood. It is for this reason Peter says, in Acts 3, “All the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after.” This then was God’s government by prophets.<sup>488</sup>

*The test.* It would appear that Darby’s notion of the test, though not entirely clear, did rest on the people being faithful to God their king, through the medium of the prophet. “Let us now turn to some passages which detail the transgression of Israel under every form of government. 1 Samuel 4:11. Eli was the high priest. . . . After this God who raised up Samuel, the first of the prophets . . . governs Israel by him, but Israel soon rejected him. 1 Sam. 8:6-7.”<sup>489</sup> Rejection of God is always followed by judgment.

*The failure and judgment.* The failure followed the test, since Israel had not listened to the prophets but had rejected them, as Darby explains with reference to Samuel: “. . . for they have not rejected you but they have rejected me [God], that I should not reign over them . . .”<sup>490</sup>

*Israel under the kings.* Government passed from a theocracy to a monarchy as the people rejected God as their king who ruled through the prophets, wanting instead an earthly king to rule over them. “. . . this then was the government by prophets; yet the people were not yet satisfied with it, but desired a king: and God gave them ‘a king in his anger, and took him away in his wrath,’ Hos. 13:11. A king chosen according to the flesh, when God was their King, served only to shew the weakness of all that man did, the folly of all that he desired.”<sup>491</sup>

*The test.* Again, faithfulness to God through the kingly line instead of the priesthood established the relationship between God and Israel.

*The failure.* According to Darby, Israel rejected a theocracy in favour of a monarchy. Darby compares the kingship of Israel with the kingship of Christ. “Nevertheless, the kingship of Christ over His people was ever in God’s designs. And He gave them a king after His own heart, and David and

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<sup>488</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 2: *Prophetic no. 1*, 139.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid., 354, 355.

<sup>490</sup> 1 Sam. 8:7

<sup>491</sup> Darby, *ibid.*, 139.

Solomon furnished the type of the kingship of Christ: one in suffering and overcoming all his enemies, after complete obedience; the other, as in reigning in peace and glory over a happy, obedient and prosperous people. . . . The repose and glory which Solomon enjoyed were the cause of his fall. He kept not his uprightness in the midst of the gifts of God, but drawn aside by his wives, he followed after other gods.”<sup>492</sup> Darby portrays an extramarital affair and failure with David and Bathsheba: “This history shews how far sin can blind the heart . . . God chastened David by the child’s death; it is another son of Bathsheba who was the elect of God, who became king and the head of the royal family, the man of peace and blessing, the beloved of Jehovah.”<sup>493</sup> Saul also failed. According to Darby: “After Israel had failed under Moses, under the judges and under Saul, David became the king chosen of God . . .”<sup>494</sup>

*The judgment.* Solomon’s son Rehoboam, unlike his father, did not walk in the ways of the Lord and sought to rule despotically, with the result that the monarchy split into the Northern and Southern kingdoms. Darby comments on the outcomes and the judgment by God: “Judah, having walked in all sorts of iniquity also, during the reign of Rehoboam, Jerusalem is taken, and all the riches which Solomon had amassed became the prey of the Egyptians. Abijam, his son, follows no better course. There was constant war between the two kingdoms—the sad story, so often renewed, of man placed in the enjoyment of God’s blessing, and the effects of his fall.”<sup>495</sup> First occurred the Assyrian captivity of the Northern kingdom in 722 BCE and then finally the Babylonian captivity of the Southern kingdom in 586 BCE, as recorded by Darby, in contrast to the destruction of the second temple in 70 CE: “. . . the temple is allowed to be cast down, as indeed it was at the captivity of Babylon; and this must be the case, in order that God may show that He has completely abandoned His people to the fruits of their ways.”<sup>496</sup> “The question then is of His government, and we can now ask, ‘When is it that God, in His government of the people of Israel, executes upon that people the sentence of ‘Lo-ammi’?’

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<sup>492</sup> Ibid.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid., *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 47.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 5: *Prophetic No.2*, 45

<sup>495</sup> Ibid., *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 50.

I am about to show my reader that it was at the time of the captivity of Babylon.”<sup>497</sup>

## 5. The dispensation of the Gentiles

*Israel under the Gentiles.* In the dispensation of Noah, government was central. In the dispensation of Abraham, the calling and promise of God were central. At the fall of the Jewish nation with the captivity of the Southern Kingdom in 586 BCE, “God transferred the right of government to the Gentiles; but with this difference, that this right was separated from the calling and promise of God.”<sup>498</sup> “With Nebuchadnezzar begins the times of the Gentiles.”<sup>499</sup> That right (calling and promise) remained with the Jewish nation that formed God’s earthly people. The dispensation of the Gentiles extends to the time of the millennium. “This still continues, and will continue, Jerusalem being trodden down, till the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, in the close of the Gentile dominion begun in Nebuchadnezzar.”<sup>500</sup> “When God set up a head of Gentile power in Nebuchadnezzar . . .”<sup>501</sup>

Crutchfield is of the opinion that the Gentile dispensation started at the time of Nebuchadnezzar with the transference of government from Israel to the Gentiles. This is certainly the view of Darby. However, the complexity of Darby’s dispensationalism is demonstrated when he also asserts: “In fact the Gentile dispensation, as a distinct thing, took its rise on the death of Stephen . . .”<sup>502</sup> It might be more proper to say that this dispensation began with Nebuchadnezzar but was ratified with the stoning of Stephen.<sup>503</sup> This would appear correct since, if the Gentile dispensation began with Nebuchadnezzar,

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<sup>496</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 5: *Prophetic No.2*, 153.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 4: *Ecclesiastical No. 2*, 255. Note: Darby defines “Lo-ammi” as God’s pronouncement of being “not my people.” Cf. *Collected Writings*, vol. 33: *Miscellaneous No. 2*, 400, where Darby references Hosea 1:6, 9.

<sup>498</sup> Darby, *The hopes of the church of God; in connection with the destiny of the Jews and the nations as revealed in prophecy*. London: J. Nisbet, 101.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 30: *Expository No. 2*, 236.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 13C: *Critical*, 365.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 9: *Apologetic No.2*, 290.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 1: *Ecclesiastical No.1*, 130.

<sup>503</sup> Crutchfield offers this explanation: “If the death of Stephen was the pivotal event which inaugurated the Gentile dispensation, then Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles was its head and chief representative.” Crutchfield, Larry. 1992. *The origins of dispensationalism: the Darby factor*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 108.

typically at the captivity of the Southern Kingdom in 586 BCE, it would then encompass the work of Christ, ending in the fullness of the Gentiles. However, Darby remarks that “outwardly, all goes on without the intervention of Christ, from the sowing of the seed until the harvest. Well, the time which elapses from the seed-sowing till the harvest is what is generally called the present dispensation. I have called it ‘the church dispensation,’ because it is the time during which the church is called, and exists here below, in contrast with the Jews and the legal system.”<sup>504</sup> Clearly, the text would accord with the previous text referring to the stoning of Stephen.

*The test.* The test is not specifically enunciated by Darby, except that the failure of Nebuchadnezzar would seem to intimate that Darby has in mind the fact that the king was God’s appointed agent of government, as can be understood by Darby’s comment on his failure.

*The failure and judgment.* The failure occurred with Nebuchadnezzar, who turned to pagan gods, as described by Darby: “God made the son of David to sit on the throne of Jehovah; but, idolatry having been introduced by him, the kingdom was divided, and the throne of the world was given of God to Nebuchadnezzar, who made a great image of gold and cast the faithful into a burning fiery furnace. In every case man was faithless; and God, having long borne with him, interposes in judgment and substitutes a better system.”<sup>505</sup> “But Nebuchadnezzar casts the faithful into the fire, and got in every sense a beast’s heart. Gentile power is corrupt, ambitious, and violent—cannot, as scripture speaks, stay at home, what he describes by likening them to ravaging beasts.”<sup>506</sup>

## 6. The dispensation of the Spirit

*The role of the Holy Spirit.* In a discussion of the dispensation of the Spirit, a number of problems arise. Darby’s system appears to be a series of overlapping dispensations. Crutchfield identifies the first overlap: “The reader will note that here, Darby seems to characterize the entire period from the

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<sup>504</sup> Darby, *ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 1: *Ecclesiastical No. 1*, 289.

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 14: *Ecclesiastical No. 3*, 87.

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 18: *Doctrinal No. 5*, 253.

giving of the Law to the coming of Christ as a single dispensation—‘the Jewish dispensation,’ the ‘dispensation of the law.’ . . . If the ‘Christian dispensation’ immediately followed the ‘Jewish dispensation . . . of the Law,’ one wonders what became of the Gentile dispensation and those of Israel under the priesthood and the kings.”<sup>507</sup> The second overlap occurs from Nebuchadnezzar to the time of the millennium, what Darby calls the “Gentile dispensation.” With this in mind, Darby now presents the “dispensation of the Spirit,” but perhaps a more appropriate term would be the “Church Age” that began with the stoning of Stephen and will extend to the pretribulational rapture. Darby comments on this dispensation with the following remark: “In fact the Gentile dispensation, as a distinct thing, took its rise on the death of Stephen, the witness that the Jews resisted the Holy Ghost: as their fathers did, so did they.”<sup>508</sup> Further: “When the church, viewed as a dispensation on earth has come to an end, the throne of God becomes again the centre of relation with the earth, and God begins again to intervene directly in the world, without having yet replaced His son on the earth.”<sup>509</sup>

Darby’s notion of the two peoples of God begins with the stoning of Stephen, the Jewish rejection of Christ, and the inauguration of the parenthetical church and start of the “dispensation of the Spirit.” “Thus we find, in the Jewish rejection of the apostles, the instantaneous cessation of derivative arrangement, and the whole dispensation, as carried upon earth, assuming a new character. This was the actual breaking of the earthly order, as the former scene with Stephen was the closing of the Jewish dispensation. But a new scene now opens—the regular Gentile form and order of the dispensation in the hand of the apostle Paul, the apostle of the uncircumcision, the apostle of the Gentiles.”<sup>510</sup> In his discussion concerning *Christ in His relation to the churches*, Darby comments: “We are arrived at a most important subject, where, if ever, we may find something of the spiritual and

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<sup>507</sup> Crutchfield, Larry. 1992. *The origins of dispensationalism: the Darby factor*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 107.

<sup>508</sup> Darby. *Collected Writings*, vol. 1: *Ecclesiastical No.1*, 75, 92, 135.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 5: *Prophetic No.2*, 14.

<sup>510</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 1: *Ecclesiastical No.1*, 97, 98.

heavenly character of the church of God during this dispensation.”<sup>511</sup> Thus, the “dispensation of the Spirit” marks the distinction between the Jews, who now become God’s earthly people, and the church, as God’s heavenly people. Crutchfield, aware of the complexities of Darby’s thoughts, proposed the following explanation: “Perhaps Darby’s point is this. From the death of Stephen through Paul’s life, the church was united in its heavenly calling and earthly arrangement. However, at the apostle’s death, the church in its earthly character (the ‘professing church,’ Christendom) and the church in its heavenly character (the true church, the Body of Christ) would become two distinctly different things.”<sup>512</sup>

*The test.* The goal of the church was to fulfil the great commission and to preach the gospel. “The Lord Jesus has, then, received these gifts to Himself, a man, and has given them to men, for the effectuating the work of the gospel and of the Church; those therefore who have received these gifts must needs turn them to their full profit, according to God, to Will (*sic*) souls, to edify Christians, and to glorify their heavenly Master.”<sup>513</sup>

*The failure and judgment.* The failure of the church is one of Darby’s key doctrines concerning “the ruin of the church,” which I have covered extensively in chapter three. Darby saw evidence of the church’s ruin in his own day and believed it would culminate in the great apostasy of the church before the Second Coming of Christ, under the Antichrist and the False Prophet of Revelation, thus ushering in judgment.

## 7. The Dispensation of the millennium

The events leading up to the millennium include the pretribulational rapture of the saints, the judgment of the saints, and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in heaven. Following these events, the saints (church) accompany Christ back to earth, where there will be the Battle of Armageddon. Then follows the millennium during which time the government will be directed by the Lord himself in conjunction with His saints. Its earthly centre of

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<sup>511</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 8: *Prophetic No.3*, 21.

<sup>512</sup> Crutchfield, Larry. 1992. *The origins of dispensationalism: the Darby factor*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 109.

administration will be Jerusalem. Thus God's heavenly people, the saints, will rule with Christ over God's earthly people, Israel.

The millennium, as regards the saints on earth, will be judicial; now in grace. The Jewish economy was not of grace, but law. The Church cannot depart from its standing with God, and therefore cannot have to do with a judicial economy, which must have reference therefore to an earthly people.<sup>514</sup>

As to the difference of the saints' calling, therefore on earth during the millennium, it will be quite different from that of the saints now on earth, for the obvious reason that the millennial dispensation, as regards the saints on earth will be a dispensation of judgment.<sup>515</sup>

We have in one sense come to the end of the Book of Revelation. Here it is that events of the prophecy are closed. What follows is a description of the holy Jerusalem, of the joy of the saints during the thousand years, and the relations of the heavenly Jerusalem with the earth. Everything is centred [*sic*] in Christ.<sup>516</sup>

Darby comments: "In the beginning of the sentence, Ephesians 1:10 is applied to the millennial state of the Jews. In the end of the passage it is said to be a dispensation which is not then yet come, and in which the millennial arrangements cease. . . . I do not believe that the passage applies to the post-millennial state, which cannot be called a dispensation, for it is eternity . . ." <sup>517</sup> Thus Darby affirmed that the "millennial dispensation" is the last and final dispensation within his system.

Thus far, Darby's dispensationalism included a highly complex system of periodization, with some dispensations overlapping others, incorporating six stated dispensations in addition to the paradisiacal state, which Darby did not consider a dispensation. Darby constructed his periodization with the belief that there were successive periods in which relationships between man and God appeared to change. Typically God imposed a test, and man failed and received judgment. God then instituted a new dispensation or period. This is the only way to make makes sense of his doctrine of the two peoples of

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<sup>513</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 14: *Ecclesiastical No.3*, 6.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid., *Collectanea*, n.p.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 32: *Miscellaneous No.1*, 276.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 5: *Prophetic No.2*, 96.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 8: *Prophetic No.3*, 222.

God. In this case, the Jews, in not accepting Christ, failed the test, forcing God to institute a new dispensation or period: the church age or the dispensation of the spirit.

*Darby's hermeneutical principle*

Darby provides a fairly comprehensive explanation of how he interprets Scripture:

First, in prophecy, when the Jewish church or nation (exclusive of the Gentile parenthesis in their history) is concerned. i.e., when the address is directly to the Jews, there we may look for a plain and direct testimony, because earthly things were for the Jews' proper portion. And, on the contrary, where the address is to the Gentiles, i.e., when the Gentiles are concerned in it, there we may look for a symbol, because earthly things were not their portion, and the system of revelation must to them be symbolical. When therefore facts are addressed to the Jewish church as a subsisting body, as to what concerns themselves, I look for a plain, common sense, literal statement, as to a people with whom GOD had direct dealings upon earth, and to whom He meant His purposes concerning them to be known. . . . Secondly . . . that wherever Scripture affords the history of a fact, there we may expect it to be distinctly and literally declared or predicated in prophecy. When the Scriptures do not extend to the giving the history (which is evidently the case after the fact of the restoration of the Jews from Babylon, save the fact of the Lord's coming to offer Himself, and perhaps we may add the outpouring of the Spirit), then we must expect it to be declared only symbolically, i.e., approximately in its moral character; and hence partly, the partial obscurity of the seventy weeks of Daniel, because they were no regular recognized portions of the Jewish history, but a sort of anomalous period for the coming of the Lord.<sup>518</sup>

In short, despite Darby's claim that he used a literal interpretation of Scripture, such literalism was at times overwhelmed by his conviction that all prophesied earthly events must apply to the Jews and that the church had no earthly prophecies of its own. Later on, even dispensationalists would question this "rule of thumb." Nevertheless, there is interconnectedness between Darby's entire dispensational doctrines concerning: The unconditionality of the Abrahamic Covenant; the seventy-week prophecy which pertained to national Israel; the sixty-ninth week which culminated in the stoning of

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<sup>518</sup> Darby. *Collected Writings*, vol. 2: *Prophetic No. 1*, 35-36.



Stephen; the two peoples of God; the pretribulation rapture; and the gap in Daniel's seventy-week prophecy.

## 5. The 70 Weeks of Daniel and the Gap Theory

The seventy-week prophecy has provided fertile ground for numerous historicist interpreters involved in “date setting,” and it has also been widely used within futurism with regard to the gap between the 69<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> weeks. In this chapter I will present the arguments for historicism and futurism in conjunction with the seventy-week prophecy, followed by Darby’s “gap thesis.”

It is widely held that the “gap thesis” was original to Darby, in that he invented it. I would argue otherwise. Darby’s “gap thesis” was *not* original to him, and for this reason I will present the early usage of the notion of a gap in the prophecy, together with what I believe to be Darby’s source, namely, Newtonian futurism. The seventy-week prophecy is recorded in Scripture in Daniel 9:24-27:

Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place. So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty two weeks; it will be built again with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing . . . And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering . . .<sup>519</sup>

Darby’s belief in the inviolability of the Abrahamic Covenant, which he believed applied to the Jewish nation and provided the background for his twin concepts of God’s earthly and heavenly people, undergirded his attempt to develop a hermeneutic for Daniel’s seventy-week prophecy. In doing so, he used a gap of an indeterminate number of years between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks, thus amputating the prophecy. Darby applied a futurist interpretation to the prophecy very much in line with that of the Roman Catholic Church.

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<sup>519</sup> Daniel 9:24-26a and 27a.

There was, however, another dominant historicist view that saw the prophecy as a composite whole without any gap. These then were the two major interpretations of Daniel's seventy-week prophecy: the Darbyite futurist view that placed a gap between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks, and the more traditional historicist interpretation that typically saw the fulfilment of the entire prophecy at the time of Christ. To understand Darby's interpretation of the prophecy, it is perhaps best to provide the rationale for the historicist interpretation first, thus laying the groundwork for the gap thesis.

#### The Millerite historicist hermeneutic

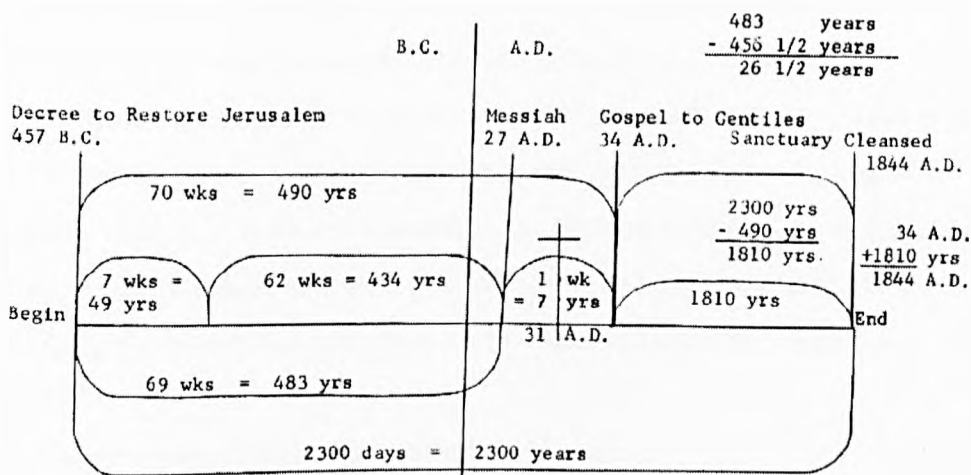
The scholars who agree that the seventy weeks lead up to the time of Jesus' crucifixion and find no gap in the prophecy are typified by the Millerite movement, which would later become the Seventh-day Adventist church. The late Frank Moran, who was a professor at the Seventh-day Adventist Loma Linda University, provides a prophetic interpretation that links the 70-week prophecy to the 2300-day prophecy of Daniel 8,<sup>520</sup> thus supplying the rationale for the Great Disappointment of 1843/1844. The starting date for both prophecies was the same, 457 BCE. In both prophecies a literal year-for-a-day interpretation was used, based upon the texts of Ezek. 4:6<sup>521</sup> and Num. 14:34.<sup>522</sup> Thus, the prophecies literally represent 490 and 2300 years respectively. It was conjectured that the supposed validity of the 70-week prophecy ensured the validity of the 2300-day prophecy, since both were given in the book of Daniel and both used the same starting date. The failure of the Millerite expectations circa 1843/1844 was later reinterpreted in the light of the "heavenly sanctuary thesis."

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<sup>520</sup> "And he said to me, 'For 2300 evenings and mornings, then the holy place will be properly restored.'" Dan. 8:14.

<sup>521</sup> ". . . I have assigned it to you for forty days, a day for each year." Ezek. 4:6b.

<sup>522</sup> "According to the number of days which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day you shall bear your guilt a year, even forty years, and you shall know My opposition." Num. 14:34.



The chart above, reproduced from *Syllabus for Personal Evangelism*, depicts how Frank Moran explained his eschatological scheme and hence that of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the early Millerite movement.<sup>523</sup> Moran adds the 7 weeks and 62 weeks,<sup>524</sup> making 69 weeks or 483 weeks of years, and subtracts 457, the date the prophecy began, making 26. Since there is a crossover from BCE to CE (there being no year 0), he adds a year, making 27 CE (AD) on the chart for “Messiah the Prince.”<sup>525</sup> Moran understands that the prophecy found fulfilment in the baptism of Jesus. “The 483 years, ending in 27 AD, were to reach to the Anointed One. In that very year Jesus was anointed with the Holy Ghost. Though centuries had passed since the prophecy was made, He fulfilled it exactly on time. In this fact we have conclusive evidence that He was the One sent of God to be our Savior.”<sup>526</sup> Moran then turned to Daniel 9:27,<sup>527</sup> in which the author saw the fulfilment in the passion: “Christ confirmed the ‘New Covenant’ with as many of the Jewish people as would accept Him for 7 years after 27 A.D. During that time he preached to the Jews for 3 ½ years, and after His ascension the disciples

<sup>523</sup> Moran, *Syllabus for Personal Evangelism*, II, 19. Note: Moran includes the 2300-day prophecy in conjunction with that of the seventy-weeks.

<sup>524</sup> Daniel 9:24-26b.

<sup>525</sup> Moran also adjusts for the fact that the decree, according to Ezra 7:9, was not issued until the fifth month; II, 16.

<sup>526</sup> Moran, *ibid.*, II, 17. The author cites a number of verses to support his argument, including John 1:41; Acts 10:38; Matt. 3:16; Mark 1-9-15.

<sup>527</sup> “And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering.” Daniel 9:27b.

preached exclusively to the Jews for another 3 ½ years ending in 34 A.D. In the midst of that week Jesus was crucified, or ‘cut off’ (verse 26).”<sup>528</sup>

Moran then considered the events that happened at the termination of the 70-week prophecy, which he asserted were fulfilled in the stoning of Stephen. “But in 34 A.D. the Sanhedrin, the highest official body in the Jewish nation, confirmed their national rejection of Christ by stoning Stephen, and launching a great persecution against Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 6:9 to 8:1).”<sup>529</sup>

The following arguments are proposed by Moran:

1. The 69 weeks found fulfilment in the baptism of Jesus.
2. The 3 ½ week prophecy found fulfilment in the crucifixion of Jesus.
3. The 70-week (remaining 3 ½ weeks) prophecy found fulfilment in the stoning of Stephen.
4. The entire 70-week prophecy is “composite” and is not split up, and there is no gap.<sup>530</sup>

Moran’s fourth point (there is no gap) is of great significance and finds support in the observations of George L. Rose: “All the evidence of the New Testament, and of Christian experience, agrees with the greatest teachers of the Christian church, that the seventieth week of Daniel’s prophecy has all been fulfilled more than 1900 years ago. This leaves no future seventieth week yet to be fulfilled in ‘the great tribulation after the rapture.’”<sup>531</sup>

Moran’s argument affirms a literal interpretation based upon his thesis that in prophetic interpretation, a week in prophecy really means a year in real terms. Moran is not alone in this interpretation but is supported by many other interpreters. John Cumming, a Scot, states that “. . . if the period of Daniel were seventy literal weeks, there would be nothing to correspond with its termination. I therefore conclude, I think justly, that the seventy weeks of Daniel are seventy weeks of years, each day being taken for a year . . . i.e., 490

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<sup>528</sup> Moran, *ibid.*, II, 17.

<sup>529</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 18. Moran supports his argument by citing Acts 8:1-5.

<sup>530</sup> Futurism and later dispensationalists (to be discussed) would disagree with the composite nature of the seventy-week prophecy, and understand that the seventieth week (or part of it) applies to the future.

<sup>531</sup> Rose, George L. *Tribulation Till Translation* (Glendale, CA: Rose Publishing Company, 1943), 62, qtd. in Pentecost, J. Dwight. 1964. *Things to come: a study in Biblical eschatology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 171.

years.”<sup>532</sup> Samuel Sharpe has similar thoughts: “Hence our commentators take no liberty whatever in understanding the week in this chapter to mean a week of years, and the seventy weeks spoken to mean 490 years.”<sup>533</sup> Jonathan Edwards is of like mind: “. . . in the 9th chapter of his prophecy; who foretold, that it should be seventy weeks, i.e. seventy weeks of years, or seventy times seven years, or four hundred and ninety years, from the decree to rebuild and restore the state of the Jews, till the Messiah should be crucified.”<sup>534</sup> It is important to note that whereas Moran affirms that the Messiah was crucified in the middle of the last week, Edwards puts the crucifixion 3 ½ years later, at the termination of the seventy weeks.

