

# For Zion's Sake

## *Darby and Christian Zionism*

by Paul Wilkinson

The Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is at hand. The Heavenly Bridegroom is returning for His Bride. The Father's house is ready. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb is prepared. Perhaps today? Even so, come Lord Jesus.

### The Powerscourt Conference

On October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1831, thirty-five clergymen and fifteen lay people gathered at the country estate of Lady Theodosia Powerscourt, in the small, Irish village of Enniskerry outside Dublin. All who assembled for the first Powerscourt Conference on Biblical prophecy were 'distressed at the condition of the Church', and 'convinced that the hope of Christ's return should figure more prominently in the thinking of Christians.'<sup>1</sup> Few could have imagined then how great an impact this, and subsequent Powerscourt Conferences would have on the wider Church.

The inspiration behind these conferences, which enabled the pioneers of the Plymouth Brethren movement to develop a more coherent understanding of prophecy, may have been Lady Theodosia's attendance at the first Albury Park Conference in Surrey, England, in 1826. There, thirty of the most eminent premillennialist scholars and clergymen of the day had gathered for the inaugural conference at the home of Henry Drummond to discuss 'the great prophetic questions which ... most instantly concern Christendom'. These included 'the times of the Gentiles', 'the present and future condition of the Jews', and 'the future advent of the Lord.'<sup>2</sup> Five annual conferences were held in total, concluding in 1830. According to Drummond's account,

the majority of what was called the Religious World disbelieved that the Jews were to be restored to their own land, and that the Lord Jesus Christ was to return and reign in person on this earth.<sup>3</sup>

The undoubted success of the Albury Conferences was that they brought together men of like heart and mind who were fully persuaded that Israel was to be restored nationally, and that Christ was to return in person to establish His thousand-year reign on earth. Men like Henry Drummond, William Cuninghame, Alexander Haldane, Spencer Perceval (Jr.), Hugh McNeile, William 'Millennial' Marsh, and Edward Irving were given a broader platform from which to disseminate their premillennial beliefs. The one, notable failure of the Albury Conferences, however, was their endorsement of historicism, which maintained that the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation had largely been fulfilled, and that the prophetic 'days', 'weeks', 'months', and 'years' were not to be interpreted literally. Historicism had been a regrettable legacy of the Protestant Reformation, which confused the Church's position and inheritance with that of Israel, veiled the doctrine of the any-moment Rapture of the Church,

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<sup>1</sup> Harold H. Rowdon, *The Origins of the Brethren 1825-1850* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1967), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Irving, 'Preliminary Discourse', in *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty, Vol. I* (London: L.B. Seeley and Son, 1827), pp. clxxxviii-clxxxix.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Drummond, *Narrative of the Circumstances which led to the setting up of the Church of Christ at Albury* (1834), p. 7.

muted the midnight cry, and robbed generations of believers of the *present* blessedness of the ‘blessed hope’.

In October 1831, against the backdrop of the Wicklow mountains outside Dublin, a new dawn began to break. One man in particular stepped forward in the sovereign purposes of God to help lighten the darkness, dispel the confusion, and chart a clear course for the Church in readiness for Christ’s return. The name of this ‘uncompromising champion for Christ’s glory and God’s truth’<sup>4</sup> was John Nelson Darby.

## John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)

John Nelson Darby was born in Westminster, London, on November 18<sup>th</sup>, 1800. His father was the English merchant, John Darby, and his mother was Ann Vaughan, the daughter of Samuel Vaughan, a sugar plantation owner from Philadelphia who was an acquaintance of George Washington and a vice-president of the American Philosophical Society, which was founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1743. Darby’s parents were married in New York on 20 July 1784. His uncle, Benjamin Vaughan, was a close friend of Franklin and a peace negotiator at the close of the War of Independence in 1782/83. Another uncle was British Admiral Sir Henry D’Esterre Darby, who fought under Admiral Lord Nelson against Napoleon’s fleet at the Battle of the Nile in 1798. Darby was given his middle name in honor of Lord Nelson, who was his godfather.

