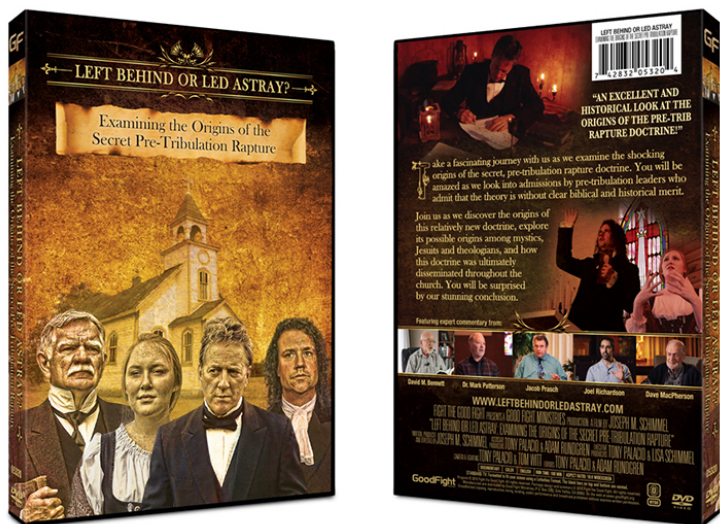


“Left Behind or Led Astray?” – *Exposed*



A new DVD documentary has just been released by Good Fight Ministries entitled, “Left Behind or Led Astray? Examining the Origins of the Secret Pre-Tribulation Rapture.” Good Fight Ministries is run by post-tribulationist Joe Schimmel, the senior pastor at Blessed Hope Chapel in Simi Valley, California. Schimmel’s documentary is endorsed by evangelist Ray Comfort* and Kirk Cameron, star of the original “Left Behind” movies. The following write-up appears on the back cover: “Take a fascinating journey with us as we examine the shocking origins of the secret, pre-tribulation rapture doctrine....

Featuring expert commentary from David M. Bennett, Dr. Mark Patterson, Jacob Prasch, Joel Richardson, and Dave MacPherson.”

The truth of the matter is that the 4½ hour film seriously distorts the historical evidence and is full of false accusations, unsubstantiated myths, and lies.

1. CLAIM – No Verse to Support a Pre-Trib Rapture

Chapter 1 of the DVD begins with Joe Schimmel’s claim that there is not a single verse of Scripture to prove what he calls the “escapist theory” of the pre-tribulation Rapture of the Church, that is, the belief that all true believers will be raptured from the earth *before* the seven-year Tribulation period begins. Schimmel further contends that “millions of Christians are under the illusion that we are going to escape that time,” and that his documentary uncovers “the elusive origins of the pre-trib Rapture theory”. Schimmel sets out to substantiate his initial claim by quoting, out of context, leading pre-tribulationist scholars and authors, including Dr Tim LaHaye, Dr Thomas Ice, and the late Dr John Walvoord of Dallas Theological Seminary, all of whom have made statements which appear to back up the claim that there is not a single verse which definitively proves that the Rapture will occur before the Tribulation.

Rebuttal

The doctrine of the Trinity, so fundamental to biblical Christianity, cannot be proved by quoting a single verse of Scripture! Joe Schimmel is making a non-argument. We are not Jehovah’s Witnesses hanging our theology on proof-texts, but Evangelical Christians seeking to show ourselves approved by studying the whole counsel of God, from Genesis to Revelation. As we do so, we discover that many of the precious truths of the Christian faith, including the doctrine of the Trinity and the Rapture of the Church, are *progressively* revealed.

Having set his stall out in this way, Schimmel then introduces an interview which he conducted in the UK with Colin Le Noury, General Director of Prophetic Witness Movement International (PWMI), the world’s oldest

pre-trib organisation. The clip from the interview shows Schimmel putting to Colin statements from the above-mentioned pre-trib scholars. After Colin is heard concurring with these statements, nothing more of the interview is shown. Although Schimmel, in his subsequent narration, mentions that Colin went on to state that other verses needed to be brought together to *prove* the pre-trib position, the viewer is not shown the rest of the interview, including the context in which he expressed his initial agreement. Viewers are thus left with the misleading impression that both he and PWMI as a movement do not believe that there is a single verse to support the pre-trib Rapture position.

It is important to note that Colin Le Noury was the only pre-trib leader interviewed by Joe Schimmel on the DVD. When the official trailer was released in October 2014, no one was more shocked and dismayed than Colin himself. When he initially agreed to be interviewed by Schimmel, he was not informed as to the purpose; he was left with the clear impression that Schimmel was coming over to the UK to do some research and was interested in learning about the history of PWMI. Having watched the trailer, Colin endeavoured, over a period of several days, to contact Joe Schimmel and his team to insist that, under no circumstances was any part of his interview to be used in this production. The following is just one of the emails which Colin sent to Joe Schimmel's church, dated 13 November 2014, which is included here with Colin's permission:

----- Original Message -----

From: colinlenoury

To: steve@blessedhopechapel.org

Sent: Thursday, November 13, 2014 10:37 PM

Subject: Left Behind DVD

Hi Steve

Greetings – not sure if we have met or if you were in the team that visited PWMI headquarters in UK.

I have now seen the trailer of the above film which includes a clip of an interview I did with Joe Schimmel. The clip is edited in such a way as to distort what I said. This is dishonouring and deceitful.

I have sent two former emails without reply and have endeavoured to phone the church only to get a recorded answer.

I would be grateful if you would inform Joe Schimmel that I DO NOT GIVE PERMISSION FOR ANY OF THE FOOTAGE TO BE USED IN ANY OF YOUR PRODUCTIONS and I would very much appreciate his assurance that all references to myself be removed from the film before the official release.

I look forward to a response on this.

Sincerely in Christ,

Colin Le Noury

Despite eventually receiving an email response from one of Schimmel's team, and despite restating his position, Colin never received the assurance he demanded; he was clearly misled and set up.

2. CLAIM – Pre-Trib Pastors are Failing their Flock

Joe Schimmel states at the beginning of the DVD that believers should not divide over the issue of the Rapture because there are “good brothers” who hold to a pre-trib position. However, he then spends the next 4hrs

charting what he calls “the scandalous history” of the pre-trib Rapture “theory,” accusing and maligning those who hold to the belief in the Lord’s any-moment return, including Dr Thomas Ice, Executive Director of the Pre-Trib Research Center in Dallas, who he twice denigrates as “Tim LaHaye’s bulldog”.