If we are to believe Samuel Sharpe’s assertion that “our commentators take no liberty . . .” we are left in a quandary by what is understood by the word “liberty.” George Stanley Faber, an English scholar and rector,<sup>535</sup> is in disagreement with the sentiments of Sharpe, and his remarks would suggest that the commentators have indeed taken great liberties with their interpretation. “Yet, if we find upon computing this smaller period that we are brought to no event which will in any manner quadrate with the expression *unto the Messiah*, we shall undoubtedly have reason to suspect, that the 490 years between the edict of Artaxerxes and the crucifixion are not the intended period of *seventy weeks*, but that their numerical correspondence with each other is purely casual.”<sup>536</sup> This brings us back to the argument by John Cumming that the seventy weeks, if they are literally that period, then there is no corresponding event that the prophecy relates to. The commentator, contrary to the sentiments of Samuel Sharpe, is then forced to take liberties with his interpretation if he is to derive any meaningful interpretation.

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<sup>532</sup> Cumming, John. 1854. *Prophetic studies. Lectures on the book of Daniel*. Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 380.

<sup>533</sup> Sharpe, Samuel. 1868. *The chronology of the Bible*. London: J. Russell Smith, 38.

<sup>534</sup> Edwards, Jonathan, and Samuel Austin. 1808. *The works of President Edwards*. Worcester [MA]: Isaiah Thomas, Jun., 149.

<sup>535</sup> “Faber, George Stanley (1773-1854), controversialist: scholar of University College, Oxford, 1790; fellow of Llincoln, 1793; M.A., 1796; Bampton lecturer, 1801; B.D., 1803; vicar of Stockton-upon-Tees, 1805-8 . . .” Lee, Sidney. 1903. *Dictionary of national biography. Index and epitome*. London: Smith, Elder & Co., 414.

<sup>536</sup> Faber, George Stanley. 1811. *A dissertation on the prophecy contained in Daniel IX 24-27: generally denominated the prophecy of the seventy weeks*. London: F.C. and J. Rivington, 411.

However, as suggested by Faber, supposed foretold events may be coincidental or, as he remarks, “casual.” Herein lies the dilemma: if there are problems in determining whether the seventy weeks should be treated as “weeks of years” or not, how then are the component parts of the seventy-week prophecy to be determined? This will become more relevant in the light of Darby’s gap thesis.

### The Darbyite futurist hermeneutic

The historicist interpretation of the seventy-week prophecy can be easily understood, but the same cannot be said about Darby’s interpretation. Faced with the fact that this was a prophecy that pertained to the Jews and one with a definite starting date, Darby was then in a dilemma over the termination of the prophecy. In his endeavour to reconcile all the variables, there appeared to be only one solution—to place a gap of an indeterminate number of years somewhere in the prophecy. Where to place the gap occupied his thoughts for a long period of time, oscillating between a three-and-a-half-year or seven-year period that was to be fulfilled at the Second Advent, not the time of Christ. He did resolve this eschatological issue but not before committing himself to the view for a number of years that alluded to a three-and-a-half-year period or half-week to be fulfilled at the Second Advent. He also interpreted the remaining period to be a full week, or seven years, of the seventy-week prophecy, also reserved for the time of the Second Advent.<sup>537</sup> Thus, Darby asserted a futurist interpretation upon which his entire eschatology hangs and without which his entire dispensationalist system falls apart. Regarding the final week of the seventy-week prophecy, Darby made the following comment: “The remaining week remains still to be fulfilled. We have here the history of this last week. At that time, God will resume with the Jews His laws, His judgments, and His terrestrial government.”<sup>538</sup>

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<sup>537</sup> “Darby initially held to a three and a-half year (1260 days) tribulation; only later did he accept a seven year tribulation.” Carter, Grayson. 2001. *Anglican evangelicals: Protestant secessions from the via media, c. 1800-1850*. Oxford theological monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 224.

<sup>538</sup> Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol. 5: *Prophetic No.2*, 31.

Darby understood that Israel was the chosen people of God up to their rejection of Christ and the “martyrdom of Stephen; and at this point the Jewish successional order closed.”<sup>539</sup> At this juncture, the church was called to fulfil the parenthesis between the 69<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> weeks of Daniel, as Darby explains: “This lapse of time, this parenthesis in the ways of God, is brought in, in the most distinct way at the end of Daniel 9 . . . to what I was calling a parenthesis, or lapse of time, during which the Jews were all set aside.”<sup>540</sup> Darby then discussed extensively the seventy-week prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27 and remarked that “. . . there is still a week left, we have had only sixty-nine weeks.”<sup>541</sup> He understood that God had stopped the prophetic clock with the martyrdom of Stephen, and this coincided with the completion of the 69<sup>th</sup> week of the seventy-week prophecy. The great tribulation marks the beginning of the 70<sup>th</sup> week, but this is all in the future, and an indeterminate number of years make up the period between the close of the 69<sup>th</sup> week and the start of the 70<sup>th</sup> week. This gap between these two weeks is what Darby refers to as the “parenthetical period,” this being outside the dispensational stages of history, awaiting the time for the secret rapture of the saints and the subsequent Great Tribulation. Darby explains this as follows:

The tribulation in Matthew 24:21 is more particularly connected with what will take place in Judea, or rather in Jerusalem, under Antichrist, and is applied to the Jews. Those who have come out from the “great tribulation,” or of “a great tribulation,” are not the church properly so called, for as is seen in Revelation 3:10, she will be kept out of it. I do not mean either, that they are the same persons of those spoken of in connection with the great tribulation mentioned in Matthew 24:15, 22, for in Matthew those persons are evidently Jews: whereas, in the chapter before us, they that came out of the great tribulation are Gentiles.<sup>542</sup>

Thus, Darby understood that the prophetic clock had stopped for the Jews following the upper room discourse and was actualized after the giving out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.<sup>543</sup> This begins the period that he calls the

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<sup>539</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 1: *Ecclesiastical No. 1*, 112.

<sup>540</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 11: *Prophetic No. 4*, 243.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 5: *Prophetic No. 2*, 25.

<sup>543</sup> Pentecost, J. Dwight. 1995. *Thy kingdom come: tracing God's kingdom program and covenant promises throughout history*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 133.



“parenthetical church,” during which time we see the clear distinction between Israel and the church, the “two peoples of God.” This parenthetical church was not a dispensation *per se* but the interlude between the martyrdom of Stephen and the future removal of the saints that will occur in the secret rapture. The distinction is maintained that unfulfilled prophecy pertains to the Jews and not to the church and that the Jews constitute God’s earthly people and the church, God’s heavenly people. Thus by adopting the two people of God thesis, Darby supported a futurist interpretation of Daniel’s seventy-week prophecy.

#### The Jesuit futurist apologetic

The question as to why Darby and other dispensationalists should adopt a Roman Catholic Jesuit doctrine of futurism is of particular interest. The post-Reformation assertion that Rome and the papacy constituted the Antichrist<sup>544</sup> was met with the Counter-Reformation apologetics of preterism and futurism. Preterism, advanced by the Jesuit Alcazar of Spain, reasoned that the Papacy could not be the Antichrist since the prophecies concerning the Antichrist were fulfilled prior to there being any Papacy. Futurism, the doctrine advanced by Francisco Ribera and Robert Bellarmine, both Jesuits, asserted that Antichrist had yet to appear and that his coming was in the future. This convenient argument of preterism and futurism placed the Antichrist either before the Papacy or sometime in the indefinite future, thus nullifying the assertion that Rome was the Antichrist. When Darby stated that “The remaining week remains still to be fulfilled,”<sup>545</sup> he appears to be in agreement with the Roman Catholic doctrine of futurism.

A number of scholars are patently aware of Darby’s affirmation of futurism. “Thus, in spite of the positive features of his ministry, Darby followed Irving (and probably Margaret), Newman, Todd, Burgh, Maitland, and Ribera by inserting the virus of futurism into his theology, now a pre-

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<sup>544</sup> Wyckliffe, Conradus Graserus, Edward Leigh, Johann Heinrich Alsted, Henry Barrow, Thomas Becon, William Bradshaw, John Brinsley, Edward Burrough, William Cowper, Thomas Cranmer, William Dell, George Downame, Patrick Forbes, William Fulke, William Guild, Henry Moore, William Perkins, Samuel Rutherford, Patrick Simson, Nathaniel Stephens, Thomas Manton, Martin Luther, the Albigenses and the Waldensians, all affirmed the Papacy to be the Antichrist.

<sup>545</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 5: *Prophetic No.2*, 31.

tribulation rapture theology. This created a link between John Nelson Darby, the father of modern dispensationalism, and Francisco Ribera, the ancient father of modern dispensationalism.”<sup>546</sup> Thomas D. Ice adds to the thoughts of Wohlberg with the following comment: “The Jesuit Francisco Ribera (1537-1591) was one of the first to revive an undeveloped form of futurism around 1580. Because of the dominance of historicism, futurism made virtually no headway in Protestantism, until the 1820’s; futurism began to gain converts and grow in the British Isles, often motivated by a revived interest in God’s plan for Israel; during this time it gained one of its most influential converts in John Nelson Darby.”<sup>547</sup> Colin Standish offers an explanation of the revival of futurism within the genre of ecumenism in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Standish, the re-establishing of relations between the Anglican Church and Rome was stymied, since the Roman Church was seen as Babylon and Antichrist by the Established Church, thus arousing opposition from the Oxford Movement. Standish explains that this opposition was to a large extent mitigated by adopting a futurist interpretation.<sup>548</sup>

Brad Molles presents an insightful comment regarding Emmanuel Lacunza’s work, *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty*. “Another Jesuit, Emmanuel Lacunza, was influential in further promoting the futurist

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<sup>546</sup> Wohlberg, Steve. 2005. *End time delusions*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 129.

<sup>547</sup> Thomas D. Ice. “Revelation, interpretative views of.” *Dictionary of premillennial theology*, 1997, Mal Couch, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 370. Note: Similar thoughts are offered by Dwight K. Nelson. “Ribera devised a new method of Bible interpretation called ‘futurism,’ which (just as it sounds) is all about the future. What the Spanish priest did was to take all of Revelation’s prophecies (except the earliest chapters) and apply them to the end-time rather than to the history of the Church. Included in his relegating to the future were the prophecies about the Antichrist, who would appear, Ribera calculated, during the last seven years of earth’s history.” Nelson, Dwight K. 2001. *What “Left Behind” left behind*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Association, 39.

<sup>548</sup> “The futurist view was revived by the efforts of the leaders of Anglo-Catholicism in England in the early part of the nineteenth century. There was a determined effort by some to facilitate the re-unification of the Church of England with the Church of Rome. Many earnest Anglicans rose up against such efforts, pointing out that the Church of Rome was the antichrist. One of the leaders of the Anglo-Catholic movement at Oxford University, Professor Morford, dusted off the thesis of Ribera and declared that the antichrist was yet to come, thus directing attention away from the papacy. Many students of theology uncritically accepted this erroneous theology. Prominent among them was John Darby, who was later to found the Plymouth Brethren Church. Standish, Colin D. And Russell R. Standish. 1989. *Deceptions of the new theology*. Hartland, VA: Hartland Publications, 97.

view. . . . Lacunza took Ribera's ideas and expanded on them, originating dispensationalism by teaching that Jesus would 'rapture' his church to save them from a future antichrist. This book was very influential in bringing attention to the futurist view when it was published in English in 1827."<sup>549</sup> There are clear distinctions between Lacunza and Darby regarding the rapture event, in particularly the view of Lacunza that the judgment of the wicked is contemporaneous with the rapture of the saints, whereas the seven-year tribulation period separates the two events for Darby. However, the 1827 publication date of the event might well have influenced Darby's thoughts, allowing him to be adaptive in his own interpretation.

#### Pre-Darbyite usage of the gap thesis

Futurism aside, Darby's use of the gap was hardly original, since other expositors prior to him had made a similar interpretation; hence my assertion that Darby did not invent the gap thesis. An early reference to the gap thesis is found in a work edited by Henry Clissold, dated 1828, with the following explanation: "The seventy weeks are broken into three parts; seven weeks, sixty-two weeks, and one week, the last week is divided into two halves. . . . At the end of the sixty-ninth week, or at the beginning of the seventieth week, John the Baptist began his ministry; and in the middle of the seventieth, when Jesus began to be about thirty years of age, (Luke iii.24), he resisted with effect the temptations of Satan . . ." <sup>550</sup> In a footnoted entry, the author then discussed his understanding of the term "consummation," <sup>551</sup> remarking: "'The consummation,' &c, i.e. (probably) until that period shall arrive, when the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled; when the Israelites, shall have suffered what God shall have thought right; and when they shall come into and embrace the Christian faith."<sup>552</sup> This early work that places an indeterminate

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<sup>549</sup> Molles, Brad. 2004. *The Beast and the Bride. Interpreting Revelation in the light of history.* Raleigh, NC: Lulu Press, 8.

<sup>550</sup> Clissold, Henry. 1827. *Prophecies of christ and christian times, selected from the Old and New Testament, and arranged according to the periods in which they were pronounced.* London: Printed for C.J.G. & F. Rivington, 122.

<sup>551</sup> Daniel 9:25b.

<sup>552</sup> Clissold, Henry. 1827. *Prophecies of christ and christian times, selected from the Old and New Testament, and arranged according to the periods in which they were pronounced.* London: Printed for C.J.G. & F. Rivington, 123.

period of time between Jesus' commencing his work in "middle of the week" and the termination at the times of the Gentiles would appear to predate Darby. It would seem to be unique were it not for another work written by Rev. S. Lee, a professor at Cambridge, in 1830: "... Messiah is to be cut off: that is, at the end of *sixty-nine weeks* of the *seventy*, the Messiah is to suffer . . . that is, at a period termed *midst* of the (last) week (i.e., of this last week); and, *after* the expiration of the sixty-ninth, according to the preceding verse, sacrifice was to cease, probably with the destruction of the temple and city, as there also stated."<sup>553</sup> The author, like Clissold, then discussed the "consummation," a period "... extending beyond the destruction of Jerusalem, and still farther beyond the death of our Lord. . . How long this period is to continue, circumstances alone must inform us . . ." <sup>554</sup>

### *Newtonian futurism*

Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727), as early as 1733 in his discussion of the prophecies of Daniel, made an important contribution to the gap thesis. Newton applied what appears to be a double meaning to the prophecy, which he first attempts to explain. "This prophecy, like all the rest of Daniel's, consists of two parts, an introductory Prophecy and an explanation thereof."<sup>555</sup> Newton then applied his double interpretation and then a futurist interpretation to the prophecy.

The former part of the Prophecy related to the first coming of Christ, being dated to his coming as a Prophet; this being dated to his coming to be Prince or King, seems related to his second coming. There, the Prophet was consummated, and the most holy anointed: here, he that was anointed comes to be Prince and reign. For Daniel's Prophecies reach to the end of the world; and there is scarce a Prophecy in the Old Testament concerning Christ, which does not in something or other

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<sup>553</sup> Lee, Samuel. 1830. *Six sermons on the study of the Holy Scriptures: their nature, interpretation, and some of their most important doctrines; preached before the University of Cambridge, in the years 1827-8. To which are annexed two dissertations: the first on the reasonableness of the Orthodox views of Christianity, as opposed to the rationalism of Germany; the second on the interpretation of prophecy generally, with an original exposition of the Book of Revelation; shewing that the whole of that remarkable prophecy has long ago been fulfilled.* London: James Duncan, xxxii-xxiii.

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxiv.

<sup>555</sup> Newton, Isaac. 1733. *Observations upon the prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John: in two parts.* London: Printed by J. Darby and T. Browne. Chap. 10:129.

relate to his second coming. If divers of the antients, as Irenaeus,<sup>556</sup> Julius Africanus,<sup>557</sup> Hippolytus the martyr,<sup>558</sup> and Apollinaris Bishop of Laodicea, applied the half week to the times of Antichrist; why may not we, by the same liberty of interpretation, apply the seven weeks to the time when Antichrist shall be destroyed by the brightness of Christ's coming?<sup>559</sup>

The contribution by Hippolytus needs special mention. After first discussing the seventy-week prophecy in detail and providing his interpretation for the first seven weeks, Hippolytus then added his understanding of the remaining sixty-two weeks plus one final week, with the following comment:

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<sup>556</sup> Irenaeus interpreted the "time, times and half a time" prophecy in Daniel 7 as three and a half literal years. "... and he [Antichrist] shall speak words against the most high God, and shall purpose to change times and laws; and [everything] shall be given into his hand until a time of times and a half time,' [Dan. 8:23, etc.] that is, for three years and six months, during which time, when he comes, he shall reign over the earth." *Against Heresies* 5:25. Irenaeus, while he does not discuss Daniel's seventy-week prophecy, does equate the three and a half years above with the last week of the seventy-week prophecy. He does not inform us, however, whether the entire seventy-week prophecy was composite or whether it had a gap. [Dan. 9:27] "Now three years and six months constitute the half-week." *Ibid.*

<sup>557</sup> Julius Africanus (200- c. 245) discusses the *Seventy Weeks of Daniel* with the following comment: "That the passage speaks then of the advent of Christ, who was manifest Himself after seventy weeks is evident." He also adopts the "year for a day" principle: "the seventy weeks which make up 490 years . . ." His start date is from Artaxerxes, although he fails to mention which one. "From Artaxerxes, moreover, 70 weeks are reckoned up to the time of Christ, according to the numeration of the Jews." He does not appear to extend the conclusion of the seventy-week prophecy to the time of Antichrist; however, Julius does refer to another work of his entitled *On the Weeks and this Prophecy*, where he claims to have discussed the seventy-week prophecy "with greater exactness." Roberts, Alexander. 1995. *Ante-Nicene fathers 6, Gregory Thaumaturgus, Dionysius the Great, Julius Africanus, Anatolius and minor writers, Methodius, Arnobius / ed. by Alexander Roberts*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 134-137.

<sup>558</sup> Anthony Garland offers his own contribution and that by Knowles (Knowles, Louis E. May 1945. The interpretation of the seventy weeks of Daniel in the early fathers. *Westminster Theological Journal*. 7 (2):136-160), with the following comment: "As early as Irenaeus (130-200) and Hippolytus (170-236), basic futuristic concepts such as the remaining week of Daniel's seventy weeks . . . had already become evident: When Knowles deals with the next major contributors - Irenaeus (130-200) and his disciple Hippolytus (170-236) - he describes their views as 'undoubtedly the forerunners of modern dispensational interpreters of the Seventy Weeks.' Knowles draws the following conclusion about Irenaeus and Hippolytus: '. . . we may say that Irenaeus presented the seed of an idea that found its full growth in the writings of Hippolytus. In the works of these fathers, we can find most of the basic concepts of the modern futuristic view of the seventieth week of Daniel ix.'" Garland, Anthony C. 2004. *A Testimony of Jesus Christ, volume 1: A commentary on the Book of Revelation*. Camano Island, WA: Spirit and Truth Publishers, 123.

<sup>559</sup> Newton, Isaac. 1733. *Observations upon the prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John: in two parts*. London: Printed by J. Darby and T. Browne. Chap. 10:132.

For when threescore and two weeks are fulfilled, and Christ is come, and the Gospel is preached in every place, the times being then accomplished, there will remain only one week, the last in which Elias will appear, and Enoch, and in the midst of it the abomination of desolation will be manifested, viz., Antichrist, announcing desolation to the world. And when he comes, the sacrifice and oblation will be removed, which now are offered to God in every place by the nations.<sup>560</sup>

Since Hippolytus uses the “year-for-a-day principle,” there remains a final week of seven years. Hippolytus established two clearly defined interpretations. First, the former part of the prophecy began prior to the time of Christ.<sup>561</sup> Second, it will terminate with the Antichrist. Since the prophecy for Hippolytus occupies 490 literal years, it is impossible to begin its inception prior to the time of Christ and its termination with Antichrist without a gap. Hippolytus does not mention any gap, but a gap is certainly implied, and Isaac Newton was patently aware of such an implication.

That Newton, well known within scientific circles, should also be interested in prophecy and eschatology would seem unusual were it not that the Fifth Monarchist movement had created a profound historicist view of Christianity that became politically charged circa 1650-65. Bernard McGinn

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<sup>560</sup> Roberts, Alexander. 1995. *Ante-Nicene fathers 5, Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix / ed. by Alexander Roberts*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 180.

<sup>561</sup> “Having mentioned therefore seventy weeks, and having divided them into two parts, in order that what was spoken by him to the prophet might be better understood, he proceeds thus, ‘Unto Christ the Prince shall be seven weeks,’ which make forty-nine years. It was in the twenty-first year that Daniel saw these things in Babylon. Hence, the forty-nine years added to the twenty-one, make up the seventy years, of which the blessed Jeremiah spake: ‘The sanctuary shall be desolate seventy years from the captivity that befell them under Nebuchadnezzar; and after these things the people will return, and sacrifice and offering will be presented, when Christ is their Prince.’ 14. Now of what Christ does he speak, but of Jesus the son of Josedech, who returned at that time along with the people, and offered sacrifice according to the law, in the seventieth year, when the sanctuary was built? For all the kings and priests were styled Christs, because they were anointed with the holy oil, which Moses of old prepared. These, then, bore the name of the Lord in their own persons, showing aforesaid the type, and presenting the image until the perfect King and Priest appeared from heaven, who alone did the will of the Father; as also it is written in Kings: ‘And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do all things according to my heart.’ 15. In order, then, to show the time when He is to come whom the blessed Daniel desired to see, he says, ‘And after seven weeks there are other threescore and two weeks,’ which period embraces the space of 434 years. For after the return of the people from Babylon under the leadership of Jesus the son of Josedech, and Ezra the scribe, and Zerubbabel the son of Salathiel, of the tribe of David, there were 434 years unto the coming of Christ, in order that the Priest of priests might be manifested in the world, and that He who taketh

comments that “Sir Isaac Newton, one of the originators of modern science, belonged to a long line of great thinkers who were obsessed with calculating the time of Antichrist and the approach of the end.”<sup>562</sup> A clue to Newton’s interest in eschatology is given by the authors Cohen and Smith:

Shortly before matriculating at Cambridge on 8 July 1661, Newton had acquired a Greek-Latin dictionary and an edition of the New Testament in Greek and Latin. In his first year at Cambridge, Newton acquired only one book from the curriculum, the *Logicae Artis Compendium* (Summary of Logical Art) by Robert Sanderson,<sup>563</sup> which exerted, as we shall see, a notable influence upon Newton’s methodological ideas. Yet he bought as many as four theological books. In a pocket book, Newton also noted the purchase, for a shilling, of a second-hand edition of *De Quatuor Monarchiis* (The Four Kingdoms) by J. Sleidan.<sup>564</sup>

Sir Isaac Newton was born just eleven years prior to the establishing of the Fifth Monarchist Government,<sup>565</sup> a religio-political movement that was to exert great influence Newton’s eschatology.<sup>566</sup> The book that Newton purchased for a shilling, *De Quatuor Monarchiis*, was the very book that expounded a similar eschatology that undergirded the Fifth Monarchist’s interpretation, as Cohen and Smith observe:

Sleidan interpreted the dream of the king of Babylon (Daniel 2): a colossal statue was broken into four pieces, each made of a different metal. The four kingdoms (Babylonia, Persian, Greek and Roman) would correspond to the four parts of the statue. Sleidan, drawing upon arguments in Luther, held that the fourth kingdom had not yet ended, and that it would endure until Christ’s return, represented by the rock which, independently of man, detached itself from the mountain,

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away the sins of the world might be evidently set forth, as John speaks concerning Him: ‘Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!’” Ibid.

<sup>562</sup> McGinn, Bernard. 2000. *Antichrist: two thousand years of the human fascination with evil*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1.

<sup>563</sup> Sanderson, Robert. 1664. *Logicae artis compendivm*. Oxoniae: Excudebat L.L. & H.H.

<sup>564</sup> Cohen, I. Bernard, and George E. Smith. 2002. *The Cambridge companion to Newton*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 388.

<sup>565</sup> July 4, 1653.

<sup>566</sup> Philip. G. Rogers wrote one of the two seminal works on the Fifth Monarchy movement. He has this to say regarding Newton: “On the other hand, in an age when the Bible was interpreted literally, there were not wanting many educated and intelligent men, who, whilst not necessarily subscribing to any particular Fifth Monarchist theory about the time of the end, nevertheless believed that a careful search of the Bible would enable this to be ascertained. Even such geniuses as Napier of Merchiston and Sir Isaac Newton devoted themselves to prolonged studies of the Bible in order to arrive at a satisfactory solution of the mysteries contained in them.” Rogers, P. G. 1966. *The Fifth Monarchy Men*. London: Oxford U.P., 138.

destroyed the colossus, and became in its turn a great mountain. Newton's reading of Sleidan probably served to strengthen his interest in the relations between prophecies and history.<sup>567</sup>

Brodetsky's biography of Sir Isaac Newton provides a colourful narrative of Newton's early childhood during the Cromwellian Protectorate, which gave rise to the Fifth Monarchist Parliament.<sup>568</sup> Paul Boyer portrays a graphic illustration of England during the formative years of Newton's early life.<sup>569</sup> Thus Newton's childhood was moulded in the crucible of a radical political environment of the Protectorate, the apocalypticism of the Fifth Monarchist Parliament with which Newton was very familiar,<sup>570</sup> and the Great Fire of

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<sup>567</sup> Cohen, I. Bernard, and George E. Smith. 2002. *The Cambridge companion to Newton*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 388.