After graduating in the Classics from Trinity College, Dublin, in 1819, Darby trained as a barrister. Much to his father’s displeasure, however, he chose instead the path to ordination in the Church of Ireland, a decision which cost him his inheritance, but as he later explained,

I was a lawyer; but feeling that, if the Son of God gave Himself for me I owed myself entirely to Him, and that the so-called Christian world was characterized by deep ingratitude towards Him, I longed for complete devotedness to the work of the Lord; my chief thought was to get round amongst the poor Catholics of Ireland.<sup>5</sup>

As a curate, Darby labored tirelessly in the harsh terrain of the Wicklow mountains, ministering to the needs of Christ’s flock while preaching the Gospel to the Roman Catholic peasants. In 1827, he recalled how these Catholic peasants had been converting ‘at the rate of 600 to 800 a week’,<sup>6</sup> before the Church of Ireland imposed upon all converts an oath of allegiance and supremacy to the Protestant faith and the British government. This great harvest of souls came to an abrupt end, by which time Darby’s health had deteriorated. As Francis William Newman, brother of Cardinal John Henry Newman and an acquaintance of Darby, recounted:

Every evening Darby sallied forth to teach in the cabins, and roving far and wide over mountain and amid bogs, was seldom home before midnight. By such exertions his strength was undermined, and he so suffered in his limbs that not lameness only, but yet more serious results were feared. He did not fast on purpose, but his long walks through

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<sup>4</sup> William Kelly, *The Rapture of the Saints: Who Suggested it, or rather on what Scripture?* (London: T. Weston, 1903), pp. 11-12.

<sup>5</sup> J.N. Darby, ‘Letter to Prof. Tholuck (185- )’, in J.N. Darby, *Letters of J.N.D.* (Kingston-on-Thames: Stow Hill Bible & Tract Depot, n.d.), 3:297.

<sup>6</sup> John Nelson Darby, ‘Considerations addressed to the Archbishop of Dublin and the Clergy who signed the Petition to the House of Commons for Protection (1827)’, in *The Collected Writings of J.N. Darby*, ed. by William Kelly (Kingston-on-Thames: Stow Hill Bible & Tract Depot, n.d.), 1:1.

wild country...inflicted on him much severe deprivation: moreover, as he ate whatever food offered itself, – food unpalatable and often indigestible to him, his whole frame might have vied in emaciation with a monk of La Trappe. Such a phenomenon intensely excited the poor Romanists, who looked on him as a genuine ‘saint’ of the ancient breed...That a dozen such men would have done more to convert all Ireland to Protestantism, than the whole apparatus of the Church Establishment, was ere long my conviction.

Newman described Darby as ‘a most remarkable man’, and has left us with one of the most evocative portraits of the man he nicknamed ‘the Irish clergyman’:

His ‘bodily presence’ was indeed ‘weak!’ A fallen cheek, a bloodshot eye, crippled limbs resting on crutches, a seldom shaven beard, a shabby suit of clothes and a generally neglected person, drew at first pity, with wonder to see such a figure in a drawing-room. It was currently reported that a person in Limerick offered him a halfpenny, mistaking him for a beggar...With keen logical powers, he had warm sympathies, solid judgment of character, thoughtful tenderness, and total self-abandonment.<sup>7</sup>

A serious horse-riding accident in October 1827 dramatically altered the course of Darby’s life. According to his own testimony, it was during his three-month convalescence in Dublin that he devoted himself to the serious study of the Scriptures, and made two important discoveries: first, that ‘the Christian, having his place in Christ in heaven, has nothing to wait for save the coming of the Saviour’, and second, that, according to Isaiah 32, ‘there was still an economy [or dispensation] to come’<sup>8</sup> when Christ would reign as King upon the earth. Darby’s life and ministry would never be the same again.

### **“For Zion’s Sake” (Isa. 62:1) ... Darby did not keep silent**

In 1840, Darby observed what many of you here today have been researching, writing and preaching about for many years:

All nations have their attention occupied about Jerusalem (Zech.12:3), and know not what to do about it...We do not mean that all this yet comes out plain...But the principles which are found in the word of God are acting in the midst of the kingdoms where the ten horns are to appear: that is, we find all western Europe occupied about Jerusalem, and preparing for war; and Russia, on her side, preparing herself, and exercising influence over the countries given to her in the word [of God]; and all the thoughts of the politicians of this world concentrate themselves on the scene where their final gathering in the presence of the judgment of God will take place.<sup>9</sup>

In 1848, precisely one hundred years before the establishment of the modern State of Israel, Darby published his *Studies on the Book of Daniel*. He wrote:

As far as the world is concerned, Jerusalem is nothing; it is a city trodden down, with neither commerce nor riches nor aught else...It is true, indeed, that the kings of the earth

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<sup>7</sup> Francis W. Newman, *Phases of Faith* (London: Trübner & Co., 1881), p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Darby, ‘Letter to Prof. Tholuck (185- )’, in Darby, *Letters*, 3:298-299.

