

# The Origin of the Pretribulation Rapture

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The story of the development of pretribulationism is a tangled one. From its inception in the early 1800s, there has been a deliberate attempt to cover up its origins. And the cover up continues to this day. This has been perpetrated along two lines of revisionism. One was to hide the real origin of pretribulationism in 19th century Scotland, and attribute it to John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren. The other has been a recent attempt to selectively quote and misrepresent ancient Christian documents to make it appear early Christian writers were pretribulationists. The purpose of this article is to document a timeline of the major events in the development of this relatively new prophetic viewpoint.

## THE REFORMATION CHURCH

During and after the Protestant Reformation (16th century), Protestant Christians held to what is called “historicism,” a view of prophecy that considers the events of Revelation as occurring all throughout the Church's history. This was supported by employing the “year-day theory” — that the 1260, 1290, & 1335 days mentioned in Daniel and Revelation should be interpreted as years. It was common for Protestants to identify the Roman Catholic Church with Mystery Babylon, and the papacy with the Antichrist. Since historicists considered the tribulation as encompassing most of the Church age, and viewed themselves as being in the tribulation, they were necessarily posttribulationists. This view lent itself to a flurry of date-setting in the first half of the 19th century, where the 1260, 1290, & 1335 days (years) were calculated from the Roman Church's rise to supreme power under the Roman Emperors, until the second coming.

## THE RETURN TO PREMILLENNIALISM

### **Morgan Edwards**

Morgan Edwards was a Baptist minister in Pennsylvania in the mid-late 1700s. As a teenager and seminary student, Morgan wrote a hypothetical essay as part of his seminary training. Morgan was assigned the task, by his tutor, to write an essay on the Millennium using literal interpretation. In Morgan's hypothetical scenario, he separated the rapture from the second coming by at least 3.5 years. His work seems to be a mixture of futurism and historicism. And, Morgan contradicted himself and made many obvious errors. Yet, his work appears to be the very first time the rapture was

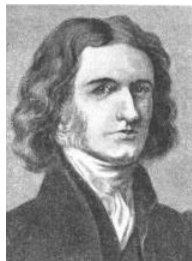
separated from the second coming of Christ. Many years later (1788), Morgan published his essay in a book. While Morgan Edwards is sometimes cited as a pretribulationist, his work indicates that he did not wish to be seen as a literalist, and was content with the typical historicist view of the times. He insisted that his work was purely hypothetical. Furthermore, there is no apparent connection between Morgan Edwards' essay and modern pretribulationism. Morgan's later works do not display pretribulationist thinking. We must look elsewhere for the origins of modern pretribulationism.

### **Father Manuel de Lacunza**

Fr. Manuel de Lacunza was a Roman Catholic Jesuit priest, born in Chili in 1731, and sent to Spain at the young age of 15 to become a Jesuit priest. When the Jesuits were expelled from Spain in 1767, Fr. Lacunza moved to Italy. In 1790, he wrote a book on prophecy, called The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty, which was published in Spain in 1812. Fr. Lacunza wrote under the pen name, *Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra (a converted Jew)*, allegedly to avoid detection since his book ended up on Rome's banned books list.

Fr. Lacunza's book promoted a return to the literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy, and the primitive futurist view of Revelation. He rejected the "year-day theory" of the historicists. Consequently, he saw a personal Antichrist and future tribulation of 1260 days, followed by the second coming of the Lord. He did not espouse a pretribulation rapture.

### **Edward Irving**



Edward Irving was the pastor of a Church of Scotland (Presbyterian) congregation in London in the 1820s. Irving became aware of Fr. Lacunza's book, and was so impressed with it, he took it upon himself to translate it into English, adding a lengthy Preliminary Discourse of his own. Irving's English translation was published in 1827. Irving's developing prophetic views can be clearly discerned from his Preliminary Discourse, including, surprisingly, all the key elements of dispensationalism that later showed up in Darby's writings, (see Appendix A for excerpts). Irving indicated that he had been teaching these things to his congregation beginning in Christmas 1825, several years before Darby embraced dispensational ideas.<sup>1</sup>

Irving strongly denounced the apostasy of the Christian denominations in his preaching. He proclaimed that God was about to restore Apostles and prophets to the Church in the last days, and that a great Pentecostal outpouring would come just before the soon return of Jesus Christ. Right on schedule, rumors of healings, tongues, visions, and other manifestations began circulating in Port Glasgow, Scotland, from the home of

James and George MacDonald and their sister Margaret. People came from England, Ireland, and Scotland to observe the strange manifestations in the prayer meetings held by the MacDonalds.

The “revival” quickly spread to Irving's church, with tongues, prophecy, and other manifestations breaking out. Irving was eventually defrocked by the Church of Scotland because of the strange goings on, and his heretical views of the person of Christ, (he taught that Jesus had a fallen human nature). So, Irving moved his congregation to a rented hall, forming the *Catholic Apostolic Church*. Not only were tongues, prophetic revelations, and other alleged miracles occurring in Irving's congregation, but these ecstatic utterances focused on end-time prophecy concerning the coming of the Lord.

### **Margaret MacDonald's Visions – March, 1830**

In March or April of 1830, after being ill and bed-ridden for about 18 months, Margaret MacDonald claimed to have seen a series of visions. She wrote down these visions in a series of letters, and sent copies to Edward Irving. A month later (June), Irving claimed in a private letter, that Margaret's visions had a huge impact on him: *“the substance of Mary Campbell's and Margaret MacDonald's visions or revelations, given in their papers, carry to me a spiritual conviction and a spiritual reproof which I cannot express.”* (See Appendix B for the full text of the letter).