While I was giving a brief rebuttal of “Left Behind or Led Astray?” during the August 2015 Berean Call conference in Bend, Oregon, post-tribulationist author Joel Richardson, one of the ‘expert’ contributors to the DVD, made the following astonishing statement in a comment he posted on the conference livestream page:

“The film is in no way an attack on pre-tribbers. It is a careful exploration of the origins of the pre-trib rapture doctrine.”

The basic premise of the entire documentary is that the origins of the pre-trib Rapture “theory,” as it is referred to throughout, are not biblical, but “demonic” and “occultic,” and that pre-tribulationism has “a sordid history.” Joel Richardson brings the following indictment against pastors who are preparing the Church to meet the Lord Jesus Christ:

“If you are a pastor who’s not preparing your people to face potentially the Antichrist and the Great Tribulation in this hour... personally I think you’re failing in your role as a shepherd and a pastor.”

As clearly stated in the official trailer, the DVD claims that all such pastors, and by extension all Christian ministries that are heralding the Lord’s any-moment return, are leading millions of believers into apostasy:

“What if millions who have been led astray by the pre-trib teaching become part of the great falling away that Jesus warned would take place at that time?... Brace yourself to see how the Church is being set up [by pre-tribulationists] for a mass deception of cosmic proportions.”

Rebuttal

Such sensational claims and wild accusations reveal the true nature of this DVD, and are not worthy of comment.

3. CLAIM – Darby ‘Stole’ from Margaret MacDonald

The documentary devotes considerable attention to John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), the principal founder of the Plymouth Brethren movement, who undoubtedly played a crucial role in restoring and popularising the doctrine of the pre-tribulational Rapture of the Church. The DVD claims that Darby opportunistically stole the notion of a ‘secret’ catching away of the Church, and immediately developed the doctrine of the pre-trib Rapture, after listening to a fifteen-year old Scottish girl named Margaret MacDonald, who gave an alleged prophetic utterance in 1830. According to Schimmel, MacDonald “engaged in occult activity”.

This accusation, or myth, has been propagated for decades by men such as the late Walter Martin, founder of the Christian Research Institute (CRI) in the United States and original host of the ‘Bible Answer Man’ radio broadcast before Hank Hanegraaff succeeded him, and by Dave MacPherson, author of *The Incredible Cover-up*, *The Rapture Plot*, *The Late Great Pre-Trib Rapture*, *The Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin*, and *The Great Rapture*

Hoax. MacPherson features prominently on the DVD as one of Schimmel's experts, and repeats the accusation that Darby 'stole' from MacDonald. However, another of Schimmel's experts who addresses this issue on the DVD is author David Bennett, who (correctly) asserts that Darby "didn't accept... didn't like... wasn't enthusiastic about" the so-called prophetic utterances of MacDonald, and yet Schimmel continually makes the connection between Darby and this girl throughout the film.

The DVD re-enacts the time when John Nelson Darby and his Plymouth Brethren colleague, Benjamin Wills Newton (1807-1899), allegedly visited Margaret MacDonald and heard her utterance in person. Darby and Newton are depicted on screen standing in a small log cabin watching and listening to MacDonald while she rocks back and forth in her chair, giving her alleged utterance. Schimmel claims that Darby spent several days listening to MacDonald prophesying about a secret coming of Jesus Christ. Schimmel admits that these utterances were denounced by Darby and Newton as being demonic in origin, and yet still entertains the claim, vehemently made by MacPherson, that MacDonald's utterances were a primary source of Darby's Rapture doctrine.

Rebuttal

In 2006, I completed my doctorate at Manchester University. My thesis, entitled *John Nelson Darby and the Origins of Christian Zionism*, was published in 2007 by Paternoster Press under the title *For Zion's Sake: Christian Zionism and the Role of John Nelson Darby*. It was republished in 2013 by The Berean Call entitled, *Understanding Christian Zionism: Israel's Place in the Purposes of God*. My research makes it abundantly clear that Benjamin Wills Newton did not visit Scotland with Darby in 1830, as Schimmel claims! This fact alone seriously undermines the credibility of Schimmel's research.

In 1830, Newton commissioned Darby, on behalf of the newly-formed Brethren movement, to travel to Scotland to investigate claims that the Holy Spirit was being 'poured out' in Scotland, and that people were prophesying, being healed, and speaking in tongues. According to Margaret Oliphant, whom Dave MacPherson cites in the DVD against Darby, "Almost every notable Christian man of the time took the matter into devout and anxious consideration".¹ In other words, it was to be fully expected that men like J.N. Darby would visit Scotland to investigate these claims, which he did, attending several meetings and hearing some of the utterances which were given. However, there is no evidence that Darby ever heard the utterance of Margaret MacDonald which is so foundational to the DVD; he certainly did not have a private audience with her, as depicted in the film. What we do know is this: based on what he heard and witnessed first-hand, Darby concluded that the utterances were not to be attributed to the Holy Spirit. As Benjamin Newton himself recalled,

"Darby had been most cautious, not giving us an opinion. But what decided him when on the spot was that when those who were inspired were expounding prophetic Scriptures, such as those in Isaiah, respecting Israel [and] Jerusalem they explained them as being prophetic of Christian Churches of this dispensation.— That determined me too."

