Chapter 4: John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)
The Father of Premillennial Dispensationalism

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1. Darby's Background and the Origins of the Premillennial Dispensationalism

John Nelson Darby is regarded by many as the father of premillennial dispensationalism and the most influential figure in the development of its prodigy, Christian Zionism[1]. Darby was ordained in the Church of Ireland in 1825 with a burning desire to evangelise Roman Catholics through the work of the Home Mission. He claimed that Catholics were '*becoming Protestants at a rate of 600 to 800 a week*' which amounted to something of a revival.[2] However, when his Bishop insisted that they also swear an oath of allegiance to the English Crown, Darby protested that this was unthinkable because it was, *'unscriptural, and derogatory to the glory of Christ'*.[3] His Bishop was unmoved, so Darby, remaining resolutely consistent with his own emerging theological stance, took the logical step of renouncing the visible church, both Anglican and Dissenting, as apostate. '*This manifestation of the glory of Christ by the Church in unity no longer exists.'* [4]

His analysis of the contemporary ecclesiastical scene was to become increasingly pessimistic, judgmental and sectarian. His repeated response was to declare '*The Church is in ruins.*'[5] He went on to insist that this was not merely the result of denominational division but that, '*...the entire nature and purpose of the church has become so perverted that it is diametrically opposed to the fundamental reason for which it is instituted*'.[6]

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[1]Donald E. Wagner, *Anxious for Armageddon* (Waterloo, Ontario, Herald Press, 1995), pp. 81, 88. This is disputed by Charles Ryrie who attempts to place the origin of Dispensationalism, unconvincingly, some 150 years earlier allegedly finding evidence in the writings of Pierre Poiret (1646-1719) and John Edwards (1639-1716) as well as Isaac Watts (1674-1748) in *Dispensationalism* (Chicago, Moody Press, 1995), pp. 65-71.

[2]J. N. Darby, as cited by W. Blair Neatby, *A History of the Plymouth Brethren* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1901), p. 16.

[3]W. G. Turner, *John Nelson Darby* (London, Chapter Two, 1901, 1986), p. 17.

[4]J. N. Darby, 'Reflections on the Ruined Condition of the Church' *The Collected Writings of John Nelson Darby,* Eccl. I, Vol. I. William Kelly, ed. (Kingston on Thames, Stow Hill Bible and Trust Depot, 1962), p. 201.

[5]J. N. Darby, 'On the Formation of Churches, Further developments' *The Collected Writings,* Eccl. I, Vol. 1. William Kelly, ed. (Kingston on Thames, Stow Hill Bible and Trust Depot, 1962), p. 303. See also Eccl. III, Vol. XIV., '*What the Christian has amid the Ruin of the Church'*

[6]J. N. Darby, 'What is the Unity of the Church?' *Collected Writings.,* Eccl. IV, Vol. XX. p.456.

The prevailing eschatology arising from the 18th Century Great Awakening was essentially postmillennial, inspiring great optimism and the rise of world-wide missionary endeavour[7]. This Darby, and others like Irving, opposed strongly and vigorously. In a lecture given in Geneva in 1840, Darby insisted,

> *What we are about to consider will tend to show that, instead of permitting ourselves to hope for a continued progress of good, we must expect a progress of evil; and that the hope of the earth being filled with the knowledge of the Lord before the exercise of His judgement, and the consummation of this judgement on the earth, is delusive. We are to expect evil, until it becomes so flagrant that it will be necessary for the Lord to judge it... I am afraid than many a cherished feeling, dear to the children of God, has been shocked this evening; I mean, their hope that the gospel will spread by itself over the whole earth during the actual dispensation.*[8]

During the period 1826-1828 he began meeting with a few influential friends for prayer, study and fellowship and following the publication of his first tract in 1828[9] they established what in effect became an informal house church. Their meetings drew others disenchanted with the religious establishment and soon developed into a close knit and exclusive connection of fellowships known as the Brethren.

To both proponents and critics, Darby was the undeniable founder and apologist for the Brethren movement, or Darbyites as they were sometimes called. Doctrinally, he was the primary influence in expressing and propagating what came to be the distinctive literalist theology of the Brethren, forging and maintaining a rigid, almost fanatical creed of doctrinal purity, in what they believed were the final days of history.

Darby's distinctive premillennial views were inevitably influenced by those of a similar persuasion whom he met at the prophetic conferences held near Dublin under the sponsorship of Lady Powerscourt from 1830 to 1833, which came to be shaped by his dominating and charismatic leadership.[10] These meetings can be traced originally to prophetic retreats held at the home of Henry Drummond in Albury, Surrey, from 1826, which Lady Powerscourt also attended. These became '*the centre for wild speculation*',[11] under the influence of Edward Irving, concerning amongst other things, the discovery of the lost tribes of Israel and the imminent restoration of the Jews.

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[7]Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope* (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1971), pp. 105-185.
[8]J. N. Darby, 'Progress of Evil on the Earth' *Collected Writings.,* Prophetic, Vol. 1, pp. 471, 483.
[9]A. H. Newman, *A Manual of Church History* (Philadelphia, American Baptist Publications Society, 1902). *'Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ'* later called 'the Brethren's first pamphlet.' by Neatby, in*, A History*., p. 18.
[10]Clarence Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1986), p. 146.
[11]Roy Coad, *A History of the Brethren Movement* (Exeter, Paternoster, 1968), p. 109.

These exclusive prophetic gatherings which focused on a pessimistic interpretation of world events and the imminent return of Christ, confirmed both Darby's denunciation of the established churches, and also his own prophetic calling. Coad insists, '*He felt himself an instrument of God, burdened with an urgent call to His people to come out of associations doomed to judgement.*'[12]

From the small beginnings in Albury, in less than 6 years the Powerscourt Conference of 1831 was attended by four hundred *'elite'* Evangelicals[13] drawn from all over Britain and Ireland.[14] Brethren leaders present at Powerscourt Castle included J. N. Darby, George Muller, Henry Soltau, John Synge, J. G. Bellett and Henry Craik. The final conference in 1833 ended in division between those who sided with the Brethren and those who still identified with the established churches. Coad describes Lady Powerscourt in tears over the issue.[15] According to Coad, she was also planning to marry Darby at this time, although the engagement was broken off because of his increasingly itinerant ministry.

In a letter to the Editor of the Christian Herald, Darby mentions some of the controversial subjects discussed at the Prophecy Conference held at Powerscourt Castle in September 1832.

> *The belief in the coming of a personal Antichrist was common... The discussion of the subject of Antichrist led to an extensive development of scripture, and to much very profitable detection of the spirit by which he might work in the nations; though no definite conclusion was come to upon this; while the recognition of his actings amongst the Jews, in Jerusalem, was more definitely recognised by those more conversant with the subject.*[16]

> *Subjects for Consideration at the Meeting... An examination into the quotations given in the New Testament from the Old... The Prophetical character of each book in the Bible... Should we expect a personal Antichrist? If so, to whom will he be revealed?... By what covenant did the Jews, and shall the Jews, hold the land?... What light does Scripture throw on present events, and their moral character? What is next to be looked for and expected? Is there a prospect for a revival of Apostolic churches before the coming of Christ?*[17]

In another letter written in 1832, Darby describes the impact of the Powerscourt conference that year upon Ireland.

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[12]Coad, *History.*, p. 111.
[13]F. Roy Coad, *Prophetic Developments with Particular Reference to the Early Brethren Movement*, A Christian Brethren Research Fellowship Occasional Paper (1966), p. 24. cited in Murray, *Puritan*., p. 200.
[14]Murray, *Puritan.,* p. 199.
[15]Coad, *History.*, p. 109.
[16]John Nelson Darby, *Letters of John Nelson Darby, Volume 1, 1832-1868* (London, Stow Hill and Bible Tract Depot), p. 6.
[17]Darby, *Letters*., pp. 6-7.