The outstanding feature of Margaret's visions was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on an elite group within Christianity, just prior to the coming of Antichrist. (See Appendix C for the full text of Margaret MacDonald's letter). She saw only “Spirit filled” Christians being caught up to meet Jesus in the air, which she identified as the five “wise virgins” of Jesus' parable in Matthew 25. The rest of Christianity, the “foolish virgins,” would be left to be purged and purified by suffering at the hands of the Antichrist, until they were fit to be with the Lord.

### **The Morning Watch – September 1830**

The official quarterly publication of the Irvingite charismatics was called, *“The Morning Watch.”* It had exclusively promoted a posttribulation second coming through mid-1830. But, the September 1830 issue featured part two of an article by someone named, “Fidus,” promoting the theory that the seven letters in Revelation describe seven consecutive “Church Ages.” In this article, Fidus articulated the new idea of a partial pretribulation rapture. He saw the Philedelphian (Spirit filled) church being raptured prior to the tribulation, and the Laodicean church representing the rest of Christianity. (See Appendix D for the full text of this article). *The Morning Watch* was quickly becoming the vehicle for providing a biblical basis for Margaret MacDonald's pretribulation rapture of “Spirit filled” Christians.

### **The Morning Watch – June, 1831**

In the June 1831 issue of *The Morning Watch*, Edward Irving made his pretribulationism crystal clear. His biblical support for the elite “Spirit-filled” believers being raptured before the tribulation was the catching up of the “man-child” in Revelation 12. Irving argued that the body of Christ has been “united to Him by regeneration of the Holy Ghost, ‘born of God, sons of God,’ (Rev. ii. 27; xii. 5). And therefore we with him are called Christ (1 Cor. xii. 12).” Irving went on to say that, “with this key [that Spirit filled Christians are also “Christ,” and that the catching up of the “man child” refers to the rapture of Spirit-filled believers] *the Old Testament prophecies which speak of Christ must be interpreted, ... and especially those prophecies which speak of the pregnant woman: to all which an explicit key is given to us in the xiith chapter of Revelation; where, though the child is spoken of as one (ver. 5), it is also described as many (ver. 11), who overcame the acuser; and when that number is accomplished, there are still a remnant of her seed, whom the dragon doth persecute and seek to destroy (ver. 17). This two-fold company – the one gathered before, and the other after the travailing woman is cast out into the wilderness, ... – do together constitute the New Jerusalem, the bride of the Lamb, which cometh down from heaven.*” (pp. 301-302).

### **The Morning Watch – December, 1832**

An anonymous writer in the December 1832 (p. 249) issue of *The Morning Watch* likely referred to Margaret MacDonald's letters (and probably her friend Mary Campbell & Emily Cardale of London) with the following words; “*The Spirit of God has caused several young women, in different parts of Great Britain, to condense into a few broken sentences more and deeper theology than ever Vaughan, Chalmers, or Irving uttered in their longest sermons; and therefore more than all the rest of the Evangelical pulpits ever put forth in the whole course of their existence.*”

### **Robert Baxter (1833)**

British Lawyer, Robert Baxter, was an early member of the Irvingite charismatics. Baxter had previously been a posttribulationist, but eventually adopted the pretribulation rapture views of Irving. He, along with several other “prophets” of the Catholic Apostolic Church, gave many prophecies, all of which failed. He later became disillusioned with the whole movement, and abandoned Irvingism (and pretribulationism). Upon his departure, he wrote an expose of Irvingism, called *Narrative of Facts, Characterizing the Supernatural Manifestations in Members of Mr. Irving's Congregation* (1833), including Irving's early pretribulation teachings. “*An opinion had been advanced in some of Mr. Irving's writings, that before the second coming of Christ, and before the setting in upon the world of the day of vengeance, emphatically so called in the Scriptures, the saints would be caught up to heaven like Enoch and Elijah; and would be thus saved from the destruction of this world, as Noah was saved in the ark, and Lot was saved from*

*Sodom.*" Baxter wrote that the coming of the Lord was the main topic of the prophetic utterances in Irving's congregation. Looking back, he thought they had all been deceived by lying spirits pretending to be the Holy Spirit. (See Appendix E).

### **Robert Norton (1861)**

Robert Norton was the author of *"The Restoration of Apostles and Prophets in the Catholic Apostolic Church"* (1861). Norton took a favorable view of the Irvingite movement, writing in the preface that his book was offered *"as proofs or illustrations of its heavenly origin and character."* (See Appendix F). Norton named Margaret MacDonald as the first to proclaim the "new doctrine" of a pretribulation rapture, which was picked up by Edward Irving.

### **Samuel P. Tregelles (1855/1864)**

Samuel P. Tregelles was the most eminent Plymouth Brethren scholar of the 19th century, with first hand knowledge of the Irvingites. In an 1855 article in *The Christian Annotator*, Tregelles wrote that the true Christian hope is the final "advent" and "not some secret advent, or secret rapture to the Lord, as Judaizers supposed might be the case..."<sup>2</sup> (A later Plymouth Brethren writer, William Kelly, also identified the Irvingites as the "Judaizers"<sup>3</sup>). Nine years later, Tregelles published *"The Hope of Christ's Second Coming,"* in which he wrote: *"But when the theory of a secret coming of Christ was first brought forward (about the year 1832), it was adopted with eagerness: ... I am not aware that there was any definite teaching that there would be a secret rapture of the Church at a secret coming, until this was given forth as an "utterance" in Mr. Irving's Church, from what was there received as being the voice of the Spirit. But whether any one ever asserted such a thing or not, it was from that supposed revelation that the modern doctrine and the modern phraseology respecting it arose. It came not from Holy Scripture, but from that which falsely pretended to be the Spirit of God, while not owning the true doctrine of our Lord's incarnation in the same flesh and blood as His brethren, but without taint of sin."<sup>4</sup> The last statement, "not owning the true doctrine of our Lord's incarnation ... without taint of sin," referred to the Irvingite cult's heretical view of the person of Christ, and to the Apostle John's test that any spirit not acknowledging the true doctrine of the incarnation was of "the spirit of antichrist," (1 John 4:1-3).*