<sup>568</sup> "This child was Isaac Newton. When Charles 1 was executed by his indignant subjects and the monarchy gave way to a military commonwealth, this little boy was learning in primitive country schools the first elements of what was considered to be a suitable education for a small farmer. When Cromwell had expelled the Long Parliament and had been declared Lord High Protector with almost all regal powers, young Newton went to Grantham in order to continue his studies at the King's School. . . . In 1660, the year of the Stuart restoration and the complete subjection of the nation's will to the prerogative of its refound (*sic*) royal idol, Newton was preparing for entry upon his studies at Cambridge." Brodetsky, Selig. 2007. *Sir Isaac Newton: a brief account of his life and work*. London: Upton Press, 2.

<sup>569</sup> "The accession of Charles II in 1660 cooled this orgy of apocalypticism. Nevertheless, the portentous year 1666 brought widespread uneasiness, worsened by the great London fire of that year. Indeed, wrote the Quaker leader John Fox, every thunderstorm in 1666 produced expectations of the end. And it was in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries that Isaac Newton pursued the exhaustive studies that ultimately supplanted his work on mathematics and optics." Boyer, Paul S. 1994. *When time shall be no more: prophecy belief in modern American culture*. Studies in cultural history. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 65, 66.

<sup>570</sup> Newton cites Joseph Mede for example: "The four horsemen which appear at the opening of the first four seals, have been well explained by Mr. Mede." Newton, Isaac. 1733. *Observations upon the prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John: in two parts*. London: Printed by J. Darby and T. Browne. II Chap. 10:129. "Mr. Mede hath explained the Prophecy of the first six trumpets . . ." Ibid., 171. Joseph Mede was perhaps the foremost scholar and expositor of the Fifth Monarchist movement. McCalman remarks that "since the seventeenth century these ideas [that the millennium would be immediately preceded by the conversion and restoration of the Jews to their former homeland and glory] had been taken up both by Puritan scholars like Joseph Mede and by Fifth Monarchists like Robert Maton . . ." McCalman, Iain. 1996. Mad Lord George and Madame La Motte: Riot and Sexuality in the Genesis of Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France. *The Journal of British Studies*. 35 (3):358. According to Ernest Lee Tuveson, ". . . Doctor Joseph Mede, fellow of Christ's College Cambridge . . . was one of the greatest Biblical scholars the English Church has produced . . ." Tuveson, Ernest Lee. 1949. *Millennium and Utopia: A Study in the Background of the Idea of Progress*. Berkeley, CA: Univ of California Pr., 76. Capp contrasts Mede with the general highly speculative and militant body of Fifth Monarchists and comments on "the calm and academic speculations of Mede . . ." Capp, B. S. 1972. *The fifth monarchy men; a study in seventeenth-century English millenarianism*. London: Faber, 39.



London in 1666 that appeared to portend a soon-coming end of the world, as proclaimed by the Fifth Monarchists.

### *The Fifth Monarchist Parliament*

By purchasing the book by Sleidan<sup>571</sup> in 1661, Newton was cognizant of his interpretation of Daniel 2. The Fifth Monarchists were historicists, but by 1665 their prophetic system was collapsing very quickly and a transition occurs at this time in Newton's life, from the Fifth Monarchist historicist view to Newton's futurist interpretation, which incorporated the gap between Daniel's sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks. Alexandra Kess discusses Sleidan's thesis:

In the *Four Empires*, Sleidan showed himself very much rooted in traditional historiography, offering a more theological than political interpretation of man's history from Fall to the apocalyptic end. . . . In the *Four Empires*, Sleidan viewed history through a theological prism, highlighting the apocalyptic preoccupation which was so common for the Protestants of that time.<sup>572</sup>

On April 20, 1653, Cromwell dissolved the Rump Parliament<sup>573</sup> in what amounted to a *coup d'état*.<sup>574</sup> On July 4, 1653,<sup>575</sup> Cromwell inaugurated the

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<sup>571</sup> *De Quatuor Monarchiis* (The Four Kingdoms).

<sup>572</sup> Kess, Alexandra. 2008. *Johann Sleidan and the Protestant vision of history*. St Andrews studies in Reformation history. Aldershot, England: Ashgate Pub., 84. Note: The "Four Empires" was a synonymous term for the four monarchies.

<sup>573</sup> The Parliament of Charles I was reduced from the Long to the Rump Parliament by Pride's Purge, 1648.

<sup>574</sup> "Wednesday 20th April 1653. . . The Parliament sitting as usual, and being in debate upon the Bill with the amendments, which it was thought would have been passed that day, the Lord General Cromwell came into the House, clad in plain black clothes and gray worsted stockings, and sat down, as he used to do, in an ordinary place. For some time he listens to this interesting debate on the Bill; beckoning once to Harrison, who came over to him, and answered dubitatingly. . . 'Come, come!' exclaims my Lord General in a very high key, 'we have had enough of this,' - and in fact my Lord General now blazing all up into clear conflagration, exclaims, 'I will put an end to your prating,' and steps forth into the floor of the House, and 'clapping-on his hat,' and occasionally 'stamping the floor with his feet,' begins a discourse which no man can report! He says - Heavens! he is heard saying: 'It is not fit that you sit here any longer!' You have sat too long here for any good you have been doing lately. 'You shall now give place to better men! - Call them in!' adds he briefly to Harrison, in word of command: and 'some twenty or thirty' grim musketeers enter, with bullets in their snaphances. . . the Long Parliament is dissolved!" Cromwell, Oliver, and Thomas Carlyle. 1899. *Oliver Cromwell's letters and speeches: with elucidations*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, III, 34-36.

<sup>575</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

Fifth Monarchist Parliament<sup>576</sup>, whose platform was the “restoration and conversion of the Jewish nation” in the face of the soon-expected return of King Jesus (the Second Coming). Chancery was to be abolished, and the Jewish Sanhedrin of Seventy was to replace the law courts.<sup>577</sup> The Fifth Monarchist Parliament was finally dissolved on January 22, 1655, but not before irreparable damage had been inflicted on Christianity in general and the historicist interpretation in particular.<sup>578</sup>

What was started principally in the universities by such divines as Joseph Mede, William Prynne, Thomas Good, Johann Heinrich Alsted, and others, including John Corbet, a minister of the Established Church, Henry Killigrew, and Sir Peter Pett, a Cambridge graduate, then spilled over to a “mobocracy,” fuelled by the artisans and working class. The latter had very little knowledge of eschatology but were informed by the “intellectuals” of the Fifth Monarchy that the reign of King Jesus was imminent. The Fifth Monarchist interpretation was based upon adding the 1,260 years<sup>579</sup> to the date for the fall of Rome, and this would be the day that Jesus would historically return. The general consensus was that this event would occur sometime between 1655 and 1670.<sup>580</sup>

Newton was then faced with a dilemma. It appeared that the underlying interpretation of Daniel 2 was correct but the interpretation was very wrong.<sup>581</sup> Newton’s answer was to deny the Fifth Monarchy understanding of the Second Advent from a historicist view and to modify the Fifth Monarchist

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<sup>576</sup> Also called the Barebone’s Parliament after a member called “Mr. Praisegod Barbone, ‘the Leather merchant in Fleet-street.’” Ibid., 41

<sup>577</sup> Clarke, William, and Charles Harding Firth. 1899. *The Clarke papers: selections from the papers of William Clarke, Secretary to the Council of the Army, 1647-1649, and to General Monck and the Commanders of the Army in Scotland, 1651-1660*. Camden Society, 61. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., II: 4.

<sup>578</sup> Cromwell was not unduly influenced by the Fifth Monarchists: “But, I say, there is another error of more refined sort; ‘which’ many honest people whose hearts are sincere, many of them belonging to God, ‘have fallen into:’ and that is the mistaken notion of the Fifth Monarch.” Cromwell, Oliver, Thomas Carlyle, Mrs. S. C. Lomas, and C. H. Firth. 1904. *The letters and speeches of Oliver Cromwell*. London: Methuen & Co., II, 346.

<sup>579</sup> Rev. 11:3 using a “year for a day” prophetic hermeneutic.

<sup>580</sup> The view of Nathaniel Stephens an English Puritan and Presbyterian and the pastor of George Fox before the latter founded Quakerism.

<sup>581</sup> “Newton largely accepts Sleidan’s interpretation of the four Kingdoms of Daniel’s vision . . .” Cohen, I. Bernard, and George E. Smith. 2002. *The Cambridge companion to Newton*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 394.

interpretation, positing a gap in Daniel's seventy weeks, thus adopting a futurist view. Crediting Darby as the inventor of the gap thesis has two major problems. First, there was no historical impetus to do so, and second, Darby was to all intents and purposes a street preacher. Although a scholar versed in Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, he lacked, I would maintain, the systematic theology to arrive at the gap thesis. Sir Isaac Newton, on the other hand, stood at the nexus of a failed historicist interpretation, a complete discrediting of Christianity as taught by the Fifth Monarchists, and the theological skill to interpret previous progenitors of the gap theory, principally in the Patristic writings. Thus, the gap between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks, far from being an invention by Darby, was more than likely purloined from Newton, along with the concept of the remnant church. Darby, schooled in Latin, would have been able to read the Latin text of *De Quatuor Monarchiis* without much difficulty.

A general consensus view credits Darby with the "gap theory," but in the light of Newton's *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John*, it is difficult to conceive of Darby as being the originator of the "gap theory." Indeed, to be thoroughly pedantic, it might be claimed that originality might be ascribed to Newton's sources<sup>582</sup> rather than Newton himself. But suffice it to say that Newtonian futurism would involve Darby's borrowing his gap theory and weaving this into his own eschatological framework, thus again we see Darby's concept of adaptation.

#### Darby's familiarity with Isaac Newton

Whether Darby was familiar with the works of Irenaeus or Hippolytus or had read Newton's work on the *Prophecies*<sup>583</sup> is not verifiable, but he was certainly familiar enough with Newton to quote him,<sup>584</sup> and here we are faced

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<sup>582</sup> Irenaeus, Julius Africanus, Hippolytus the martyr and Apollinaris Bishop of Laodicea. Newton, Isaac. 1733. *Observations upon the prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John: in two parts*. London: Printed by J. Darby and T. Browne. Chap. 10:132.

<sup>583</sup> Newton, Isaac. 1733. *Observations upon the prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John: in two parts*. London: Printed by J. Darby and T. Browne.

<sup>584</sup> "... but to take such men as Mr. N., Sir Isaac Newton, Pascal, Paul, Justin Martyr . . . I beg the reader to remark, I am not here supposing Sir Isaac Newton or Paul to be right. . . . Suppose a biographer of Sir Isaac Newton, after narrating his sublime discoveries . . ." Darby., *Collected Writings*, vol. 6: *Apologetic No. 1*, 13, 14, 61.

with a dilemma. Newton purchased *De Quatuor Monarchiis* in 1661, just eight years after the British parliamentary system had been terminated with a Cromwellian *coup d'état*<sup>585</sup> in favour of a political party, established to herald the Second Advent of Christ.<sup>586</sup> Darby was fully cognizant of this event and discussed it at length:

The doctrine of the Lord's second coming fell into the hands of real fanatics, who would have set up what they called the fifth monarchy by the sword; and in Germany did attempt it, and held a city they called their Zion for some time under Munzer.<sup>587</sup>

Darby's prose does indicate more than a cursory understanding of the events at this time, which would appear to suggest, that he would also have been more than familiar with the works and eschatology of Sir Isaac Newton. Other scholars were patently aware of Newton's interpretation, and it appears odd that Darby, a classical scholar well versed in the works of Newton, should have been unaware of Newtonian futurism. Bicheno was one scholar who had read Newton and who states his view of Newton's futurism: "It is (says Sir Isaac Newton) a part of this prophecy (of the Apoc.) that it should not be understood before the last age of the world . . ." <sup>588</sup>

Darby's eschatology included, first, the inviolability of the Abrahamic Covenant, and second, the concept that all prophecy, both fulfilled and unfulfilled, pertained to the Jewish nation.<sup>589</sup> For Darby, the Abrahamic Covenant being unconditional meant that they were and are God's chosen people in perpetuity.<sup>590</sup> While the historicist interpretation, which Frank

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<sup>585</sup> April 20, 1653.

<sup>586</sup> July 4, 1653.

<sup>587</sup> Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol. 3: *Doctrinal No 1*, 342. Also, *Collected Writings*, vol. 22: *Doctrinal No.6*, 28.

Note: "He signed himself 'Munzer with the hammer,' and 'with the sword of Gideon.'" Schaff, *History of Christian Church* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1995), VII, 442.

<sup>588</sup> Bicheno, J. 1808. *The signs of the times: in three parts*. London: J. Adlard, 187.

<sup>589</sup> "Prophecy refers to the government of this world, and the Jews are the center of that; but as for the Christian, he is predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." Darby, *Notes and Jottings b.*, 178. 'Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people.' There is no reference here to us as Christians; the verse refers to the people of Daniel, and the holy city of Daniel. The seventy weeks are only applicable to them." Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 5: *Prophetic No.2*, 172.

<sup>590</sup> "Israel, as His people and the assembly of His chosen ones, are commanded to remember these things, for He is Jehovah their God, and His judgments are in all the earth. Israel is

Moran exemplifies, saw the fulfilment of the entire seventy weeks of Daniel’s prophecy without a gap, others—notably Henry Clissold, the Rev. S. Lee, Isaac Newton, and J. N. Darby—apply a futurist interpretation and in doing so were forced to place a gap within its time frame. The reasons for an indeterminate period of time are generally vague, as witnessed by Edward Denny, a futurist, who made the following comments regarding the seventy-week prophecy and in particular the last week: “I believe,”<sup>591</sup> “we may imagine,”<sup>592</sup> “it seems clear,”<sup>593</sup> “I am told,”<sup>594</sup> “. . . at the close of a period of Seventy Weeks it struck me as likely that . . . ,”<sup>595</sup> “Now I confess that I take a different view of this passage from either of these, believing that all this will occur after this dispensation . . . ,”<sup>596</sup> “and then by assuming (as I here venture to do) . . . .”<sup>597</sup> “Here we must imagine an interval between this last cited verse, and those which precede it,”<sup>598</sup> “A thought has struck me while considering this chapter, as to a method by which the Lord may shorten the days without interfering at all with his purpose as to one week . . . .”<sup>599</sup> Denny might well have been reading Newton’s interpretation when he, Newton, remarked: “. . . why may not we, by the same liberty of interpretation, apply the seven weeks to the time when Antichrist shall be destroyed by the brightness of Christ’s coming?”<sup>600</sup>

It appears that futurists apply a literal interpretation to prophecy but are willing to apply “liberty of interpretation” when a literal explanation fails; therein lies the weakness of their argument. The indeterminate period of time inserted in the prophecy, while not sound exegesis, does become a necessary

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called to remember, not Moses and the conditional promises given to the people through him, but the covenant made with Abraham unconditionally - an everlasting covenant to give the land to his seed.” Ibid., *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 424.

<sup>591</sup> Denny, Edward. 1850. *The seventy weeks of Daniel*. London: J Nisbet, 13, 74, 76, 80, 132, et al.

<sup>592</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>595</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>598</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>599</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>600</sup> Newton, Isaac. 1733. *Observations upon the prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John: in two parts*. London: Printed by J. Darby and T. Browne, 106.

construct to maintain the inviolability of the Abrahamic Covenant, together with the notion that all prophecy pertains to the Jews. But it must be said that any liberty of interpretation flies in the face of a literal hermeneutic. An inconsistent interpretation of prophecy inevitably leads one to question the validity of prophetic interpretation using the gap thesis.

### Darby's hermeneutic concerning the gap

Darby has more to say on the reasons for the gap, which he blamed on the Jews, the gap being God's answer to their rejection of Christ, as he notes. "The seventy had very nearly elapsed when Christ came. If the Jews, and Jerusalem in that her day, had repented, all was ready for her re-establishment in glory. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob could have been raised up, as Lazarus had been."<sup>601</sup> Darby offers no reason why the patriarchs could have been raised up but places the gap almost as an afterthought by God. "The seventy weeks, or 490 years, include the great gap which has already lasted more than 1800 years—these coming in between the end of the 483<sup>rd</sup> and the 490<sup>th</sup>—only Christians know that half the seventieth week was really fulfilled in Christ's ministry; therefore we get a half week in Daniel 7 and the Revelation."<sup>602</sup> At this stage, however, Darby is not sure whether it is the full or the half week that pertains to fulfilment by the Jewish nation. "I see two distinct halves of the last week of the seventy weeks of Daniel; and I think that it is in the last half week that this particular testimony is given."<sup>603</sup> The clue to understanding Darby's convoluted eschatology appears to lie in the phrase "we get a half week in Daniel 7 and the Revelation."<sup>604</sup> Apparently, Darby has in mind the 1,260-day prophecy of Rev. 11:3<sup>605</sup>—also referred to prophetically as 42

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<sup>601</sup> Darby., *186 Proverbs*, 337.

<sup>602</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>603</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 11: *Prophetic No.4*, 85. Note: A comment was added to this text as follows: The phrase here is altered, as the writer then followed the division into two half weeks in chapter 11; now he sees ground for seeing here only the last, as in Matthew 24." "Are there two half-weeks spoken of in the Apocalypse? I do not reason on it . . ."  
*Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>604</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>605</sup> "And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophecy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."

months<sup>606</sup> or 3 ½ years or the half week—as pertaining to the Jews, a point he comments on: “When the twelve hundred and sixty days are made years of (save as a general possible analogy) all is false. The three times and a half are the half week of the seventy weeks of Daniel.”<sup>607</sup> He further observes: “And there is a clear earthly period running on, which it is admitted is not yet accomplished, and in which a gap takes place, to let in the events spoken of in this Psalm, that is, the seventy weeks of Daniel. It is admitted that, at any rate, half a week is yet unfulfilled, which must close before the new age comes in.”<sup>608</sup>

Having given support for the half week, Darby then has a distinct change of mind in view of the failed mission of Christ, stating that his three-and-a-half-year ministry was ineffectual and therefore a full week or seven years remain of Daniel’s prophecy. “‘And he shall confirm a covenant with the many for one week.’ This is the week which still remains; for Christ was cut off, it is said, after the sixty-nine weeks. . . . We are to leave off counting from the time the Messiah was cut off, viz., at the end of the sixty-nine weeks. After this period, time, so to speak, does not go on, God does not take count of it; it is indefinite. But the seventieth week still remains to be fulfilled.”<sup>609</sup>

How we are to understand two different interpretations, one pertaining to half a week and the other to the full week, or seven years, remains paradoxical. C. I. Scofield attempts to shed light on the interpretation, first alluding to the gap in Daniel’s prophecy and then to the final week: “Then ‘unto the end,’ a period not fixed, but which has already lasted nearly 2000 years. . . . When the Church-age will end, and the seventieth week begins, is nowhere revealed.”<sup>610</sup> This then would appear to be the best understanding of

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<sup>606</sup> “ And there was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies; and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him.” Rev. 13:5.

<sup>607</sup> Darby., *Collected Writings*, vol. 11: *Prophetic No.4*, 344.

<sup>608</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 8: *Prophetic No.3*, 13.

<sup>609</sup> *Ibid.*, 1864. *Notes on the Book of Daniel*. London: J.B. Bateman, 75.

<sup>610</sup> Scofield, C. I. 1945. *The Holy Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments. Authorized King James version, with a new system of connected topical references to all the greater themes of Scripture, with annotations, revised marginal renderings, summaries, definitions, chronology, and index, to which are added helps at hard places, explanations of seeming discrepancies, and a new system of paragraphs*. New York: Oxford University Press, 914.

Darby's thoughts regarding the last week, which remains to be fulfilled at the Second Advent. Thus we have remaining one week or seven years and not the earlier interpretation pertaining to the half-week or 3 ½ years.

It is now possible to construct Darby's interpretation of the last week of Daniel's prophecy. The period of seven years was partially fulfilled by the ministry of Christ, which lasted 3 ½ years,<sup>611</sup> but this was ineffectual, thus nullifying half of the last week. After this period, Christ was "cut off," was rejected, suffered on the cross, and while He got the glory in heaven, He failed in His mission.<sup>612</sup> The Jews, having rejected Christ but still governed by the inviolability of the Abrahamic Covenant and remaining God's earthly people, are now placed "on hold" while God deals parenthetically with the Gentiles, God's heavenly people.

Numerous expositors well before the time of Darby had posited a gap in Daniel's seventy-week prophecy, but unique to Darby's system is the manner in which he "stopped the clock" at the end of week sixty-nine and moved the week or the seven-year period to the Second Advent, where it would be resumed and the clock would once again start ticking. The rule by the saints during the Millennium will be preceded by the Great Tribulation of Matthew 24. The Tribulation will be this period of seven years, the final week of Daniel's prophecy, when the Antichrist is given full power to rule. However, the saints will have nothing to fear because they do not go through the Great Tribulation, since they will be secretly raptured prior to that event.

Thus Darby, by assuming the inviolability of the Abrahamic Covenant and the application of Daniel's prophecy to the Jews, was able to construct an eschatology that embraced both the Jewish nation and the Gentiles, the Christian church.

#### Current views regarding Darby and the gap

Modern scholars have much to say regarding Darby's interpretation of Daniel's seventy-week prophecy, but the waters are often muddied, in part because of the complexity of Darby's writings and thoughts. Wayne Rohde is

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<sup>611</sup> Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol. 28: *Expository No. 7*, 366.

<sup>612</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 11: *Prophetic No. 4*, 243, 244.



correct in stating that the “flawed link involves ‘*the gap*’ between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week of Daniel . . . ,”<sup>613</sup> which is foundational to Darby’s entire doctrine. “Remove it and the whole dispensational house of cards falls. You will see clearly from the scriptures that, just as in mathematics, *seventy follows immediately after sixty-nine.*”<sup>614</sup> However, Rohde’s assertion that “he invented a ‘gap’ (which at this time has spanned almost two thousand years) where none exists”<sup>615</sup> is partially correct for the period of time involved but understandably incorrect regarding Darby’s *invention* of the gap. As has been demonstrated, Newtonian futurism predated Darby by about two centuries; hence, it would be more correct to say that he borrowed and adapted the use of the concept.

Colin Standish offers further insight into Darby’s thesis that Christ’s ministry on earth was ineffectual, thus nullifying the first half of the last week of Daniel’s prophecy. Commenting on what would have happened if Christ’s ministry had been effectual, he states: “Had the Jews accepted Christ, His millennial kingdom would have been established then on earth. These dispensationalists believe that when John the Baptist preached ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand,’ Jesus was then ready to set it up; but the Jews rejected it, so God had to extend time to give the gospel to the Gentiles before He could set up His kingdom.”<sup>616</sup>

Gershon Gorenberg notes that Darby’s futurist interpretation of Daniel’s seventy-week prophecy was radically different from the historicist interpretation: “The field was open to John Darby—whose new theology, in sharp contrast to the Millerites, put the Jews at center stage, in their land.”<sup>617</sup> Gorenberg discusses Darby’s thesis of the failed ministry of Darby: “At the end of the sixty-ninth week, Jesus arrived—and the Jews rejected him. That disrupted the prophetic plan. So God began a new dispensation, in which he

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<sup>613</sup> Rohde, Wayne. 2002. *A future, a hope, an unexpected end; the inevitable conquest of Christianity*. Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 7.

<sup>614</sup> Ibid.

<sup>615</sup> Ibid.

<sup>616</sup> Standish, Colin D., and Russell R. Standish. 1996. *The evangelical dilemma*. Rapidan, VA: Hartland Publications, 208, 209.

<sup>617</sup> Gorenberg, Gershon. 2002. *The end of days: fundamentalism and the struggle for the Temple Mount*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 52.

built a new, heavenly people; the Church, Christianity . . . a parenthetical clause between Daniel's sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks."<sup>618</sup> Thus Gorenberg also affirms that the period of time set off from the rest of the weeks amounts to the last week of the prophecy.

Having presented Darby's gap thesis involving the last week of Daniel's seventy-week prophecy, I will now show how the gap thesis applies to Darby's secret rapture. In this respect, the last week of the prophecy became the seven years of tribulation following the rapture, a doctrine known as pretribulationism.

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<sup>618</sup> Ibid.

## 6. The Secret Pretribulation Rapture

In this chapter, I intend to review the arguments claiming that the secret pretribulation rapture can be ascribed to Darby. This will involve researching both the term *rapture* and the doctrine surrounding its usage. It is commonly understood that Darby was the progenitor of the whole notion of the rapture, but such a view negates the fact that Darby had at his disposal doctrines and nomenclature antedating the nineteenth century. An understanding of his use of these terms and doctrines will reveal whether he was being original or innovative in his rapture thesis.