In the meanwhile, the meeting at Powerscourt, as it has wrought conscious desires, and inquiry and prayer too, in the minds of many of the evangelical people in this place, there has been a considerable plunge made into the minds of this country by it, and this has partly exercised me, as interested in this country.[18]

Despite the indisputable evidence of Edward Irving's influence on those present, Darby rarely conceded to any such sources for the development of his own theological views. There is, however, one lone reference to Irving in Darby's 34 volumes. It is the one implicit acknowledgement of Irving's influence, albeit in the context of Darby disassociating himself from the fanciful prophecies of the Irvingites and the Catholic Apostolic Church.

The largest expression of piety and holiness prove nothing. They were found in Mr Irving's writings, and much most blessed and precious truth too; few writings could be named where there is so much.[19]

For Darby, '*Separation from evil was the divine principle of unity,*'[20] since doctrinal error led, so he claimed, to '*gross moral contamination.*'[21] On another occasion Darby admitted, *'I prefer quoting many passages than enlarging upon them.'*[22]

Not surprisingly perhaps, Charles Spurgeon observed in Darbyism, a growing tendency to isolationism, obscurantism and a party spirit.[23] Spurgeon regarded their hermeneutics as 'warped' and his colourful description might easily apply to some contemporary Christian Zionists, '*Plymouth Brethren delight to fish up some hitherto undiscovered tadpole of interpretation, and cry it round the town as a rare dainty.*'[24]

Former co-labourers like George Muller, Anthony Groves and Benjamin Newton, for example, experienced first hand Darby's severe and autocratic leadership which led to painful and repeated doctrinal schisms within the Brethren movement.[25]

Darby was a charismatic figure, a dominant personality, persuasive speaker and zealous missionary for his dispensationalist beliefs. He personally founded Plymouth Brethren churches as far away as Germany, Switzerland, France and the United States, and translated the entire Scriptures in what one ardent supporter claimed was, ' *...an entirely free and independent rendering of the whole original text, using all known helps.'* [26]

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[18]Darby, *Letters*., pp. 13.
[19]J. N. Darby, 'Remarks on a tract circulated by the Irvingites,' *Collected Writings.,* Doctrinal. IV, Vol. 15, p. 34.
[20]Turner*, Darby.*, p. 22.
[21]Coad, *History.*, p. 122.
[22]Darby, *Collected Writings*., Vol. 11, p. 363.
[23]Turner, *Darby.*, p. 34.
[24]C. H. Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries* (London, Banner of Truth Trust, 1876), p. 31.
[25]Coad, *History*., pp. 139-154.
[26]Turner, *Darby*., p. 53.

The churches Darby planted with the seeds of a separatist premillennial dispensationalism, in turn sent missionaries to Africa, the West Indies, Australia and New Zealand, so that by the time of his death in 1885, around 1500 Plymouth Brethren churches had already been founded world-wide. His views also came to influence the Bible and Prophetic Conferences associated with Niagara and other centres in North America from 1875.[27]

> *During his lifetime, Darby wrote more hymns than the Wesleys, travelled further than the Apostle Paul, and was a Greek and Hebrew scholar. His writings filled forty volumes... If Brightman was the father of Christian Zionism, then Darby was its greatest apostle and missionary...* [28]

2. Darby's Innovative Dispensational Scheme

Darby was not the first to discover 'dispensations' within Biblical history, nor was his own scheme universally accepted even within Brethren circles.[29] Prior to the rise of dispensationalism it was common to find history divided into three dispensations.

> *Divines designate these various dispensations as the Patriarchal, the Mosaic or Jewish, and the Christian; the first commencing with Adam, and reaching to the giving of the law; the second from the giving of the law to the death of Christ; the third from the death of Christ to the end of the world. All these were adapted to the circumstances of the family of man at these different periods: all, in regular succession, were mutually connected, and rendered preparatory to one another: all were subservient to the design of saving the world, and promoting the perfection and happiness of its rational and moral inhabitants.*[30]

In his principle work on the dispensations published in 1823, George Faber, an Anglican, likewise distinguished three stages in God's gracious dealing with mankind, Patriarchal, Levitical, and Christian. However, unlike Darby, he did not regard them as necessarily consecutive nor was each a remedy for the failure of the previous.

> *From the time of the fall down to the termination of the world, man lives under one and the same system of divine grace, a system, which was rendered necessary for him by the very circumstances of the fall, and which therefore at no one period can differ essentially from itself.*[31]

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[27]Joseph M. Canfield, *The Incredible Scofield and his Book* (Vallecito, California, Ross House Books, 1988), pp. 122 ff.

[28]Wagner, *Anxious*., p. 89.

[29]Ryrie attempts, unconvincingly, to show that the idea of dispensations were latent in the writings of the French mystic Pierre Poiret (1646-1719); an amillennial Calvinist John Edwards (1639-1716) and Isaac Watts (1674-1748). See Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago, Moody Press, 1995), pp. 65-71.

[30]McClintock and Strong Encyclopedia, PC Study Bible. Biblesoft 2000

[31]Faber, George Stanley, 'On the peculiar genius of the three dispensations, Patriarchal, Levitical, and Christian', *A Treatise on the Genius and Object of the Patriarchal, the Levitical and the Christian Dispensations* (London, C & J. Rivington. 1823), p. 2.

Jonathan Edwards, writing after Darby and his colleagues had begun to propound their more novel speculations, acknowledges there was no unanimity even on the distinction between the Old and New Dispensations.

> *There is, perhaps no part of divinity attended with so much intricacy, and wherein orthodox divines so much differ, as in stating the precise agreement and difference between the two dispensations of Moses and Christ*.[32]

Given the controversy over the extent of Edward Irving's influence on Darby, Irving was, already by 1828, using the term '*dispensation*' to contrast God's contemporary dealings between Israel and the church.

> *There are, and there can be, only two opinions with respect to this point: the first, that they are the last days of the Jewish; and the second, that they are the last days of the Christian dispensation.*[33]

Hugh M'Neile, another of those who attended the Albury Conferences in the 1820's, referred to three dispensations associated with Abraham, Moses and Christ, believing that Israel's national repentance would precede her restoration to the land.[34]

George Faber also wrote a number of speculative treaties on Israel, prophecy and biblical history. In 1822, for example, Faber spoke on the relative dating of the termination of the times of the Gentiles and the restoration of the Jewish people preceding the millennium, at the annual gathering of the London Jews Society.[35]

Timothy Stunt, the Brethren historian, has highlighted important correspondence, hitherto ignored, from S.P. Tregelles to B.W. Newton dating from 1857 and 1862. Both were former Brethren leaders and contemporaries with Darby. In two particular letters Tregelles highlights other French and German influences on Darby's emerging dispensational scheme.[36]

> *The book on Prophecy by the Pere Lambert is entitles Exposition des Predictions et des Promesses faites a l'Eglise pour les derniers temps de la Gentilite. Paris 1806. The views in this are much more sound than those in the Commentaries on the prophets by the President Agier (published at various times up to about 1824).*

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[32]Jonathan Edwards, *On Full Communion, Works*, (New York. 1848), 1:160.
[33]Edward Irving, *The Last Days A Discourse on the Evil Character of These Our Times, Proving Them to be The 'Perilous Times' and the 'Last Days'* (London, James Nisbit, 1850), p. 10.
[34]Hugh M'Neile, *The Prophecies Relative to the Jewish Nation* (London, Christian Book Society, 1878), p. 67. (for references to dispensations see pp. 50, 53, 64, 117, 120, 128).
[35]M'Neile, *Prophecies.,* p. 64.
[36]T.C.F. Stunt, 'The Tribulation of Controversy: Dave MacPherson, the Rapture Plot. A Review.' *Brethren Archivists' and Historians' Network Review.* (2000).

Lambert and Agier were the writers whom Mr J.N. Darby studied earnestly before he left the Church of England. I remember his speaking much about them in 1835; & when I saw what Agier had said, I learned the source of his notions. As soon as he learned German he read Olshausen (who had himself gathered from Agier) with avidity: I remember how earnestly he recommended Olshausen to me before I know a line of German. And thus out of Agier and Olshausen sprung up the system that divides the Church of the saved into classes essentially distinct and puts the saved on this dispensation on a ground indescribably higher than those before or after.[37]

...after quoting from his pamphlet The Throne of David (1840 twenty two years ago) This was just when Mr Darby was learning from Olshausen to split up the saved into classes essentially distinct.[38]

Perhaps unaware of these influences on Darby, Harry Ironside, who was for years the pastor of Moody Memorial Church in Chicago, and a dispensationalist sympathetic to Darby, claimed he had merely rediscovered the apostolic teaching lost to the church.