### **John Nelson Darby**



The Irish lawyer, John Nelson Darby, one of the founders of the Plymouth Brethren, is typically credited by pretribulationists as the man who "revived" dispensational pretribulationism. Yet it is clear that Darby was a latecomer to pretribulationism, which originated among the Irvingites. Darby wrote his first prophecy paper in 1829.<sup>5</sup> In this paper, he clearly did not have dispensationalist or pretribulationist views. Darby

argued that unfulfilled Old Testament prophecy concerning the restoration of Israel should be applied to the Church, the typical historicist – amillennial point of view. He also placed the Church on earth until Armageddon, showing he was still a posttribulationist. By this time, dispensationalist ideas were already well developed in Irving's 1826 Preliminary Discourse. Darby was familiar with Irving and his ideas. On pages 6-10 & 19-21, Darby referred to Irving, de Lacunza, *The Morning Watch*, and even quoted some of Irving's works, including his Preliminary Discourse! So, while dispensational concepts may have eventually taken root in Darby's mind, they were not developed by him! He borrowed them from Irving.

In 1830, Darby was still defending historicism against futurism three months after the pretribulationist "Fidus" article appeared in *The Morning Watch*. In the December 1830 issue of *The Christian Herald*, Darby published an article entitled, "*On 'Days' Signifying 'Years' in Prophetic Language.*"<sup>6</sup> Darby defended the standard historicist view, that the 1260 day tribulation meant 1260 years. (See Appendix H). Consequently, he saw the tribulation as largely past, and could not possibly have been expecting a pretribulation rapture, which requires a "futurist" viewpoint.

In 1830, J. N. Darby also visited the MacDonald's in Port Glasgow, and observed the strange manifestations in their prayer meetings, as Darby later recalled. Darby described the sequence of events — who prayed, who spoke in tongues, etc.<sup>7</sup> But, while he noted Margaret's speaking, he failed to mention the subject of her prophesying. However, John Cardale, who was also present, wrote that Margaret "*commenced also speaking ... gave testimony to the judgments coming on the earth; but also directed the church to the coming of the Lord as her hope of deliverance,*" and was heard speaking in a loud voice "*denouncing the coming judgments.*"<sup>8</sup> Therefore, we can conclude that Darby was fully aware that the pretribulation rapture was a subject of the prophecies among the MacDonalds and the Irvingite charismatics. It was nine more years before Darby clearly espoused a pretribulation rapture in his published works.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have tried to be fair in this short article, attempting to avoid over-reaching the facts or drawing unwarranted conclusions. Yet, the evidence points to an inescapable conclusion. The pretribulation rapture view did not grow out of a diligent study of the Scriptures, or revival of early Christian doctrines. Rather, it was birthed from the womb of charismatic excesses, and developed by a preacher known for his heretical views of the person of Christ. Interestingly, Irving's heresy was precisely the same heresy as many modern self-appointed prophets – that Jesus was a proto-type "Christian," possessing a fallen sinful nature, and able to live godly only by the power of the indwelling Spirit. While Irving himself was already developing dispensationalist ideas

in 1825, his pretribulationism was not the direct outgrowth of the implications of his dispensational leanings. Rather, the secret rapture of the wise virgins first appeared in the visions of Margaret MacDonald, followed by the prophecies among Irving's congregation. Irving, having been already predisposed to dispensational ideas, simply provided the theological framework for the new revelation of a secret rapture, allegedly revealed by the Holy Spirit.

It is clear that Darby was fully aware of the alleged prophecies and visions among the MacDonalds and Irvingites, Irving's dispensational ideas, and the published articles in *The Morning Watch*. Darby seems to have given the whole theory a facelift, disposing of the charismatic connections, and developing Irving's partial pretribulation rapture into the full blown dispensational pretribulationism proclaimed today. As a respectable lawyer and clergyman, Darby was able to sell the new eschatology to the public who would naturally be skeptical of the excesses of the Irvingites. So, while Darby did not originate the pretribulation rapture idea, he gave it theological respectability, and became its greatest salesman.

Why then are John Darby and the Plymouth Brethren almost universally credited with the development of dispensational pretribulationism? The answer is simply that the true origin is being intentionally hidden – the ecstatic visions of Margaret MacDonald, the defrocked Edward Irving, and the excesses and failed prophecies of the Irvingite charismatic cult.

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I am indebted to Dave MacPherson whose years of research uncovered the many out of print works cited in this paper, and who graciously provided me with hundreds of pages of photocopies of these works.

#### NOTES:

1. See: Dave MacPherson, *The Rapture Plot*, p. 94
2. Tregelles, Samuel P., *Premillennial Advent* (The Christian Annotator, June 16, 1855), p. 190.
3. Kelly, William, *The Catholic Apostolic Body, or Irvingites* (The Bible Treasury, Dec. 1890), p. 191.
4. Tregelles, Samuel P., *The Hope of Christ's Second Coming* (Ambassadors for Christ, n.d. 1864), pp. 34,35.
5. Darby, J. N., *Reflections* (1829), Prophetic No. 1, pp. 1-31.
6. Darby, J. N., *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, Prophetic No. 1, p. 40.
7. Darby, J. N., *The Irrationalism of Infidelity* (London: 1853), pp. 283-285.
8. Cardale, John B., *On the Extraordinary Manifestations in Port Glasgow* (The Morning Watch, Dec. 1830) p. 870, 871, 873.