The belief that Jesus would return a second time is not something new. Christians throughout the centuries had expected an imminent Second Advent, but Darby's ideas were different in that Christ would come not just once but twice, in what is commonly called his two-stage return. The Second Advent would be his appearance to gather, or rapture, the saints.<sup>619</sup> But then at the end of seven years Christ would return again *with* the saints to defeat the Antichrist and establish his millennial reign. The idea of the rapture was novel in that this would be a "secret" affair in which the saints are whisked off to heaven. The unrighteous would remain behind, to go through seven years of the Great Tribulation, at the end of which would be the "Glorious Appearing,"<sup>620</sup> when a Jerusalem-based kingdom replete with the third Temple would be established on earth. The seven years of tribulation, preceded by the rapture, would occur during the last week of Daniel's seventy-week prophecy. Since God could only work with one people at a time, according to Darby, the rapture of the church was needed so that He would be free to carry on His redemptive work with the Jewish nation.

Darby's eschatology, known as premillennialism, was also pre-tribulation, in that the secret rapture would occur *prior to* the Great Tribulation, which directly precedes the millennium. The message to the saints

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<sup>619</sup> Some expositors including Darby differentiate between "the translation" and the "Glorious Appearing," the first when Jesus comes *for* his saints and the latter when he comes *with* the saints.

was simple: they would escape the ordeals that were predicted to happen during the tribulation. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the dominant view was postmillennial, in that there would be a thousand years of improved conditions on earth and that Christ would return *after* the millennium. The historicist interpretation, based upon the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, had predicted the rise of the Antichrist, which was widely held to be the Roman Catholic Church. Darbyite futurism reinterpreted the notion of Antichrist to be a man of intense evil who would arise just prior to the Second Advent. Closely connected with postmillennialism were two views, namely midtribulationism and posttribulationism; thus, Darby's eschatology of pre-millennialism and pretribulationism radically transformed current thinking.

The Albury and Powerscourt prophetic conferences that occurred on British and Irish soil respectively, found their counterparts in America during the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Ernest Sandeen, the "Niagara Bible Conference was the mother of them all—the Monte Cassino and Port Royal of the movement."<sup>621</sup> Richard R. Reiter states, in his contribution to the book *Three Views on the Rapture*, that there were three hotly contested views present at the 1878 Niagara Conference. The discussions centred on the imminence of Christ's return. The historicists, represented by A. J. Gordon, maintained the view that "a long period of apostasy separated the First and Second comings—a period concealed from believers in former ages but revealed to believers in modern times by the symbols and chronology of Daniel and the Revelation."<sup>622</sup> According to this interpretation, only the last generation would know that the apostasy, amounting to some two thousand years, was nearing its end, and therefore they were scripturally justified in holding to the imminent return of Jesus. A second group accepted the view of "futurist premillenarians, defining 'imminent' in the context of their debate with postmillennialism, believing the imminent return of Christ meant that the

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<sup>620</sup> "Looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." Titus 3:13.

<sup>621</sup> Sandeen, Ernest Robert. 1970. *The roots of fundamentalism; British and American millenarianism, 1800-1930*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 132.

<sup>622</sup> Reiter, Richard R. "The Case for the Pre-Tribulation Rapture." *Three Views on the Rapture*. Ed. Gleason Edward Archer. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996, 14.

signs could be fulfilled and that He could return ‘within the lifetime of any individual generation of believers.’”<sup>623</sup> The third group was represented by futurists, who held to the pretribulation rapture, asserting that the occurrence of the secret rapture could happen at any moment, this being their understanding of imminence.

### The imminency and parousia of the Second Advent

Reiter explains that consistency regarding imminency, in accordance with the 1878 prophetic conference resolutions, was only maintained by the historicists. The futurists were unaware of the tensions that were building up regarding the time of the rapture. “In this case the posttribulationists would modify the definition of ‘imminent’ as possible at any moment and the pretribulationists would maintain the Rapture to meet the Lord in the air, not the later glorious return of Christ to the earth, was the event that was possible at any moment.”<sup>624</sup> The nature of the rapture continued to be a hotly debated subject after the 1878 Niagara Conference, as the pretribulationist versus posttribulationist interpretations were contested. Robert Cameron, a Baptist who attended the Conference, spent time restudying the nature of the rapture and eventually abandoned the pretribulationist view in favour of posttribulationism.<sup>625</sup>

Success for the “any moment rapturists” came in 1896 when C. I. Scofield gave support to the futurist views of Daniel and Revelation by incorporating his views in his Scofield Reference Bible, which was to become the *de facto* Bible for thousands of Protestant evangelicals.<sup>626</sup> Gary Dorrien, commenting on the contribution made by the Scofield Reference Bible, first published in 1909, said that it “provided an accessible guide to scripture from a Darbyite standpoint. Featuring an extensive system of annotations and cross-references, the Scofield Reference Bible made the case for a dispensationalist

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<sup>623</sup> Ibid.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid., 14, 15.

<sup>625</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>626</sup> “In 1896 C. I. Scofield, Congregational pastor and protégé of Brookes, said that specific events, such as the division of the Roman Empire into eastern and western kingdoms, fulfilled part of the prophecies of the four empire in Daniel 2 and 7. . . . He sensed no

division of biblical and Christian history, the doctrine of the any-moment rapture, and the pretribulationist secret rapture in a manner that made dispensationalism seem self-evident to millions of Bible readers afterward.”<sup>627</sup> However, the rapture doctrine was also spread by other means, including many “turn-of-the-century publications like *The Truth and Our Hope*; popular books like Brookes’s *Maranatha*, [and] William Blackstone’s *Jesus Is Coming* . . .”<sup>628</sup> Notable Bible expositors who also spread the rapture doctrine included Harry Ironside, Lewis Sperry Chafer, A. J. Gordon,<sup>629</sup> James M. Gray, and Arno Gaebelein, as well as C. I. Scofield.<sup>630</sup>

According to Gary Wills, looking back from a 21<sup>st</sup>-century perspective, the doctrine of imminence was beneficial to the pulpiteer: “The imminent Second Coming lets some preachers, who no longer dwell on the horrors of hell, dwell on the horrors of the Tribulation.”<sup>631</sup> Revivalist preachers still preached about hell, but the any-moment rapture eliminated the argument that “I still have time.”

In discussing the rapture, Gleason Leonard-Archer notes that his colleague Paul D. Feinberg

. . . claims, for instance, that “There is no clear indisputable reference to a Rapture in any Second Advent passage.” But I argue in my chapter that precisely such a reference is found in Matthew 24:31. To be sure the reference is not “indisputable,” but can *any* argument in this tangled debate be put in such a category? . . . Likewise, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, which clearly describes the Rapture, is directed to a church undergoing severe tribulation (cf. 2:14, 3:3-4). In other words, Paul does not need to specify in the immediate context of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 that tribulation is to precede the Rapture because he and the Thessalonians are already suffering tribulation. The persistent tendency on the part of pretribulationists to confine

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tension between the historicism expressed here and the any-moment Rapture doctrine, which also held.” *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>627</sup> Dorrien, Gary J. 1998. *The remaking of evangelical theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 31.

<sup>628</sup> Thomas D. Ice. “Rapture, Biblical study of the.” *Dictionary of premillennial theology*, 1997, Mal Couch, ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 347.

<sup>629</sup> He later changed his mind.

<sup>630</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>631</sup> Wills, Garry. 2007. *Head and heart: American Christianities*. New York: Penguin Press, 366.

tribulation only to a climactic seven-year period at the end of history seriously distorts the New Testament perspective.<sup>632</sup>

Archer highlights the controversy regarding the Rapture and whether it is to be pre-, mid-, or posttribulational. Clearly, whether the rapture was scriptural or not was not an item for debate. The author, well known in evangelical circles, is adamant that the narrative is found in both Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 4, clearly demonstrating the validity of the rapture. J. Dwight Pentecost provides his contribution with the following comment: “Therefore, it is concluded, this is the resurrection of the church mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. This view is supported by a reference to the word coming (*parousia*), which is often applied to the rapture.”<sup>633</sup> Witness Lee observes: “During the Lord’s *parousia*, the majority of believers will be raptured to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thes. 4:17).”<sup>634</sup> George Eldon Ladd affirmed that “Dispensationalists hold that Christ will come before the Tribulation begins to raise the dead saints and to catch up the living saints (the Rapture) to be with him in heaven. . . . Furthermore, the *parousia* of Christ will occur not only to rapture the church and to raise the righteous dead but also to destroy the Man of Lawlessness, the Antichrist.”<sup>635</sup> According to John Walvoord, “The use of *parousia* in these passages<sup>636</sup> proves it is not a technical word. The same word is used of the coming of the Lord at the translation (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1; James 5:7-8; 1 John 2:28).”<sup>637</sup> It would appear that dispensationalists get “real mileage” out of a number of New Testament passages, in particular 1 Thessalonians 4. For that reason, Darby’s doctrine of the nature of the rapture becomes central to understanding dispensationalism today.

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<sup>632</sup> Archer, Gleason L. 1996. *Three views on the Rapture: pre-, mid-, or post-Tribulation ?* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 98, 99.

<sup>633</sup> Pentecost, J. Dwight. 1964. *Things to come: a study in Biblical eschatology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 403.

<sup>634</sup> Lee, Witness. 2001. *Life-study of I & II Thessalonians*, Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 14.

<sup>635</sup> Ladd, George Eldon. 1978. *The last things: an eschatology for Laymen*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 49-50.

<sup>636</sup> 1 Cor. 16:17 KJV; 2 Cor. 7-6-7; Phil. 1:26 KJV; 2 Thess. 2:9; 2 Peter 3:12 KJV.

<sup>637</sup> Walvoord, John F. 1979. *The rapture question*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 172.

Several problems arise in a discussion of Darby and the rapture. There is the widely held belief, by both the informed and the uninformed, that Darby invented the rapture doctrine. In making such a generalized statement, one has to ask whether commentators are suggesting that Darby invented or coined the “term” rapture or simply supplied the “content” or “doctrine” of the rapture? If the latter, we should perhaps understand that he applied a unique eschatology to a term that might or might not have been in common usage. This presents a dilemma: first, there is the need for an etymological understanding of the term, and second, there is the need to understand Darby’s unique spin on the term.

### Pre-Darbyite notions of the rapture

From an etymological perspective, the doctrine of the pretribulation rapture, though not a chronological event, finds support principally from two verses, 1 Thessalonians 4:16<sup>638</sup> and 2 Corinthians 12:2.<sup>639</sup> Of interest is the etymology of the word “rapture” as it relates to the phrase “caught up” (2 Cor. 12:2), as used by John Bale, Bishop of Ossory, in 1570: “. . . and thought my selfe rapt vp with Paul vnto the thirde heaven.”<sup>640</sup> William Perkins had a similar usage: “Of this Paul speaketh, when he was rapt vp to the third heaven, 2 Cor. 12. It is called Paridise, because it is a place of pleasure . . .”<sup>641</sup> William

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<sup>638</sup> “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.” Scofield, C. I. 1945. *The Holy Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments. Authorized King James version, with a new system of connected topical references to all the greater themes of Scripture, with annotations, revised marginal renderings, summaries, definitions, chronology, and index, to which are added helps at hard places, explanations of seeming discrepancies, and a new system of paragraphs.* New York: Oxford University Press. Note: Scofield adds the following comment to this verse. “Not church saints only, but all bodies of the saved, of whatever dispensation, are included in the first resurrection (see 1 Cor. 15, s2, note), as here described, but it is peculiar the ‘blessed hope’ of the Church.” Ibid.

<sup>639</sup> “I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell: or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth) such an one caught up to the third heaven.” Ibid.

<sup>640</sup> Bale, John. 1570. *The image of both Churches after the most wonderfull and heavenly Revelation of saint Iohn the Euangelist, contayning a very fruitfull exposition or paraphrase vpon the same. Wherin it is conferred vvith the other scriptures, and most auctorised histories. Compyled by Iohn Bale an exyle also in thys lyfe, for the faithfull testimony of Iesu.* Printed at London: By Thomas East, no page number.

<sup>641</sup> Perkins, William, and Robert Hill. 1604. *Lectvres Vpon The Three First Chapters Of The Revelation: Preached In Cambridge Anno Dom. 1595. To which is added an excellent Sermon penned at the request of that noble and wise Councillor, Ambrose, Earle of*



Bradshaw's treatise dated 1620 also used the term "rapt vp" within a similar context.<sup>642</sup> By 1650, the Middle English form of "rapt vp" had given way to the modern usage of "rapt up," as demonstrated by Richard Baxter in the following comment: ". . . rapt up in Revelations into the third heaven, and seen things unutterable?"<sup>643</sup> A similar usage is found in the works of Alexander Ross (1655),<sup>644</sup> John Everard (1657),<sup>645</sup> and Humphrey Hody (169).<sup>646</sup> George Downname's contribution<sup>647</sup> to the etymology of the word "rapture" is significant and expands on the thoughts of Bale, Perkins, and Bradshaw:

If in the celestiall Paradise, that is the third heauen as *Paul* speaketh, it may first be doubted, whether they be there in body: because it may be thought that Christ was the first that in body ascended into heauen: or if their go there, we must hold that in the translation they were changed into immortal and incorruptible bodies, as theirs shall, who shall be found liuing vpon the earth as the second comming of Christ, and shall be rapt vp into the aire.<sup>648</sup>

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*Warwicke : in which is proued that Rome is Babylon, and that Babylon is fallen.* London: Burbie, 162.

<sup>642</sup> ". . . that had been rapt vp in the third heauen . . ." Bradshaw, William. *A plaine and pithy exposition of the Epistle to the Thessalonians*. London: Thomas Pavier, 1624, 149. Note: English and spelling as per the original text.

<sup>643</sup> Baxter, Richard, and George Herbert. 1650. *The saints everlasting rest, or, A treatise of the blessed state of the saints in their enjoyment of God in glory wherein is shewed its excellency and certainty, the misery of those that lose it, the way to attain it, and assurance of it, and how to live in the continual delightful forecasts of it by the help of meditation : written by the author for his own use in the time of his languishing when God took him off from all publike imployment and afterwards preached in his weekly lecture*. London: Printed by Rob. White for Thomas Underhil and Francis Tyton, 329.

<sup>644</sup> ". . . rapt up into the third heaven." Ross, Alexander, Henrick van Haestens, and John Davies. 1655. *Pansebeia, or, A view of all religions in the world with the severall church-governments from the creation, to these times : also, a discovery of all known heresies in all ages and places, and choice observations and reflections throughout the whole*. London: Printed by T.C. for John Saywell, 425.

<sup>645</sup> ". . . rapt up into the third Heaven . . ." Everard, John, Thomas Brooks, and Matthew Barker. 1657. *The Gospel treasury opened, or, The holiest of all unvailing discovering yet more the riches of grace and glory to the vessels of mercy unto whom onely it is given to know the mysteries of that kingdom and the excellency of spirit, power, truth above letter, forms, shadows*. London: Printed by John Owsley for Rapha Harford, 352.

<sup>646</sup> ". . . being rapt up into Heaven . . ." Hody, Humphrey. 1694. *The resurrection of the (same) body asserted, from the traditions of the heathens, the ancient Jews, and the primitive church with an answer to the objections brought against it*. London: Printed for Awnsham and John Churchill, 215.

<sup>647</sup> "George Downname (also Downham) was born at Chester, where his father was a bishop. He studied at Cambridge and was elected fellow of Christ College in 1585. Later he was appointed professor of logic and granted the D.D. degree. In 1616 he became bishop of Derry." *George Downname*. [http://www.the-highway.com/justification\\_Downname.html](http://www.the-highway.com/justification_Downname.html).

<sup>648</sup> Downname, George. 1603. *A treatise concerning Antichrist divided into two bookes, the former, proving that the Pope is Antichrist, the latter, maintaining the same assertion, against all the objections of Robert Bellarmine, Iesuit and cardinall of the church of Rome*.

This text is again from 2 Cor. 12:2, written in terms of the Second Advent, and speaks of the saints being “rapt vp” into the air to ascend to the celestial paradise or third heaven. That the term “rapt vp” is used interchangeably with the word “rapture” is suggested by a comment of Gregory Nazianzen: “If it had been permitted to Paul to utter what the Third Heaven contained, and his own advance, or ascension, or assumption thither, perhaps we should know something more about God’s nature, if this was the mystery of the rapture. But since it was ineffable we will honour it by silence.”<sup>649</sup> That Downname uses the term “rapt vp” and Nazianzen the term “rapture” for the same biblical text would suggest that the terms “caught up,” “rapt up,” and “rapture” are synonymous. The term itself in 2 Cor. 12:2 (in Greek, ἀρπαγεντα<sup>650</sup>) is commented on by Lenski: “‘Such a one’ is added; he was nothing but a human being in connection with Christ who was ‘snatched’ or removed by a *raptus* ‘as far as the third heaven.’”<sup>651</sup> Bert Peerbolte is one expositor who uses the term rapture in place of “caught up” in 2 Cor. 12:2: “. . . of the rapture experience he offers in 2 Cor. 12:2-4 suggest that Paul not only shared the language of apocalyptic Judaism, but also its practice of ecstasis.”<sup>652</sup>

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At London: Imprinted for Cuthbert Burbie, 62. Note: English and spelling as per the original text.

<sup>649</sup> Nazianzen, Gregory. *The Second Theological Oration*. XX. NPNF 7: 295.

<sup>650</sup> ἀρπαζω acc. sing. masc. part. aor. 2 pass.

<sup>651</sup> Lenski, R. C. H. 1963. *The interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* / by R.C.H. Lenski. Minneapolis, MI: Augsburg, 1293. Note: Kittel offers the following comment with reference to the use of ἀρπαζω in the Matthew account: “Since ἀρπαζω does not mean either to bring in by force or to plunder, only three alternatives are open in the difficult saying in Mt. 11:12 . . . It may mean that the kingdom of God is stolen, i.e., taken away from men and closed to them; it may mean that violent men culpably try to snatch it to themselves; or, it may mean that men forcibly take it in the good sense. Linguistically all three are possible.” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Vol. 1*. Editors Gerhard Kittel and Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964, 472. Bauer offers the following interpretation: To “snatch, seize, i.e., take suddenly and vehemently away, or take away in the sense of.” Arndt, William, F. Wilbur Gingrich, John R. Alsop, and Walter Bauer. 1957. *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature; a translation and adaptation of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur, 4th rev. and augm. ed., 1952*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 108.

<sup>652</sup> Peerbolte, Jan Lietaert. “Paul’s Rapture: 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 And the Language of the Mystics.” *Experinta*, Vol. 1: Enquiry into Religious Experience in Early Judaism and Christianity (Symposium). Eds. Colleen Shantz, Rodney W. Werline, Frances Flannery. Society of Biblical Literature, 2008, 159, 168.

### The rapture and the invention thesis

It can thus be established that an early use was made of the word “rapture” by Saint Gregory of Nazianzen, Archbishop of Constantinople, born circa 325 CE,<sup>653</sup> and subsequent usage by Bale and others of “rapt vp or rapt up” from 1570 onwards. Any argument that Darby invented the rapture *as a term to describe his eschatology* is clearly in error. Yet this is the argument of Tony Campolo, who states: “The word *rapture* does not appear in the Bible. It was invented by Darby. That is not to say that the doctrine does not have biblical support. The passage most commonly cited to undergird belief in the rapture is 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.”<sup>654</sup> Campolo’s contribution has reference to both the *term* and the *doctrine* of the rapture, the latter suggesting the possibility of biblical support.

There is also the question whether the *doctrine* of the rapture, perhaps without use of the term, was extant either prior to or during Darby’s early years. Edward Irving translated and published Emmanuel Lacunza’s work *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty* in 1827, and this gives a graphic account that, while not mentioning the word rapture *per se*, does reflect the doctrine very closely:

Then the Lord being come to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and being seated upon a throne of majesty, not upon the earth, but in the air, though very near the earth, and all the just being in like manner stationed in the air, according to their orders, after the manner of an amphitheatre, the books of the consciences of men shall be opened, and all the good and evil of every one published abroad; whereby the cause of God being justified, the Judge shall pass the final sentence, on some eternal life, on others of eternal death: whereupon instantly the sentence shall be executed, which casteth down to hell all the wicked to dwell with devils, and Jesus Christ shall return once more to heaven carrying all the good along with him.<sup>655</sup>

There are clear distinctions between Lacunza and Darby regarding the rapture event, particularly Lacunza’s view that the judgment of the wicked is contemporaneous with the rapture of the saints, whereas the seven-year

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<sup>653</sup> Nazianzen, Gregory. *Prolegomena*. NPNF 7: 188.

<sup>654</sup> Campolo, Tony. *Letters to a Young Evangelical*. New York: Basic Books, 2006, 107.

<sup>655</sup> Lacunza, Manuel, and Edward Irving. 1827. *The coming of Messiah in glory and majesty*. London: L.B. Seeley. I:164, 165.

tribulation period separates the two events for Darby. However, the narrative of the event being published in 1827 might well have influenced Darby's thoughts, allowing him to be adaptive to his own interpretation.

Howard Peth continues the notion of the invention thesis: "The theory of the pre-tribulation Rapture was invented by John Nelson Darby . . ." <sup>656</sup> Barbara Rossing echoes similar thoughts in a chapter of her book entitled "The Invention of the Rapture": "A British preacher named Darby invented this point of view centuries after the Bible, and the Left Behind authors and other dispensationalists are using it to further their particular social and political agenda." <sup>657</sup> Archibald Cameron ascribes originality not only to Darby but also to James Hall Brookes: "The Reader will please remember that this thing called 'a rapture.' has no place in the Holy Scriptures. Neither Christ nor His apostles ever mention a seven years' rapture in cloud-land. It is an invention of Darby, Brookes & Co." <sup>658</sup> Michael Byron comments: "Dispensationalism's founder, John Nelson Darby, in the early 1840's, invented the notion of the pre-tribulation rapture of the Church. Darby claimed that seven years before Christ returns to Earth, all believing Christians (apparently this applies only to Dispensationalists) will be suddenly 'raptured,' that is, they will be made to disappear forever from Earth as they will have been transported directly to Heaven to spend eternity with God." <sup>659</sup> Byron poses numerous eschatological problems in that he ascribes both the "founding" of dispensationalism and the "invention" of the rapture to Darby. Dispensationalism is a subject to be presented later in this dissertation; however, it is insightful that the author essentially ascribes originality of both doctrines to Darby. The author's assertion that the saints will be "raptured forever from Earth" is contrary to Darby's eschatology, which claims that, following a period of seven years, Christ returns to earth with the saints at the Glorious Appearing, something he

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<sup>656</sup> Peth, Howard A. 2002. *7 mysteries solved: 7 issues that touch the heart of mankind ; investigating the classic questions of faith*. Fallbrook, CA.: Hart Books, A Ministry of Hart Research Center, 537.

<sup>657</sup> Rossing, Barbara R. 2004. *The Rapture Exposed*. Boulder: Westview Press, 39, 40.

<sup>658</sup> Cameron, Archibald Alexander. *Protestantism and its relation to the Moral, Intellectual and Spiritual Development of Modern Times: A Lecture*. (1872). Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2009, 10.

<sup>659</sup> Bryon, Michael P. 2007. *Infinity's Rainbow*. New York: Algora Pub, 152.

could not do if, according to Byron, they were made to “disappear forever from Earth.”

Hank Hanegraaff’s contribution borders on the originality thesis when he comments that “Darby’s innovative invention gave birth to the notion of a pretribulation rapture.”<sup>660</sup> A novel by Catherine Arslanian provides an interesting perspective on the rapture being invented by Darby *as a term and a doctrine*; it is geared more for the popular market than for an informed approach, but the content is interesting if not insightful: “‘Were y’all aware that the word ‘rapture’ does not occur anywhere in the Bible?’ he told me once. ‘Really? You’re kidding, Phil,’ I answered. ‘No, I’m not. I know that for a fact because I went looking for it. Thessalonians four thirteen said something about people being sucked up into the air for some reason. I don’t remember what it was, but it wasn’t no rapture. That whole idea was invented by some looney preacher named John Nelson Darby in the eighteen thirties, probably because he’d been eating too much moldy bread.’”<sup>661</sup> The “lunacy thesis” is also taken up by Brian Marshall: “The Rapture for example, invented by a lunatic in England named Darby.”<sup>662</sup>

Banality is taken to its logical conclusion with a remark by Herbert Stollorz that states the impossible:<sup>663</sup> “Today, many gullible Christians still adhere to a pre-tribulation rapture invented 150 years ago by a little girl in England that was later elevated to the highest degree by a British scholar John Nelson Darby. The pre-tribulation rapture dogma was really finalized by a brilliant engineer Clarence Larkin who was talented in making drawings of

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<sup>660</sup> Hanegraaff, Hank. 2008. *The apocalypse code: find out what the Bible really says about the end times--and why it matters today*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 55.

<sup>661</sup> Arslanian, Catherine. *Email from Camp Khatar*. Lincoln: iUniverse, Inc: 2006, 88.

<sup>662</sup> Marshall, Brian Leonard Golightly. 2006. *Mayan Calendar found in the Great Pyramid and Christ’s return*. Walla Walla: Dixie Press, 618.