<sup>9</sup> Darby, ‘The Hopes of the Church of God, in Connection with the Destiny of the Jews and the Nations as Revealed in Prophecy (1840)’, in Kelly, *Collected Writings*, 2:342.

are beginning to look that way, because providence is leading in that direction, but as for God, He ever thinks of it; it is always His house, His city. His eyes and His heart are there continually. Now faith understands this.<sup>10</sup>

Darby understood this because *his* faith was rooted and anchored in the One who ‘remembers His covenant for ever, the word He commanded for a thousand generations, the covenant He made with Abraham, the oath He swore to Isaac’ (Psa. 105:8-9). Christ’s atoning sacrifice at Calvary had, according to Darby, secured ‘the sure mercies of David’ and guaranteed the fulfilment of ‘all the promises made to Israel.’<sup>11</sup> As he stated in his exposition of Rom. 11:25-32,

God’s covenant to take away Israel’s sins is sure. It shall be accomplished when Christ comes; for, note, the apostle speaks of Christ in Zion in a time yet to come...The final restoration of Israel will be on the ground of the promises made to the fathers, ‘for his mercy endureth for ever.’<sup>12</sup>

Darby understood the importance of Paul’s words in Rom. 9:4-5:

Theirs *is* the adoption as sons; *theirs* the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. *Theirs are* the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, for ever praised! Amen.

God’s faithfulness – to His Name, to His covenants, and to His people – guaranteed Israel’s national future. This cardinal truth had been obscured for centuries by amillennial and postmillennial teaching, which had served to rob *the people* of Israel of their promised inheritance, *the Messiah* of Israel of His earthly throne, and *the God* of Israel of His future glory. As Darby emphatically declared in 1850,

Israel is always the people of God...Israel cannot cease to be the people of God. ‘The gifts and calling of God are without repentance’, and it is of Israel that this is said. God never ceases to consider Israel as His people; but He *has* ceased *to govern* them as His people, and to have His throne in the midst of them upon the earth...In all times, Israel is His people, according to His counsels, and the thoughts of His love. This does not prevent their being called ‘Lo-ammi’ (not my people) as to the government of God.<sup>13</sup>

This was no new revelation – it was the Word of God! As the Lord Himself had declared through His prophet Jeremiah,

Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar – the Lord of hosts is His Name: ‘If this fixed order departs from before me, says the Lord, then shall the descendants of Israel cease from being a nation before me for ever’ (Jer. 31:35-36).

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<sup>10</sup> Darby, ‘Studies on the Book of Daniel (1848)’, in Kelly, *Collected Writings*, 5:151.

<sup>11</sup> Darby, ‘The Purpose of God’, in Kelly, *Collected Writings*, 2:273.

<sup>12</sup> Darby, ‘Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans (1871)’, in Kelly, *Collected Writings*, 26:186.

<sup>13</sup> Darby, ‘Examination of a few Passages of Scripture (1850)’, in Kelly, *Collected Writings*, 4:254-255.

For thus says the Lord: ‘Just as I have brought all this great calamity upon this people, so I will bring upon them all the good that I have promised them’ (Jer. 32:42).

God said what He meant and meant what He said. By interpreting Biblical prophecy in its plain, literal, and common sense, Darby dealt a hammer blow to Augustinian allegorism, amillennialism, and supercessionism, which had blighted the Church for centuries. He could not, however, have foreseen the impact his faithful exposition of God’s Word would have many years later, when the people of Israel entered their darkest night.

## Darby and the Holocaust

In 1942/43, approximately 5,000 Jewish refugees found sanctuary in the homes of villagers in the remote, mountain village of Le Chambon in south-eastern France. Among the villagers were Plymouth Brethren (in French, ‘Darbystes’) who, according to Jewish author Philip Hallie, sheltered Jewish refugees from the Nazis because of the special sympathy they had for God’s chosen people. As Hallie explains, ‘Believing that every word of the Bible was inspired by God, the Darbystes had a thorough knowledge of the history of the Jews as that history is told in the Old Testament.’ On one occasion, a German-Jewish lady came to buy eggs from one of their farms. The farmer’s wife invited her into the kitchen, before asking: ‘You – you are Jewish?’ The lady ‘stepped back trembling, and became even more frightened’ when the farmer’s wife called to her family to come down immediately. Hallie records what happened next. Rooted to the spot in fear, ‘her fright disappeared when the woman added, while her family was coming down the steps, “Look, look, my family! We have in our house now a *representative of the Chosen People!*”’<sup>14</sup>

It is a fitting tribute not only to the Chambonnais villagers, but also to John Nelson Darby himself, that these ‘righteous’ acts have been recognised by the Department for the Righteous among the Nations at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, and described by its former director, Mordecai Paldiel, as ‘probably the most celebrated case of Christian charity’<sup>15</sup> in the history of the Holocaust. David Brog offers his analysis of what transpired at Le Chambon:

In rejecting replacement theology, Darby laid the groundwork for a far more philo-Semitic Christianity. *Dispensationalism* restored to the Jews the divine mission and divine love that replacement theology had stripped away. In so doing, dispensationalism provided a very different instruction to individual Christians about how they should relate to the Jews living among them. If God never rejected the Jews but still held them dear, then it followed logically and emotionally that man should do the same.<sup>16</sup>

Darby’s interest in Israel was not an end in itself. He understood that the supreme focus of Scripture was not the salvation of mankind, or the return of the Jewish people to their land, or even the catching away of the Church to be with Christ in the air – as vital as these things were. The supreme focus was the glory of God. As Darby explained,

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<sup>14</sup> Philip Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood be Shed: The Story of the Village of Le Chambon and how Goodness happened there* (London: Harper Torchbooks, 1985), pp. 182-183.

<sup>15</sup> Mordecai Paldiel, *Sheltering the Jews: Stories of Holocaust Rescuers* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 36.

<sup>16</sup> David Brog, *Standing with Israel: Why Christians Support the Jewish State* (Lake Mary, FL: FrontLine, 2006), p. 46.

First, the thoughts of God are upon the glory of Christ, who, on His re-appearance, will reign over the earth...Secondly...the Jews are the habitual object of the thoughts of God ... and ... will by and by be re-established in all their privileges.<sup>17</sup>

In this way, then, Darby set Israel in a proper theological, and eschatological, context, while at the same time, and as a matter of priority, directing ‘the eye of the believer...to the coming of the Lord.’<sup>18</sup> This is Christian Zionism.

## Waiting for God’s Son from Heaven

Darby understood what many even today fail to understand (or stubbornly refuse to acknowledge), namely that the expectation of Christ’s return ‘had ruled the intelligence, sustained the hope, [and] inspired the conduct, of the apostles’.<sup>19</sup> The spiritual decline of the Church owed much, he believed, to the loss of this expectation. In his *Reflections upon the Prophetic Inquiry* (1829), Darby observed how, in every New Testament letter, ‘the coming of the Lord Jesus is...made the prominent object of the faith and hope of believers’.<sup>20</sup> He drew particular inspiration from the example of the early Thessalonians, who had turned to God from idols ‘to wait for His Son from heaven’ (1 Thess. 1:9-10). He understood that the Church was now seated in Christ in heavenly realms, with nothing to wait for except Christ Himself:

- How, then, could the Church be destined for the time of God’s judgment upon the earth, as many were teaching?
- How could those who had been purchased by God and freed from their sins through the blood of the Lamb (Ac. 20:28; Rev. 1:5) now be made subject to the wrath of the Lamb (Rev. 6:16)?
- Hadn’t Jesus delivered repentant sinners from the wrath to come through His death on the cross? Hadn’t His atoning sacrifice been sufficient to consecrate and purify a people and a Bride for Himself *before* the Great Tribulation?
- How could an end-times Church be given a mandate that the Church of nearly two millennia had not been given?

Many had confused the Church’s own position and destiny not only with that of Israel, but also with those who would be redeemed during the Great Tribulation. Darby, on the other hand, understood what the Apostle Paul had taught the Thessalonians:

A most extraordinary thing to do! Waiting for God’s Son! that is, all our hopes are clean out of this world. Do not expect anything from earth, but look for something from heaven, and this God’s Son Himself, ‘even Jesus which delivered us from the wrath to come’...Those who were looking for Christ were entirely delivered ‘from the wrath to come.’ This gives a very distinct position to the Christian...Here is the historical fact of wrath passed. At Christ’s first coming He had taken up the whole question of wrath...All the question is totally and finally settled: sin is borne once, and He who bore it is raised from the dead...This sets me in perfect freedom; and it does more, because it links me up with Christ in heaven. I know He is coming. Why? Because I know Him there. This

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<sup>17</sup> Darby, ‘Studies on the Book of Daniel (1848)’, in Kelly, *Collected Writings*, 5:151-153.

<sup>18</sup> Darby, ‘Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ (1828)’, in Kelly, *Collected Writings*, 1:30.

<sup>19</sup> Darby, ‘The Hopes of the Church of God’, in Kelly, *Collected Writings*, 2:291.