## Appendix A

### Excerpts from Edward Irving's Preliminary Discourse (1826)

Edward Irving's English translation of de Lacunza's book included a rather lengthy (126 page) Preliminary Discourse outlining Irving's eschatology, and his analysis of de Lacunza's eschatology. In this discourse, Irving spoke clearly of the very fundamentals of dispensationalism years before Darby wrote anything on the subject. All of the basic elements of dispensationalism can be found in Irving's Preliminary Discourse. Of special notice is Irving's statement that he first began to teach these things to his congregation, "Last Christmas, which fell upon a Sabbath" (p. iv). A few pages later, he wrote of teaching these things to his congregation from "Sabbath to Sabbath," that is Sunday to Sunday (pg. vii). The year 1825 is the only year of that decade where Christmas fell on a Sunday. His preliminary discourse is also dated "Christmas Day, 1826" at the end. And on pg iv, he wrote, "It was this day twelve-months," referring back to when he first began teaching his dispensational ideas to his congregation. Irving also stated that after being convinced of this eschatology, he did not immediately inform anyone, but "*pondered the matter for several months in my own heart, until there was not the shadow of a doubt left upon my mind that I had been in error, if the word of God was in the right.*" It is clear therefore, that Irving was convinced of the ideas contained in his Preliminary Discourse several months before Christmas 1825, several years before Darby.

*"When I obtained this light, I did not make haste to communicate it to any one, but pondered the matter for several months in my own heart, until there was not the shadow of a doubt left upon my mind that I had been in error, if the word of God was in the right. And perceiving upon the grounds laid down in a discourse which I have published under the title of "Babylon and Infidelity foredoomed," that the time was near at hand, and the series of thick-coming judgments and fearful perplexities was just about to open, I felt it as an immediate and overpowering duty which I owed to the Lord and to his unawakened church, to make known that sure conviction to which I had attained. But still my fears withheld me, and I know not how long these unfaithful fears would have withheld me from entering with good earnest on the warfare, when the Lord himself, as oft his manner is, plunged me into the fight whether I would or not. Last Christmas, which fell upon a Sabbath, purposing to warn my flock against the several indulgences to which at that season we are all exposed, I chose for my text the 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th verses of the fifth chapter of 1 Thessalonians, and beginning my discourse by an exposition of the preceding context, found that I had insensibly wandered too far into that subject which was near my heart, to return again; which feeling as the admonition of the spirit, I feared to shun any longer to declare the whole counsel of God, and so it came to pass that upon the day set apart for the commemoration of the first advent, I was found maintaining the doctrine of the second advent. It was this day twelve-months, a day to be remembered in the history of my ministry; for which, not I only, but many souls now walking in the hope of thine appearing have reason to bless thee, oh thou great Head of thy Church!*

*The doctrine which I maintained, was, that "the coming of the Lord in judgment, from the time of Enoch, the first of inspired preachers, until the time of John, the last of them, had been upheld before the elect church as the great object of their hope and desire; and for these three great reasons, - 1st. That then the number of the elect is accomplished; 2nd. That then their warfare is ended; and 3rd. That their kingdom is come: while on the other hand, it had been equally upheld before the reprobate and unbelieving, as the great object of fear and argument of repentance; 1st. because their kingdom is ended, 2ndly. their day of grace concluded; and 3rdly. their judgment, i.e. of the quick is accomplished, and the fate of all their generations sealed until the judgment of the dead, which cometh not till after the reign of the saints and the elect, designated in scripture, "a thousand years," and among divines, the millennium."*



Having broken ground in this great controversy, I found it necessary to maintain myself, and to that end took up certain great and strong positions, which seemed to me the keys of the whole debatable land; of which positions these three were the chief.

First; That the present visable church of Gentiles, which hath been the depository of the oracles and the sacraments, and the ordinances, since the Jewish state was dissolved, I mean the mixed multitude who are baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, under that seal including Protestants, Roman Catholics, Greek church, Armenians, &c. and all the sects of each, as Scottish, English, Irish, .... with the dissenters and seceders from each, that this body of baptized men, which I call the Gentile church, who should every one of them have been a saint; being "by baptism ingrafted in Christ Jesus to be made partakers of his justice, whereby our sins are covered and remitted;" standeth threatened in the Holy Scriptures because of its hypocrisies, idolatries, superstitions, infidelity, and enormous wickedness, "because it hath transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, and broken the everlasting covenant" (Isaiah xxiv.) with such a terrible judgment, as hath not been, not ever shall again be seen upon the earth; in the which deluge of wrath she shall be clean dissolved, as the synagogue was heretofore in the destruction of Jerusalem, when she in like manner had filled up the measure of her iniquity: - which fearful consumation I judge to be close at hand, both by the signs of the times, and from the prophetic numbers expressly given to guide us in the anticipation of these great Gentile judgments, which are mentioned in scripture wherever and whenever the coming of the Lord is mentioned.