Darby further informed Newton in his report "...that there wasn't a meeting or an interview in which the spirits did not dwell on the notion that the Israelitish blessings are all ours now." As Newton recalled, "That

¹ Margaret Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving, Vol. II* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), p.134.

decided me at once, Darby too.”² Francis William Newman, brother of the future Cardinal John Henry Newman, initially believed that the alleged utterances were of God, but his opinion changed after Darby sent him

“...a full account of what he heard with his own ears; which was to the effect – that none of the sounds, vowels or consonants, were foreign;- that the strange words were moulded after the Latin grammar... so as to denote poverty of invention rather than spiritual agency;- and *that there was no interpretation*. The last point decided me, that any belief which I had in it must be for the present unpractical.”³

In his essay, *The Irrationalism of Infidelity* (1853), Darby included a full account of his visit to Scotland, which completely exonerates him from any charge that he opportunistically formulated his doctrine of the pretribulation Rapture based on the utterance of Margaret MacDonald. In his account, written in the third person and using one of his nicknames, “the Irish clergyman,” Darby writes:

“Two brothers (respectable shipbuilders at Port Glasgow, of the name M’D-), and their sister, were the chief persons who spoke, with a Gaelic maid-servant, in the tongues, and a Mrs. J-, in English. J. M’D-spoke, on the occasion alluded to, for about a quarter of an hour, with great energy and fluency, in a semi-latin sounding speech – then sung a hymn in the same. Having finished, he knelt down and prayed there might be an interpretation.... His sister got up at the opposite side of the room, and professed to give the interpretation; but it was a string of texts on overcoming, and no hymn, and one, if not more, of the texts was quoted wrongly.... The sense he [Darby] had of the want of the power of the Holy Ghost in the Church made him willing to hear and see. Yet he went rather as deputed for others [Newton wasn’t there!] than for himself. The excitement was great, so that, though not particularly an excitable person, he felt its effects very strongly. It did not certainly approve itself to his judgment; other things contributed to form it. It was too much of a scene. Previous to the time of exercising the gifts, they read, sung psalms, and prayed, under certain persons’ presidency.... This being finished, the ‘Irish Clergyman’ was going away, when another said to him, ‘Don’t go: the best part is probably to come yet.’ So he stayed, and heard what has just been related. He was courteously admitted, as one not believing, who came to see what was the real truth of the case. The parties are mostly dead, or dispersed, and many freed from the delusion, and the thing itself public; so that he does not feel he is guilty of any indiscretion in giving a correct account of what passed. It may be added, without of course saying anything that could point out the persons, that female vanity, and very distinct worldliness, did not confirm, to his mind, the thought that it could be the Spirit’s power.”⁴

Leading nineteenth-century Brethren scholar William Kelly asked, “...can any fair mind in God’s presence, if he knew no other facts, conceive a greater improbability than J.N.D. adopting the utterance of what he believed a demon as a truth of God?”⁵

² Alfred C. Fry, *The Fry Manuscript* (Manchester: Christian Brethren Archive, John Rylands University Library), pp.236-237, 208.

³ Francis William Newman, *Phases of Faith* (London: Trübner & Co., 1881), p.119.

⁴ J.N. Darby, ‘The Irrationalism of Infidelity,’ in *The Collected Writings of J.N. Darby*, ed. by William Kelly (Kingston-on-Thames: Stow Hill Bible & Tract Depot, n.d.), 6:284-285.

⁵ William Kelly, *The Rapture of the Saints: Who Suggested it, or rather on what Scripture?* (London: T. Weston, 1903), p.12.

It should be noted that in Chapter 9 of the DVD, Joe Schimmel admits that pre-trib leaders since the days of John Nelson Darby have distanced themselves from Margaret MacDonald's utterance by "claiming... that her secret rapture is not clearly pre-trib". Schimmel admits that this "is true". However, he continues to make the claim that "whatever she [Margaret MacDonald] meant with regard to her secret coming, it is undeniable that those who were influenced by her and [Edward] Irving became early catalysts for pre-trib". Schimmel fails to appreciate the importance of his own admissions. Despite insisting that Darby must have been influenced by MacDonald, Schimmel contradicts himself by making the following statement at the beginning of Chapter 10:

"How many people Margaret MacDonald actually influenced with the idea of a pre-trib Rapture, besides her own husband Robert Norton... and perhaps Edward Irving and some of the Irvingites, is still unclear...."

Joe Schimmel makes much of Darby biographer Max Weremchuk, a disillusioned and somewhat jaundiced ex-member of the Exclusive Brethren, yet a man whom Schimmel hails as "an unbiased Brethren historian". Schimmel quotes the following statement by Weremchuk:

"*I would not be surprised* if Darby at some time thought of a partial rapture – as appears in [the utterance of] Margaret MacDonald."

This is mere conjecture, and not objective research.

Let us consider Margaret MacDonald's actual utterance, that lies at the heart of this DVD and the accusations made throughout. Her own personal account is quoted in Robert Norton's *Memoirs of James & George MacDonald of Port-Glasgow* (1840), and warrants closer scrutiny. From a careful reading of MacDonald's account, we may categorically conclude that her utterance bears no resemblance whatsoever to a pre-trib Rapture. On the contrary, we may reasonably conclude that this fifteen-year-old girl was, in fact, advocating a *post-tribulation* Rapture, the Tribulation being "the fiery trial which is to try *us*" and which will be "for the purging and purifying of *the real members* of the body of Jesus". She also described this period as being "from Antichrist," when Satan "will try to shake in every thing *we* have believed," when "the awful sight of a false Christ [will] be seen on this earth," and when "nothing but the living Christ *in us* can detect this awful attempt of the enemy to deceive" (*italics mine*). MacDonald included herself among the faithful who would be tried *after* the Antichrist has been revealed and *during* the Tribulation period. This is completely inconsistent with Darby's teaching, and with pre-tribulationism in general.

Here are the relevant extracts from MacDonald's utterance – let the reader make up his/her own mind:

"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.... Only those who have the light of God within them will see the sign of his appearance.... '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.... 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 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.... 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 – for 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.... The trial of the Church is from Antichrist.... 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 fit us to enter into the marriage supper of the Lamb.... 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.... 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."⁶

Even Joe Schimmel admits that “our personal position at Good Fight Ministries is that Margaret MacDonald's end-time Rapture vision is convoluted, and we can't say for sure that Margaret MacDonald had a partial pre-trib Rapture in mind. What we can say with absoluteness, is that Margaret MacDonald did introduce what she claimed to be a new revelation about the Rapture”. Schimmel adds that “many others have also pointed out that Margaret MacDonald's vision is a bit convoluted and can be interpreted in different ways,” and yet

⁶ Quoted in Dave MacPherson, *The Incredible Cover-Up: Exposing the Origins of Rapture Theories* (Medford, OR: Omega Publications, 2001), pp.151-154. MacPherson combines MacDonald's account in Norton's *Memoirs* (1840; pp.171-176) and *The Restoration of Apostles and Prophets* (1861; pp.15-18). The portions in italics are from the latter.

asserts that Margaret MacDonald and her husband, Robert Norton, later claimed that “this was the first time that pre-tribulationism was taught publicly” – and this is what Schimmel is wanting viewers to believe.