<sup>20</sup> Darby, ‘Reflections upon the Prophetic Inquiry and the Views advanced in it (1829)’, in Kelly, *Collected Writings*, 2:25.

divine Person before my soul – this Christ – the Man who, infinitely interested about my sins, died for me, He is waiting in heaven...We are waiting, our bodies to be raised, when we are to see Him and be like Him...We are really waiting for something: for what? For the Person who has so loved us...Government under Christ is going to be set up. All things are to be put under His feet...I shall be happy long before that...We love His appearing, but we love Himself better. Therefore we wait for Him to take us to Himself...I cannot be waiting for God's Son from heaven if I am expecting wrath...Suppose God said, 'Tonight,' would you say, This is what I want? If not, there is something between your affections and Christ.<sup>21</sup>

The problem which had beset many in the Church was not so much 'the denial of the Lord's coming', but 'the loss of the sense and present expectation of it.'<sup>22</sup> The teaching that Jesus could not come for His Bride until certain prophetic events had taken place had forced the Church into prophecies relating to the time of *Jacob's* trouble, a time clearly identified with *Daniel's* people (Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21). As Darby remarked,

The Lord considers it important that the saints should be always expecting [His return] as a present thing, and wishing for it as a present thing...And, indeed, were I to adopt the system proposed to me [post-tribulationism], I should not expect the Lord at all until a time when I was able to fix the day of His appearing...I say fix the day, for I cannot expect His coming until the abomination of desolation is set up at Jerusalem, and then I can say, Now in twelve hundred and sixty days the Lord will be here. And this fixing by signs and dates, I am told, is the sober way of waiting. But it is quite clear that it is contrary to the way the Lord Himself has taught me to expect Him. It is clear that, if these signs are to be expected for the church, I have nothing to expect till they are fulfilled. I may expect them, and have my mind fixed on them, but not on Christ's coming. And, when one particular one happens, I can name to a day His coming. This is not what Christ has taught me, and therefore I do not receive it.<sup>23</sup>

Darby made one final, and crucial, observation:

If the bride has got the sense of being the bride of Christ, she must desire to be with the Bridegroom; there is no proper love to Christ unless she wants to be with Him.<sup>24</sup>

## Darby's Love for the Church

In 1857, Darby expressed his delight that the doctrines of the Rapture of the Church and the restoration of Israel were 'attracting the attention of many Christians'. Though much opposition had arisen, this was to be welcomed, for it would encourage 'serious Christians'<sup>25</sup> to examine God's Word afresh. Controversy and conflict accompanied Darby wherever he went, but his love for the Church, *including* those he could not fellowship with, remained undiminished. The most striking example of this is the response he wrote to Francis William Newman, following the publication of Newman's work, *Phases of Faith*. (It was Newman who had invited Darby to speak at Oxford University in 1830, which led to the formal

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<sup>21</sup> Darby, 'The Freshness of Faith', in Kelly, *Collected Writings*, 21:359-363.

<sup>22</sup> Darby, 'The Rapture of the Saints and the Character of the Jewish Remnant', in Kelly, *Collected Writings*, 11:156.

<sup>23</sup> Darby, 'A Few Brief Remarks on "A Letter on Revelation 12"', in Kelly, *Collected Writings*, 11:25-27.

<sup>24</sup> Darby, 'The Coming of the Lord that which Characterises the Christian Life', in Kelly, *Collected Writings*, 32:246-252.

<sup>25</sup> Darby, 'The Rapture of the Saints', in Kelly, *Collected Writings*, 11:118.

establishment of the Plymouth Brethren). Although Darby ‘had no thought’ of sparing Newman’s work because of its heterodoxy, it drew from him ‘somewhat different’ feelings because of his close acquaintance with the author. As Darby said to Newman in his response,

If the book is a guilty one, its author is guilty of it. But there is another feeling arises as to the author, which does not as to the book. To the book I can measure out, without a pang, unmingled feelings of disgust and contempt; to the author I could not. The thought of him awakens sorrow, regret, pain...I do mourn...But I write that you may at least feel that my attacking your book is as far as possible from bitterness toward you...May the Lord, who alone has power to blot out and overcome our wretchedness, and new-create the heart, make you – as in other ways He has me – a monument of His almighty and infinite grace!<sup>26</sup>

Though many questioned his approach to church discipline, Darby’s conscience was clear. Echoing the sentiment expressed by the Apostle Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:2), Darby wrote:

The one desire of my heart is the beauty and blessing of the church – the bride of Christ. That will make me earnestly love all saints for they are of it. I desire its entire separation to Christ to whom she belongs – espoused as a chaste virgin. My feet in the narrow way – my heart as large as Christ’s.<sup>27</sup>

In a letter to his dear friend, John Gifford Bellett, Darby declared that, ‘while specially happy in evangelising, my heart ever turns to the church’s being fit for Christ. My heart turns there.’<sup>28</sup>

## Darby, Dispensationalism, and the United States of America

It was Darby’s love for the Church which took him across the Atlantic for the first time in 1862. His purpose was to strengthen the French and Swiss Brethren who were struggling out in the prairies. Little did he realise then that he would tour North America seven times during the course of the next fifteen years.