Until brought to the fore through the writings and preaching and teaching of a distinguished ex-clergyman, Mr J. N. Darby, in the early part of the last century, it is scarcely to be found in a single book or sermon through a period of sixteen hundred years.[39]

Charles Ryrie also concedes that it was Darby who systematised and popularised the idea of dispensationalism.[40] He does not however acknowledge that the term 'dispensation' was being used contemporaneously to Darby by more orthodox writers simply to distinguish the Old Testament from the New.[41]

The clearest expression of Darby's thinking is to be found in 'The Apostasy of the Successive Dispensations' published in *The Christian Witness* in October 1836. The following extended quotation includes every reference to the word 'dispensation'. It shows how vague and embryonic his views actually were, compared with later attempts by Scofield and then Ryrie to systematise seven distinct dispensations.

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[37]Letter from S.P. Tregelles to B.W. Newton, 29 January 1857, The Fry Collection, Christian Brethren Archive, John Rylands University Library, Manchester, CBA 7181 [7], cited in Stunt., Tribulation., (2000).

[38]Letter from S.P. Tregelles to B.W. Newton, 31 August 1862, The Fry Collection, Christian Brethren Archive, John Rylands University Library, Manchester, CBA 7181 [28], cited in Stunt., Tribulation., (2000).

[39]Harry A. Ironside, *The Mysteries of God* (New York, Loizeaux Brothers, 1908), pp. 50-51. Cited in Daniel P. Fuller, *Gospel and Law* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans, 1980), p. 13.

[40]Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*., p. 67.

[41]For example, Edward Arthur Litton, *The Mosaic Dispensation Considered as Introductory to Christianity*. *Eight Sermons given at the Bampton Lecture 1856* (London, Hatchard, 1856). See also Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture, viewed in connection with the whole series of the Divine Dispensations* (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1876)

*The detail of the history connected with these **dispensations** brings out many most interesting displays... But the **dispensations** themselves all declare some leading principle or interference of God, some condition in which He has placed man, principles which in themselves are everlastingly sanctioned of God, but in the course of these **dispensations** placed responsibly in the hands of man for the display and discovery of what he was, and the bringing in their infallible establishment in Him to whom the glory of them all rightly belonged... In every instance, there was a 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; and further, that there is no instance of the restoration of a **dispensation** afforded us, though there might be partial revivals of it through faith.*

*The **paradisaical** state cannot properly perhaps be called a **dispensation** in this sense of the word; but as regards the universal failure of man; it is a most important instance... Corruption, disorder, violence were the consequences of this, until the Lord destroyed the first world created... Here **dispensations,** properly speaking, begin. **On the first, Noah** I shall be very brief... The first account after his call we have of faithful Abraham which as a minuter circumstance I also pass briefly over...*

*But to take up the point of the **dispensation** - **obedience under the law** by which life was to be: this obedience they undertook; and Moses returned to receive the various orderings of divine appointment as under it, and the two tables of testimony. But this dispensation which met the failure of the world...*

*The ordinance or **dispensation of priesthood** failed in like manner. Before Aaron and his sons had gone out of the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, because the anointing oil of the Lord was upon them, Nahab and Abihu had already offered stranger fire and been consumed before the Lord...*

*The **kingly dispensation** failed in the same way as did the nation under the previous ordering which made way for the king (see Judges 2)... till the provocation's of Manasseh set aside all hope of recovery or way of mercy in that **dispensation**. The same is true of universal rule transferred to the Gentiles: Nebuchadnezzar, the golden head, sets up the golden image, persecutes the faithful, and is turned into the image of a beast for his pride.*

*The rejection of our blessed Lord proved that no present mercy or grace, no present interference of God in goodness here would meet the wilful and persevering enmity of the human heart, but only showed it in its true light. But this never being set up as a **dispensation** but only the manifestation of His Person (by faith), I pass by. **The last** we have to notice, in a humbled sense of sin in us, **is the present**, where we are apt to take our ease in the world... the **dispensation of the Spirit**. Much has been said, with strong objection to it, as to the apostasy or failure of this **dispensation**. The results are but too plain...*

*But the point which is proved is that this is not merely that it is in a bad state now, but that like all others it broke down in the commencement-no sooner fully established than it proved a failure... The remnant have been preserved... but the **dispensation** was gone. We belong to a better glory...*

*And as he cannot desire, so neither does Scripture present the restoration of a **dispensation**; it never justifies its actual condition; and though grace and faith may, as I have said, effect revivals during the long-suffering of God, the*

***dispensation**, as such, is actually gone, that the glory of the principle contained in it may shine forth in the hands of Messiah. The attempt to set this **dispensation** on another footing, as to its continuance, than those **dispensations** which have failed already, not only shows ignorance of the principles of God's dealings...*

*And the close of all **dispensation**, and the end of all question and title of authority shall come, and all be finished, God shall be all in all without question and without failure...*

*Reference to the second chapter of Galatians will confirm and establish the point historically as to the present **dispensation**... In fact the **Gentile** **dispensation**, as a distinct thing, took its rise at the death of Stephen, the witness that the Jews resisted the Holy Ghost: as their fathers did, so did they.*[42]

It is suggested that Darby was not attempting to devise a specific scheme of dispensations here but rather, as his title implies, merely showing how all attempts by mankind to find acceptance with God had failed. It was only later in the writings of Scofield that seven dispensations became fixed within dispensational thinking. Ryrie's interpretation of Darby's dispensations is actually significantly at variance with Darby's own writings but more consistent with Scofield. It is an understatement when Ryrie claims Darby's scheme is, '*not always easily discerned from his writings'*.[43] It is suggested that Ryrie has read back into Darby's mind, a scheme that suited his own purposes. From Darby's own pen we may attempt to reconstruct his dispensational chronology and compare it with Ryrie's interpretation, together with Scofield's later 1909 version, itself at variance with the further revision made by Schuyler English in 1967.

Darby's Dispensations[44]	**Ryrie's Version of Darby**[45]	**Scofield's Dispensations**[46]
	1. Paradisaical state	1. Innocency (Genesis 1:28)
1. Noah (Government)	2. Noah	2. Conscience (Genesis 3:23)
	3. Abraham	3. Human Government (Genesis 8:20) 4. Promise (Genesis 12:1)
2. Moses (Law) 3. Aaron (Priesthood) 4. Kingly (Manasseh)	4. Israel- under law under priesthood under kings	5. Law (Exodus 19:8)
5. Spirit (Gentile)	5. Gentiles 6. Spirit	6. Grace (John 1:17)
	7. Millennium	7. Kingdom (Ephesians 1:10)

[42]J. N. Darby, 'The Apostasy of the Successive Dispensations.' *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby,* Vol. 2*,* Ecclesiastical No. 1. William Kelly, ed. (Kingston on Thames, Stow Hill Bible and Trust Depot, 1962). pp. 124-130 (*emphasis added*).

[43]Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 68.

[44]Darby, *Apostasy*., pp. 124-130.

[45]Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 68, 71.

[46]C. I. Scofield, 'Introduction,' *The Scofield Reference Bible* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1909), p. 5.

When he wrote, *'The paradisaical state cannot properly perhaps be called a dispensation in this sense of the word... On the first, Noah I shall be very brief'*, Darby clearly and unambiguously regarded Noah as marking the first dispensation, something no other dispensationalist has held to since. Nor is there any indication that Darby regarded there as being any future dispensation after the present one.

B. W. Newton, a colleague of Darby interpreted the dispensations in yet another pattern, indicating that such a scheme is not as self evident in Scripture as Dispensationalists would wish.