Secondly; When the Lord shall have finished the taking of witness against the Gentiles, and summed up the present dispensation of testimony in this great verdict of judgment, and while the execution is proceeding, he will begin to prepare another ark of testimony, or rather to make the whole earth an ark of testimony; and to that end he will turn his Holy Spirit unto his ancient people the Jews, and bring unto them those days of refreshing spoken of by all the holy prophets since the world began; [pp. iv,v]

Thirdly. That these judgments upon Gentile nations and all the earth, he will finish by his own personal appearance in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; raising those who sleep in Jesus, and changing those of the Gentile church who still abide in life; and preserving the mourning Jewish church, as Goshen was preserved in the plagues of Egypt: and when the promised land shall have been cleared of all intruders, and they themselves by suffering perfected for the habitation of it, he shall lead them into it with a mighty and outstretched arm: and sit upon the throne of David, judging and seeking judgment, and hastening righteousness; and send forth the law from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem; and rule among the nations, and be the Prince of universal peace; using in this judgment and government of the earth his risen saints, who shall be ministers to execute whatever his pleasure is. And thus, Satan being cast out, and the Prince of light, and the heavenly Jerusalem, the dwelling place of his elect church being present, the Jerusalem on earth, with the house of Jacob, and all the nations shall enjoy that fulness of peace and joy, that millennial reign of righteousness, for which we all hope and pray, and diligently labour.

These three points of doctrine concerning the Gentile church, the future Jewish and universal church, and the personal advent of the Lord to destroy the one and to build up the other, I opened and defended out of the Scriptures from Sabbath to Sabbath..." [pp. vi,vii].

"I sought very diligently to define from the scriptures what was the precise place and purpose of the present spiritual dispensation, which God hath interposed between a dispensation of a local

and typical character upon the one hand, and a dispensation yet to be, of a universal and real character upon the other; both centering in and radiating out from the Jewish people." [p. ix]

"This idea being clearly demonstrated to my mind as the root and germ of the dispensations both Jew and Gentile, or of "earthly things" as distinguished from "heavenly things," or the things of the kingdom, (John iii) it was a very easy matter to derive and set forth the wisdom and adaption of those particular forms which the purpose assumed, under the one and the other of these great preparatory institutions of God. ...[p. x]

"[F]or the declaration of the righteousness which is by faith; in order that the mystery might come full before the observation of men, and be a witness against them, whether they would read the written word or not: this they had in the temple and sacrifices and levitical priesthood of the former dispensation, and this we have now in the two sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the Communion of the Saints, who are partakers of Christ's sufferings, and "fill up that which is wanting of these sufferings for his body's sake, that is the church." These three great parts are necessary to express and embody that idea of witness and testimony for the conviction of the world, which we believe to be the germinating principle of this preparatory dispensation." [p. xi]

"The restoration of the Jewish nation, to be again the Church of God, and their re-establishment in their own land, to be the head of the nations, and the centre of the earth's unity," [p. xii]

"The epistles to the seven churches in Asia, to whom the whole book of the Apocalypse is addressed, do show that it was intended for the instruction and consolation of the Gentile and not the future Jewish church as my author [Lacunza] would have it. Upon the same grounds, on which I conclude that Isaiah was inspired to be a witness to the Jewish church and nation, and believe that all the terms there used of Jerusalem, Zion, Judah, Israel, &c. are to be literally understood of them, and by right belong to them in the first intention, and will certainly be fulfilled of them, I do conclude that the Apocalypse belongeth to the Gentile church, and was given for her instruction and consolation, and will be all fulfilled in her ... From whence we conclude, as well as from the emblematical character of the whole book, that if Jewish names do occur in it, as in the sealing of the tribes, and in the new Jerusalem which cometh down from heaven, they ought not to be understood literally, but emblematically, as Egypt, and Sodom, and Babylon are." [p. xxxviii]

"Christmas Day, 1826."

Several points are crystal clear in Irving's dispensationalism.

1. A distinct premillennialism, where the future Millennium intervenes between the coming of the Lord and the final judgment of the wicked dead.
2. The visible Church, made up of the various denominations, is not necessarily the true Church of Jesus Christ, i.e., that the mystical universal Church is made up of only the redeemed within the denominations.
3. A clear dichotomy between Israel and the Gentile Church.
4. A clear dichotomy between the previous Jewish dispensation, the present dispensation, and the future Millennial (Jewish) dispensation.
5. That the present dispensation is a parenthetical period of the Gentile Church between the former and future Jewish dispensations.
6. A clear distinction between "heavenly things" and "earthly things" in the Millennium, which Irving sees as the Church dwelling in the New Jerusalem while the earthly Jerusalem is restored for the Jewish people. At this point, Irving would be a posttribulational dispensationalist.

## Appendix B

**Letter of Edward Irving to Mr. Chalmers.** It was published in the biography of Edward Irving entitled, *The Life of Edward Irving*, by Mrs. Oliphant, and published in 1865 by Hurst and Blackett, London.

*"13 Judd Place, East  
June 2nd, 1830.*

*"My dear and kind friend, - I have at last found the document I referred to. You will find it in the printed Acts of the year 1704, Act xxviii., and from the 6th of certain 'Overtures concerning Schools and Bursaries, and for instructing youth in the principles of religion;' and is as follows:-*

*"There are very many Acts of the Church scattered through these years following the Restoration concerning the advancement of learning, which would, I think, strengthen your hands very much in any undertaking to that effect.*

*"I had thought to see you to thank you in person for your great kindness to me and my church on this occasion; but the state of my poor boy's health prevents me from leaving home for a night. Accept of them now, and be assured of my willingness to repay unto Christ and His Church the kindness which by you He hath shown unto me; and whenever any opportunity occurs of serving you personally, be assured of my readiness.*