In 1863, Darby travelled ‘on the skirts of the [American Civil] war’, and recalled in a letter that he had travelled ‘about 2,000 miles in the last four weeks’<sup>29</sup> – some achievement by 1863 standards! In a letter written in 1866, he summed up the spiritual condition of the United States in one word: ‘frightful’.<sup>30</sup> Though Darby found the American Church ‘more worldly...than anywhere you would find it’,<sup>31</sup> his heart became ‘greatly knit to the States and God’s people there’.<sup>32</sup> The cities he visited most frequently were Chicago, St. Louis, Boston, and New York, but wherever he went his mission objective remained the same: ‘to present Christ and the truth, accomplished salvation, and His coming.’<sup>33</sup> In a letter from New York in 1867, he expressed great joy at the progress being made: ‘the Lord’s coming is planted in

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<sup>26</sup> Darby, ‘The Irrationalism of Infidelity: Being a Reply to “Phases of Faith” (1853)’, in Kelly, *Collected Writings*, 6:1-2.

<sup>27</sup> Darby, ‘What is the Church and in what sense is it now in Ruin?’, in *Miscellaneous Writings of J.N.D.* (Oak Park, IL: Bible Truth Publishers, n.d.), 4:166-167.

<sup>28</sup> Darby, ‘Letter to J.G. Bellett (September 1864)’, in Darby, *Letters*, 1:384.

<sup>29</sup> Darby, ‘Letter to Mr Pollock (Toronto, 27 May 1863)’, in Darby, *Letters*, 1:351-352.

<sup>30</sup> Darby, ‘Letter to A.B. Pollock (Toronto, October 1866)’, in Darby, *Letters*, 1:460.

<sup>31</sup> Darby, ‘Letter to Mr Pollock’, in Darby, *Letters*, 1:351.

<sup>32</sup> Darby, ‘Letter to F.G. Brown (London, 1869)’, in Darby, *Letters*, 2:34.

<sup>33</sup> Darby, ‘Letter to G. Biava (New York, 1873)’, in Darby, *Letters*, 2:212.



many souls...The cloud is not bigger than a man's hand, but I believe there is unequivocal blessing.<sup>34</sup>

Dwight Lyman Moody, James Hall Brookes, Adoniram Judson Gordon, Cyrus Ingerson Scofield, William Eugene Blackstone, and Arno Clemens Gaebelein – seven of the founding fathers of American Dispensationalism who took up Darby's mantle and sounded the midnight cry loud and clear across the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their names are, I am sure, greatly admired by many in this room today. Let us briefly consider the formative and enduring influence Darby and his eschatology had upon each one of them.

### Moody (1837-1899)

- Described as 'the most influential "clergyman" in America'.<sup>35</sup>
- Spent considerable time among the Plymouth Brethren, and invited many of them, including Darby, to preach in his Illinois Street Church in Chicago.
- Inspired by Darby's 'uncompromising belief in the imminent, bodily, and premillennial return of the Lord Jesus Christ'.<sup>36</sup>
- Darby wrote of him: 'I know the man well'.<sup>37</sup> In 1876, Darby rejoiced that Moody had 'greatly got on in truth'.<sup>38</sup>
- Became a 'patron of dispensationalism'.<sup>39</sup>

### Brookes (1830-1897)

- Presbyterian minister in St. Louis who disciplined Cyrus Scofield.
- Founding father and president of the Niagara Bible Conference (the Believers' Meeting for Bible Study, 1876-1897), which helped spread Dispensationalism across America.
- Described Darby and the Brethren as 'a people who are on the whole the soundest in faith, and most intelligent in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ'.<sup>40</sup>
- Recalled how he had 'often heard with great pleasure and profit Mr. Darby',<sup>41</sup> who 'preached in his church in St. Louis at various times'.<sup>42</sup>

### Gordon (1836-1895)

- Pastor of Clarendon Street Baptist Church, Boston, who inspired D.L. Moody to accept Dispensationalism.
- One of the leaders of the Bible and Prophecy Conference movement.

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<sup>34</sup> Darby, 'Letter to John Pollock (New York, April 1867)', in Darby, *Letters*, 1:495-496.

<sup>35</sup> Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800-1930* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 172.

<sup>36</sup> Lyle W. Dorsett, *A Passion for Souls: The Life of D.L. Moody* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1997), p. 136.

<sup>37</sup> Darby, 'Letter to Walter Wolston (1874)', in Darby, *Letters*, 2:257.

<sup>38</sup> Darby, 'Letter to B.F. Pinkerton (Chicago, 23 June 1876)', in Darby, *Letters*, 2:369.