> *'The Adamic - the Antediluvian - the Noahic - the Hagar dispensation of the Jews - the Nebuchadnezzar dispensation of power - the Sarah dispensation of the church - all have failed."*[47]

Biblical prophecy and millennial speculation were nevertheless among the distinctive features of the early Brethren. Within this hothouse environment Darby sought to explain the present by reinterpreting the past. His form of dispensationalism was different in so far as he say them distinguished by a change in the means by which God has apparently dealt with mankind. This enabled Darby to speculate about an imminent change of dispensation in which the church would soon be 'raptured' to heaven and replaced by the Jews who would be the people of God on earth during the final millennium. Despite Ryrie's views to the contrary,[48] Darby, himself, recognised that his ideas were novel and urged some caution in disseminating them.

> *I think we ought to have something more of direct testimony as to the lord's coming, and its bearing also on the state of the church: ordinarily, it would not be well to have it so clear, as it frightens people. We must pursue it steadily; it works like leaven, and its fruit is by no means seen yet; I do not mean leaven as ill, but the thoughts are new, and people's minds work on them, and all the old habits are against their feelings - all the gain of situation, and every worldly motive; we must not be surprised at its effect being slow on the mass, the ordinary instruments of acting upon others having been trained in most opposite habits.*[49]

Darby defended his dispensational hermeneutic on two grounds. First, because others had not studied the Scriptures correctly.

> *The covenant is a word common in the language of a large class of Christian professors... but in its development and detail, as to its unfolded principles,*

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[47]B. W. Newton, *The Christian Witness* (Plymouth, The Christian Witness and Tract Co., 1838), p. 302.
[48]Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p. 69.
[49]J. N. Darby, *Letters of John Nelson Darby*, Vol. 1. (London, Stow Hill Bible and Trust Depot, n.d.), pp. 25-26.

much obscurity appears to me to have arisen from a want of simple attention to Scripture.[50]

The second reason Darby insisted that his interpretation was correct was because he believed the Lord had revealed it to him personally and directly.

For my part, if I were bound to receive all that has been said by the Millenarians, I would reject the whole system, but their views and statements weigh with me not one feather. But this does not hinder me from enquiring by the teaching of the same spirit... what God has with infinite graciousness revealed to me concerning His dealing with the Church.[51]

But I must, though without comment, direct attention to chapter 32 of the same prophet; which I do the rather, because it was in this the Lord was pleased, without man's teaching, first to open my eyes on this subject, that I might learn His will concerning it throughout.[52]

In response to public reaction to his doctrine of the dispensations, he wrote,

...I believe it to be the one true Scriptural ground of the church... I am daily more struck with the connection of the great principles on which my mind was exercised... Christ coming to receive us to Himself; and collaterally with that, the setting up of a new earthly dispensation, from Isaiah XXXII... It was a vague fact that received form in my mind long after, that there must be a wholly new order of things...[53]

Even Coad, in his otherwise positive history of the Brethren Movement, admits that '*For the traditional view of the Revelation, another was substituted.*'[54] Barr is less sympathetic arguing premillennial dispensationalism was, '*...individually invented by J. N. Darby... concocted in complete contradiction to all main Christian tradition...*'[55]

Coad claims to trace what came to be known as this '*futurist view*' of the end times, so evident in Darby's writings to the works of a Jesuit, Francesco Ribera of the sixteenth century, whose writings were later popularised in the nineteenth century by another Spanish Jesuit, Manuel Lacunza. As has been noted, Lacunza used the pseudonym Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra, allegedly a converted Jew, for his book, *'The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty'* which Edward Irving translated into

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[50]J. N. Darby, 'The Covenants.' *Collected Writings.,* Doctrine I. Vol. III. William Kelly, ed. (Kingston on Thames, Stow Hill Bible and Trust Depot, 1962). p. 68.X

[51]J. N. Darby, 'Reflections Upon the Prophetic Inquiry, and the Views Advanced in It', *Collected Writings*., Prophetic I, Vol. II. pp. 6-7.

[52]J. N. Darby, 'Evidence from Scripture for the passing away of the present dispensations' *Collected Writings*., Prophetic I, Vol. II. p. 108.

[53]J. N. Darby, *Letters of John Nelson Darby*., Vol. 1. (London, Stow Hill Bible and Trust Depot, n.d.), pp. 343-345.

[54]Coad, *History*., p. 129.

[55]James Barr, *Escaping from Fundamentalism* (London, SCM, 1984), p. 6.

English.[56] Irving's 203 page preface to the translation superimposed his own prophetic speculations about the end of the world, predicting, like Darby, the apostasy of Christendom, then subsequently the restoration of the Jews and finally the imminent return of Christ.

S.P. Tregelles' correspondence with B.W. Newton indicates that he was aware of the influence of Pere Lambert and President Agier on Darby's dispensational speculations.[57] It is most likely therefore that Darby was also familiar with Lacunza's writings via Irving, since they had met with those of like mind to discuss 'the end times' at a prophetic conference under the enthusiastic sponsorship of Henry Drummond at Albury in 1826. It is not surprising, however, that Darby does not credit them or Lambert and Angier with having influenced his own writings since he was consistently dismissive of everyone's views but his own. Referring to Darby's dispensational ideas, Clarence Bass concludes,

> *Such a concept is singularly missing from historic Christian theology... Darby is pointedly correct in stating that this came to him as a new truth, since it is not to be found in theological literature prior to his proclamation of it. It is not that exegetes prior to his time did not see a covenant between God and Israel, or a future relation of Israel to the millennial reign, but they always viewed the church as the continuation of God's single program of redemption begun in Israel.*[58]

Darby's contribution then, to the development of Christian Zionism and a rigid differentiation between the church and Israel arose out of ecclesiastical expediency, his novel dispensational speculations and an independent and rigid literalist hermeneutic. These led him to formulate two innovative doctrines concerning the church and Israel. Both marked a significant departure from Christian orthodoxy and evangelicalism in particular.

The first might be termed a 'replacement theology', although ironically, his was the opposite of that which is so criticised by Christian Zionists today. Darby taught that Israel would soon replace the church, rather than the church having replaced, superseded or indeed become, Israel. To accomplish this, Darby postulated his second distinctive doctrine involving two stages to the return of Christ instead of one, the first being to secretly gather the church to heaven in a 'rapture' leaving a revived and gathered nation of Israel to rule on earth for the millennium.

3. Darby's Ecclesiology - A Replacement Theology

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[56]Arnold Dallimore, *The Life of Edward Irving, Fore-runner of the Charismatic Movement* (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1983), p. 62.
[57]T.C.F. Stunt, 'The Tribulation of Controversy: Dave MacPherson, the Rapture Plot. A Review.' *Brethren Archivists' and Historians' Network Review.* (2000).
[58]Bass, *Backgrounds*., pp. 26-27.

Darby's strong and repeated condemnation of the visible church as apostate, clearly influenced his innovative belief that the church era was now merely a 'parenthesis'[59] of the Last Days. '*Satan having beguiled the Church, the church is in the position of earthliness and united in system with the world.*'[60]

Darby regarded the church as merely one more dispensation that had failed like the previous five. Each in turn had lost its place in the divine economy and was under God's judgement. Just as Israel had been cut off, so he believed the church would also be. Just as only a small remnant of Israel had been saved, so would only a small remnant of the church be saved. The remnant taken from the ruins of the church would conveniently be, he claimed, his own followers, also known as 'the Assembly'. His answer to the condition of the visible church was not to insist on the need for a new reformation, national repentance or even a revival, since to attempt to restore or repair the ruins would actually be sinful.