4. CLAIM – Edward Irving Influenced John Nelson Darby

Joe Schimmel claims that J.N. Darby was directly influenced by the man he believes (but no pre-trib historian or author believes!) was the real founder of the pre-trib Rapture doctrine, namely the controversial, charismatic, de-frocked Scottish Presbyterian minister Edward Irving (1792-1834). Dave MacPherson claims on the DVD that Irving’s followers, known as Irvingites, “were prone to dabble a little bit with the occult”. In Chapter 7, Schimmel states that Darby was not only an advocate of Irving’s teaching, but was also “waiting in the wings as an opportunist to see if the new theory will catch on beyond the Irvingites and the Plymouth Brethren.” Schimmel claims that “the evidence is quite clear that Darby and his followers were late-comers to pre-tribulationism and that Darby was quite familiar with pre-trib teaching among the Irvingites before he accepted and then proliferated the doctrine.... It is to ignore the clear facts of history to pretend that Edward Irving and the Irvingites in no way influenced Darby’s prophetic views.”

Contrary to Joe Schimmel’s claim, the evidence is not clear; in fact, it is non-existent!

Rebuttal

Mark Patterson categorically states on the DVD that Darby learned the pre-trib Rapture from Irving, because Darby and the Plymouth Brethren were familiar with Irving’s writings. Patterson’s case is flimsy to say the least. However, in the same section, he even admits that “it [the Rapture] was swirling about the air at that time”.

With conferences being convened in the UK and Ireland (Albury Park Conference, Powerscourt Conference, The Society for the Investigation of Prophecy, etc.) and all manner of books and articles being published on prophetic themes, especially in relation to the Second Coming, an entire generation of Evangelicals at that time was exercised by Bible prophecy and the study of the end-times (‘eschatology’). Patterson admits that Darby “reminisces many years later that he first thought of the Rapture around 1827” – long before MacDonald’s utterances and before Edward Irving achieved notoriety – and yet insists that “there’s not a single piece of evidence that that’s the case”. This is a telling statement; Patterson is counselling viewers of the DVD not to believe Darby’s own testimony, and therefore to question his Christian integrity!

It should be noted that millions of believers who have believed in, and continue to believe in, the doctrine of the Lord’s any-moment return as the blessed hope of the Church, have never heard of Margaret MacDonald, Edward Irving, or even John Nelson Darby, and yet claim, as Darby himself did, to have arrived at their understanding of the Rapture based on the study of God’s Word.

This is what I wrote in Chapter 6 of *Understanding Christian Zionism*, which collapses Schimmel’s entire thesis and the connection he makes between Darby and Irving:

“...Darby believed that ‘the positive work of the enemy’ was ‘most manifest’ in Irving’s church. In 1844, he recalled how, ‘at least fourteen years ago’, he had disputed with Irving on the matter of spiritual gifts, and later recollected being drawn into conflict with him ‘some four-and-thirty years ago’, because of his ‘meddling metaphysically with the Lord’s Person’. Darby described Irving’s doctrine of the Incarnation as ‘plainly wicked and evil, and contrary to God’s word and Spirit’. He claimed that the Irvingite gifts had been ‘founded on this doctrine’, and lamented ‘all poor Irving’s heresies and wanderings’. Darby also described elements of Irving’s *Preliminary Discourse* [to Manuel Lacunza’s work – see below] as ‘evidence, and accumulated evidence, of great carelessness’, and drew attention to passages ‘highly injurious to the work and honour of Christ, and in it, the just, holy, and influencing comfort of believing saints’. He also criticised Irving’s sermons on Daniel’s vision of the four beasts, and his interpretation of Isaiah, which he believed demonstrated ‘the extreme neglect of Scripture and even prophecy itself, the hurried pursuit of an object in the mind’. These are hardly the comments one would expect from a man allegedly impressed by, and indebted to, Edward Irving.... According to William Kelly, ‘no one was farther from lending an ear to the impious and profane voices of the quasi-inspired Irvingites than Mr. T. [Tweedy], unless indeed it were J.N.D. [Darby] himself who had closely investigated their pretensions and judged their peculiar heterodoxy on Christ’s humanity as anti-christian and blasphemous.’ Kelly also noted how the Brethren had admired Irving as a preacher, but that ‘no serious brother in fellowship’ regarded the utterances in his church ‘with less than horror, as emanating not from human excitement merely but from a demon accredited with the power of the Holy Spirit.’”⁷

Both Joe Schimmel and Jacob Prasch hail Samuel P. Tregelles as the most eminent and educated member of the Brethren who did not believe in a pre-tribulational Rapture. They cite a statement Tregelles made in his book, *The Hope of Christ’s Second Coming* (1864), which connects the origin of a secret rapture to an utterance given in Edward Irving’s church in 1832, even though Schimmel then corrects Tregelles by suggesting that the teaching of the pre-trib Rapture originated earlier! What is not mentioned on the DVD, however, is that Tregelles was the cousin of Benjamin Wills Newton, the man at the centre of the heresy controversy within the Brethren movement. As I wrote in Chapter 6 of *Understanding Christian Zionism*, Tregelles was accused by fellow Brethren leader William Kelly of conducting a vendetta against Darby. In addition, a number of academics, most of whom were/are not sympathetic to a pre-trib position, have dismissed Tregelles as “a prejudiced witness” on the basis of the support he gave to Newton:

“Flegg and Weber are among those who have expressed dissatisfaction with Tregelles and the ‘hardly convincing’ claims of [Dave] MacPherson, concluding that ‘their arguments do not stand up to serious criticism’. Sandeen accuses those who have cited Tregelles against Darby of bringing ‘a groundless and pernicious charge’, while MacPherson’s book has been dismissed as an ‘anti pre-Trib vendetta’ that is ‘patently ridiculous’ and full of ‘tiresome polemics’. Benware and Nebeker assert that ‘no clear evidence exists that Darby got his views from Margaret MacDonald or Edward Irving,’ and that any suggestion of a ‘directly derivative link’ between Darby and Irving is ‘unduly reductionist’. Brethren scholar F.F. Bruce also distanced Darby from Irving and MacDonald, and acknowledged that the doctrine of the pretribulation Rapture was ‘in the air in the 1820s and 1830s among eager students of unfulfilled