<sup>39</sup> Yaakov Ariel, *On Behalf of Israel: American Fundamentalist Attitudes toward Jews, Judaism, and Zionism, 1865-1945* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1991), p. 31.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in C. Norman Kraus, *Dispensationalism in America* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1958), pp. 37-38.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Roy A. Huebner, *Elements of Dispensational Truth: Vol. I*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Morganville, NJ: Present Truth Publishers, 1998), p. 20.

<sup>42</sup> John Reid, *F.W. Grant: His Life, Ministry and Legacy* (Plainfield, NJ: John Reid Book Fund, 1995), p. 29.

- Paid the following tribute to Darby and the Brethren: ‘It demands a fearless candour to concede it, but we believe that truth requires us to confess that we owe a great debt, both in literature and in life, to the leaders of this ultra-Protestant movement.’<sup>43</sup>

### Scofield (1843-1921)

- Pastored the First Congregational Church of Dallas and later Moody’s church in East Northfield, Massachusetts.
- His *Bible Correspondence School Course of Study* (1890) was used by Moody Bible Institute to promote Dispensationalism around the world.
- Popularised Dispensationalism on an unprecedented scale through his *Reference Bible* (1909).
- According to his research assistant, Miss Emily Farmer, ‘the two sets of reference books on Dr. Scofield’s desk to which he referred constantly, were the *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible* by J.N. Darby and the *Numerical Bible* by F.W. Grant.’<sup>44</sup>

### Blackstone (1841-1935)

- Founder of the Chicago Hebrew Mission (today, Life in Messiah International).
- Author of *Jesus is Coming* (1878), America’s first dispensationalist best seller.
- Presented his famous petition on behalf of European Jewry (known as the *Blackstone Memorial*) to President Benjamin Harrison in 1891. In 1917, it was re-presented to President Woodrow Wilson, who approved the Balfour Declaration shortly after.
- When Theodor Herzl, the leader of the Zionist movement, was looking for a viable homeland for the Jewish people, Blackstone showed him why there could only ever be one homeland for the Jews – by sending Herzl a Bible with all the prophecies relating to *the Land of Israel* clearly marked.
- Described by first Jewish Supreme Court Justice, Louis D. Brandeis, as ‘the Father of Zionism’.<sup>45</sup>
- In 1956, Israel named a forest in his honor.

### Gaebelein (1861-1945)

- German Jewish immigrant who founded The Hope of Israel mission in New York.
- Helped Scofield compile his *Reference Bible* and Lewis Sperry Chafer establish the Evangelical Theological College here in Dallas (today, Dallas Theological Seminary).
- Wrote: ‘I found in his [Darby’s] writings...the soul food I needed.’<sup>46</sup>
- Described Darby as the ‘most outstanding’ among ‘the mighty men of God’<sup>47</sup> of the Plymouth Brethren, and ‘one of the most eminent scholars who ever lived and possessed insight in the word of God, which made him one of the greatest gifts the Lord ever gave to His church. And yet he was a very humble man.’<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Ernest B. Gordon, *Adoniram Judson Gordon, A Biography* (New York: Revell, 1896), pp. 86-88.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Reid, *F.W. Grant*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Paul C. Merkley, *The Politics of Christian Zionism 1891-1948* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), p. 89.

<sup>46</sup> Arno C. Gaebelein, *Half a Century: The Autobiography of a Servant* (New York: Our Hope, 1930), pp. 83-85.

<sup>47</sup> Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Conflict of the Ages*, Revised edn (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1983), p. 62.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Huebner, *Elements of Dispensational Truth: Vol. I*, p. 16.

As E. Schuyler English declared in a 1943 edition of *Our Hope* magazine, ‘The best friend that the Jew has is the Christian, who knows God’s Word, His love for His Chosen People, and their place in the prophetic plan.’<sup>49</sup> These men were friends of the Jewish people.

Darby left the United States in 1877, never to return. By then, 88 regular Brethren Bible-reading meetings had been established.<sup>50</sup> Darby’s considerable legacy, however, is perhaps best expressed in terms of the sheer momentum the Lord generated through his ministry, which was carried forward by the American Bible and Prophecy Conference movement for years to come. In his final letter from America, dated June 1877, Darby made the following observation: ‘The truth is spreading ... For some time the coming of the Lord has wrought in souls far and wide, and the doctrine is spreading wonderfully.’<sup>51</sup>

## The Last Days of John Nelson Darby

In 1881, after a fall in Dundee, Scotland, Darby’s heart and lungs began to fail. A paralytic stroke soon followed, leaving him unable to walk without assistance. During his final days many Brethren gathered at his bedside. On one occasion Darby told them, ‘Well, it will be strange to find myself in heaven; but it won’t be a strange Christ – one I have known these many years. How little I know of Him! I am glad He knows me.’ Two weeks later

The dear servant fell asleep, with the quietness and peace that had characterized him in his long and devoted life...He had said, on the previous Thursday, ‘I feel like a bird, ready to fly away;’ and, on the following Saturday, 29<sup>th</sup> April, 1882, at 11:05a.m., in the presence of all in the house, standing around his bed...he departed to be with Christ.