> *We insist on the fact that the house has been ruined, its ordinances perverted, its orders and all its arrangements forsaken or destroyed; that human ordinances, a human order, have been substituted for them; and what merits all the attention of faith, we insist that the Lord... is coming soon in His power and glory to judge all this state of things.*[61]

To those who saw things differently, Darby repeatedly asserted, *'The house is in ruin, and you are bad imitators acting from your own leading and wrongly.'*[62]

Because Darby insisted on there being irreversible and progressive dispensations, in which the church was merely one such dispensation, he deduced, a priori, that there could be no future earthly hope for the church. He argued that Scripture does not,

> *...present the restoration of a dispensation; it never justifies its actual condition; though grace may... effect revivals during the long suffering of God, the dispensation, as such, is actually gone, that the glory of the principle contained in it may shine forth in the hands of the Messiah. The attempt to set this dispensation on another footing, as to its continuance than those dispensations which have failed already shows ignorance of the principles of God's dealing for the calling of God was always by Grace.*[63]*.*

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[59]J. N. Darby, 'The Dispensation of the Fulness of Times', *Collected Writings.*, Critical. Vol. I, p. 236.
[60]J. N. Darby, 'Reply to the Remarks... 'Our Separating Brethren,' *Collected Writings.*, Eccl. III. Vol. XIV, p. 222.
[61]J. N. Darby, 'A Glance at Various Ecclesiastical Principles', *Collected Writings.*, Eccl. II, Vol. IV, p. 10.
[62]J. N. Darby, 'A Glance at Various Ecclesiastical Principles', *Collected Writings.*, Eccl. II, Vol. IV, p. 10-11.
[63]J. N. Darby, 'The Apostasy of Successive Dispensations.' *Collected Writings.*, Eccl. I Vol. I, p. 197.

Instead he speculated that the church would soon be replaced in God's purposes on earth by a revived national Israel.

> *The Church has sought to settle itself here, but it has no place on the earth... [Though] making a most constructive parenthesis, it forms no 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 (the Jews).*[64]

Darby, through his rigid literalist interpretation of Scripture, regarded the covenantal relationship between God and Abraham as binding for ever, and that the promises pertaining to the nation of Israel, as yet unfulfilled, would find their consummation in the reign of Jesus Christ on earth during the millennium. He thereby encouraged an essential dichotomy between those promises that applied to Israel and those to the church. In an article in the *Christian Witness* published in 1838, and attributed to Darby, he went further arguing that,

> *There are two great subjects which occupy the sphere of millennial prophecy and testimony - The Church and its glory in Christ, and the Jews and their glory as a redeemed nation in Christ - the heavenly people and the earthly people. The habitation and scene of the one being the heavens; of the other, the earth.*[65]

In a lecture entitled, '*The Hopes of the Church of God',* Darby claimed that Israel was the theatre through which God had displayed His character,

> *It is in this people, by the ways of God revealed to them, that the character of Jehovah is fully revealed, that the nations will know Jehovah, and that we shall ourselves learn to know him.*[66]

Darby made this assertion because of his unusual, if not eccentric view of prophecy.

> *Prophecy applies itself properly to the earth; its object is not heaven. It is about things that were to happen on the earth; and the not seeing this has misled the church. We had thought that we ourselves had within us the accomplishment of these earthly blessings, whereas we are to enjoy heavenly blessings. The privilege of the church is to have its position in the heavenly places; and later blessings will be shed forth upon the earthly people.*[67]

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[64]J. N. Darby, 'The Character of Office in The Present Dispensation' *Collected Writings.,* Eccl. I, Vol. I, p. 94.
[65]*The Christian Witness,* April 1838, p. 164.
[66]J. N. Darby, 'The Hopes of the Church of God in Connection with the Destiny of the Jews and the Nations as Revealed in Prophecy,' *The Collected Writings*, Prophetic I, Vol. II, p. 363.
[67]J. N. Darby, 'The Hopes of the Church of God in Connection with the Destiny of the Jews and the Nations as Revealed in Prophecy,' *The Collected Writings*, Prophetic I, Vol. II, p. 376.

Following his literalist interpretation of Old Testament prophecy, every promise and prediction concerning Israel then that had not been fulfilled completely must, according to his logic, apply to the future.

> *Revelation 12 presents to us the last great object of prophecy... the combat which takes place between the last Adam and Satan. It is from this centre of truth that all light which is found in Scripture radiates. This great combat may take place either for the earthly things... and then it is in the Jews; or for the Church... and then it is in the heavenly places. It is on this account that the subject of prophecy divides itself into two parts, the hope of the Church, and those of the Jews...*[68]

A little later Darby went further, insisting that this distinction between Israel and the Church has resulted in two separate "callings", the grounds upon which some today teach that Jews can be saved by the Law and Gentiles by grace.

> *There are indeed the called from among the nations (namely the church) but it is for the heavens they are called. The calling of God for the earth is never transferred to the nations; it remains with the Jews. If I want an earthly religion, I ought to be a Jew. From the instant that the church loses sight of its heavenly calling, it loses, humanly speaking, all.*[69]

Following the heretic Marcion[70], Darby's rigid dichotomy between heaven and earth, and discontinuity between the Jews and the Church, similarly had implications for his doctrine of the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ.

> *The Lord, having been rejected by the Jewish people, is become wholly a heavenly person.*[71]

In his developing scheme, Darby therefore, laid the foundation for a dispensationalism in which the church was seen as a mere parenthesis[72] to God's continuing covenantal relationship with Israel. Darby was emphatic, the Jews would remain his primary instrument of rule on earth during the millennium. With the benefit of hindsight, modern dispensationalists differ from Darby in believing the Jews would return to the land before the Messiah comes. Darby argued the reverse.

> *The first thing, then, which the Lord will do will be to purify His land (the land which belongs to the Jews) of the Tyrians, the Philistines, the Sidonians; of Edom and Moab, and Amon - of all the wicked, in short from the Nile to the Euphrates. It will be done by the power of Christ in favour of His people re-*

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[68]J. N. Darby, 'The Hopes.,' *The Collected Writings*, Prophetic I, Vol. II, pp. 372-373.
[69]J. N. Darby, 'The Hopes.,' *The Collected Writings*, Prophetic I, Vol. II, p. 378.
[70]W. Ward Gasque, 'Marcion,' *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, J. D. Douglas, gen. ed. (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 1978), p. 620.
[71]J. N. Darby, 'The Hopes.,' *The Collected Writings*, Prophetic I, Vol. II, p. 376.
[72]See definition *'...the calling out of the Church takes place, extending as a parenthesis, from the Day of Pentecost to the rapture of the saints.'* p. 217, *A New and Concise Bible Dictionary*, ed. William Kelly (London, G. Morrish) - a standard Brethren work.

established by His goodness. The people are put into security in the land, and then will those of them who remain till that time among the nations be gathered together.[73]

What is not generally conceded by later Dispensationalists, or at least is conveniently ignored, is that Darby took no less a favourable view of the Jews than he did of the Arabs resident in the Middle East and Palestine, in particular. Even though he argued that the Lord would remove the Arabs from the land between the Nile and the Euphrates and give it all to Israel, Darby did not envisage the Jews actually co-operating with Christ or ruling on earth with him during the Millennium.

His prognosis for the Jews was no less pessimistic than his view of the church. Indeed some would regard his teaching as anti-Semitic since Darby taught that the Jews will rule on earth in league with Satan. Following the rapture of the saints, Darby insisted,

The government of the fourth monarchy will be still in existence, but under the influence and direction of the Antichrist; and the Jews will unite themselves to him, in a state of rebellion, to make war with the lamb... Satan will then be displayed, who will unite the Jews with this apostate prince against heaven... a remnant of the Jews is delivered and Antichrist destroyed.[74]

Perceptive Jews are not surprisingly cynical of Christian Zionist support for the State of Israel when it is realised that they largely share Darby's dispensational views on the fate of the Jews, believing most will not escape Armageddon in the 'rapture' but will be annihilated in the tribulation to follow. Hal Lindsey, for example, on the basis of passages like Revelation 16:13-14, predicts the 200 mile valley from the Sea of Galilee to Eilat flowing with blood several feet deep.[75] Similarly, based on the same passage, Timothy Dailey describes Tel Aviv destroyed by nuclear warheads fired from Syria.[76]

Clarence Bass summarises the novel nature of Darby's emerging theological framework.

It is not that exegetes prior to his time did not see a covenant between God and Israel, or a future relation of Israel to the millennial reign, but they always viewed the church as a continuation of God's single program of redemption begun in Israel. It is dispensationalism's rigid insistence on a distinct cleavage between Israel and the church, and its belief in a later unconditional fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant, that sets it off from the historic faith of the church.[77]

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[73]J. N. Darby, 'The Hopes.,' *The Collected Writings*, Prophetic I, Vol. II, p. 380.
[74]J. N. Darby, 'The Hopes.,' *The Collected Writings*, Prophetic I, Vol. II, p. 379.
[75]Hal Lindsey*, The Final Battle* (Palos Verdes, Western Front, 1995), pp. 250-252.
[76]Timothy J. Dailey, *The Gathering Storm* (New York, Chosen Books, 1992), p. 245
[77]Bass, *Backgrounds*., p. 27.