<sup>663</sup> Stollorz cites his source as: MacPherson, Dave. 1973. *The unbelievable pre-trib origin: the recent discovery of a well-known theory’s beginning, and its incredible cover-up*. Kansas City, MO: Heart of America Bible Society. According to John Walvoord: “In the attempt to discredit pretribulationism, however, numerous assertions have been made that Darby did not get his view from his own studies, as seems to be the case, but rather from several erratic individuals, including such characters as Edward Irving and a woman by the name of Margaret MacDonald. This charge has been made for years but has been especially advanced by Dave MacPherson, the son of Norman MacPherson, also a posttribulationist.” Walvoord, John F. 1979. *The rapture question*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House,

dispensational charts published in the 1920's. You can check it out on the Internet."<sup>664</sup> The most insightful remark on the rapture comes from an unlikely quarter, namely, the authors of the *Left Behind* series of books that have done much to popularize Darbyite eschatology:

For several years opponents of the pre-Trib position have argued that it was invented by John Darby in the mid-1800's and was never mentioned before that. Quite simply, this argument is false—a fact that cost one post-Trib writer a bundle of cash. This author offered five-hundred dollars to anyone who could prove that the pre-Trib Rapture theory was known before John Darby began to popularize it in the 1840's. When it was discovered that the Reverend Morgan Edwards saw it back in 1742, the writer had to pay off his costly challenge. He has since had to admit his error and withdraw his offer.<sup>665</sup>

LaHaye and Jenkins offer the most informed opinion on the origin of the term “rapture,” indicating that Darby did not “invent” the word. However, the authors are not entirely alone in their thesis. Paul Bortolazzo also alludes to this in his narrative of Drew Henley, a somewhat confused student, who thought Pastor Mark's eschatological teaching was bogus. In reply to Drew's question about the secret rapture, Pastor Mark gave the following reply:

“Drew, no one really knows who invented it. We do know a minister from the Church of England named John Nelson Darby popularized this teaching in the 1800's. . . . John Nelson Darby taught the coming of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 is a secret rapture that could happen at any moment.”<sup>666</sup> The author clearly understands Darby's eschatology of imminence and the notion of the secret rapture, while at the same time drawing the correct conclusion that Darby not only did not invent the term and

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151. See also: Walvoord, John F. 1976. *The blessed hope and the tribulation: a Biblical and historical study of posttribulationism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 43.

<sup>664</sup> Stollorz, Herbert R. *Asteroid Answers to Ancient Calendar Mysteries*. Charleston: BookSurge Publishing, 2007, 272. Note: The author states that this little girl was Margaret MacDonald, who attended one of Edward Irving's sessions in 1830 and fell into a trance. “After several hours of visions and prophesying, she revealed that Christ's return would occur in two phases, not just one. Christ would come secretly, being visible only to the righteous, then He would come a second time visible to all in order to execute God's wrath on the unrighteous nations.” Ibid., 274.

<sup>665</sup> LaHaye, Tim F., and Jerry B. Jenkins. 2000. *Are we living in the end times?: current events foretold in scripture -- and what they mean*. Carol Stream: Tyndale House, 112-123.

<sup>666</sup> Bortolazzo, Paul. 2007. *The Coming of the Son of Man After the Tribulation of Those Days*. Mustang, OK: Tate Pub & Enterprises Llc., 141.

that the *jury is still out*. This point is supported by Steve Stephens, who attributes the source to Margaret MacDonald, a matter that I would dispute: “Many people have thought that John Darby, the founder of the Plymouth Brethren, was the originator of the Rapture doctrine; Darby only popularized it. . . . The fact is, however, John Darby received the knowledge of the doctrine from someone else. The source was Margaret MacDonald.”<sup>667</sup>

Clearly, there are numerous opinions as to the origin of the *term* and the *doctrine* of the rapture, and the uniformed opinions that rely on the “internet for support” can be clearly rejected out of hand. These opinions only serve to disturb the already muddied water and do little to clarify Darby’s true eschatology. Faced, then, with the two alternatives regarding Darby as an inventor of the rapture, there has to be an acceptable answer that can accommodate both opinions. It has already been determined that Darby did not invent the *term* “rapture”; that much is certain without further proof. However, Darby did create a wholly different rapture doctrine that was innovative and different from what had previously been understood.

Since the assertion that Darby “invented” the rapture is contentious<sup>668</sup> and the etymology of the *term* “rapture” can be traced back to Gregory Nazianzen, there is still an argument concerning the *doctrine* of the rapture. It could be construed that Darby’s view of the “secret rapture,” while not referred to by that name, was certainly evident prior to his time. For that reason, it behooves us to examine sources prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century to understand the interpretation applied to 1 Thess. 4:16, 17<sup>669</sup> and 1 Cor.

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<sup>667</sup> Stephens, J. Steve. *The Rapture Event*. Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008, 30.

<sup>668</sup> “Darby’s use of the word *rapture* was derived from the Latin Vulgate translation of the Greek text of 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 . . . In the Vulgate translation, ‘caught up’ was translated *rapiemur*, from the Latin verb *rapio*. In medieval Latin, *rapio* became a noun, *raptura*, which then became in English ‘rapture.’ For Darby, rapture designated the event of the ‘taking up’ of the true church to heaven in the Last Days combined with the religious and emotional ecstasy that the word implied.” Frykholm, Amy Johnson. 2004. *Rapture culture: left behind in Evangelical America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 16, 17.

<sup>669</sup> “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the 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.”

15:52.<sup>670</sup> An understanding of how these texts were interpreted is important, since Darby's doctrines of imminence and the secret rapture would appear nonsensical if there is a general announcement to all and sundry by the "trumpet of God and the voice of the archangel" prior to the rapture. This raises the question of how these texts were understood prior to Darby, by Darby himself, and finally in a post-Darbyite period.

#### The events surrounding the rapture, trumpet, and call

Examining first those scholars prior to Darby to gain an understanding of the "trumpet of God and the voice of the archangel," we find that an early interpretation is provided by John Flavel, who was an English Presbyterian. "He studied at Oxford and in 1650 became curate of Diptford, in Devonshire."<sup>671</sup> Here is Flavel's understanding of the Thessalonian narrative:

Christ shall come forth out of heaven, with the shouts of angels, above all which shall the voice of the archangel be distinctly heard. And after this, the trump of God shall sound. The dead being raised, shall be gathered before the great throne in which Christ shall sit in his glory; and there by the angels they shall be divided exactly to the right and left hand of Christ. Here will be the greatest assembly that ever met; where Adam may see his numerous offspring, even as the sand of the sea-shore, which no man can number. . . . The saints shall meet the Lord in the air; the Judge shall sit upon the throne, with the saints round him; the wicked remaining below upon the earth, to receive their final doom.<sup>672</sup>

Unlike Darby's interpretation, the event will not be secret, since the "voice of the archangel will be distinctly heard." Second, the division is not between the two peoples of God, the church and the Jewish nation, but between the righteous and the unrighteous. Third, the event will be a universal judgment of both the righteous and unrighteous. "It will be a *universal* judgment. 'We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.' 2 Cor. 5:10. 'Every one of us shall give an account of himself to God.' Rom. 14:12."<sup>673</sup> The result of this

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<sup>670</sup> "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed."

<sup>671</sup> *The new Schaff-Herzog encyclopedia of religious knowledge* 12. 1912. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, ix:327.

<sup>672</sup> Flavel, John. 1671. *The fountain of life; or, A display of Christ in His essential and mediatorial glory*. New York: The American Tract Society, 523.

<sup>673</sup> *Ibid.*, 525.



universal judgment will be twofold: The unrighteous “shall go into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal. This is the judgment of the great day.”<sup>674</sup>

Flavel states that the voice of the archangel “shall be distinctly heard.” William Sherlock understands the shout to be similar to “when the signal is given for battle.”<sup>675</sup> While not too sure of the correct interpretation for the “trump of God,” Sherlock remarks that “it is such a trumpet, at the sound of which the Dead shall rise . . . this last Trump seems to be what our Saviour calls the voice of the Son of God . . .”<sup>676</sup> Ebenezer Erskine draws a distinction between Christ’s ascension and his coming again for judgment: “Why, as he went up with a *shout*, and the *sound of a trumpet*; so in like manner he will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: but with this difference, that the shouts and sounds were not heard in this lower world when he went up; but when he descends or comes down to judge the world, the shouts of the Redeemer’s voice, and the trump of God will be so loud, as not only to startle them that are alive, but to awaken the dead that have lain in their graves for many thousand years.”<sup>677</sup>

Joseph Perry understands the shout to have global significance. “He will come with a Shout so loud as will be heard all the World over, yea and those that are in the Grave, or at the Bottom of the Sea . . .”<sup>678</sup> According to Robert Russel, “The sound of this last trumpet shall be so loud, that it shall be heard all over the world; it shall pierce even to the bottom of the sea, and to the bowels of the earth.”<sup>679</sup> There is general agreement among a wide

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<sup>674</sup> Ibid.

<sup>675</sup> Sherlock, William. 1704. *A practical discourse concerning a future judgment: By William Sherlock*. London: Printed by M. R. for W. Rogers, 259.

<sup>676</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>677</sup> Erskine, Ebenezer. 1798. *The whole works of the late Rev. Mr. Ebenezer Erskine, ... consisting of sermons and discourses, on the most important and interesting subjects. In three volumes*. Edinburgh: printed by D. Schaw and Co., for Alex. M'Leran, 276.

<sup>678</sup> Perry, Joseph. 1721. *The glory of Christ's visible Kingdom in this world asserted, proved, and explained, in its two-fold branches; first spiritual, secondly personal: ... By Joseph Perry*. Northampton: printed by R. Raikes and W. Dicey, for the author, 122.

<sup>679</sup> Russel, Robert. 1784. *Seven sermons, viz, I. Of the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost; or, The sin unto death. II. The saint's duty and exercise: in two parts, being an exhortation to, and directions for prayer. III. The accepted time and day of salvation. IV. The end of time and beginning of eternity. V. Joshua's resolution to serve the Lord. VI. The*

spectrum of scholars that the “trumpet of God and the voice of the archangel” would be literal, verbal and loud to the point that the entire world would be aware of the announcement. There is, however, a marked change in the understanding of the trump of God and the voice of the archangel among scholars after the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as explained by Leon Wood: “Sometimes Christians use the designation ‘secret rapture.’ The term is somewhat misleading, however, for, though the time is unknown beforehand, these audible signs will occur. Certainly all saints will hear them, and it is likely that the unsaved will as well. The signs would let the unsaved know of the significant occurrence and that they have indeed been left out.”<sup>680</sup>

Charles Taze Russell, better known as the founding father of the Jehovah Witnesses, disagrees that the sound of the trumpet has any literal meaning. “‘THE TRUMP OF GOD.’ Many seem thoughtlessly to entertain the idea that this trumpet will be a literal sound on the air. But this will be seen to be an unreasonable expectation, when it is noticed that Paul here refers to what the Revelator designates ‘The Seventh Trumpet,’ the ‘Last Trump’ in a series of symbolic trumpets (Rev. 11:15; 1 Cor. 15:52).”<sup>681</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer discusses the last trumpet but is unwilling to say whether this is an audible sound that everyone will hear or not: “Respecting the resurrection of the bodies of believers, there are no more revealing Scriptures than 1 Corinthians 15:42-50 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, in which contexts the one trump of God is said to raise the bodies of the saints and to summon living saints to meet the Lord in the air. This trump of God is designated in 1 Corinthians 15:52 as *the last trump*.”<sup>682</sup> Apart from a comment that the last trump of 1 Cor. 15:52 has no connection to the last trump of Revelation, Chafer declines to comment further on its nature.

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*way to heaven made plain. VII. The future state of man: or, A treatise of the resurrection.*  
Glasgow: J. and M. Robertson, 118.

<sup>680</sup> Wood, Leon James. 1973. *The Bible & future events; an introductory survey of last-day events.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 44.

<sup>681</sup> Russell, Charles Taze. *The Time is at Hand.* New Brunswick, Bible Students Congregation, 2000, 148, 149.

<sup>682</sup> Chafer, Lewis Sperry. 1993. *Systematic theology.* Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 376.

John Walvoord, in speaking of the events in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, comments: “The expression here, ‘the trump of God,’ must therefore be considered a parallel to the last trump of 1 Corinthians 15:52, but should not be confused with other trumpets in the New Testament. In contrast to the seven trumps of angels in Revelation 8:2-9, 21; 11:15-18, this is a trump of God, a trump of grace, a trump of triumph, and a trump pertaining to the righteous dead and living saints.”<sup>683</sup> Clearly, Walvoord’s interpretation has departed considerably from the earlier understanding of a trump that is a literal, verbal pronouncement to both the righteous and the unrighteous and is heard globally even to the depths of the sea. J. Dwight Pentecost provides a more understandable notion by first subscribing to a verbal call but then limiting that call to just the saints. “In 1 Thessalonians 4 the voice associated with the sounding of the trumpet summons the dead and the living and consequently is heard before the resurrection. . . . The trumpet in 1 Thessalonians is distinctly for the church.”<sup>684</sup> Here is the dilemma: if, as Pentecost asserts, the trumpet is a verbal call that is only heard by the church and that at the end times there will be both saints and sinners alive, then he must be talking cogently about a secret rapture, because sinners will not hear the trumpet of God, only the church! John Phillips disagrees with Pentecost’s view that the trumpet is “distinctly for the church.” According to Phillips, “The voice and the shout are accompanied by the trump of God. The trump is primarily for Israel.”<sup>685</sup>

Newman Smyth’s allegorical interpretation departs entirely from the literalism of the pre-Darbyite period, as indicated by the following: “For why should we Christians ever think of that great voice, and that last trump, as a wild alarm resounding through space—an awful voice of doom? Shall it not be the full, joyous melody of grace made audible everywhere at last, and not one discord left? that archangel’s voice the harmony of all sweet voices of peace

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<sup>683</sup> Walvoord, John F. 1999. *The church in prophecy: exploring God's purpose for the present age*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, p. 80.

<sup>684</sup> Pentecost, J. Dwight. 1995. *Thy kingdom come: tracing God's kingdom program and covenant promises throughout history*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 190.

<sup>685</sup> Phillips, John. *Exploring the Future*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002, 250.

and good will on earth?”<sup>686</sup> Lynn Hiles also provides an allegorical interpretation. In commenting on 1 Thessalonians 4:16, he remarks: “The Lord is descending into our very lives today. He is descending in the trumpet of God. He’s coming in the message He’s bringing to our hearts.”<sup>687</sup>

Darby’s interpretation of the “last trump” and the “voice of the archangel” departs considerably from expositors previous to him. Nowhere does he maintain that the last trump is a distinct, audible sound of the trumpet heard by both saints and sinners alike. Instead, he interprets this to pertain more to a military call, as he explains in a section entitled “The allusion ‘in the last trump of 1 Corinthians 15:52’”:

After all the grave and wise speculations on the last trump, I strongly suspect it is merely an allusion to military matters. Somewhere we have in Josephus’ *War*, and perhaps in other books, we have the order of the breaking up of a Roman camp, and at the last trump they all break up and march forward. Now I acknowledge that scripture interpretation is not to be borrowed from without; but I have only seen tortured linkings with other passages within. I am content to take the general idea of the last public call of God relating to the church, and leave it there; but what suggested the image, I suspect, was what I say; just as the Greek for ‘assembling shout’ in 1 Thessalonians 4, beyond controversy, is a similar military term used to a similar purpose. Matthew 24:31 (‘And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet’), I have not the smallest shadow of doubt, applies to the assembling of the Jews (elect, as in Isaiah 65) after Christ is come.<sup>688</sup>

Darby’s reference to the “Great Trumpet” of Matthew 24:31 as applying to the Jewish nation is understandable in that Darby applies the whole prophetic chapter to the Jews and not the church. His vague reference to Josephus does, however, complicate his interpretation of the trumpets. The passage that Darby is referring to is taken from Josephus’ *War on the Jews*, in a chapter headed “A description of the Roman armies and Roman camps and of other particulars for which the Romans are commended.”

Now when they are to go out of the camp, the trumpet gives a sound, at which time nobody lies still, but at the first intimation they take down their tents, and all is made ready for their going out, then do the trumpets sound again, to order them to get ready for the march, then do

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<sup>686</sup> Smyth, Newman. 2008. *The Reality of Faith*. Charleston, SC: Bibliobazaar, 264.

<sup>687</sup> Hiles, Lynn. 2007. *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 96.

<sup>688</sup> Darby. *Collected Writings*, vol. 5: *Prophetic No.2*, 229.

they lay their baggage suddenly upon the mules, and other beasts of burden, and stand, as at the place of starting, ready to march . . . Then do the trumpets give a sound the third time, that they are to go out, in order to excite those that on any account are a little tardy, that so no one may be out of his rank when the army marches.<sup>689</sup>

If Darby has in mind this passage from Josephus, then his reference to “military matters” is certainly indicated. However, there are numerous trumpet calls to awake sleeping and tardy soldiers, and these together with the trumpeters “made a terrible shout.”<sup>690</sup> But Darby is insistent that Josephus *is* providing the illustration for the rapture:

When we learn that “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump,” we shall be changed. The last trump among the Romans, was the signal for all to start from the camp. They sounded one trumpet, then pulled down their tents; then a second; and put themselves in order; and when the last was sounded they all started. It is the same idea in 1 Thessalonians 4; it is there the military technical shout when they were all called into the rank again from standing at ease (originally it was the sound given to the rowers to pull together). We have three there: the Lord first; then the archangel carrying it on; and then the trump of God that completes all.<sup>691</sup>

For Darby, the trumpet is a summons or a call for action. “The last trump of 1 Corinthians 15 means the final summons when the heavenly saints leave their earthly sojourn to join the Lord—a figure like others in the chapter, taken from familiar military matters.”<sup>692</sup> The recurring theme for Darby is that the trumpet call has reference to the military:

Dr. Rossier, the “last trump” is but a military allusion, neither more nor less. There were three trumpets for breaking up the camp among the Romans. At the first, they folded the baggage; at the second, they fell into rank; at the third they all started together. The trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:52 is simply that of the resurrection of the dead, not of the change of the living. 1 Thessalonians confirms the above explanation.<sup>693</sup>

It could be argued that Darby, in finding an analogy between the trump of God and the breaking up of the Roman camp, as recorded by Josephus, is

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<sup>689</sup> Josephus, Flavius, and William Whiston. 1981. *Complete works*. Lynn, MA. Hendrickson - *War of the Jews*, III:5, 506.

<sup>690</sup> *Ibid.*, III:7, 512.

<sup>691</sup> Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol. 26: *Expository No. 5*, 297.

<sup>692</sup> *Ibid.*, *My Dear Brother*, 337.

suggesting a trumpet call which in the latter case would be heard not just by the Romans but also by their enemies. It would be hard to conceive of an army that did not take prisoners, and if that is the case, then the prisoners in the Roman camp would surely hear the trumpet as easily as the Romans. But this is where Darby's analogy breaks down. He is insistent that while the trumpet call and the voice of the archangel are given, not everyone will hear the call. "But the only persons who hear it are the 'dead in Christ,' Christ being represented as in this way gathering together His own troops."<sup>694</sup> Darby continues with his explanation that this call is not a resurrection *of* the dead but *from* the dead.<sup>695</sup>

So the call is a specific call of the righteous dead, not the unrighteous dead, who will have to wait until the end of the millennium. "There will be a thousand years between the two resurrections."<sup>696</sup> Darby emphasizes his point: "And not only does the voice of the archangel and the trump of God minister to the raising of the dead in Christ at what this statement would call His first coming . . ."<sup>697</sup> Whether the trumpet of God is limited just to the raising of the dead or is a signal for the entire church is a point of debate. John Alifano subscribes to the latter view with the following comment in connection with 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: "Of importance is the fact that the text reads that Christ shall return from heaven to the air and not to the earth. It is from the air that the church will hear the trump of God and be caught up or raptured."<sup>698</sup> Darby appears to endorse the view that only the righteous dead hear the trumpet of God and not the righteous living or, as stated by Alifano, "the church." Darby also presents an analogy of the way the God spoke to Saul of Tarsus, both at the death of Stephen and when on the Damascus Road. According to Darby, this presents a sort or "regulating sound" in that not everyone heard the voice of God. In like manner, not everyone will hear the trump of God and the voice of the archangel, just the dead in Christ:

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<sup>693</sup> Ibid., Dear F. Cavanaugh, 417.

<sup>694</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 11: *Prophetic No.4*, 235.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid.

<sup>696</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>697</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 2: *Prophetic No.1*, 14.

Of course, on the other hand, He did regulate in a hidden way, as when he let Saul of Tarsus be at the death of Stephen, and when he spoke to Saul out of the glory. In a quiet way He regulated them, but He will speak in quite a different way in the day that is coming. The “shout” spoken here is a regulating sound, such as a call to men to present arms; and its tones will be heard as announcing that the time is come.<sup>699</sup>

In summary, Darby’s view of the trump of God and the voice of the archangel differs considerably from those of his predecessors. The declaration for Darby was limited just to the dead in Christ, not to a general call or a call to be heard globally throughout the world. In this sense, the idea of a “secret rapture” becomes understandable, since only the righteous dead will hear the trump of God and the voice of the archangel and will be raised to meet the Lord in the air. These would be joined by the righteous living, and the two groups will meet Christ at his appearing and will be raptured to heaven. The unrighteous living will only know that the rapture has occurred when loved ones are suddenly found missing.

#### The post-, mid-, and pretribulation hermeneutic

Darby’s views of the nature of the trump of God and the voice of the archangel were not the only distinguishing features of his eschatology. Premillennialists, including futurists and historicists prior to Darby, subscribed either to a midtribulation or a posttribulation rather than a pretribulation rapture; thus, for the posttribulationist the rapture would occur not at the beginning but at the end of the tribulation at Christ’s Second Advent. Alexander Reese clarifies this interpretation:

The Church of Christ will not be removed from the earth until the Advent of Christ at the very end of the present Age; the Rapture and the Appearing take place at the same crisis; hence Christians of that generation will be exposed to the final affliction under Antichrist.<sup>700</sup>

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<sup>698</sup> Alifano, John A. *The Pretribulation Rapture Doctrine and the Progressive Dispensational System: Are they Compatible?* Boca Raton, FL: Dissertation.com, 2002, 2.

<sup>699</sup> *Ibid.*, *The Lord Himself Shall Descend*, n.p.

<sup>700</sup> Reese, Alexander. *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, 18, qtd. in Pentecost, J. Dwight. 1964. *Things to come: a study in Biblical eschatology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 164.

This final affliction under Antichrist finds fuller understanding within the parable of the wheat and tares.<sup>701</sup> Those that rejected the pretribulation explanation generally felt that the church was composed of wheat and tares, and that the function of the church was to be a witness until the harvest when the wheat would be separated from the tares. The general feeling was that the church would not be taken out of the world during the tribulation, since the church was to be called upon to maintain its witness.

Larry Pharr discusses the importance of the parable with regard to the pre- and posttribulation views: “It must be emphasized that the Lord deals with the tares *at the same time* that the wheat is gathered by rapture, and this is impossible with pre-tribulation rapture doctrine yet is consistent with post-tribulation rapture teaching. . . . With pre-tribulation rapture teaching, no judgment is given at this time to the wicked and no one is cast into hell.”<sup>702</sup>

Roy Anderberg supports the posttribulation interpretation and admits to being “a dispensationalist to an extent.” He then clarifies his thinking by stating that “the treatment of Israel and the Church are somewhat different; but when it is held that the Church cannot be present in the 70<sup>th</sup> week, that presents a problem. . . . and to suggest that the ‘Church age’ ends at the beginning of the week, in light of the revealed scripture would be a difficult notion to accept; especially since there will be millions of Christians present during the tribulation who won’t take the mark, name, or the number of the Antichrist.”<sup>703</sup>

James Bennett supports the posttribulation position, arguing against the pretribulation interpretation: “Now comes the fact which is conclusive against the secret rapture. That doctrine, it will be remembered, is, that the Church or ‘wheat’ shall be taken away to heaven at a coming of Christ which is to precede the end of the age by several years. The wheat are to be removed

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<sup>701</sup> Matthew 13.

<sup>702</sup> Pharr, W. Larry. 2007. *The Rapture Examined, Explained and Exposed*. Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 80, 81.