⁷ Paul Richard Wilkinson, *Understanding Christian Zionism: Israel’s Place in the Purposes of God*, ed. by Andrew D. Robinson (Bend, OR: The Berean Call, 2013), pp.176-177.

prophecy'. As Weber concedes, those who have criticised Darby 'may have to settle for Darby's own explanation.'"⁸

5. CLAIM – If the Rapture is Pre-Trib, then the Church Fathers would have taught it

Chapter 2 of the DVD is devoted to the teachings of the 'Church Fathers' – theologians, apologists and bishops within the Church who rose to prominence after the time of the Apostles, and who are venerated as saints by the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican and Lutheran churches. Joe Schimmel asserts that the 'Church Fathers' never taught a pre-tribulation Rapture. Despite admitting that the 'Church Fathers' are not authoritative, one of his experts, Joel Richardson, makes the following claim:

"If this [a pre-tribulational Rapture] is what was taught by the Apostles, we would see it in the writings of the early Church writers; it doesn't exist."

Following the same line of argument, Jacob Prasch hails Irenaeus (c.130-202), Bishop of Lyons, as a "pivotal figure" due to the fact that he was a disciple of Polycarp, who in turn was a disciple of the Apostle John. Prasch hails Irenaeus as "probably the single most important of the Church Fathers in understanding what the Apostles taught and believed".

Rebuttal

Irenaeus declared in his most famous work, *Against Heresies*, that the Jews "are disinherited from the grace of God" – something the Apostles, including John, did not believe or teach!

The same 'Church Fathers,' quoted at length in the DVD to support post-tribulationism, adopted a predominantly allegorical, as opposed to literal, hermeneutic, or method of interpreting the Scriptures. Here is a sample of statements they made concerning the future of the Jewish nation:

- "For the true spiritual Israel... are we who have been led to God through this crucified Christ.... Christ is the Israel and the Jacob, even so we... are the true Israelite race." (Justin 'Martyr')
- "...the Jews... had lost God's favour... while the Christians had succeeded to their place". (Cyprian)
- "...it would be tedious to state at length how the figurative interpretation [of Israel's promised restoration] is spiritually applicable to Christ and His church, and to the character and fruits thereof." (Tertullian)
- "...they [the Jews] will never be restored to their former condition". (Origen)
- "And therefore we ought to take this saying... 'And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers' [Ezekiel 36:28] not literally, as if they referred to Israel after the flesh, but spiritually, as referring to the spiritual Israel." (Augustine)
- "The synagogue is worse than a brothel... it is the den of scoundrels... the temple of demons... the cavern of devils... a criminal assembly of Jews... a place of meeting for the assassins of Christ.... The

⁸ Wilkinson, *Understanding Christian Zionism*, p.181.

Jews sacrifice their children to Satan.... Debauchery and drunkenness had brought them to the level of the lusty goat and the pig.... This is why I hate the Jews.” (Chrysostom)

Thus, using Joel Richardson’s argument, if Israel’s future restoration/salvation was believed and taught by the Apostles, which it was, then we should see it in the writings of the early ‘Church Fathers,’ which we don’t!

6. CLAIM – The Protestant Reformers were Post-Trib, so Pre-trib cannot be True

In Chapter 4, Joe Schimmel states that the Protestant Reformers were “a mixed bag in regard to biblical prophecy and had deviated somewhat from the teaching of the early Church fathers because of the influences of Augustine”. Despite such an admission, Schimmel still champions the Reformers as advocates of post-tribulationism, quoting Luther and Calvin to support his claim.

Rebuttal

The Reformers were largely Augustinian in their theology, and Augustine (354-430) is acknowledged by the Pope to be the most important theological ‘father’ of the Roman Catholic Church! The Reformers were often allegorical in their interpretation of the Bible; they were amillennial in their eschatology, not believing that the Lord Jesus would return to this earth and reign for a thousand years; they were proponents of Replacement Theology, in keeping with the teaching of the ‘Church Fathers,’ believing that the Church was the new, true, or spiritual Israel; and they were often anti-Semitic in their sermons and writings, notably Luther. We should add, in agreement with William Trotter, that “...a doctrine cannot be proved true by the number of its adherents, or by the length of time during which it has been generally received. Much less is a doctrine true because it is soothing to ourselves, or palatable to men in general. The one, only, infallible test of the truth of any doctrine is, What saith the word of God?”⁹

7. CLAIM – The Pre-Trib Rapture is Rooted in the Teachings of the Jesuits

Joe Schimmel claims that Roman Catholic Jesuit priest and theologian, Francisco Ribera (1537-1591), developed a theology of the end-times strikingly similar to that of John Nelson Darby. Schimmel nevertheless concedes that Ribera was an amillennialist, and that “a direct line” cannot be drawn to the nineteenth century – quite a contradiction. Why, then, has Schimmel introduced the viewer to the Jesuits?

Rebuttal 1

As I wrote in Chapter 6 of *Understanding Christian Zionism*,

“...any claim that Protestant futurists in general, and Darby in particular, adopted and adapted Ribera’s futurism is absolutely groundless. Ribera’s amillennial and Augustinian theology of replacement, and the absence of a pretribulation Rapture position in his eschatology, completely separates him from Darby on a theological level. This, coupled with the ‘ample and varied arsenal of anti-Catholic polemic’ which

⁹ William Trotter, *Plain Papers on Prophetic and Other Subjects*, Revised edn (London: G. Morrish, n.d.), p.195.

Darby employed in his liberation of Irish peasants from the Church of Rome, is evidence enough to destroy the artificial link critics have forged between Darby and the Jesuits.”¹⁰

Undeterred, Schimmel devotes an entire chapter of his DVD to another Jesuit priest, Manuel Lacunza (1731-1801), this time drawing a direct line to the nineteenth century and to Edward Irving and John Nelson Darby, despite asserting that Lacunza’s eschatology “appears to have been influenced by... Francisco Ribera”. Schimmel seeks to discredit Lacunza from the outset owing to the fact that Lacunza wrote under the Jewish pseudonym, Rabbi Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra. Schimmel refers to “the deceptive pen name” and “bogus rabbinical title,” failing to acknowledge the fact that Lacunza was on the run in exile after being expelled from his native Chile by King Charles III of Spain, and that Lacunza’s opponents denounced him and his book (which, among other things, addressed the corruption within the Roman Catholic priesthood) before the Spanish Inquisition, his book being placed by Pope Leo XII on his *Index of Prohibited Books*. The fact that Lacunza speaks throughout the book with great compassion about the Jewish people may also explain his choice of pseudonym. Schimmel states that “there’s no doubt that Irving was quite influenced by Lacunza,” even though one of his experts, Mark Patterson, who wrote his doctoral thesis on Irving, contradicts Schimmel by stating that Lacunza’s influence on Irving is “uncertain”.