In his final letter, read out before his funeral, which was attended by upwards of a thousand people, Darby urged his ‘Beloved Brethren’ to be ever ‘watching and waiting for Christ’.

The graveside service began with the hymn, *O Happy Morn, the Lord Will Come*. Mr C. Stanley then read from Matthew’s account of Christ’s burial and those who despaired at His death, before declaring with great conviction:

But we are here around the servant’s grave with knowledge that the Master has risen; that He is with us here in our sorrow, and that He is coming soon to take us all to be with Himself in heaven. How could we possibly have come here to lay this loved one in the grave with confidence did we not know the blessed hope of resurrection?...One name only of all who have walked this earth is worthy here to be remembered and spoken of, even He who has annulled death...and Who will, we know not how soon, call forth from the tomb the bodies of His sleeping saints, and take up His living ones to be with Himself for ever...We place the body of our beloved brother in this grave, with this our blessed hope, to comfort and cheer our sorrowing hearts.

The hymn, *Soon Thou Wilt Come Again*, was then sung, before Mr. Stanley read John 14:1-3 and 1 Thess. 4:15-18. He then paid the following tribute to John Nelson Darby:

The precious truths contained in these and other scriptures have now become familiar to thousands, and perhaps tens of thousands in the Church of God. But some of us around

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<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Gaebelien, *The Conflict of the Ages*, pp. xiv-xv.

<sup>50</sup> Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, p. 79.

<sup>51</sup> Darby, ‘Letter to Mr. Brockhaus (7 June 1877)’, in Darby, *Letters*, 2:395.

this grave may be able to look back and remember the time when these distinctive truths were forgotten and unknown. Yes; we can remember a time when there was not a person in the various districts from which we have gathered today that knew the blessed truth of the coming of the Lord to take His Church, or the abiding presence of the Holy Ghost on earth. He would acknowledge in the presence of our God, in the presence of death – as we commit this precious body to the Lord’s care in this grave – the great goodness of our God and Father in using our beloved departed brother as His vessel to restore these and other blessed truths to the Church...Let our prayer be that the Lord may use his death to our blessing, and his writings more largely to the rich blessing of the entire Church of God.

Mr. Stanley ‘then prayed that the coming of the Lord, as the *immediate* hope of believers – which our departed brother had, under God’s hand, been the means of reviving – might more than ever be a living and operative truth in our souls.’<sup>52</sup> All of us here today would, I’m sure, amen his prayer. The hymn, *Lord Jesus, Come*, was then sung, as Darby’s body was lowered into the grave.

Asleep in Jesus, John Nelson Darby awaits with us today the great ‘cry of command’, ‘the archangel’s call’, and ‘the sound of the trumpet of God’ (1 Thess. 4:16).

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*‘The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!”  
... He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen.  
Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen’  
(Rev. 22:17, 20-21).*

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<sup>52</sup> *The Last Days of J.N.D. (John Nelson Darby) From March 3<sup>rd</sup> to April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1882, With Portrait, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn* (Christchurch: N.C.M. Turner, 1925).

# **IT WON'T BE LONG**

**It won't be long 'till Christ returns,  
To catch away His waiting Bride.  
It won't be long, the trumpet call will sound;  
And we'll be gathered to His side.  
Above the turmoil and the strife;  
Above this world with all its pain.  
There peace and joy and boundless life,  
When with the Lord in heaven we'll reign.**

**It won't be long, the day will dawn,  
When Christ will rise up from His throne.  
Down through the skies of blue He will descend,  
When He returns to claim His own.  
The dead in Christ will rise up first,  
Then those alive will be transformed.  
O happy day, to sing God's praise,  
When we join in redemption's song.**

**It won't be long, 'till Christ returns,  
When we shall see Him face to face.  
And enter into all that He's prepared,  
Through His great sacrifice and grace.  
The Marriage Supper of the Lamb;  
The mansions made by perfect Man;  
The Blessed Hope for which we've yearned;  
The consummation of God's plan.**

**It won't be long, the day draws near,  
When saints in glory will be found.  
The former things will all have passed away,  
And songs of praises will resound.  
Behold all things will be made new;  
The dwelling place of God with men;  
And we will live eternally,  
In the New Jerusalem.**

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