<sup>703</sup> Anderberg, Roy W. 2008. *Post Tribulation Rapture*. Tucson, AZ: Wheatmar, 25, 26, 31, 32.



some years, therefore, before the tares. And how does this theory tally with the teaching of this parable: It flatly contradicts it.”<sup>704</sup>

John Walvoord provides a helpful insight into the posttribulation support of the wheat and tares parable:

The position of dispensational posttribulationism is stated briefly by Gundry in what he calls “Excursus on the Consummation of the Age” . . . Gundry follows other posttribulationists, however, in singling out the parable of the wheat and the tares as evidence for post-tribulationist rapture. As Matthew 13:30 states clearly, at the time of harvest the tares are gathered first, and then the wheat is gathered into the barn. Gundry, like most other posttribulationists, makes much of the fact that the wheat is gathered *after* the tares – which fact, he holds, corresponds to the second coming of Christ to set up His kingdom. This contradicts the order of the pretribulationist rapture, in which believers are gathered out first. Like other posttribulationists, however, Gundry ignores the parable of the dragnet in Matthew 13:47-50 in which the exact opposite order is indicated. There, according to verse 48, the good fish representing believers are gathered into vessels, and then the bad fish are thrown away.<sup>705</sup>

The parable of the wheat and tares advanced by the supporters of post-tribulationism finds a similar argument in that the tribulation period is essential for the “purification of the church,” as explained by John Cumming:

But we must not overlook, in the midst of the coming tribulation, those rays of glory stricken through the clouds, which relieve the density of the night, and indicate, beyond the sunshine that sleeps unbroken on the everlasting hills of the heavenly Jerusalem. However sure the tribulation, there are those that “come out of it,” and stand resplendent “in white robes,” who “shall be purified and made white and tried,” who “shall rest and stand in their lot at the end of days.”<sup>706</sup>

Elsewhere, Cumming explains what this purification during the tribulation consists of: “Then we shall be purified from unbelief, purified from the alloy of sin, purified from all the remains of corruption; purified more and more . . .”<sup>707</sup> According to James Smith, quoting the book of Revelation,

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<sup>704</sup> Bennett, J. 1878. *The second advent*. London: J. Nisbet, 162.

<sup>705</sup> Walvoord, John F. 1976. *The blessed hope and the tribulation: a Biblical and historical study of posttribulationism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 83.

<sup>706</sup> Cumming, John. 1863. *The great tribulation: or, the things coming on the earth*. New York: Rudd & Carleton, xv.

<sup>707</sup> Cumming, John. 1860. *The great tribulation: or, the things coming on the earth*. New York: Rudd & Carleton, xv, 103.

. . . *during the great tribulation*, before ever they could stand thereupon (xv., 1, 2) and those who reign with Christ 'are those who *during the great tribulation* had been beheaded by the beast because they would not worship either him or his image' &c. (xx, 4). From actual experience then, it seems clear as noon-day that the saints – the Church, the bride, the Lamb's wife – will surely *pass through*, suffer in, be purged, purified, and prepared for the marriage during the great tribulation.<sup>708</sup>

Contrary to the view of pretribulationism and according to Smith, during the tribulation Christ reigns on earth and not in heaven, the Church is on earth and not in heaven, and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb is on earth and not in heaven. The Church is to suffer the torment of the tribulation period rather than being raptured to meet Christ at his appearing prior to the Great Tribulation. Thus, there is a considerable difference between the views of post- and pretribulationism. It was deemed essential for the post-tribulationists that the saints should go through the tribulation and not be raptured prior to the tribulation period.

Darby's advancement of pretribulationism rather than post-tribulationism has considerable import.

The rapture of the saints and the character of the Jewish remnant: shewing the position which the scriptures give to the remnant in Israel, in the latter day, in prophecy, in the Psalms and in the New Testament; and the rapture of the saints, gathered by the Holy Ghost, sent down from heaven, before the tribulation of the last days. . . . The rapture of the saints before the appearing of Christ, connects itself with the existence of a Jewish remnant waiting for a deliverance after the rapture and before the appearing.<sup>709</sup>

Several scholars present the view that the pretribulation interpretation can be attributed to Darby: “. . . the Pre-Tribulation rapture of the saints; a visible reign of Christ in Jerusalem during the millennium; and a restricted view of what constitutes the true church. It is in large part, the work of an Irish cleric, John Nelson Darby (1800-82).”<sup>710</sup> According to Larry Pharr, “The debate over pre-tribulation rapture as opposed to post-tribulation rapture might never have

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<sup>708</sup> Smith, James. 1872. *Plain thoughts on the sealed book*. London: Houlston & Sons, 309.

<sup>709</sup> Darby. *Collected Writings*, vol. 11: *Prophetic No.4*, 118.

<sup>710</sup> Landes, Richard Allen. 2000. *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements*. New York: Routledge, 125.

occurred except for the fact of John Nelson Darby coming to America and teaching pre-tribulation rapture to ministry that was very immature in prophecy. Darby, a brilliant, yet eccentric theologian who authored over seventy books, first taught pre-tribulation rapture to the Plymouth Brethren in 1832.”<sup>711</sup> Not all scholars are in agreement that originality can be ascribed to Darby. Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins would disagree, as evidenced by the following:

For several years opponents of the pre-Tribulation position have argued that the position was invented by John Darby in the mid-1800s and was never mentioned before that. Quite simply, this argument is false. The Reverend Morgan Edwards was a Baptist pastor in Philadelphia who described a pre-Trib return of Christ for his church in his 1788 book *Millennium, Last Days Novelties*. Although he saw only a 3 ½ year tribulation, he definitely saw the Rapture occur before the Tribulation.<sup>712</sup>

However, the views of the authors are not conclusive, and as Carl Olson points out, “LaHaye admits Edwards ‘saw only a three and a half year tribulation’, meaning Edwards’ writings would better support midtribulationism, a view LaHaye strongly opposes. Even if Edwards did envision some type of Rapture prior to a time of tribulation, his explanation is ambiguous and only gives pretribulationists another fifty years or so of history to claim as their own. In the context of two thousand years, this is hardly persuasive, especially since Edwards’ views are not clear or fully formed.”<sup>713</sup>

There are other views as to who originated the doctrine of pre-tribulation besides that of Morgan Edwards. Stephen Hunt presents the case propounded by Mark Patterson and Andrew Walker that suggests that “Irving and the Albury circle predate Darby’s mature view on the pre-tribulation Rapture.”<sup>714</sup> Robert Van Kampen suggests that Edward Irving is a possible candidate as the originator of the pretribulation doctrine: “Although John

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<sup>711</sup> Pharr, W. Larry. *The Rapture Examined, Explained and Exposed*. Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2007, ix.

<sup>712</sup> LaHaye, Tim F., Jerry B. Jenkins, and Sandi Swanson. 2005. *The authorized Left Behind handbook*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 76.

<sup>713</sup> Olson, Carl E. 2003. *Will Catholics be "left behind"?: a Catholic critique of the rapture and today's prophecy preachers*. Modern apologetics library. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 327.

Darby, founder of the Plymouth Brethren movement, apparently never claimed to have originated pretribulationism, many have credited him with the idea. Most historians believe, however, that the idea of a pre-seventieth week Rapture was first popularized by Edward Irving. Because of his low view of Christ, Irving was thrown out [*sic*] of the Presbyterian Church and started the Apostolic Catholic Church.”<sup>715</sup>

#### Darby’s hermeneutic

The pretribulation rapture, like his doctrine of the two peoples of God, was absolutely central to Darby’s eschatology. That the relationship of the church to the tribulation occupied his mind, with the church avoiding the tribulation, is evident in the following comments:

And first, as to our being in the tribulation: How do I know there will be a tribulation? I must get some revelation of it. He who would place the church in it will answer me, I am sure, that the Scriptures are clear on the point. . . . There will be a tribulation. The other part of the question still remains: Shall we, who compose the church, be in this tribulation? . . . We have found that the passages which speak of the tribulation first apply it directly to the Jews on one side and then exclude the church from it on the other. I do not see how such a point as this could be made clearer by scripture.<sup>716</sup>

The church is associated with Christ already gone, it is not of this world as He was not, it is risen with Him, has its life with him in God. There is no earthly event between it and heaven. It must have been gathered, and Christ rise from the Father’s throne to receive it: that is all. It is this conviction that the church is properly heavenly, in its calling and relationship with Christ, forming no part of the course of events of the earth, which makes its rapture so simple and clear; and on the other hand, it shews how the denial of its rapture brings down the Church to an earthly position, and destroys its whole spiritual character and position. Prophecy does not relate to heaven. The Christian’s hope is not a prophetic subject at all.<sup>717</sup>

For Darby, the pretribulation rapture is a doctrine not derived from Scripture *per se* but from the doctrine of the two peoples of God, which requires it.

Stanley Grenz understands this argument clearly:

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<sup>714</sup> Hunt, Stephen. 2001. *Christian millenarianism: from the early church to Waco*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 98.

<sup>715</sup> Van Kampen, Robert. 2000. *The Sign*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 17.

<sup>716</sup> Darby. *Collected Writings*, vol. 11: *Prophetic No.4*, 110, 113.

Finally and most important, the pretribulation rapture is demanded by the dispensationalist system itself. This is readily evident in the classical expression of the system. If there are two peoples of God and two phases of God's program in the world, and if the Israel phase has been placed in abeyance during the church age, then the pretribulation rapture follows logically.<sup>718</sup>

Of interest are the views of those that understand the rapture as an invention by Darby. If, as Grenz insightfully remarks, the rapture was the "logical conclusion of the two peoples of God," then Scriptural support would be lacking, since Darby's doctrine would have been predicated upon the separation of the two peoples of God and not from any passage of Scripture.

Darby's eschatology embraced the doctrine of imminence or "at any moment coming" of Christ—what is commonly termed the "secret rapture." This any-moment return of Christ he expressed succinctly: "There is no event between me and heaven."<sup>719</sup> By abandoning historicism and its prophetic timetable, Darby established a futurist interpretation of the secret rapture. Before the end of the current dispensation and prior to the beginning of Daniel's last week, Jesus would remove his faithful remnant, while the rest, the unrighteous including the professing church, would go into the Great Tribulation. The faithful remnant includes both the righteous dead as well as the righteous living. Grace and faith had made the separation between the saints, the church, and the unrighteous.<sup>720</sup> By adopting a literalist interpretation to 1 Thessalonians 4:18-17, Darby reasoned that Christ would come back twice at the Second Advent. The first coming would be *for* his church and the next coming, seven years later, would be *with* the church.

Pentecost disagrees with applying the Second Coming to the time of the rapture and is thus in agreement with Darby, insisting that the Second Advent pertains to the end of the seven-year period when Christ appears with the bride.<sup>721</sup> The rapture or translation is the event during which Christ comes

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<sup>717</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>718</sup> Grenz, Stanley J. 1992. *The millennial maze: sorting out evangelical options*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 107.

<sup>719</sup> Darby, *Dearest G. Gausby*, 330.

<sup>720</sup> Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol. 10: *Doctrinal No.3*, 358.

<sup>721</sup> Pentecost, J. Dwight. 1995. *Thy kingdom come: tracing God's kingdom program and covenant promises throughout history*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 206.

to claim his bride and the saints are caught up in the air. Such semantics do a disservice to those who hold to the single and not double coming of Christ and see the Second Advent as the time when the saints are translated.<sup>722</sup> According to Herbert Lockyer, the term “Second Advent” should be treated as a general and not a specific term.<sup>723</sup> Pentecost’s argument appears central to his eschatology, particularly with this remark: “The translation results in the removal of the church and the inception of the tribulation, and the second advent results in the establishment of the millennial kingdom.”<sup>724</sup> Lockyer’s comments are insightful, and one wonders whether such eschatological gymnastics are to detract from the central argument that Christ actually comes back twice. Pentecost does, however, point to helpful distinctions between the two events. “At the translation believers are judged, but at the second advent Gentiles and Israel are judged. . . . The translation leaves creation unchanged, while the second advent entails the change in creation.”<sup>725</sup>

These then are the events that Darby sets forth at the rapture. First, the “translation” of the church to meet Jesus in the air, when Christ comes for his saints both living and resurrected, followed by the appearing when Christ comes back to earth for judgment, as follows: “. . . so that these three things, the presenting of the Son of man to the Ancient of days, the rapture of the church to meet Jesus in the air, and the appearing of Jesus with all the saints to judge the world . . .”<sup>726</sup> The rapture is commensurate with the start of the last week of Daniel’s seventy-week prophecy.<sup>727</sup> With the church removed, God is able to continue His redemptive work with the Jewish nation and in particular

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<sup>722</sup> Bill Hamon subscribes to this view with the following comment: “Christ’s first coming was when God sent His only begotten Son to Earth to become the perfect sacrifice for the redemption of mankind. Jesus shed His life’s blood for the purchase of His Church. Christ’s first coming birthed the age of the Mortal Church. His second coming will end the age of the Mortal Church by translating and resurrecting the Saints into the Immortal Church.” Hamon, Bill. 2005. *The Day of the Saints*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 419.

<sup>723</sup> “The term ‘the Second Advent’ is a general one covering many events that are associated with our Lord from the time of His return for His church right on until the end of the millennium when he surrenders the kingdom to God.” Lockyer, Herbert. 1973. *All the messianic prophecies of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 186.

<sup>724</sup> *Ibid.*, 206, 207.

<sup>725</sup> Pentecost, J. Dwight. 1995. *Thy kingdom come: tracing God's kingdom program and covenant promises throughout history*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 207.

<sup>726</sup> Darby. *Collected Writings*, vol. 11: *Prophetic No.4*, p. 64.

the 144,000 of Revelation, who are natural Jews from the twelve tribes who will be present during the tribulation period. The 144,000 will receive Jesus possibly through the work of the two witnesses,<sup>728</sup> who will then lead the victory over the Antichrist.<sup>729</sup> Darby understands that the Great Tribulation concerns the wrath of God against the Jews for their rejection of Christ, as he explains with reference to the book of Matthew:

But then we have the additional truth that this Gospel of the Kingdom must be preached to all the nations (Gentiles) and then the end shall come. This gives the full general history consequent on the rejection of Christ . . . Then, as I have said, the special portion of Jerusalem who had rejected Him, and the great tribulation, when the abomination of desolation has been set up, is brought in.<sup>730</sup>

He further states: “In a word it is the final and terrible tribulation of the Jews, guilty of having rejected their Messiah, but whose deliverance will then take place in grace, those who are written in the book, for God has an elect people . . .”<sup>731</sup> This then appears to be the nature of the Great Tribulation according to Darby. First, it is against the Jewish nation for their rejection of Christ, and second, it is to prepare the Jewish nation for their Messiah, Jesus Christ. “. . . after the great tribulation, He appears in glory, and gathers all Israel.”<sup>732</sup> It appears that the period of the Great Tribulation is for half the final week, or 3 ½ years: “Now we learn from the gospels His ministry was as nearly as possible three years and a half, so for intelligent faith there is only half a week left, and in fact, only that of the great tribulation.”<sup>733</sup> “It is a peremptory sign of the great tribulation, the beginning of the last week of Daniel’s people.”<sup>734</sup>

Out of the Jewish nation 144,000 are set aside by God, as Darby explains: “The difference, I apprehend, in their character, is this. The vision of the 144,000 sealed ones is their being marked by God, so as to secure them for Himself in grace through the coming trials.”<sup>735</sup> The question as to whether the

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<sup>727</sup> Ibid., *My Dear Brother*, 423.

<sup>728</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 8: *Prophetic No. 3*, 121.

<sup>729</sup> Ibid.

<sup>730</sup> Ibid., *Notes and Comments*, vol. 5, 168.

<sup>731</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 24: *Expository No. 3*, 183.

<sup>732</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 19: *Expository No. 1*, 15.

<sup>733</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 5: *Prophetic No. 2*, 31.

<sup>734</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 24: *Expository No. 3*, 183.

<sup>735</sup> Ibid., *Collected Writings*, vol. 30: *Expository No. 2*, 361.

144,000 in Revelation 7 and 14 refer to the same group is answered by Darby, who discusses the opening of the sixth seal of Revelation 6 and then proceeds with a discussion of the 144,000. “First, the perfect number of the remnant of Israel is sealed, before the providential instruments of God’s judgments are allowed to act; 144,000 = 12 x 12 x 1000.”<sup>736</sup> A page later Darby states: “The 144,000 of chapter 14 are a similar class from among the Jews, coming out of their special tribulation.”<sup>737</sup>

Darby appears to see the two references as synonymous, but other expositors take a different view. William Kelly understands the two groups to be different: “. . . not merely sealed as the servants of God (like a similar band out of the twelve tribes of Israel chapter vii), but brought into association with the Lamb in Zion, that is, with God’s royal purpose in grace. These seem to me sufferers of Judah, who pass through the unequalled tribulation, which it is not said the other remnant do.”<sup>738</sup> John Walvoord is in disagreement with Kelly and sees the two groups to be the same, thus concurring with Darby: “Scholars have had difficulty determining whether the 144,000 of chapter 14 is the same as that of chapter 7. Though various explanations have been given, it is preferable to regard them as the same group, as it would be most unlikely to have two different groups of 144,000 each, especially when the original 144,000 is based on 12 tribes of 12,000 each in order to arrive at this number.”<sup>739</sup>

The saints who have been raptured at Christ’s appearing do not spend the seven-year period idly wandering between the clouds, meeting friends and conversing with Christ. Rather, they now face judgment. This is not judgment regarding their standing with Christ, inasmuch as their faith in Jesus Christ has been established; if it were not, they would be part of the professing church or the Gentiles that would have been left behind to go into the tribulation. The saints, facing judgment, “give account of themselves to God.”<sup>740</sup> That they

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<sup>736</sup> Ibid., 283 Ephesians, 395.

<sup>737</sup> Ibid., 396.

<sup>738</sup> Kelly, William. 1903. *Lectures on the Book of Revelation*. London: T. Weston, 318.

<sup>739</sup> Walvoord, John F. 1999. *Every prophecy of the Bible*. Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Pub, 588.

<sup>740</sup> Darby., *Collected Writings*, vol. 11: *Prophetic No.4*, 155.



have received Christ as Lord and Saviour is one thing, and how the indwelling Spirit has been manifested in a changed life for God is another, and this for Darby is what the judgment is all about.<sup>741</sup> He alludes to saints being rewarded for displaying meritorious work as “receiving crowns differing each from each [other] . . .”<sup>742</sup> Following the judgment, the saints will then join Christ in the “Marriage supper of the Lamb.” Darby states: “Babylon being judged, the Lord celebrates the marriage supper of the Lamb. We see the contrast between Babylon, the glory of the world, and the church of God that has suffered with Christ, which has been persecuted in the world, but which is now glorified with Jesus.”<sup>743</sup>

Back on earth and just prior to when Christ comes back to earth with the church for judgment, there is the battle of Armageddon. This then is what some expositors term the Second Coming. “The nations are gathered to Armageddon, and then comes the judgment.”<sup>744</sup>

It may be argued that Darby’s doctrine of the pretribulational rapture is inconsequential. John Hannah presents such an argument in his review of Joseph Canfield’s book *The Incredible Scofield and His Book*. According to Hannah, Canfield produced “false assumptions, *ad hominem* arguments, innuendos, [and] unfounded allegations”<sup>745</sup> in his attempt to discredit the Scofield Reference Bible and dispensational premillennialism. Hannah concludes his argument by noting that “the truth of this system of theology (dispensationalism) is determined not by the life of an individual but by its biblical mooring.”<sup>746</sup> If we take this line of reasoning, it could be construed that the doctrine of the rapture is all-important irrespective of who was the progenitor of the doctrine, because the eschatology rests solidly on biblical

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<sup>741</sup> “Where the coming of Christ is spoken of elsewhere, it is spoken of as the time of judgment; or the display of the effect of righteousness and glory in the saints . . . The judgment connected with Christ’s coming includes the judgment of, and retribution to, the saints . . .” *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>742</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 21: *Evangelical No. 2*, 32. Note: see 1 Cor. 9:25; 1 Thess. 2:19; Js. 1:12; 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pt. 5:4. See also *Collected Writings*, vol. 16: *Practical No. 1*, 345.

<sup>743</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 5: *Prophetic No. 2*, 70.

<sup>744</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collected Writings*, vol. 11: *Prophetic No. 4*, 298.

<sup>745</sup> Hannah, John. D. *A Review of The Incredible Scofield and his book*. *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 no. 587 JI-S 1990, 364.

<sup>746</sup> *Ibid.*

grounds, namely 1 Thess. 4:16. I would like to argue otherwise, for a number of reasons, because my principal aim is to determine Darby's contribution to dispensational premillennialism. To investigate the historicity of the rapture and the etymology of the term is not to discredit either Darby or his doctrine, nor should it undermine its "biblical moorings." What such a study should reveal is how Darby made use of terms such as "the rapture" that were in common use before his time and fashioned them into a new, systemized eschatology, resulting in a completely new explanation. In this sense, Darby is adapting old ideas into a revolutionary eschatological framework, giving it his unique spin. Hence, I would have to disagree with Hannah's assertion that "the truth of this system of theology is determined not by the life of an individual but by its biblical moorings," though at the same time I am sympathetic to Hannah's views. Again, Hannah's argument is that the rapture doctrine derives its credibility from being Scripture based. It would be more correct to say that Darby's rapture doctrine is not based upon Scripture, but upon his doctrine of the "two peoples of God" which requires it.

In a discussion of the interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4 and the *parousia*, it is important to note whether the text points to a chronological event or not. Ladd comments in general terms, and not specifically to Thessalonians, that ". . . the fundamental meaning of the nearness of the Kingdom is not chronological, but it is the certainty that the future determines the present."<sup>747</sup> David Luckensmeyer has a similar argument that refers specifically to Thessalonians 4:13-18: "On the other hand, the various elements of the apocalyptic scenario (e.g. descent, resurrection, translation, meeting) may be telescoped into the ultimate goal of being with the Lord (v.17d); the adverbial pair *πρωτον/επειτα* has qualitative not chronological significance. On the other hand, the Thessalonians may not require an outline of the *parousia* with the associated occurrences as much as they need assurance that those who have died will take part in the *parousia*. That is, Paul reassures them that the resurrection is temporally before the translation to

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<sup>747</sup> Ladd, George Eldon. 1993. *A theology of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 209.

meet the Lord.”<sup>748</sup> However, as Mal Couch notes, Darby’s eschatology was strictly chronological: “Darby clearly laid out an eschatological pattern: (1) the rapture and first resurrection; (2) postrapture events in glory; (3) postrapture events on earth; (4) the return of Christ and the millennial kingdom; (5) postmillennial events; and (6) the eternal state.”<sup>749</sup> A similar outline is also given by Stephen Travis: “A chronological scheme for the future was not known before Darby thought of it.”<sup>750</sup>

It is now possible to summarize Darby’s eschatology surrounding the rapture:

- a) A period of apostasy before Jesus comes.
- b) Jesus will come in secret, and will take both dead and living Christians to be with himself—the so-called “secret rapture.”
- c) A seven-year period known as the tribulation, in which Antichrist will rule the earth.
- d) Then Christ will appear from heaven openly and will overthrow Antichrist at Armageddon. This will usher in Christ’s thousand-year reign at Jerusalem, and the Temple and sacrificial worship will be restored.
- e) After the thousand years, Satan will be loosed again and will stir up rebellion against God. His defeat will be followed by the resurrection, the judgment of the wicked, and the final, eternal state.<sup>751</sup>

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<sup>748</sup> Luckensmeyer, David. 2009. *The eschatology of First Thessalonians*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 253.

<sup>749</sup> Couch, Mal. 2000. *An introduction to classical evangelical hermeneutics: guide to the history and practice of biblical interpretation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 112.

<sup>750</sup> Travis, Stephen H. 2004. *Christ will come again: hope for the second coming of Jesus*. Toronto: Clements Pub., 149.

<sup>751</sup> Ibid. Note: George Eldon Ladd notes the following: “Thus the church will escape the Great Tribulation; the persecution against the ‘saints’ will be directed against Israel - the living Jews. At the end of the Tribulation Christ will return, this time accompanied by the church (1Thess. 3:13), to rescue Israel and to bring them into his millennial Kingdom. These two comings of Christ have been called the Rapture - when he comes to catch up the church - and the Revelation. The Rapture will be a secret coming, known only by the church. The Revelation will be a public, visible coming where he comes with power and glory to establish his Kingdom.” Ladd, George Eldon. 1978. *The last things: eschatology for Laymen*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 49, 50.

## 7. Darby's Dispensationalism in Retrospect

### Putting the puzzle together

#### *Summarizing Darby's dispensational system*

Darby had a number of unique eschatological doctrines: the unconditionality of the Abrahamic covenant, the gap in Daniel's seventy-week prophecy, the ruin of the church, the pretribulational rapture of the church, and the two peoples of God. These doctrines, combined with Darby's system of periodization, become an integrated eschatology that can properly be called "dispensationalism." I would argue that, by removing any one of Darby's cardinal doctrines, his eschatology, far from being "integrated," actually falls apart and becomes "disintegrated."

To support my thesis, I call to mind the nature of the Abrahamic Covenant. According to Darby, this was an "unconditional" agreement between Israel and God, with the logical conclusion that the Jewish people are God's chosen people in perpetuity. Darby argued that the first coming of Christ was part of God's redemptive plan for Israel, but because the Jews rejected Christ, salvation was then offered to the Gentiles. Darby was now faced with the dilemma of how to resolve the relationship between the church and Israel as part of God's redemptive plan.

Another problem concerned Daniel's seventy-week prophecy, which began with the Jews. According to Darby, the 69<sup>th</sup> week ended with the stoning of Stephen, with the final week being concluded at the Second Coming, and no amount of juggling with prophetic years was going to resolve the fact that this was a prophecy with a fixed duration. Darby resolved the problem of the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant and the termination of the seventy-week prophecy by placing a gap between the 69<sup>th</sup> and 79<sup>th</sup> weeks. He reasoned that when the Jewish people rejected Christ, God's redemptive plan continued with the Gentiles, and therefore the redemptive plan for Israel was placed in abeyance until the Second Coming of Christ. The Gentiles or the church filled the parenthesis between the stoning of Stephen and the Second Coming, when God would resume His redemptive plan with Israel. The

problem for Darby was to find an event that would allow God's redemptive plan for the church to cease and for the Jews to continue. He resolved this issue by incorporating the pretribulation rapture into his eschatology. At the time of the rapture, God would remove his true church from the earth, but not the church in ruin, thus allowing him to continue His redemption with Israel.