Rebuttal 2

There is much to commend Lacunza for in his book, *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty*, which I have on my shelf, and it is surely no surprise at all that Bible prophecy scholars of that day were reading and discussing it. Joe Schimmel makes a quantum leap by asserting a Jesuit link to the doctrine of the pre-trib Rapture. As I wrote in Chapter 6 of *Understanding Christian Zionism*,

John Nelson Darby “...made no reference to Lacunza in his writings. Undeterred, Darby’s amillennial, postmillennial, and premillennial critics have sought to discredit him by tracing his eschatology back to this Jesuit priest. There are indeed similarities between them, particularly in relation to the restoration of Israel, the apostasy of the Church, the times of the Gentiles, and the physical return of the Lord Jesus to the earth, but we should not be surprised when Biblical scholars, from diverse ecclesiastical traditions, arrive at similar conclusions. Having said that, it is important to point out that there are significant disparities in the theology of Darby and Lacunza, not least Lacunza’s advocacy of Roman Catholic dogma, his belief in Antichrist as ‘a moral body, composed of innumerable individuals... all morally united and animated with one common spirit’, and his contention that Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians were written to correct their ‘error... of expecting every moment the coming of the Lord.’”¹¹

This last statement is key. Lacunza *did not* believe in an imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ to catch away the Church; John Nelson Darby did, and this belief was foundational to both his Christian walk and his private and public ministry, both here in the UK and in North America, which he toured seven times.

Schimmel goes on to address the Albury Park Conferences in Surrey, England (1826-1830), claiming that Edward Irving was dominant at Albury, and that because Irving was allegedly influenced by Lacunza, then it inevitably follows that Albury was the real birthplace of the doctrine of the pre-trib Rapture.

¹⁰ Wilkinson, *Understanding Christian Zionism*, p.172.

¹¹ Wilkinson, *Understanding Christian Zionism*, pp.171-172.

Rebuttal 3

Not only is this faulty logic, but having established in the previous rebuttal that Lacunza did not believe in the Lord's imminent return, we can see that Schimmel's claim is simply false.

The Albury conferences were convened at a time when "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."¹² Most of those who assembled at Albury Park in Surrey were respected Evangelical clergymen and theologians within the Church of England, who nobly helped to revive premillennial truth at the beginning of the nineteenth century by proclaiming the restoration of the Jews and the Second Coming of Jesus. They were historicist premillennialists, and not futurists – in other words, they were not pre-trib, at least not in the way Darby was then and pre-tribulationists are today.

8. CLAIM – Benjamin Newton's Testimony against Darby is Key

Schimmel's chief historical witness, in seeking to discredit the teaching and malign the Christian character of John Nelson Darby, is Darby's former colleague and friend within the Brethren movement, Benjamin Wills Newton. It is interesting to note that Schimmel repeatedly informs viewers that Edward Irving, who he wants to claim as the real founder of pre-tribulationism, was charged with heresy by the Presbyterian Church for his teaching on the Incarnation, and yet he conveniently understates the fact that this was also the reason why Newton eventually withdrew from the Brethren assembly in Plymouth, having been charged by his fellow Brethren leaders with teaching heresy concerning the Lord's humanity! Schimmel accuses Darby and his colleagues of embarking on a merciless witch-hunt against Newton by searching Newton's writings "for the thinnest thread on which to hang him".

Rebuttal

As I wrote in Chapter 3 of *Understanding Christian Zionism*, Darby did not embark on a witch-hunt against Newton:

"In an article written for the magazine *Perilous Times* (April 1917), Robert Cameron, one of the leading figures in the American Bible and prophecy conference movement who met Darby towards the end of his life, provides further insight into the mind of this 'dictator': 'Over forty years ago, at my own table in New York City, Mr Darby called Mr Newton 'dear brother Newton'. I expressed my deep surprise at the use of such an endearing term concerning the one who had been freely called 'that dangerous man', 'the arch enemy', 'the fearful blasphemer', and other equally harsh terms. At once Mr Darby replied: 'Mr Newton is the most godly man I ever knew.' I said, 'Well, then, what was all this trouble and condemnation about, if Mr Newton is such a godly man?' He answered promptly, 'Oh, but Mr Newton had taught blasphemous doctrines about the person of our blessed Lord, and these had to be dealt with.'" Though 'relentless' in his pursuit of Newton's error, Darby believed he had acted in the best

¹² Henry Drummond, *Narrative of the Circumstances which led to the setting up of the Church of Christ at Albury* (1834), p.7.

interests not only of the Church, but of Newton himself. After Newton had publicly acknowledged his error, Darby wrote: 'If Mr.N. were restored, it would be the joy of my heart.'"¹³

9. CLAIM – Darby Preached Another Gospel

As well as accusing Darby of date-setting the Rapture (without providing any evidence), and claiming that Darby grew disillusioned with the pre-trib Rapture at one point (again without any evidence), Joe Schimmel accuses Darby of "...introducing another Gospel and two ways of salvation, one for the Gentiles during this dispensation and a law-based Gospel and works salvation for the Jews in a future dispensation, namely the Tribulation."

Rebuttal

In Chapter 4 of my book, I quote the following statement made by Darby in a private letter:

"...if anyone doubts, after twenty years that I have been preaching, whether I teach the necessity of redemption through the blood [of Christ] for all and every redeemed soul, I could hardly expect to disabuse him by telling him the contrary twenty times over."¹⁴

10. CLAIM – Darby was a Cult Leader

Jacob Prasch asserts on the DVD that "John Nelson Darby was an extremist, but more than that, he was a confused extremist," and that his critics denounced him as "a despot, a cult leader... a dangerous despot... a crazy man who hurt people". Jacob makes the same accusation himself against Darby on the official DVD trailer, portraying him as "a cult leader, a cult founder, a confused man." Joe Schimmel claims that Darby was of a more disreputable character than Edward Irving and the Irvingites, a claim he makes after denouncing Irving and his followers as dabblers in the occult who were demonically driven.