*"I perceive two things in Scotland of the most fearful omen: First, self-sufficient ignorance of theological truth, and a readiness to pride themselves in and boast of it, and to call everything speculation which proposes to advance the bounds, or rather narrow the limits, of theological knowledge. My doctrine on our Lord's human nature is as literally the doctrine of the Confessions of the Church as can be - viz., That He took the human nature of the Virgin, that it was thoroughly and completely sanctified in the generation by the work of the Holy Ghost, and underwent no process or progress of sanctification. Yet, through ignorance of the person and office of the Holy Ghost, I perceive the greatest horror to prevail against this truth, and a readiness to adopt one or other of the errors - either that His nature was intrinsically better than ours, or that it underwent a physical change before its assumption into the person of the Son. If you would see, within a short compass, the three opinions brought to the test of the Confessions of Faith, I recommend to you a short anonymous tract, entitled *The Opinions circulating concerning the Human Nature of our Lord brought to trial before the Westminster Confessions of Faith*. You ought to give some study to this point, and stand in the breach for the truth. I have thoroughly gone through the subject of the Incarnation; and if it served you, could at any time give you the history from the beginning of the controversies on this subject, and of its present form. The second thing which grieves and oppresses my heart with respect to poor Scotland, is the hardness of heart manifest in the levity and cruelty with which they speak of others; the zeal and readiness with which they rush to overthrow such men of God as John Campbell; the union of all parties to this end; the scorn with which they regard the signs of the Holy Ghost beginning to be again vouchsafed to the Church; and, if not scorn, the mere juryman way of considering them, as the House of Commons might, without any respect to any existing promise, or probability, or doctrine of any kind upon the subject, - also without any regard to the discernment of the Holy Ghost in us, and even as if the Holy Ghost were merely a sharpener of our natural faculties to detect imposture or to know sincere persons. The substance of Mary Campbell's and Margaret Macdonald's visions or revelations, given in their papers, carry to me a spiritual conviction and a spiritual reproof which I cannot express. Mr. Cunningham, of Lainshaw, said to me the other day, that he had seen nothing since the Apostles' days*

worthy to be compared with a letter of Mary Dunlop's which is written to the person of this city. Thomas Erskine and other persons express themselves more overpowered by the love, and assurance, and unity seen in their prayers and conversations than by the works. Oh, my friend! oh, my dear master! there are works of the Spirit and communications of the Spirit which few of us ever dream of! Let us not resist them when we see them in another. Mind my words when I say, 'The Evangelical party in the Church of Scotland will lay all flat if they be not prevented.' I desire my true love to Mrs Chalmers and Miss Anne. May God give you a prosperous journey!

Your faithful friend and brother  
"Edwd Irving."

## Appendix C

Here is the only surviving letter of Margaret MacDonald describing her visions.

"It was first the awful state of the land that was pressed upon me. I saw the blindness and infatuation of the people to be very great. I felt the cry of Liberty just to be the hiss of the serpent, to drown them in perdition. It was just 'no God.' I repeated the words, **Now** there is distress of nations, with perplexity, the seas and the waves roaring, men's hearts failing them for fear - **now look out for the sign of the Son of man.** Here I was made to stop and cry out, O it is not known what the sign of the Son of man is; the people of God think they are waiting, but they know not what it is. I felt this needed to be revealed, and that there was great darkness and error about it; **but suddenly what it was burst upon me with a glorious light I saw it was just the Lord himself descending from Heaven with a shout, just the glorified man. even Jesus; but that all must, as Stephen was, be filled with the Holy Ghost, that they might look up, and see the brightness of the Father's glory.** I saw the error to be, that men think that it will be something seen by the natural eye; but 'tis spiritual discernment that is needed, the eye of God in his people. Many passages were revealed, in a light in which I had not before seen them. I repeated, 'Now is the kingdom of Heaven like unto ten virgins, who went forth to meet the Bridegroom, five wise and five foolish; they that were foolish took their lamps, but took no oil with them; **but they that were wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.**' 'But be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is; and be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but **be filled with the Spirit.**' This was the oil the wise virgins took in their vessels - this is the light to be kept burning - the light of God - that we may discern that which cometh not with observation to the natural eye. **Only those who have the light of God within them will see the sign of his appearance.** No need to follow them who say, see here, or see there, for his day shall be as the lightning to those in whom the living Christ is. **'Tis Christ in us that will lift us up - he is the light - 'tis only those that are alive in him that will be caught up to meet him in the air. I saw that we must be in the Spirit, that we might see spiritual things.** John was in the Spirit, when he saw a throne set in Heaven. - But I saw that the glory of the ministration of the Spirit had not been known. I repeated frequently, but the spiritual temple must and shall be reared, and **the fullness of Christ be poured into his body, and then shall we be caught up to meet him.** Oh none will be counted worthy of this calling but his body, which is the church, and which must be a candlestick all of gold. I often said, Oh the glorious inbreaking of God which is now about to burst on this earth; Oh the glorious temple which is now about to be reared, the bride adorned for her husband; and Oh what a holy, holy bride she must be, to be prepared for such a glorious bridegroom. I said, Now shall the people of God have to do with realities - now shall the glorious mystery of God in our nature be known - now shall it be known what it is for man to be glorified. I felt that the revelation of Jesus Christ had yet to be opened up - it is not

knowledge about God that it contains, but it is an entering into God - I saw that there was a glorious breaking in of God to be. I felt as Elijah surrounded with chariots of fire. I saw as it were, the spiritual temple reared, and the Head Stone brought forth with shoutings of grace, grace, unto it. It was a glorious light above the brightness of the sun, that shone round about me. I felt that those who were filled with the spirit could see spiritual things, and feel walking in the midst of them, while those who had not the Spirit could see nothing - so that two shall be in one bed, the one taken and the other left, because the one has the light of God within while the other cannot see the Kingdom of Heaven.