Similarly, H. C. Leupold, professor of Old Testament exegesis at the Evangelical Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio, in his commentary on Genesis 12:3 and with reference to the promise made to Abraham, makes the following critique of Darby's dispensationalism,

> *Now surely, as commentators of all times have clearly pointed out, especially already Luther and Calvin, this promise to Israel is conditional, requiring faith... History is the best commentary on how the promise is meant. When the Jews definitely cast off Christ, they were definitely as a nation expelled from the land. All who fall back upon this promise as guaranteeing a restoration of Palestine to the Jews... have laid into it a meaning which the words simply do not carry.*[78]

4. Darby's Eschatology - An Imminent Secret Pre-Tribulation Rapture

It was into this dispensational scheme that Darby and his contemporary Edward Irving postulated two stages to Christ's imminent return. First, there would be an invisible 'appearing' when Christians would meet Christ in the air and be removed from the earth, a process which came to be known as *'the rapture of the saints'*. With the restraining presence of the Holy Spirit removed from the world, the Antichrist would arise. His rule would finally be crushed by the public 'appearing' of Jesus Christ. Darby argued that, regarding the rapture,

> *The Church's joining Christ has nothing to do with Christ's appearing or coming to earth. Her place is elsewhere. She sits in Him already in heavenly places. She has to be brought there as to bodily presence..*
>
> *...We go up to meet Christ in the air. Nothing is clearer, then, than that we are to go up to meet Him, and not await His coming to earth; but that this coming to receive us to Himself is not His appearing is still clearer...*
>
> *..This is the rapture of the saints, preceding their and Christ's appearing ...so that at their rapture He has not appeared yet... This rapture before the appearing of Christ is a matter of express revelation, as we have seen from Colossians 3:4.*[79]

In commenting on 1 Thessalonians 4:15, in his Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, Darby asserts,

> *Observe, also, that this revelation gives another direction to the hope of the Thessalonians, because it distinguishes with much precision between our departure hence to join the Lord in the air, and our return to the earth with Him.*[80]

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[78]H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Book House, 1953), p. 490.
[79]J. N. Darby, 'The Rapture of the Saints and the Character of the Jewish Remnant,' *Collected Writings,* Prophetic. I, Vol. II, pp. 153-155.
[80]J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, Vol. V. (London, G. Morrish, n.d.), p. 91.

These passages actually say nothing about any secret rapture in any dispensational sense, still less that the church will be removed and return later to earth with Christ at His public appearing. Bass insists, '*Only by involved exegetical interpretation can the pre-tribulation rapture be supported.*'[81]

Darby's interpretation of passages such as 1 Thessalonians 4 is a clear example of the way later Dispensationalists read back from their presuppositional view of the church into the Scriptures. In doing so Darby denies what the passage teaches (the blessed hope of the church does have to do with the coming of Christ) and affirms what it does not teach (the blessed hope is the secret going and later public returning of the church). Darby admitted as much that his doctrine of the rapture was an innovation, the result of 'express revelation', indeed he seemed quite pleased with the reaction to it.

> *The rapture of the saints to meet the Lord in the air, before His manifestation to the earth, and the existence of a Jewish remnant in whom the Spirit of God is graciously working before the Lord manifests Himself to them for their deliverance, is happily attracting the attention of Christians. It has made sufficient way to be the occasion of renewed opposition...* [82]

Following his literalist hermeneutic, Darby insisted that the tribulation would end seven years after the rapture when Jesus Christ would return to Jerusalem to set up his kingdom from which he would rule the world for a thousand years. Indeed Darby made the 'pre-tribulation rapture' yet one more of his exclusive tests of Brethren orthodoxy.

> *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 the rapture so simple and clear, and on the other hand, it shows how the denial of its rapture brings down the Church to an earthly position, and destroys its whole spiritual character and position.*[83]

His attitude toward those who disagreed with his doctrine of the secret rapture was scathing,

> *...Wherever this is enfeebled, Satan is at work.... He who awaits Christ's appearing, as the time in which he is to go to be with Him, has denied the proper hope and proper relationship of the Church with Christ. On this point there can be no compromise. Ignorance of privilege is one thing... the denial of it another*[84]

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[81]Bass, *Backgrounds*., p. 39.
[82]J. N. Darby, 'The Rapture of the Saints,' *Collected Writings, Prophetic.* Vol. IV, William Kelly, ed. (Kingston on Thames, Stow Hill Bible and Trust Depot, 1962). p. 118.
[83]J. N. Darby, 'The Rapture of the Saints and the Character of the Jewish Remnant,,' *Collected Writings,* Prophetic. IV, Vol. II, p. 149.
[84]J. N. Darby, 'The Rapture of the Saints and the Character of the Jewish Remnant,' *Collected Writings,* Prophetic. IV, Vol. II, p. 154.

He regarded disinterest in his teaching of the rapture as a sign that the church was apostate and his own 'Assembly' elect.

> *The rapture of the saints before the appearing of Christ, strange as it may appear to some, has nothing to say to the church, directly or exclusively; but as we form part of those caught up, it of course, interests us in the highest degree.*[85]

Among Darby's supporters, '*his delineations of millennial glory dazzled the minds of his hearers*.'[86] Despite its novelty, Darby's belief of the 'pre-tribulation rapture' became central to his doctrine of the church as well as his dispensational eschatology, and subsequently came to be '*a foundation for contemporary Christian Zionism*'[87]

5. Darby's Dispensationalism Criticised and Refined

Darby's novel ideas were not left unchallenged even within Brethren circles. B. W. Newton, his chief assistant in Plymouth, confronted Darby arguing that these views were heretical and a departure from Biblical orthodoxy. Darby's intransigence led to one of many splits within the Brethren movement, and with former colleagues like Irving from the prophetic conference days in Albury. Despite holding similar views concerning the rapture, there was no love lost for the Irvingites and their charismatic excesses.

> *The people called Irvingites have been plainly convicted elsewhere of so much false doctrine, false practice, and false prophecy, and that by so many of the Church of God as to make it, when known, a question only of preserving God's children against the deceits and crafts of Satan.*[88]

In particular, Darby was scathing of their speculative prophecies concerning the Antichrist and the lost tribes of Israel, allegedly given by the Holy Spirit.

> *...that spirit pronounced young Napoleon to be the man of sin; It stated an American Indian Chief, then in London, would be converted there, and receive the work and return to America, and lead back his countrymen, who were the ten tribes, to Palestine; but he went back unconverted.*[89]

Strong differences also repeatedly emerged within the Brethren movement, particularly between Darby and Newton, as to the implications of his new doctrines concerning the rapture and the relationship of the church to Israel. If the church had already been removed before the Antichrist could persecute them, who then would be the remnant persecuted under his rule? For Darby, a faithful Jewish remnant

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[85]J. N. Darby, *Collected Writings,* Prophetic. IV, Vol. II, p. 118.
[86]W. Blair Neatby, *A History of the Plymouth Brethren* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1901), p. 81.
[87]Wagner, *Anxious*., p. 90.
[88]J. N. Darby, 'Remarks on a tract circulated by the Irvingites,' *Collected Writings,* Doctrinal. IV, Vol. 15, p. 2.
[89]J. N. Darby, '*Remarks*.,' p. 21.

would reign on earth after the rapture and remain faithful to the Law under persecution, seeing the literal fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies still to be realised. The church however, Darby insisted, would play no part in this earthly reign. *'This remnant has neither the church's heavenly blessings nor the church's hopes*.'[90]

Newton and others saw Darby's elevation of Israel above the church as '*full-blown heresy*'.[91] They understood the church in Scripture to be made up of both Jews and Gentiles who have been made one in Christ. Darby's scheme, followed logically, implied two distinct and separate ways to salvation. For Newton,

> *...the church included all the faithful from Abraham down. he considered Mr Darby's dispensational teaching as the height of speculative nonsense.*' [92]

If the church were removed and a Jewish remnant were the fruit of God's redemptive work apart from Christ then it must be the result of '*another*' gospel condemned by the Apostle Paul in Galatians. C. H. Spurgeon was one of Darby's most vociferous critics. Of Darby's *Translation of the Holy Scripture,* Spurgeon wrote,

> *We don't even mention the other renderings in his new Bible, just as serious and erroneous as the above; much less notice the transposition of tenses and prepositions, or the awkward English diction throughout. Suffice it to say, that some renderings are good, and some of the notes are good; but taken as a whole, with a great display of learning, the ignorance of the results of modern criticism is almost incredible. And the fatal upsetting of vital doctrines condemns the work as more calculated to promote scepticism than true religion-the most sacred subjects being handled with irreverent familiarity.* [93]

It is not clear whether Darby's translation influenced his doctrine or vice versa. However, like his fellow millennialist, Charles Russell, who also translated the scriptures and formed his own sect, the Jehovah witnesses, it is true to say that there is a consistency between Darby's translation and teaching.