Rebuttal

Only those who have never read Darby's collected writings, letters, biblical synopses, notes, jottings, and hymns, along with the testimonies of close friends and associates, could make such accusations. Although a number of Darby's critics, mostly former Brethren colleagues of his, are quoted in the documentary, not a single mention is made of his numerous advocates. In Chapter 3 of *Understanding Christian Zionism*, I wrote the following:

"In 1867, John Jewell Penstone published a response to 'the course of animosity against Mr. Darby' which he felt was being 'so unrelentingly pursued' by some, and which had led 'some otherwise excellent and honourable men into a path of misrepresentation which has been coolly persevered in even after such evidence as any candid enquirer would require at their hands had entirely broken down.' In spite of all the accusations made against him, Darby holds a place of affection in the hearts of many.

¹³ Wilkinson, *Understanding Christian Zionism*, pp.76-77.

¹⁴ Darby, 'Answer to "A Second Letter to the Brethren",' in *The Collected Writings*, 8:369.

Darby has been described as ‘a great and good man, an uncompromising champion for Christ’s glory and God’s truth’, ‘one of the most remarkable servants of Christ that this country has produced’, ‘a great man and ever greater servant of God’ whose ‘greatness... gave prominence to his weaknesses’, ‘a really good man’ whose ‘largeness of heart... showed itself in many ways’, ‘a man of commanding intellect’ who was ‘tireless in his missionary zeal to teach the Bible’, ‘the Tertullian of these last days’, a man of ‘simple and unaffected piety; combined with the ripest scholarship and unequalled ability in expounding the Word of God’, ‘a man of one aim – the glory of God’ who was ‘always maintaining that close communion with the Lord that gave lustre to his testimony and fragrance to his life’, ‘a man of overwhelming devotion, whose charismatic personality galvanised disciples throughout his long life’, one who was ‘generous to the wasting of his substance, and possessed of more than martyr courage’, a man capable of ‘remarkable humility’ who demonstrated ‘an especial sympathy’ with children, a man used by God ‘to bring cosmos out of chaos for the church of God’, the founder of a movement which ‘attempted a more thoroughgoing revival of primitive Christianity than either the Puritan or Wesleyan movements’, and ‘a leader of matchless sagacity’ whose life resembled ‘a landscape with its towering rocks and solitudes; its verdant meads and meandering streams; its rushing torrents and calm lakes; each of which stand upon the canvas as the arresting feature of the picture.’”

Even Darby critic Max Weremchuk, who is quoted by Schimmel on the DVD, writes in an article that he remains impressed by Darby’s “devotion to Christ and his high level of personal holiness.”¹⁵ The actor who plays Darby throughout the DVD portrays him as an enraged, feverish, tyrannical leader – a far cry from the man we meet in his own writings, and in the numerous testimonies of friends and acquaintances who esteemed him as a faithful servant of God.

11. CLAIM – Darby Advocated a ‘Secret’ Rapture

Throughout the DVD, Joe Schimmel places great store on the alleged *secrecy* of the pre-tribulation Rapture, whereby the Church is said to be raptured without the world knowing. The word “secret” or “secrecy” is emphasized over and over again by Joe Schimmel, and overlaid with demonic and occultic overtones. Schimmel triumphantly claims to have a clinching piece of evidence from the pen of Darby himself, but in so doing completely misunderstands what Darby was writing on this subject in his article, ‘The Rapture of the Saints and the Character of the Jewish Remnant’.

Rebuttal

Here is what Darby stated when he himself was confronted with the charge of endorsing a ‘secret’ rapture:

“A point connected with this [the Rapture and the Second Coming] has been insisted on by the adversaries of the truth, to which I advert here only to leave it aside, as not touching the main point, even if true, and used by them to obscure the great and vital truth of the rapture of the church – I mean the secrecy of the rapture. The two points on which it is important to have the clear testimony of Scripture are – first, that there will be a Jewish remnant at the end... secondly, the true character of the

¹⁵ Wilkinson, *Understanding Christian Zionism*, pp.78-79.

church of God.... The great object of the enemy in denying the rapture of the saints before the appearing of the Lord [i.e. a pre-tribulation Rapture]... is to deny and destroy the proper faith of the church of God, and to set the church itself aside.... They are deceived by the enemy, though far from intending to deceive with him.”¹⁶

As the preceding paragraph of Darby’s article makes clear, Darby was dealing with those “who deny the rapture of the saints before Christ’s appearing” i.e. with post-tribulationists. He was not claiming, as Schimmel triumphantly asserts, that “the great and vital truth of the rapture” was “the secrecy of the rapture,” but that it was the issue of the rapture’s “secrecy” which was being used against him by “the adversaries of the truth”. Thus Darby was stating that the secrecy issue was “not touching the main point,” which was simply “the great and vital truth of the rapture” and the distinction between an end-time Jewish remnant and the character and hope of the Church.

It should be added that all the accusations made concerning the “secrecy” of the Rapture are a smokescreen; this is a non-issue. In all the Rapture passages of the New Testament, there is no indication that the unbelieving world will witness an event which the Apostle Paul clearly states is confined to the Church, and which will take place “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Corinthians 15:52). To assert, then, that the pre-trib Rapture will be “secret,” in this sense, is perfectly in keeping with Scripture.

12. CLAIM – The Pre-Trib Rapture is Demonic and Occultic in Origin

Joe Schimmel makes the following claim:

“While much of Darby’s doctrine fell within the pale of orthodoxy, he espoused a socially cultic mentality that was similar to that of Charles Taze Russell, who founded the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Joseph Smith, the prophet of Mormonism in the same century.”