I saw the people of God in an awfully dangerous situation, surrounded by nets and entanglements, about to be tried, and many about to be deceived and fall. Now will THE WICKED be revealed, with all power and signs and lying wonders, so that if it were possible the very elect will be deceived. - This is the fiery trial which is to try us. - It will be for the purging and purifying of the real members of the body of Jesus; but Oh it will be a fiery trial. Every soul will be shaken to the very centre. The enemy will try to shake in every thing we have believed - But the trial of real faith will be found to honour and praise and glory. Nothing but what is of God will stand. The stony-ground hearers will be made manifest - the love of many will wax cold I frequently said that night, and often since, now shall the awful sight of a false Christ be seen on this earth, and nothing but the living Christ in us can detect this awful attempt of the enemy to deceive - or it is with all deceivableness of unrighteousness he will work - he will have a counterpart for every part of God's truth and an imitation for every work of the Spirit. The Spirit must and will be poured out on the church, that she may be purified and filled with God - and just in proportion as the Spirit of God works, so will he when our Lord anoints men with power, so will he. This is particularly the nature of the trial, through which those are to pass who will be counted worthy to stand before the Son of man. There will be outward trial too, but 'tis principally temptation. It is brought on by the outpouring of the Spirit, and will just increase in proportion as the Spirit is poured out. The trial of the Church is from Antichrist. It is by being filled with the Spirit that we shall be kept. I frequently said, Oh be filled with the Spirit - have the light of God in you, that you may detect satan - be full of eyes within - be clay in the hands of the potter - submit to be filled, filled with God This will build the temple. It is not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit saith the Lord. This will fit us to enter into the marriage supper of the lamb. I saw it to be the will of God that all should be filled. But what hindered the real life of God from being received by his people, was their turning from Jesus who is the way to the Father. They were not entering in by the door. For he is faithful who hath said, by me if any man enter in he shall find pasture. They were passing the cross, through which every drop of the Spirit of God flows to us. All power that comes not through the blood of Christ is not of God. When I say, they are looking from the cross, I feel that there is much in it - they turn from the blood of the Lamb, by which we overcome, and in which our robes are washed and made white. There are low views of God's holiness, and ceasing to condemn sin in the flesh, and a looking from him who humbled himself, and made himself of no reputation. Oh! it is needed, much needed at present, a leading back to the cross, I saw that night, and often since, that there will be an outpouring of the Spirit on the body, such as has not been, a baptism of fire, that all the dross may be put away. Oh there must and will be such an indwelling of the living God as has not been - the servants of God sealed in their foreheads - great conformity to Jesus - his holy holy image seen in his people just the bride made comely, by his comeliness put upon her. This is what we are at present made to pray much for, that speedily we may all be made ready to meet our Lord in the air - and it will be. Jesus wants his bride. His desire is toward us. He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry. Amen and Amen. Even so come Lord Jesus."

## Appendix D

THE MORNING WATCH, Quarterly Publication of the Catholic Apostolic Church (Irvingites),  
September 1830

COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES IN THE APOCALYPSE, PART II. –  
Interpretation, Author: Fidus, Page 510,513,514

*"Having established, on the grounds which rest neither on the success of any particular interpretation nor on the existence of any interpretation at all, that the seven epistles of the Apocalypse (excepting the promise concerning the age to come, variously introduced into each, and sent to each angel, yet addressed to the churches) do cover the whole Gentile dispensation, and no more we assuredly believe that their fulfillment must somewhere be found within the history, past, present, and to come, of this dispensation. Let us now reverently, yet confidently, prepare to find it; for God will undoubtedly reveal it to them who truly expect and faithfully seek its revelation.*

*"The most useful, although not perhaps the most accurate, course will be to state at the outset those conclusions which our subsequent investigations will be seen to warrant, regarding the allocation of the seven epistles. They are as follow:*

- 1. The Ephesian church carries us down to the commencement of the great persecution by Nero, in A.D. 64.*
- 2. That of Smyrna represents the church purified by trial at the hands of Rome, till the accession of Constantine, in 324.*
- 3. The church at Pergamos sets forth the interval between the elevation of Constantine and the rise of the little horn, at the commencement of the 1260 years.*
- 4. The church at Thyatira expresses the testimony of the church against the Papacy during the 1260 years.*
- 5. That of Sardis indicates the state of the church from the end of the 1260 years, until the preparation for the coming of the Lord.*
- 6. The Philadelphian church expresses the period of that preparation, until the Lord come to the air, and be met by his saints changed and risen.*
- 7. The Laodicean church (the only one yet entirely future) is our sad monitor concerning the history of the church on earth during that period of great tribulation which shall intervene between the coming of the Lord to the air and the establishment of his throne and rest in Zion." ..." [p. 510]*

*"Philadelphia expresses brotherly love, whether between those who had or between those who had not been previously brethren. Accordingly, it represents that era, so often spoken of throughout the epistles, when they that look for the Lord shall, in the midst of the strife and selfishness of the last days, be knit together, by their common faith and hope, in the bonds of his mystical body, in the unity of the Holy Ghost; ... And what is very remarkable, [Philadelphia] now bears the name Allah Shehr, The City of God. Now its antitype is the church in that period which succeeds the great earthquake of the French Revolution (Rev. xi. 13); which is characterized by the earnest yet patient expectation of the Lord; which receives the answer of its faith in being caught up to meet him; which is thus kept from the hour of temptation; and which so becomes, not Laodecea chastised in love, but the victorious ministerer of great tribulation (Rev. ii.24,26; iii.10; Luke xxi.36; Heb. xi.5). [p. 513,514].*