Thus far Darby's eschatology included national Israel/the Jews and the church, with a separate redemptive plan for both. For Darby, the Abrahamic covenant concerned "a land, seed, and the promise." Since it was obvious to him that the Jews were part of a land issue, they therefore were God's earthly people. That being so, Darby then posited that the church must be God's heavenly people, leading to his key doctrine of the "two peoples of God." This entailed two different people groups, namely, Israel and the church, with two different redemptive plans. It is within the framework of the two peoples of God, together with an earlier system of periodization, that Darby constructed his system of dispensationalism.

Darby's dispensationalism resembles a "house of cards." Remove one unique doctrine and the remainder collapse into a heap. I will argue that the pretribulation rapture is inextricably linked to the two peoples of God. If there is only one people, not two, the secret rapture is no longer required. But the pretribulation rapture was vital to Darby, since the removal of the church was a prerequisite for God to continue his work with national Israel. It should be noted that progressive dispensationalism's view of the church and Israel will determine whether the modern form of dispensationalism supports or negates Darby's scheme.

Here then is my argument. Darby took ancient periodization and added to this his unique facets of the two peoples of God and the pretribulation rapture, thus creating a whole new eschatology properly termed "dispensationalism." Thus Darby was both innovative and unique in his thinking. He took older concepts and put them together in new ways to create a new system, which made him in reality an adapter, not an originator.

*Perpetuating Darby's vision: classical dispensationalism*

Classical dispensationalism began with Darby and continued up to and including Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952). The *Scofield Reference Bible*, first published in 1909, contained thousands of cross references and easy-to-read footnotes. It thus popularized classical dispensationalism and provided an easy study guide for the layman. The study and reference system was incorporated into the King James Bible, which gave it authority and immense popularity. It was logical for laypersons to reason that anything contained within the covers of the Bible must be as authoritative as the Bible itself. The influence of classical dispensationalism was not limited to the *Scofield Reference Bible*. Dispensationalism soon found a home in a new kind of educational institution—the Bible Institute. Starting with the founding of the Moody Bible Institute (Chicago) in the mid-1880s, dozens of such institutions sprang up by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. They were neither colleges nor theological seminaries, but practical training schools for urban ministry, foreign missions, and various specialized ministries. Dispensationalism took root in such schools, which supplied an enthusiastic corps of Christian workers well-versed in Darby’s eschatology.<sup>752</sup>

Classical dispensationalism was also incorporated in a number of theological seminaries. The most important was begun in Dallas in 1924. Lewis Sperry Chafer, with the assistance of Scofield, founded the Evangelical Theological College, which was later to become Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS). Chafer remained President of DTS until his death in 1952. His influence continued through his publications, which included his eight-volume *Systematic Theology*, published in 1947. Thus classical dispensationalism is typified by Darby, Scofield, and Chafer.<sup>753</sup> While remaining true to Darby’s teachings, the classical dispensationalists clarified a few issues where Darby was obscure, for example, the number and descriptions of dispensations. In

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<sup>752</sup> Brereton, Virginia Lieson. 1990. *Training God's army: the American Bible school, 1880-1940*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

<sup>753</sup> Mal Couch includes Charles C. Ryrie as a classical dispensationalist. “In order to evaluate the writings of the fathers for dispensational concepts, it is necessary to set forth the main features of ‘classic’ or ‘normative’ dispensational theology as presented by men like C. I. Scofield, Lewis Sperry Chafer, and Charles C. Ryrie.” Couch, Mal. 2000. *An introduction to classical evangelical hermeneutics: a guide to the history and practice of biblical interpretation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 88.

this section I will present the key doctrines that supported or clarified Darby's dispensational system.

*Dispensations.* Scofield identified a sevenfold periodization system that largely mirrored Darby's: (1) Innocency; (2) Conscience; (3) Human government; (4) Promise; (5) Law; (6) Grace; (7) The Millennium.<sup>754</sup> Scofield, like Darby, sees that each dispensation presents a test with a corresponding failure. "Each of the Dispensations may be regarded as a new test of the natural man, and each ends in judgment—marking his utter failure."<sup>755</sup> According to Lewis Sperry Chafer, "A dispensation can be defined as a stage in the progressive revelation of God constituting a distinctive stewardship or rule of life. . . . Each dispensation, therefore, begins with man being divinely placed in a new position of privilege and responsibility, and each closes with the failure of man resulting in righteous judgments from God."<sup>756</sup> Chafer identifies seven dispensations: (1) innocence, (2) conscience, (3) government, (4) promise, (5) law, (6) grace, (7) millennial kingdom,<sup>757</sup> thus mirroring almost word for word Scofield's system of periodization.

*The two peoples of God.* Scofield, like Darby, made a clear distinction between Israel and the church. According to Scofield,

Whoever reads the Bible with any attention cannot fail to perceive that more than half of its contents relate to one nation, the Israelites. . . . It

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<sup>754</sup> Scofield, C. I. 1961. *Rightly dividing the word of truth (II Timothy 2:15): being ten outline studies of the more important divisions of Scripture*. Findlay, OH: Dunham Pub. Co., 13-16. Scofield and Darby periodization are summarized thus:

Scofield	Innocency - from the creation of Adam to the expulsion of Adam
Darby	<i>(Paradisiacal state), to the flood</i>
Scofield	Conscience - a basis right moral judgment following the fall of Adam & Eve
Scofield	Human government - from Noah to the call of Abraham
Darby	<i>Noah</i>
Scofield	Promise - the covenant relationship with Abraham
Darby	<i>Abraham</i>
Scofield	Law - from Sinai and the Decalogue to Christ
Darby	<i>Israel: (a) Under the law; (b) Under the priesthood; (c) Under the kings.</i>
Scofield	Grace - from the substitutionary atonement of Christ to the pre-trib. rapture
Darby	<i>The Gentiles</i>
Darby	<i>The Spirit</i>
Scofield	The Millennium
Darby	<i>The Millennium</i>

<sup>755</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>756</sup> Chafer, Lewis Sperry, and John F. Walvoord. 1974. *Major Bible themes; 52 vital doctrines of the Scripture simplified and explained*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 126, 127

<sup>757</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

appears also, that all the communications of Jehovah to Israel *as a nation* relate to the Earth. . . . Continuing his researches, the student finds large mention in Scripture of another distinct body, which is called the Church. This body also has a peculiar relationship to God, and, like Israel, has received from Him specific promises. . . . In the predictions concerning the future of Israel and the Church, the distinction is still more startling. The Church will be taken away from the earth entirely, but restored Israel is yet to have her greatest earthly splendor and power.<sup>758</sup>

According to Chafer,

The distinction between the purpose for Israel and the purpose for the Church is about as important as that which exists between the two Testaments. Every covenant, promise, and provision for Israel is earthly, and they continue as a nation with the earth when it is created new. Every covenant or promise for the Church is for a heavenly reality, and she continues in heavenly citizenship when the heavens are recreated.<sup>759</sup>

Chafer provides twenty-four “contrasts between Israel and the Church.”<sup>760</sup>

Dwight Pentecost in his book *Things to Come* summarizes these points.<sup>761</sup> Of

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<sup>758</sup> Scofield, C. I. 1961. *Rightly dividing the word of truth (II Timothy 2:15): being ten outline studies of the more important divisions of Scripture*. Findlay, OH: Dunham Pub. Co., 6-9.

<sup>759</sup> Chafer, Lewis Sperry. 1993. *Systematic theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 47.

<sup>760</sup> *Ibid.* 47-53.

<sup>761</sup> “*The distinctions between Israel and the church*. Chafer has set forth twenty-four contrasts between Israel and the church which show us conclusively that these two groups can not be united into one, but that they must be distinguished as two separate entities with whom God is dealing in a special program. These contrasts may be outlined as follows: (1) The extent of Biblical revelation: Israel-nearly four-fifths of the Bible; Church-about one-fifth. (2) The Divine purpose: Israel-the earthly promises in the covenants; Church-the heavenly promises in the gospel. (3) The seed of Abraham: Israel-the physical seed, of whom some become a spiritual seed; Church-a spiritual seed. (4) Birth: Israel-physical birth that produces a relationship; Church-spiritual birth that brings relationship. (5) Headship: Israel-Abraham; Church-Christ. (6) Covenants: Israel-Abrahamic and all the following covenants; Church-indirectly related to the Abrahamic and new covenants; (7) Nationality: Israel-one nation; Church-from all nations. (8) Divine dealing: Israel-national and individual; Church-individual only. (9) Dispensations: Israel-seen in all ages from Abraham; Church-seen only in this present age. (10) Ministry: Israel no missionary activity and no gospel to preach; Church-a commission to fulfill. (11) The death of Christ: Israel-guilty nationally, to be saved by it; Church-perfectly saved by it now. (12) The Father: Israel-by a peculiar relationship God was Father to the nation; Church-we are related individually to God as Father. (13) Christ: Israel-Messiah, Immanuel, King; Church-Saviour, Lord, Bridegroom, Head. (14) The Holy Spirit: Israel-came upon some temporarily; Church-indwells all. (15) Governing principle: Israel-Mosaic law system; Church grace system. (16) Divine enablement: Israel-none; Church the indwelling Holy Spirit. (17) Two farewell discourses: Israel -Olivet discourse; Church-upper room discourse. (18) The promise of Christ's return: Israel-in power and glory for judgment; Church-to receive us to Himself. (19) Position: Israel a servant; Church-members of the



interest is Chafer's point 9, where he states that "Dispensations: Israel—seen in all ages from Abraham; Church—seen only in this present age."<sup>762</sup>

*The pretribulational rapture.* C. I. Scofield, like Darby, had a solid belief in the rapture. Commenting on 1 Thess. 4:17, Scofield says, "Not church saints, but all bodies of the saved, of whatever dispensation, are included in the first resurrection . . ."<sup>763</sup> Scofield confuses the events happening at the rapture. Darby's view was that Christ comes first *for* His saints and second *with* His saints after the Marriage Supper of the Lamb at the close of the seven years—the last week of the seventy-week prophecy. For Darby, the Second Coming is when Christ comes *with* His saints. Scofield's nomenclature is different, though the events are the same: "By these Scriptures it abundantly appears that the second advent will be personal and bodily . . . but that it is the 'blessed hope' of the Church, the time when sleeping saints will be raised, and, together with saints then living, who will be 'changed' (1 Cor. 15:51,52), caught up to meet the Lord;"<sup>764</sup> For Scofield, the "translation" when Christ comes in the clouds of glory is the Second Coming.

Lewis Sperry Chafer shares the views of Darby with regard to the rapture. In a section entitled "Contrasts Between Christ Coming For His Saints

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family. (20) Christ's earthly reign: Israel-subjects; Church-co-reigners. (21) Priesthood: Israel-had a priesthood; Church-is a priesthood. (22) Marriage: Israel-unfaithful wife; Church-bride. (23) Judgments: Israel -must face judgment; Church-delivered from all judgments. (24) Positions in eternity: Israel-spirits of just men made perfect in the new earth; Church-church of the firstborn in the new heavens. These clear contrasts, which show the distinction between Israel and the church, make it impossible to identify the two in one program, which it is necessary to do if the church goes through the seventieth week. These distinctions give further support to the pretribulation rapture position." Pentecost, J. Dwight. 1964. *Things to come: a study in Biblical eschatology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 201, 202.

<sup>762</sup> "This would imply that the church did not exist in Old Testament times, a point highlighted by Clarence Larkin in his summation of what the church is. "The 'Mystery' of the church was first revealed to Paul." For this cause I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of 'The Dispensation of the Grace of God' which is give me to you-ward; how that by revelation He made known unto me 'The Mystery' which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs and of the same body and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel . . . according to the 'eternal purpose' which He purposes in Christ Jesus our Lord." Eph. 3:1-11. Cited in: Larkin, Clarence. 2005. *Dispensational truth, or, God's plan and purpose in the ages*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 74.

<sup>763</sup> Scofield, C. I. 1945. *The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Testaments*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1269.

and His Coming With His Saints,” Chafer makes these observations: “The view that the rapture occurs before end-time events is called the pretribulational view in contrast with the posttribulational view which makes Christ’s coming for His saints and with His saints one event.”<sup>765</sup> Chafer discusses the importance of the pretribulational rapture. Aside from the benefits to the church who go to meet Christ in the clouds of glory, the rapture provides the necessary construct for God to continue his work with national Israel. “His return ushers in the earthly kingdom and ends the long night of Israel’s afflictions.”<sup>766</sup>

In summary, classical dispensationalism is the term that is applied not only to Darby’s dispensationalist system, but also to those who are supportive of his teachings. Scofield and Chafer, though reflecting slight differences either in nomenclature or in the way periodization is classified, do support Darby’s cardinal doctrines, particularly the distinction between Israel and the church. The importance of the rapture and the two peoples of God will form the benchmark when considering post-Darbyite dispensationalists.

#### The continuing debate over Darby’s originality

##### *Darby as inventor*

From Darby’s time to the present, classical dispensationalists have been accused of theological novelty. Critics have charged that dispensationalism originated with Darby in the nineteenth century and thus had no legitimate place in the long history of Christian theology. It was new and therefore could not possibly be true. The “invention” thesis requires careful consideration because it too misconstrues Darby’s dispensationalism. I have demonstrated that dispensationalism properly begins with Darby, but care needs to be exercised in defining terms.

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<sup>764</sup> Scofield, C. I. 1961. *Rightly dividing the word of truth (II Timothy 2:15): being ten outline studies of the more important divisions of Scripture*. Findlay, OH: Dunham Pub. Co., 20.

<sup>765</sup> Chafer, Lewis Sperry, and John F. Walvoord. 1974. *Major Bible themes; 52 vital doctrines of the Scripture simplified and explained*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 79.

<sup>766</sup> Chafer, Lewis Sperry. 1915. *The kingdom in history and prophecy*. New York: Fleming H. Revell, 151.

Those who use the invention thesis claim that Darby invented *all* aspects of his dispensationalism, including periodization, but this is simply not true. In his discussion of Harry Emerson Fosdick, Bruce Bawer makes the following comment: “But if Fosdick was being a law unto himself, then so was Darby when he invented dispensationalism.”<sup>767</sup> Barbara Rossing notes that “A British preacher named Darby invented this point of view centuries after the Bible, and the Left Behind authors and other dispensationalists are using it to further their particular social and political agenda.”<sup>768</sup> She further comments: “Darby refrained from predicting a specific date for Christ’s return. Instead, he invented ‘dispensations’—that is, intervals of time ordering God’s grand timetable for world events. From this expression came ‘dispensationalism,’ a particular system or school of thinking about the end-times reflecting Darby’s premise.”<sup>769</sup> Wayne Rohde, in his discussion of “Darby & Dispensational Premillennialism,” is more dogmatic, stating that “The currently popular eschatology is the system invented in the 1830’s by John Nelson Darby . . . Most of these adherents would be shocked (as I was) to find out there is *absolutely no question* that this system was introduced by J. N. Darby in the 1830’s. It had *never been heard of* in the early, Roman, Eastern Orthodox, or Protestant church prior to Darby’s introduction.”<sup>770</sup> Nancy Koester provides her definition of dispensationalism with the following comment: “Dispensationalism: a system of biblical interpretation that claims to match biblical prophecy with events in modern history, making it possible to know the timetable for Christ’s return. John Nelson Darby (1800-1883) invented the system eventually popularized in American Christianity.”<sup>771</sup> But the author’s statement that Darby made it possible “to know the timetable for Christ’s return” is not only erroneous but fails to understand that this is a historicist argument, and Darby was not a historicist but a futurist. And since

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<sup>767</sup> Bawer, Bruce. 1997. *Stealing Jesus: how fundamentalism betrays Christianity*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 122.

<sup>768</sup> Rossing, Barbara R. 2004. *The Rapture Exposed*. Boulder: Westview Press, 40.

<sup>769</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>770</sup> Rohde, Wayne. 2002. *A future, a hope, an unexpected end; the inevitable conquest of Christianity*. Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 20, 21.

<sup>771</sup> Koester, Nancy. 2007. *Fortress introduction to the history of Christianity in the United States*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 219.

futurism is concerned with the “imminent” return of Christ, there are no dates to set.

Revisionist dispensationalist John Walvoord illustrates this misconception with the following insightful comment:

The widespread prejudice and ignorance of the meaning of dispensationalism was illustrated when I was asked by a prominent Christian publication to write an article on dispensational premillennialism. In my manuscript I referred to *The Divine Economy*, written in 1687 in which the author, Pierre Poiret (1646-1719), discussed seven dispensations. The editor omitted this from the manuscript, and when I protested, he said, “That is impossible because John Nelson Darby invented dispensationalism.” It would be difficult to find a statement more prejudicial than that.<sup>772</sup>

In summary, the thesis that purports that dispensationalism was invented by Darby is a widely held misconception that is simply in error. It has been established beyond a shadow of doubt that a system of periodization existed prior to Darby, and while the term dispensationalism can properly be attributed to Darby, the system made full use of earlier notions of periodization in conjunction with Darby’s unique contribution. Through his astute adaptation, Darby took an early form of periodization and used it to suit his eschatology.

#### *In defense of Darby: the Ehlert thesis*

By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, dispensationalist teachers were making some significant adjustments to Darby’s system, primarily because they felt constrained to make some concessions to conservative biblical scholarship that was beginning to utilize more mainstream methodology. The most prominent dispensationalist teachers of the mid-century—Walvoord, Ryrie, and Pentecost—were classed with the revisionists. Among their concerns was to counter the old charge that Darby had created his system out of thin air. Such charges were levelled at the onset of dispensationalism, but by the 1940s there was a special urgency to answer them. Arnold Ehlert accepted this challenge and presented an historical argument that became the standard

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<sup>772</sup> Walvoord, John. Ap-Je 2001. Reflections on dispensationalism. *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 158 (630):134.

dispensationalist “proof” for the system’s historicity. Ehlert’s thesis was that “ancient dispensationalism” predated Darbyite dispensationalism, which he attempted to prove by establishing a history of “periodization.” He ignored Darby’s fundamental doctrines of the two peoples of God and the unifying theme of God’s glory in history.

Ehlert’s argument presented

Ehlert published his *Bibliographic History of Dispensationalism* in a series of nine monographs in *Bibliotheca Sacra* from January/March 1944<sup>773</sup> to January/March 1946.<sup>774</sup> It appeared in a slim book form in 1965.<sup>775</sup> The *Bibliographic History* contains his evidence that dispensationalism can be traced back to sources that predate Darby. He thus distinguishes between “ancient” and “modern” dispensationalism.

The current use of the term “modern dispensationalism” carries two possible inferences: either that the doctrine of dispensationalism as such is modern, or that the particular type of dispensationalism styled “modern” is quite different from ancient dispensationalism. Those who use the term, however, do not always indicate definitely which inference they mean to imply, beyond that of animadversion. Neither do they indicate the history or the features of ancient dispensationalism and related doctrines, if they admit such. This so-called “modern dispensationalism” is usually dated from Mr. John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) and the Plymouth Brethren of England, or from Dr. Cyrus Ingerson Scofield (1843-1921), who popularized the doctrine in his preaching, teaching and Bible notes.<sup>776</sup>

Ehlert maintained that though Darby contributed his eschatological doctrines, the dispensational system existed in one form or another in very early writers (typically from the Patristic Writings) to the modern period. Despite his assertion that dispensationalism predated Darby, Ehlert admitted that “Theologically speaking, an adequate definition of *dispensationalism* probably remains to be written. As soon as the suffixes are added to the word the

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<sup>773</sup> Ehlert, Arnold D. Ja-Mr 1944. A bibliography of dispensationalism. *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 101 (401):95-101.

<sup>774</sup> Ehlert, Arnold D. Ja-Mr 1946. A bibliography of dispensationalism. *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 103 (409):57-67.

<sup>775</sup> Ehlert, Arnold D. 1965. *A bibliographic history of dispensationalism*. BCH bibliographic series, no. 2. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

<sup>776</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

subject is transferred immediately from Biblical to theological grounds.”<sup>777</sup> Such a lack of definition did not prevent him from identifying a list of early writers beginning with Clement of Alexandria and Augustine as early proponents of his system. By doing so, he hoped to disprove the common assertion that Darby “created dispensationalism” in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. If Clement and Augustine were dispensationalists, then the system has a patristic pedigree and Darby’s teachings are absolved of the charge of novelty. Ehlert’s most important examples of pre-Darbyite dispensationalism were Isaac Watts and John Edwards. I will examine Ehlert’s argument as outlined in his *Bibliographic History* by making a comparison with the writings of both Watts and Edwards.

*Ehlert’s use of Isaac Watts to support his thesis*

Ehlert supports his thesis that Isaac Watts (1674-1748) was a dispensationalist with the following comment:

Isaac Watts (1674-1748), the great hymn writer, was also a considerable theologian. His collected works fill six large volumes. He wrote an essay of some forty pages entitled, “The Harmony of all the Religions Which God ever Prescribed to Men and all his Dispensations towards them.” Due to the comparative inaccessibility of his works to the general public, it seems to be in order to quote here his definition of dispensations.<sup>778</sup>

Ehlert presents the following excerpt as his *prima facie* case that Watts was a dispensationalist: “The public dispensations of God toward men, are those wise and holy constitutions of his will and government, revealed or some way manifested to them, in the several successive periods or ages of the world, wherein are contained the duties which he expects from them . . .”<sup>779</sup> Having provided the rationale for classifying Watts as a dispensationalist, namely, his usage of the terms “dispensations of God” and “ages of the world,” Ehlert then provides a summary of Watts’ periodization:

Each of these dispensations of God, may be represented as different religions, or, at least, as different forms of religion, appointed for men in the several successive ages of the world.

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<sup>777</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>778</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>779</sup> *Leed ed., n.d., Vol. II, p. 625; London ed. of 1753, Vol. II, p. 543. Ibid., 39.*

His outline follows:

- I. The Dispensation of Innocency; or, the Religion of Adam at first
- II. The Adamical Dispensation of the Covenant of Grace; or, the Religion of Adam after his fall
- III. The Noachical Dispensation; or, the Religion of Noah
- IV. The Abrahamical Dispensation; or, the Religion of Abraham
- V. The Mosaical Dispensation; or, the Jewish Religion
- VI. The Christian Dispensation<sup>780</sup>

This constitutes Ehlert's entire argument, which can be summarized as follows: Watts used such terms as "dispensations" and "ages and stages" of the world and divided history into six periods. Consequently, he may serve as an early proponent of a dispensationalist system. Thus to qualify as an "ancient dispensationalist," all one had to do was to use the right terms and some form of periodization. Ehlert completely ignored the criteria that Darby made absolutely foundational to his own dispensational system: First, the clear distinction between Israel and the church, namely, the two peoples of God; second, the unifying theme of God's glory;<sup>781</sup> and third, a literal and plain hermeneutic. Upon further examination, it becomes clear that Watts not only rejected what became Darby's distinctive approach, but actually used periodization to support covenant theology, which Darby identified as the arch-foe of dispensationalism. Simply put, both dispensationalists and covenant theologians used the term "dispensation," and both employed some form of "periodization."

The following texts taken from *The Works of Isaac Watts* clearly demonstrate that Watts did not accept this clear distinction between Israel and the church as the "two peoples of God":

And indeed Judaism was but a sort of infant christianity (*sic*), a veiled gospel. The christian (*sic*) religion is Judaism fulfilled, or the gospel standing in open light. . . . Besides, it should be observed here also, that since the christian (*sic*) religion has received its full authority and divine establishment, the Jewish dispensation ceases, and is no longer

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<sup>780</sup> Ehlert, Arnold D. 1965. *A bibliographic history of dispensationalism*. BCH bibliographic series, no. 2. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 39-40. Note: see Watts, Isaac. 1812. *The works of the Rev. Isaac Watts*. London: Printed by Edward Baines, III:57 ff.

<sup>781</sup> Covenant theology would disagree with this definition, understanding the unifying theme to be soteriological.

owned, or aided by the Spirit of God, to produce these wonderful effects. . . . So that the doctrine of Christ is the only religion which we know of, that is practiced in the world, that has the stamp of divine authority above sixteen hundred years . . . so there is no other religion ever since can produce and shew such divine testimony; for there is salvation in no other name; Acts iv.12.<sup>782</sup>

We have glory in our religion, that distinguishes it from, and advances it above the Jewish dispensation . . .<sup>783</sup>

The Jewish dispensation was the childish or infant state of the church of God, as it is described, Gal. iv. 1-3, &c.<sup>784</sup>

The Christian dispensation is an extension of the Mosaic, or rather the Abrahamic covenant. It abolishes the Jewish peculiarity, the law of ordinances, and the rite of circumcision. It includes in its capacious inclosure all of every country, whether Jew or Gentile, who believe in Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah . . .<sup>785</sup>

But the christian (*sic*) dispensation is and shall be conveyed through the world, to all the heathen nations, as well as to the Jews, and that by a multitude of messengers . . . nor shall any other dispensation succeed it. . . . I might add here some characteristics of the christian (*sic*) dispensation, which the apostle gives in 2 Cor. iii. 6-18 whereby he exalts it above all the religion of the Jews, and especially the Sinai-covenant.<sup>786</sup>

The awful and glorious scene of the day of judgment is spread out at large in christian (*sic*) dispensation, together with the decision of the eternal states of the righteous, and the wicked according to their work, when everlasting joy, or everlasting sorrow shall be the portion of every son and daughter of Adam.<sup>787</sup>

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<sup>782</sup> Watts, Isaac. 1812. *The works of the Rev. Isaac Watts in nine volumes*. London: Printed by Edward Baines, I:23-24.