Newton and others within the Brethren sought to devise alternative, less problematic interpretations of the future to Darby's system which, even to those favourably disposed to the Brethren, like Coad, admitted was built on a '*completely new structure of Biblical interpretation*.'[94]

These included what came to be known as 'the partial rapture.' Newton expounded through the journal, *The Christian Witness,* the belief that a remnant both of

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[90]J. N. Darby, 'The Rapture of the Saints and the Character of the Jewish Remnant,' *Collected Writings,* Prophetic. IV, Vol. II, p. 120.
[91]Coad, *History.*, p. 131.
[92]H.A. Ironside, *A Historical Sketch of the Brethren Movement* (New Jersey, Loizeaux Brothers, 1985), p. 32. The same quote is attributed to Samuel P. Tregelles in Charles E. Brown, *The Reign of Christ* (Anderson, Ind., Gospel Trumpet Co., 1950), p. 54.
[93]C. H. Spurgeon, 'Darbyism and Its New Bible,' *The Sword and the Trowel* (London, W. Macintosh, 1874) p. 18.
[94]Coad, *History*., p. 132.

faithful Jews as well as Gentiles would survive the Tribulation, while others would be raptured before hand. In 1836, for example, he contradicted Darby's scheme arguing, '*Accordingly, the resurrection glory of the saints is as distinctly connected with Israel and Jerusalem, as with the earth.*'[95]

Newton also argued that the New Testament writers spiritualised the promises in the Old Testament to the inheritance of a literal land.

> *It is thus that the descriptions which in the Old Testament are confined to the earthly city, are used by the Apostles to express the glories of Jerusalem which is above; for these are the expansion and heavenly antitype of the typical (though real) glories of Jerusalem below. They both belong to the same system - they are different courts of the same glorious temple visibly united yet distinct.*[96]

Newton postulated a millennial reign whereby the dispensations were not consecutive and in which Israel would be restored under the same covenant of faith as the church, not one in which, as Darby claimed, national Israel would be restored and the church excluded. Newton did not see the means of blessing as parallel and distinct but converging, both on the basis of grace through faith, and a foretaste of heaven.[97]

In 1838 Newton sought a reconciliation between Darby's dispensationalism and more orthodox Reformed theology. In a paper called 'The Dispensations' he argued that in Abraham,

> *In order to preserve blessing in the earth, we for the first time find ostensibly and manifestly introduced that method of elective grace, which alone secures the perpetuity of blessing, because it is 'not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.' And hence the call of Abraham... Here was sovereign grace calling, and sovereign grace giving and multiplying, and this is the character of all the branches of the covenant to Abraham. And therefore nothing that could arise from man, no subsequent arrangement even of God Himself could possibly annul it, so as to make the promise of none effect. This covenant therefore must be everlasting, and all that ever will be effectually blessed either in earth or in heaven, hand upon it as a covenant of promise. Upon this covenant the natural seed of Abraham, Israel according to the flesh is secretly sustained now...*
>
> *...But not only the earthly Jerusalem and the land, the Heavenly Jerusalem likewise does equally rest upon the covenant of promise to Abraham; for the promise was not made simply to Abraham, but equally to his seed, i.e. Christ*

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[95]'Chiefly on subjects connected with the Present Church.' *The Christian Witness*, Vol. III, (London, Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1836), p. 45
[96] *The Christian Witness*, Vol. III, (London, Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1836), p. 53
[97]Coad, *History*., p. 134.

(Galatians iii). 'And therefore if ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to promise.'[98]

Like Darby, Newton believed that the church would be raptured, and that the Jews would be restored, but instead, he brought together Darby's views of the heavenly church and earthly Israel arguing this would all occur after the tribulation and return of Christ, not before, and that the remnant of Jews in Jerusalem would be brought to faith in Messiah and so too be blessed.

The dispensation, therefore, which commenced with Abraham, is necessarily an eternal one, for (though many earthly and temporary blessings yet to be accomplished were included in it), it had respect to a heavenly and eternal city-Jerusalem which is above... the manifestation of Sarah blessing is altogether future and will not be shown forth in its power until the whole family both in earth and heaven, Jerusalem above and Jerusalem below, are alike manifestly brought under its bond of blessing.[99]

Restored Israel in Jerusalem, will in many respects resemble the Church now. Not indeed, in suffering, for that is a privilege possessed by the Church of the first-born distinctly. But as it is now said of the Church, that they are a chosen generation, a royal Priesthood; so it is written of Israel in that day, that they shall be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.[100]

It seems inexplicable that Darby should have ignored these attempts by other Brethren leaders like Newton to accommodate themselves to his own idiosyncratic doctrinal position, nor recognise that their views fitted the Scriptures more convincingly than his own speculations.

Only the supposition of a mental block can explain Darby's total failure to acknowledge that what was proposed was a strengthening, not a weakening, of his own system. Not only did it bring his teaching back into accord with the basic Reformed orthodoxies, without denying anything essential in it, but it also cured the dangerous Docetic tendencies that were latent in Darby's own vivid distinction between the exclusively earthly hopes of Israel and the exclusively heavenly hopes of the Church. It is significant that a tendency to Doceticism has always been a serious flaw in Darbyite thinking.[101]

Friction between Darby and Newton came to a head in 1843 when Newton published his *Thoughts on the Apocalypse*, and Darby felt impelled to attack it.

What Mr Newton teaches subverts the truth of Christ. If he says it does not, it only proves that he does not know the truth which it clearly does subvert.[102]

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[98]*The Christian Witness*, Vol. V, (Plymouth, The Christian Witness & Tract Depot, 1838), pp. 290-291.
[99]*The Christian Witness*, Vol. V, p. 292.
[100]*The Christian Witness*, Vol. V, p. 306.
[101]Coad, *History*., p. 135
[102]J. N. Darby, *Collected Writings*., Doctrine IV, Vol. XV, p. 34.

Of Newton's attempt to show that Jew and Gentile must come to faith by the same means and enjoy the same blessings, Darby replied in a letter dated 14th November 1844,

> *And it is precisely on this point... that I feel that Plymouth has lost, or for the most part never has attained, the idea which seems to me essential to the Church - that is, which distinguishes it in its privileges. I knew that the system, which prevails there placed the Church on the same ground as Israel in the millennium, and it was one of the things which convinced me that the notion of the Church was entirely wanting... But my answer to your question, Has the church any spiritual things which it has not received through Israel? is -ALL that is properly essential to it as the Church. I admit the truth of what is stated at Plymouth. The evil is this, that all the higher part of the truth is left out, and everything which expresses it reduced to this level... But union with a Saviour hid in God... is of the essence of the Church, and I cannot see that this forms a part of Israel's privileges in the millennium... In a word, all that is distinctive to the Church is lost in this system, for that which is distinctive to it is not the subject of promise...*[103]

Darby's insistence on two dispensations, one for the church and another for Israel is the basis on which much non-evangelistic but triumphalist Christian Zionism views Israel. It is, as shall be shown later, the stance taken by the International Christian Embassy, Jerusalem, the Messianic Testimony, and in large measure, Christian Friends of Israel who see their role primarily in terms of supporting and defending Israel. Coad summarises the split between Darby and Newton.