Original issues of The Morning Watch can be found in British libraries, and Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, Fuller Theological Seminary, Oral Roberts University, Princeton Theological Seminary, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

## Appendix E

### Robert Baxter, *Narrative of Facts, Characterizing the Supernatural Manifestations in Members of Mr. Irving's Congregation*, London; James Nisbet, 1833

*"[T]he delusion first appeared in Scotland ... it was not until adopted and upheld by Mr. Irving, that it began to challenge much attention..." "An opinion had been advanced in some of Mr. Irving's writings, that before the second coming of Christ, and before ... the day of vengeance ... the saints would be caught up to heaven..." [p. 17] (Baxter later explained that the "day of vengeance" would begin with the arrival of "the man of sin." [p. 31])*

*"...the successive failures of prophecy and contradictions of utterance ... I was convinced it must be a work of Satan..." "[W]e had all been speaking by a lying spirit, and not by the Spirit of the Lord." [p. 118]*

*"[T]he whole work is mimicry of the gifts of the Spirit." [p. 135]*

*"...the continual use which was made of the doctrine of the second advent of our Lord. This was the leading theme of our utterances. ... [T]here must have been much error, in our view of the manner and circumstances of the coming of the Lord, or we could not have been so deceived." [pp. 142,143]*

## Appendix F

### Robert Norton, *The Restoration of Apostles and Prophets in the Catholic Apostolic Church*" (1861)

*"Marvelous light was shed upon Scripture, and especially on the doctrine of the second advent, by the revived spirit of prophecy. In the following account by Miss M.M---, of an evening during which the power of the Holy Ghost rested upon her for several successive hours, in mingled prophecy and visions, we have an instance; for here we first see the distinction between the final stage of the Lord's coming, where every eye shall see him, and His prior appearing in glory to them that look for Him.*

*She writes: --- "I felt this needed to be revealed, that there was great darkness and error about it; but suddenly what it was burst upon me with a glorious light. I saw it was the Lord Himself descending from heaven with a shout - the glorified Man - even Jesus; but that all must be, as Stephen was, filled with the Holy Ghost,..." [p. 15]*

## Appendix G

### John Nelson Darby's First Prophecy Paper - Prophetic #1 The Prophetic Inquiry and the Views Advanced in it - 1829

*"If there be a direct testimony that Israel shall be planted again in their own land, and never be plucked up, it is plain it has never been fulfilled. The more the extended prophecies on this subject are considered, the more will it be found connected with the promises of God in the latter day as regards the blessings of the church, and the circumstances which attend it." [p. 28]*

*"When John saw heaven opened and behold a white horse, and He that sat upon him called Faithful and True, and in righteousness doth He judge and make war - when he saw the Person and glory of the Word of God, it was the revelation of something wholly different from the secret operations of the Spirit of God, and it was something characteristically different from the previous providential judgments. These had been hail, and thunder, and lightning, and earthquakes; but this was a manifestation of Him who had been long hid behind instruments, who had governed the world as one that apparently suffered His church to grow up and spring He knew not how, because the harvest of the earth was ripe. The ordained government of the earth and the operation of the Spirit of God was that by which He has ruled the church hitherto; therefore it was a suffering church. Now He was Himself manifest in His power, and therefore the church became triumphant."* [p. 29]

## Appendix H

**The Christian Herald - Dec. 1830**

**On "Days" Signifying "Years" in Prophetic Language, John Nelson Darby**

*"Take these things together and we see - not to avert to the three days and a half - a connection with Babylon and the papacy during these periods, which brings them, in addition to the difficulty of making days symbols of days, to be a continuous period when the woman rides the beast (not, is devoured by the horns), and therefore is a continuous period of some such length as is generally supposed. In a word, we may, I think, state it thus; The mystery of Babylon and the papacy have no place in the prophets, or the 1260 days mean years. A difficulty in date does not affect the moral evidence of the subject-matter of the prophecy; for difficulties may lie at the door of ignorance as well as inconsistency.*

*"It would be inconvenient here to enter into further detail. The true question to be discussed is, whether the papacy, as such, has any place in the prophetic writings or not, or merely infidelity. If it has, it appears to me that no doubt remains on the question; but I refuse no light on its special application to the last infidel state, though I deprecate a morbid disposition to apply all things to our own times. I rejoice, however, in the discussion, not merely in that it will throw light on Scripture by consequent research and inquiry, but that I am persuaded that this will lead more (for such I believe to be the truth) to the deep conviction that we are within the verge of the end of all, so as to be daily looking for the Lord, i.e., to be caught up to meet Him in the air in order to His judging of the nations. Amen. Amen."* [p. 40]

Although Darby argues for the "year=day" theory, and that the 1260 days means 1260 years of the Roman Catholic papacy, he seems willing to allow that he could be wrong.

The last statement could be interpreted by some that Darby had already developed a pretribulation understanding, because he speaks of "daily looking for the Lord." However, it is clear that he was a "historicist" at this time, and viewed the 1260 day tribulation as 1260 years of the Roman papacy. And he thought that the end of this period was very near. That would make him a posttribulationist! His "daily looking" for the coming of Christ was typical of historicism, because this view held that the tribulation was nearly over! This is a far cry from pretribulationism's "imminence." Darby was not even convinced of futurism at this point, never mind a pretribulation rapture.