<sup>783</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>784</sup> Watts, Isaac. 1822. *A short view of the whole scripture history: with a continuation of the Jewish affairs from the Old Testament, till the time of Christ; and an account of the chief prophecies that relate to Him: represented in a way of question and answer*. London: Printed for F. C. and J. Rivington [and 11 other publishers], 56.

<sup>785</sup> Watts, Isaac, David Jennings, and Philip Doddridge. 1754. *The posthumous works of the late Reverend Dr. Isaac Watts, containing the second part of The improvement of the mind. Also A discourse on the education of children and youth... Published from his manuscript by D. Jennings and P. Doddridge*. London: Longman, 93.

<sup>786</sup> Watts, Isaac. 1812. *The works of the Rev. Isaac Watts, D.D. in nine volumes*. London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, by Edward Baines, II:64.

<sup>787</sup> *Ibid.*, 65, 66. Note: The Jews and Gentiles would be included in the phrase "son and daughter of Adam." According to Watts, all mankind is subsumed into one and will be judged according to their works in line with the covenant of grace.



It is not confined to one sex only, or to one age. The children are called as well as the fathers, and men and women are invited to partake of this blessing in Christ. *There is neither male nor female*, neither young nor old, neither Greek nor Jew, that they have any distinction put upon them, to exclude them from this grace, *they are all one in Christ Jesus*, Gal. iii.28.<sup>788</sup>

In the christian (*sic*) dispensation the gospel or covenant of grace is revealed more perfectly and plainly than before . . .<sup>789</sup>

Watts cites Gal. 3:28 to reinforce his conviction that far from there being two peoples of God, the “Jewish dispensation” has ceased and been replaced by the “Christian dispensation,” whereby the covenant of grace is extended to Jew and Gentile alike. Thus in Christ Jesus the two peoples are made one.

The second defining feature of dispensationalism concerns the unifying theme of God’s glory, but this too is negated by Watts in favour of the “covenant of grace,” thus providing the soteriological hermeneutic of covenant theology.

Hence it comes to pass, that in describing the several religions of men, or the public dispensations of God, we do not so much enter into his eternal designs, or the secret and inward transactions of grace, either with, or concerning the children of men, in order to bring them into his covenant of grace, nor do we search into his early and divine transactions with Christ Jesus, his Son, in the covenant of redemption, in order to the salvation of men:<sup>790</sup>

Thus it was also, in the jewish (*sic*) law, or Sinai covenant, which was not the gospel, but an additional constitution, relating only to the jewish (*sic*) nation, to be governed by God as the peculiar king. And it was really distinct from the covenant of grace or gospel of salvation, whereby Adam, Noah, Abraham, and the Israelites themselves were to be saved. . . It is true, indeed, the jewish (*sic*) law had much of grace in it as well as much of terror, and in many parts of it, it represented,

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<sup>788</sup> Watts, Isaac. 1811. *Sermons, on various subjects, divine and moral: designed for the use of Christian families, as well as for the hours of devout retirement; with a hymn, suited to each subject*. Macpherson: Published by F. Wright, 401.

<sup>789</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>790</sup> Watts, Isaac. 1812. *The works of the Rev. Isaac Watts*. London: Printed by Edward Baines, III:333.

typified, witnessed and held forth the gospel or covenant of grace, whereby all believers in all ages are to be saved . . .<sup>791</sup>

It may be granted, indeed, there was much grace and mercy mingled in this political law or covenant of life, between God as a civil king, and Israel as his subjects in this world; but still this was not the gospel or covenant of grace and salvation, whereby the pious Jews were saved from the wrath of God . . .<sup>792</sup>

Thus Ehlert's argument that Isaac Watts was a dispensationalist is clearly negated by the fact that Watts subscribed to the covenant of grace, the central doctrine of covenant theology. It is true that Watts had a system of periodization, and his nomenclature included such terms as "dispensations" or "ages and stages," but to call him an example of ancient dispensationalism is clearly in error. Watts, by his rejection of the two peoples of God in favour of only one people of God under the covenant of grace, undercuts Ehlert's argument entirely.

*Ehlert's use of John Edwards (1637-1716) to support his thesis*

Ehlert comments that "John Edwards<sup>793</sup> . . . wrote the first extensive treatment on the subject of dispensations that has come to our attention."<sup>794</sup>

Ehlert cites Edwards' *A Compleat History or Survey of all the Dispensations*. Ehlert made the following comment on this work: "It is not possible to go into detail here as to the great mass of material contained in this work. One can only recommend its perusal to any who would attempt to understand the beginnings of dispensationalism in its larger sense."<sup>795</sup> I will use this source in order to demonstrate the fallacy of Ehlert's argument and to show that Edwards's writings negate the very basis of dispensationalism.

Having made the remark that the scheme provided by Edwards is "rather involved," Ehlert then provides a periodization for Edwards as follows:

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<sup>791</sup> Watts, Isaac, David Jennings, Philip Doddridge, and George Burder. 1810. *The works of the reverend and learned Isaac Watts, D.D. containing, besides his sermons, and essays on miscellaneous subjects, several additional pieces*. London: J. Barfield, III:599.

<sup>792</sup> *Ibid.*, 629

<sup>793</sup> Ehlert is incorrect in his dating for Edwards, which he gives as 1639-1716. It should read 1637-1716. Ehlert, Arnold D. 1965. *A bibliographic history of dispensationalism*. BCH bibliographic series, no. 2. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 36.

<sup>794</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>795</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

- I. Innocency and Felicity, or Adam created upright
- II. Sin and Misery, Adam fallen
- III. Reconciliation, or Adam recovered from Adam's redemption to the end of the World, "The discovery of the blessed seed to Adam"
  - a. Patriarchal economy: (1) Adamical, antediluvian. (2) Noachical. (3) Abrahamic.
  - b. Mosaical
  - c. Gentile (concurrent with c and b)
  - d. Christian or Evangelical: (1) Infancy, primitive period, past. (2) Childhood, present period. (3) Manhood, future (millennium). (4) Old age, from the loosing of Satan to the conflagration.<sup>796</sup>

Like Watts, Edwards did not teach the notion of the two peoples of God, as the following texts demonstrate:

Therefore the Apostle saith, the law was our school-master to bring us to Christ; which shews the inferior nature of the law, and that it was to indure but for a time, for the authority of a school-master over those whom he teacheth is but temporary. The legal pedagogy was to cease and Christ was to be the end of the law to every one that believeth, Rom. 10.4.<sup>797</sup>

Thus he [God] plainly erases and abolishes the Mosaic service, and calls those that worship God in the Evangelical manner the true worshippers.<sup>798</sup>

Christ came to exprobrate to them [Jews] the want of more perfect fruit, and to put a period to the dispensation of the Jews, so that it should quite wither away and be null'd.<sup>799</sup>

. . . of the Jewish Church; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; they shall be converted, and become obedient Christians; and there shall be one fold, one church, agreeing in the same faith, and

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<sup>796</sup> Ibid., 37, 38.

<sup>797</sup> Edwards, John. 1699. *Polpoikilos sophia, a compleat history or survey of all the dispensations and methods of religion, from the beginning of the world to the consummation of all things, as represented in the Old and New Testament shewing the several reasons and designs of those different administrations, and the wisdom and goodness of God in the government of His church, through all the ages of it : in which also, the opinion of Dr. Spencer concerning the Jewish rites and sacrifices is examin'd, and the certainty of the Christian religion demonstrated against the cavils of the Deists, &c.* London: Printed for Daniel Brown, Jonath. Robinson, Andrew Bell, John Wyat, and E. Harris, 433.

<sup>798</sup> Ibid., 434.

<sup>799</sup> Ibid., 513.

worship, and religious practice; and one Shepherd, they shall acknowledge to be their head, and pastor.<sup>800</sup>

. . . the Jews in the last times shall obtain mercy, justified with us by Grace in Christ. The Jews, saith another Godly Father, shall turn unto God, and believe in Jesus, at the end of the world and be saved.<sup>801</sup>

This might convince them that Judaism was to give place to Christianity, which is large and fitted for all the World, which hath God, the Church, Religion, and Salvation all in common. This is a great Prerogative of Christianity that it is Universal, and excludeth no People or Nations, whereas the Religion and Worship of the Jews was narrow and scant, and confined to themselves; which is a Demonstration that it was Temporary, and that there was to be a change of the Mosaik Law and Administration.<sup>802</sup>

So, i.e. in this Manner and Method all Israel shall be Saved, the whole Body of the Jews shall be received into the Church.<sup>803</sup>

Far from supporting the doctrine of the two peoples of God, Edwards supports the opposite thesis that both Jew and Gentile are one in Christ. Regarding the second defining feature of dispensationalism, namely, the unifying theme of God's glory, Edwards makes the following comments:

The Covenant made with the Israelites at the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai was the Covenant of Grace, though it seem'd to resemble the Covenant of Works. The Covenant of Grace was completed and perfected by Christ's Coming, and not before. The Mediator, the Terms, the Seals of this Covenant now fully manifested. It is proved that according to the Stile of the Scripture the Old and New Covenant are the same Covenant of Grace.<sup>804</sup>

The Christian Institution and the New Covenant of Grace therein contained, are the Will and Testament of our Saviour, wherein he hath set down what he would have done after his death (for that is the true notion of a Testament.) Christ the Testator died, and bequeathed to us the Gospel.<sup>805</sup>

John Edwards subscribed to the covenant of grace, and this, together with the Jews and Gentiles being one in Christ, negates the principal doctrines of dispensationalism as Darby taught them.

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<sup>800</sup> Ibid., 684.

<sup>801</sup> Ibid., 692.

<sup>802</sup> Ibid., 423.

<sup>803</sup> Ibid., 719.

<sup>804</sup> Ibid., 340.

Ehlert's definition of periodization

Clearly, in *A Bibliographic history of Dispensationalism* Ehlert gives too much significance to the use of periodization to prove his thesis. As just shown, two of his best examples of “ancient dispensationalism” used dispensations to prove covenant theology. This is diametrically opposed to Darby’s dispensational system. In a second work entitled *Early periodization of redemptive history*, Ehlert again addresses the subject.<sup>806</sup> In this work, Ehlert misinterprets a work by Karl Löwith to support his own thesis about periodization. According to Ehlert:

Karl Loewith in his *Meaning of History*<sup>807</sup> develops a definition of the term “Philosophy of history” to mean “a systematic interpretation of universal history in accordance with a principle by which historical events and successions are unified and directed toward an ultimate meaning. Taken in this sense,” he says, “philosophy of history is . . . entirely dependent on theology of history, in particular on the theological concept of history as a history of fulfillment and salvation.” He says further that the “ancients did not presume to make sense of the world or to discover its ultimate meaning.” He contends that “philosophy of history originates with the Hebrew and Christian faith in a fulfillment and that it ends in the secularization [we presume he means here periodization or division into ages] of its eschatological pattern . . . To the Jews and Christians . . . history was primarily a history of salvation, and, as such, the proper concern of prophets, preachers, and teachers . . .” (*Meaning in History*, Chicago, 1958, p. 1-5 passim).<sup>808</sup>

By presuming that Löwith meant periodization when he wrote secularization, Ehlert radically changed the meaning of Löwith’s argument. Löwith uses the term “secularization” eleven times in his book and is very precise in his definition of the word. He uses it in its normative sense, which has nothing whatsoever to do with the notion of “periodization.” I give as my examples the following passages: “Christianity might ultimately be ‘responsible’ for the possibility of its own secularization, including its non-Christian consequences, but the original proclamation of a Kingdom of God certainly did not intend to

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<sup>805</sup> Ibid., 582.

<sup>806</sup> The system of ages and stages or dispensations.

<sup>807</sup> Ehlert has the title wrong. It should read *Meaning in History*.

make the world more worldly than it was for the pagans.”<sup>809</sup> “The modern world is as Christian as it is un-Christian because it is the outcome of an age-long process of secularization. Compared with the pagan world before Christ. . . our modern world is worldly and irreligious and yet dependent on the Christian creed from which it is emancipated.”<sup>810</sup> “. . . the secularization of the world which became increasingly worldly . . .”<sup>811</sup> Löwith consistently uses the term “secularization” to refer to the historical process by which Christianity’s supernatural orientation gave way to a more “worldly” perspective, which makes Ehlert’s “translation” of the concept for his own purposes completely unwarranted.

It remains then to return to Ehlert’s monograph to derive further understanding of his notion of periodization. Ehlert attempts to show historically that the use of ages and stages developed from an ancient period, through the Jewish tradition, apocalyptic literature, the Qumran scrolls, pseudepigraphic literature, and the church fathers.<sup>812</sup> Ehlert’s closing remark states that his *Bibliographic History of Dispensationalism* . . . brings the story up to the present.<sup>813</sup>

In summary, it must be concluded that while Ehlert is able to show that various forms of periodization were common throughout the history of theology, the mere use of “dispensations” or “ages” does not validate his claim that the dispensationalist system existed before Darby—especially when those who divided history in this way did so to prove concepts that were completely at odds with Darby’s system. As can be seen in his misrepresentation of Löwith’s views, sometimes Ehlert twisted the evidence to support his point of view. The comments of John Gerstner seem judicious: “Unfortunately, Ehlert views anyone who used the term dispensation as a dispensationalist and thus his bibliography (which cites such foes of Dispensationalism as Jonathan

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<sup>808</sup> Ehlert, Arnold D. Spr 1971. Early periodization of redemptive history. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. 14 (2):95-102, 95, 96.

<sup>809</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>810</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>811</sup> *Ibid.*, 158. Note.

<sup>812</sup> Ehlert, Arnold D. Spr 1971. Early periodization of redemptive history. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. 14 (2):95-102.

<sup>813</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

Edwards and Charles Hodge) is almost worthless as a prior bibliography of Dispensationalism.”<sup>814</sup> Ehlert’s argument supports covenant theology, not dispensationalism. We are then left with the correct conclusion that a system of periodization existed prior to Darby, but that dispensationalism itself has its origin in the person of John Nelson Darby.

Ehlert’s loyal supporters

Other dispensationalists and thinkers are appreciative of Ehlert’s argument and often cite him as a source for early forms of dispensationalism. Clarence E. Mason<sup>815</sup> is one person who found Ehlert useful in his debate with John Wick Bowman. Mason adopted Ehlert’s thesis in his apologetic to Bowman’s monograph, *The Bible and Modern Religions*.<sup>816</sup> Bowman’s opening paragraph stated: “Dispensationalism is a term descriptive of a fantastic type of interpretation of the Scriptures which originated toward the beginning of the last century among certain groups of people in England who later became organically related and have since been styled ‘Plymouth Brethren.’”<sup>817</sup> Bowman’s argument was against both dispensationalism and the *Scofield Reference Bible*.<sup>818</sup> Mason’s reply to Bowman was fully supportive of Ehlert’s line of reasoning:

Not only is it evident that the multiple-age thesis had its roots deep in the past, but it can be demonstrated that there were well-developed multiple-age systems being projected in the postreformation, pre-Darby period. Arnold Ehlert cites fifteen lists of more or less

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<sup>814</sup> Gerstner, John H. 1991. *Wrongly dividing the word of truth: a critique of dispensationalism*. Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 8.

<sup>815</sup> Dr. Clarence E. Mason was former Dean of Philadelphia College of Bible and part of the editorial committee which spent 14 years revising and updating the Scofield notes for the *New Scofield Reference Bible*, published in 1967. Bateman, Herbert W., and Darrell L. Bock. 1999. *Three central issues in contemporary dispensationalism: a comparison of traditional and progressive views*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 27.

<sup>816</sup> Bowman, John Wick. Ap 1956. Bible and modern religions, pt 2: Dispensationalism. *Interpretation*. 10 (2):170-187.

<sup>817</sup> *Ibid.*, 170,

<sup>818</sup> “The writer had intended to dwell at some length on the genuine excellencies to be found in the Scofield Bible, for there are such. But as the present reading and meditation proceeded with a view to writing this article, the fact was so overwhelmingly borne in upon him afresh that this book represents perhaps the most dangerous heresy currently to be found within Christian circles that his first intention was abandoned. . . . To say that there is much true Christian teaching in the Scofield Bible is merely what may as truly be said of Roman Catholic theology, of Christian Science, and of Mormonism. *Ibid.*, 172.

extensiveness taken from writers in the two hundred years prior to Darby, i.e., 1625-1825 (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, 101:447-69, October-December, 1944). Three of the most interesting of these were produced by John Edwards (1639-1716), Isaac Watts, the noted hymn writer (1674-1748), and Pierre Poiret, a French writer (1646-1719).<sup>819</sup>

This writer does not believe that the prominence of Darby should be confused with the dominance of Darby, and he believes the facts cited in the foregoing paragraphs are adequate proof that dispensationalism was not invented approximately 125 years ago by Darby.<sup>820</sup>

In summary, Clarence E. Mason used Ehlert's *Bibliographic History of Dispensationalism* as primary source material in his response to John Wick Bowman. If Bowman was in error in his *ad hominem* argument against dispensationalism and Scofield, Mason was in error in his choice of Ehlert to support his thesis.

Roy Zuck also found Ehlert's *Bibliographic History* useful:

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) was the first to give systematic form to the doctrine of ages and dispensations. But he was by no means the first to recognize and employ the basic principles on which this doctrine stands. Ehlert's valuable work, *A Bibliographic History of Dispensationalism*, show that this doctrine has a history almost as old as the church itself. In every major area of importance in the early church one finds rudimentary features of dispensationalism that bear striking resemblance to their contemporary offspring.<sup>821</sup>

Zuck falls into the same trap as Ehlert. He states that the "basic principles" of dispensationalism predate Darby. His "rudimentary features" refer to "periodization," thus missing the whole point of Darby's doctrine of dispensationalism concerning the two peoples of God and the unifying theme of God's glory in history.

*Conclusion: Darby as adapter, not inventor*

By graphically putting together the various notions of dispensationalism as propounded by Ehlert and those who maintain the

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<sup>819</sup> Mason, Clarence E. Ja 1957. A review of "Dispensationalism" by John Wick Bowman. [1]. *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 114 (453):10-22, 17.

<sup>820</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>821</sup> Zuck, Roy B. 1995. *Vital prophetic issues: examining promises and problems in eschatology*. Vital issues series, v. 5. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Resources, 58.



invention thesis, it can be shown that there is a considerable difference between these and the dispensationalist system developed by Darby. Ehlert, in attempting to show a historical precedence for dispensationalism, has presented an argument that supports dispensationalism's archrival, covenant theology. The invention thesis is in error by not understanding that ancient periodization preceded Darby and that Darby, far from inventing dispensationalism, was simply adaptive of earlier forms of periodization.

Darby's dispensationalism can be demonstrated as follows:

*Ancient periodization + the two peoples of God + the unifying theme of God's glory + a plain, literal hermeneutic = Dispensationalism*

Although Ehlert argues otherwise, by examining two of his best examples of "ancient dispensationalism" namely, Watts and Edwards, the scholar reaches the conclusion that his thesis is as follows:

*Ancient periodization + the one people of God (the church) + the covenant of grace = Dispensationalism*

The invention thesis that Darby originated dispensationalism is also in error. This is summarized as follows:

*Darby's periodization + the two peoples of God + the unifying theme of God's glory + a plain, literal hermeneutic = Dispensationalism*

## Conclusion

I have stated in my introduction that I would assemble the puzzle that constitutes Darby's dispensationalist system, to provide an overall picture of his eschatology as it related to his contemporaries and to demonstrate that he was "adaptive" in forming his doctrine of dispensationalist millenarianism.

My thesis presents a different view from that of other scholars, for several reasons. A number of dispensationalist thinkers, to counter the charge that Darby's dispensationalism is novel and unique, have argued that his system was rooted in writers and thinkers dating from the Patristic Writings. But, as I have shown, this argument is flawed, primarily because of a misunderstanding of the accepted definition of dispensationalism and what amounts to mischaracterizing what the sources actually say. The arguments presented by Ehlert, for example, appear highly convincing and evince sound reasoning, were it not for the fact that the sources he cites support not dispensationalism but Covenant theology, by using a system of periodization that did not contain key Darbyite characteristics. This study has also challenged the opposite perspective—that Darby invented dispensationalism in the early nineteenth century. This common but unscholarly approach is also in error, since it fails to take into account Darby's usage of earlier ideas and terminology, which he adapted and incorporated into his own system of periodization and his notion of the two peoples of God.

I have researched the key tenets of Darby's eschatology and have shown that each part has its own unique facets. Darby's doctrine of the "two peoples of God" was rooted in the inviolability of the Abrahamic Covenant, which understands that the "land, seed, and the blessing," as promised by God, belong to national Israel in perpetuity. Darby found a way to accommodate the two peoples of God to His redemptive plan. The "two peoples of God" doctrine would appear to be unique to Darby; but he used terminology regarding God's earthly and heavenly kingdoms that existed well before his time. So while the doctrine was unique to Darby, he adapted terms already in use.

Darby's interpretation of Daniel's seventy-week prophecy was very much in line with other thinkers both prior to and contemporary with him. He used the commonly accepted "year for a day" principle to arrive at 490 literal years. What was different about his interpretation was the insertion of an indeterminate gap between the 69<sup>th</sup> week, which ended with the stoning of Stephen, and the 70<sup>th</sup>, which would usher in the Second Coming. Unlike other scholars, I have shown that the gap theory actually originated with Isaac Newton, who developed a similar view in his book *Observations upon the prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John* a full century prior to Darby, who was fully aware of Newton's thesis and borrowed the doctrine to suit his eschatological interpretation. As stated in my introduction, the gap theory absolved Darby of calculating a date for the Second Coming, as many historicists had tried but failed to do. The ramification of my argument is that Darby assimilated the Jesuit futurist hermeneutic as propounded by Ribera and Bellarmine and his gap theory from Newton.

The pretribulational rapture of the church was a doctrine very much allied to the two peoples of God. It allowed God to remove the parenthetical church in order to carry on his redemptive work with national Israel. There are aspects of the rapture that would appear unique to Darby, namely, that it would be "secret." However, I also demonstrated that the notion of the rapture, though not pretribulational, had been extant in "terms" well before Darby. It is my contention that the pretribulational rapture of the church was not unique to Darby but that he was adaptive of much earlier nonpretribulational nomenclature that finds its roots in the middle English of being "rapt vp."

The "ruin of the church" is central to understanding Darby; the doctrine is rooted in his reaction to Dr. Magee's Charge in 1826. As I have shown, this launched Darby on a ministry that embraced both the Plymouth Brethren and an extensive publishing career. I have demonstrated that the term the "ruin of the church" and its meaning can be traced to writers and thinkers prior to Darby's day. In particular, his extensive reliance upon *Milner's Church History* and the fact that Milner discusses the term extensively would alone negate any originality on the part of Darby. Besides Milner, I have also

shown that both Jean Claude and John Calvin used the term. Once again, Darby adapted his use of extant terminology of “the ruin of the church” for his particular brand of eschatology.

In summary, I contend that very little of Darby’s eschatology was unique to him. I would rather portray him as “adapting” earlier concepts to suit his own particular version of dispensationalism. I have demonstrated that Darby’s eschatology is highly convoluted and that the argument that his doctrines are outside the realm of academic respectability is a valid one. Equally valid is that Darby’s dispensationalism remained peripheral to mainstream British Christianity but became central in America towards the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century following the Niagara Bible conferences. Darby continues to shape and mould much of American dispensationalism, as witnessed by the continuing popularity of novels such as Hal Lindsey’s *The Late, Great Planet Earth* and Timothy LaHaye’s *Left Behind* series. The conundrum to date concerns the validity of much of the popular eschatology as portrayed in the *Left Behind* series. The two current but erroneous arguments presented in this dissertation do little to clarify how Darby put together his eschatology. The options are either that Darby formulated his dispensationalism “out of thin air” (the invention thesis) or that it was grounded in much earlier writings (Ehlert’s thesis). These do little to affirm or disavow dispensationalist millenarianism as propounded by Darby. Indeed, if we are to accept Ehlert’s thesis, then Darby is accorded credibility that is not due him. This dissertation, while demonstrating why these arguments are in error, has also established that Darby “adapted” extant doctrines to suit his eschatological doctrines. The question is no longer simply the validity of Darby’s eschatology, but also the sources he used.

It is too easy to dismiss Darby as being “outside the realm of academic respectability.” This assertion does little to defuse the influence of Darbyite thinking among a large section of American evangelicalism. It may be true that this form of evangelicalism is driven by unchallenged subjectivity, together with the influence of popular works on eschatology. While an academic approach may do little to diffuse this popularity, this dissertation has

at least provided that groundwork. In short, the affirmation or disavowal of dispensationalism need no longer rest on erroneous ideas about how Darby may or may not have put together his eschatology, but on the clear understanding of his adaptive process.

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