> *Newton, to Darby, was depriving the Church of its glories in Christ. The simple thought that Newton's system did nothing of the kind, but that it rather added the glories of the redeemed Israel to the glories of the redeemed Church, seems never to have entered Darby's mind.*[104]

Darby's response to opposition was simple. He would charge his critics with sectarianism and excommunicate them. Darby led the 'Exclusive' Brethren and Newton the 'Open' Brethren. George Muller and others tried to remain neutral, refusing, as Darby insisted, on excommunicating those who remained in fellowship with Newton. Those who suffered his wrath in this way included Groves, Muller, Harris and Newton, and by 1865 without them, and those like Bellett and Craik who had died, his hold over the Exclusive Brethren gradually waned.[105] Darby's Exclusive Brethren underwent further schism splitting into three parties by 1881, known after the names of their leaders as the Darbyites, Kellyites and Cluffites.[106]

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[103]*Letters of John Nelson Darby*. Vol. III, (Kingston on Thames, Stow Hill Bible and Trust Depot, n.d.), pp. 240-2.
[104]Coad, *History*., p. 137.
[105]Bass, *Backgrounds*., p. 93.
[106]Albert Henry Newman, *Manual of Church History Volume 2, Modern Church History 1517-1902* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Society, 1904), p. 713.

Darby was hardly less sympathetic with those who failed to understand his arguments.

> *That he could be ungracious and scathing in his criticism is evident in the incident where, when the great evangelist Dwight L. Moody failed to grasp a point, Darby turned to a bystander and remarked, 'I am here to supply exposition not brains.'*[107]

Darby's supporters, when forced to take sides, inevitably saw things differently,

> *He faced heresy in the very society originally formed by himself... and in spite of the obloquy, scorn, and contempt of the brethren once most dear to him, he continued, even as he had begun, to esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. The world may pour contempt on such a man; sectarians may dip their pens in wormwood and gall for his destruction; and the eulogies of hypocrites and liars may denounce him as a fiend incarnate; but, in our very heart of hearts, we honour and reverence him as a true soldier of the Cross.*[108]

6. Darby's Influence on the Rise of Modern Dispensationalism

Darby and his supporters clearly believed the '*secret rapture*' would occur in their own life time and certainly before the end of the 19th Century. Looking back, Blair Neatby, writing his history of the Brethren in 1901 reflects,

> *If anyone had told the first Brethren that three quarters of a century might elapse and the Church be on earth, the answer would probably have been a smile, partly of pity, partly of disapproval, wholly of incredulity. Yet so it has proved. It is impossible not to respect hopes so congenial to an ardent devotion; yet it is clear now that Brethrenism took shape under the influence of a delusion, and that delusion was a decisive element in all of its distinctive features.*[109]

But the rapture did not occur. Whereas the leaders of Irving's Catholic Apostolic church refused to appoint successors, convinced that the Lord would return to Albury before the last one died, so that today the church there remains empty, Darby's dispensationalist ideas permeated beyond his narrow Brethrenism to a new generation of evangelicals in the 20th Century.

Professor Francis W. Newman was a contemporary of Darby and offers this assessment of his impact on those who came under his influence.

> *For the first time I perceived that so vehement a champion of the sufficiency of the Scriptures, so staunch an opposer of creed and churches, was wedded*

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[107]Gerstner, *Wrongly*., p. 27, quoting Turner, *Darby*., p. 21.
[108]Turner, *Darby*., p. 37.
[109]W. Blair Neatby, *A History of the Plymouth Brethren* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1901), p. 3.

to an extra-scriptural creed of his own, by which he tested the spiritual state of his brethren. [110]

...this gentleman has every where (sic) *displayed a wonderful power of bending other minds to his own, and even stamping upon them the tones of his voice and all sorts of slavish imitation. Over the general results of his action I have long deeply mourned, as blunting his natural tenderness and sacrificing his wisdom to the Letter, dwarfing men's understandings, contracting their hearts, crushing their moral sensibilities, and setting those at variance who ought to love, yet oh! how specious it was in the beginning! he only wanted men 'to submit their understanding to God,' that is to the Bible, that is to his interpretation.*[111]

From 1862 onwards, as his influence over Brethrenism in Britain waned, Darby focused his ministry more and more on North America, making seven journeys in the next twenty years. Sandeen has estimated that Darby spent 40% of his time in the United States.[112] During that time he had a considerable and increasing influence on such evangelical leaders as James H. Brookes, Dwight L. Moody, William Blackstone and C. I. Scofield, as well as the emerging evangelical Bible Schools and Prophecy Conferences which,

'...set the tone for the evangelical and fundamentalist movements in North America between 1875 and 1920.'[113]

Krauss claims that by 1901, following a good deal of controversy at these prophetic conferences,

...the dispensationalists had won the day so completely that for the next fifty years friend and foe alike largely identified dispensationalism with premillennialism.[114]

Bass, in his definitive critique of Dispensationalism concludes,

The line of continuity from Darby to the present can be traced unbroken from the works of his contemporaries, C. H. Mackintosh, William Trotter, William Kelly, and F. W. Grant, through the intermediary works of W. E. Blackstone, James Hall Brooks, A. J. Frost, G. Campbell Morgan, Harry Ironside, A. C. Gaebelein, C. I. Scofield, and his Scofield Bible, to the contemporary adherents of his views... Suffice it to say that he stamped his movement with his own personality. Much of its spiritual atmosphere undoubtedly belongs to his

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[110]Francis W. Newman, *Phases of Faith, or, Passages from the History of my Creed* (London, John Chapman, 1850), p. 29.
[111]Newman, *Phases.,* p. 33.
[112]Ernest R. Sandeen, 'Towards a Historical Interpretation of the Origins of Fundamentalism,' *Church History* 36 (1967), p. 70, quoted in Gerstner, *Wrongly.,* p. 38.
[113]Wagner, *Anxious*. p. 89.
[114]C. Norman Kraus, *Dispensationalism in America* (Richmond, John Knox Press, 1958), p. 104.

influence; and certainly its interpretative principles, its divisive compartmentalization of the redemptive plan of God, its literalness as to prophetic interpretation, and its separatist spirit may be traced to this personality. Perhaps it is too broad a summary to say that Darby's personality influenced directly the spirit of contemporary dispensationalism, but certainly the pattern which he set into motion is reflected in it. [115]

Similarly, George Marsden, in his history of the rise of fundamentalism between 1870 and 1930, traces the considerable influence of Darby's dispensationalism on the American evangelical world of Moody and Scofield.

This new form of premillennial teaching, imported from England, first spread in America through prophecy conferences where the Bible was studied intently. Summer conferences, a newly popular form of vacation in the age of the trains, were particularly effective. Most importantly, Dwight L. Moody had sympathies with the broad outlines of dispensationalism and had as his closest lieutenants dispensationalist leaders such as Reuben A. Torrey (1856-1928), James M. Gray (1851-1925), C. I. Scofield (1843-1921), William J. Erdman (1833-1923), A.C. Dixon (1854-1925), and A. J. Gordon (1836-1895). These men were activist evangelists who promoted a host of Bible conferences and other missionary and evangelistic efforts. They also gave the dispensationalist movement institutional permanence by assuming leadership of the new Bible institutes such as the Moody Bible Institute (1886), the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (1907), and the Philadelphia College of the Bible (1914). The network of related institutes that soon sprang up became the nucleus for much of the important fundamentalist movement of the twentieth century. Dispensationalist leaders, in fact, actively organised this antimodernist effort. Notably, they oversaw the publication between 1910-1915 of the widely distributed twelve-volume paperback series, The Fundamentals.[116]

It is not inaccurate to conclude that Darby's dispensational views, like those of Edward Irving, would probably have remained the exotic preserve of the dwindling and divided Brethren sects were it not for the energetic efforts of significant individuals like William Blackstone, D. L. Moody and above all, C. I. Scofield who introduced them to a wider audience in America and the English speaking world through his *Scofield Reference Bible*.

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[115]Bass, *Backgrounds*., pp. 17, 63.
[116]George M. Marsden. *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans), 1991. p. 40.