Not only does Joe Schimmel claim that demonic, lying spirits were at work among the Irvingites, who he credits with formulating the pre-trib Rapture, but he also sets a photograph of John Nelson Darby in between those of Charles Taze Russell and Joseph Smith to connect pre-tribulationism with The Watchtower Society (Jehovah’s Witnesses) and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (the Mormons). Schimmel ultimately credits “the spirit of Antichrist” with the formulation of the pre-trib Rapture doctrine. In the concluding chapter he states that “the pre-trib Rapture was first taught in the nineteenth century in 1830, the same year that Joseph Smith founded Mormonism.”

Chapter 11 of the DVD is entitled “Pre-Trib, the Occult, and the 20th–21st Centuries,” in which Schimmel asserts that ideas similar to that of the pre-trib Rapture, with its “occultic origins,” were “promoted among the cults” during the late nineteenth century. He turns his attention at one point to The Berean Call ministry, founded by the late Dave Hunt, stating that “Dave Hunt has done a great job exposing cults and aberrations

¹⁶ J.N. Darby, ‘The Rapture of the Saints and the Character of the Jewish Remnant,’ in *The Collected Writings*, 11:120-122.

within the church through the years, [but] he missed the occult history of the secret Rapture that he himself vigorously promoted.” Schimmel continues:

“The parallels between the occult influences of the Irvingites in the early nineteenth century, and pre-trib in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and some of the occult influences on pre-trib leaders in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, is chilling.”

Rebuttal

Such reckless statements are not worthy of comment.

Concluding Remarks

Joe Schimmel quotes from a letter Darby wrote in 1834 in which he speaks of the doctrine of the Lord’s return working “like leaven” through the churches. In so doing, he rips Darby’s statement completely out of context by claiming this as evidence of Darby’s malevolent intentions. In a letter which any believer would be blessed to receive, expressing as it does Darby’s love for the brother to whom he is writing, and for all his brethren in Plymouth, Darby addresses the need to “wholly depend upon God’s Spirit” and “lean upon the Lord, and look for grace,” and the need for the message of “the Lord’s coming” to spread like leaven, a statement he immediately qualifies by saying: “I do not mean leaven as ill” i.e. as something negative. To give the reader a sense of the kind of person Darby was, here is how the letter, which Schimmel uses against Darby, concludes:

“My kindest love to all my dear brethren and sisters... may the Lord keep and bless them abundantly.... The Lord bless you and keep you, dear brother, and make you to abound more and more in the only true riches. Your very affectionate brother in Him.”¹⁷

Darby’s life and ministry was characterised by a joyful expectation and personal longing to meet his Saviour. This longing had characterised the early Thessalonian believers, who had “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath” (1 Thess. 1:9-10). In *The Freshness of Faith*, Darby offered the following insights into these verses:

“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’.... 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 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

¹⁷ J.N. Darby, ‘Letter (Dublin, 1834),’ in *Letters of J.N.D.* (Kingston-on-Thames: Stow Hill Bible & Tract Depot, n.d.), 1:24-26.

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,' etc., would you say, This is what I want? If not, there is something between your affections and Christ."¹⁸

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***[Editor's note: Although the inclusion of the quote by Ray Comfort in the trailer promoting the post-trib documentary *Left Behind or Led Astray?* left viewers with the distinct impression that Ray was endorsing the movie, Living Waters Ministry responded to our inquiry by stating that "the impression received from the trailer is understandable. Whether intentional or not, by placing Ray's endorsement of his ministry within the trailer...Joe certainly leads the viewer to believe it is linked directly to the documentary. Ray has not seen the video and did not give any endorsement of it."]**

Pastoral Endorsement

The above rebuttal is based solely on the DVD *Left Behind or Led Astray?* In August 2015, Paul gave a brief exposé of the DVD at The Berean Call Conference in Bend, Oregon, following which he has been the subject of a "roundtable discussion" between two of the major contributors to the documentary. I want to make it clear that we have no intention of being drawn into a debate on this subject. The Lord always vindicates His Word, and those who faithfully preach the truth have nothing to fear. I am grateful to those who have voiced their support for Paul publically, but I would urge readers to avoid the temptation of taking issue with those who are contending with him. My prayer is that the flock of God, His beautiful flock (*cf.* Jeremiah 13:20), will be protected from confusion, fear and doubt, and be at peace in the knowledge that the Lord has not destined us to endure any part of the Tribulation. We have a glorious future, and as one senior pastor shared with me recently, it is sad that these

"...bombastic words, rough actions and incessant attacks upon the body produce nothing good only grief. It is evil to suggest that waiting with expectancy for Jesus' appearing is sourced in a demonic doctrine. It is evil (my opinion) to tell anyone that Jesus could not come back today. Is there any verse or chapter or doctrine in the scriptures that tell us to not be eagerly waiting? Not one."

We are grateful for the support of our brothers and sisters in the wider Church, and for the encouragement of many godly ministers, including Jewish pastor, theologian, and author Dr David Hocking, founder of *Hope for Today* ministry based in California, who has sent us this encouraging endorsement:

"None of the attacks and accusations against Dr. Paul Wilkinson, and his classic documentation and support of John Nelson Darby, ever had anything to do with my support and belief in the pre-tribulation rapture of the church. I came to my conviction by studying God's Word and especially the Greek

¹⁸ J.N. Darby, 'The Freshness of Faith,' in *The Collected Writings*, 21:359-363.

manuscripts. I have believed, preached and taught the pre-tribulation rapture of the church long before my connection with the Pre-Trib Research Center in Dallas, Texas.

The supreme issue of all (in my opinion) is the 'new song' of Revelation 5:9-10. The usage of the second person plural pronoun ('us') forces any Bible scholar to support pre-tribulationalism (the Greek manuscript evidence reveals that out of the 24 manuscript readings available today, 23 read 'us' and the only manuscript reading otherwise is Codex Alexandrinus.) In addition to the usage of 'us' in the phrase of verse 9 ('redeemed us'), the reading of verse 10 is identical to Revelation 1:6.

The anger and hostility evidenced in the writings and messages of these men is not only revealing, but exposing them. The truth of I Thessalonians 4:13-18, along with I Thessalonians 5:1-9 is overwhelming in its support of pre-tribulationalism. It is time to stop the bitterness and to learn the grace and love of our Lord in speaking of Biblical truth. Our viewpoints do NOT authenticate Biblical truth – It is the BIBLE, the whole BIBLE, and nothing but the BIBLE – it is God's infallible and inspired word!"

Paul's doctoral research resulted in a 200,000 word thesis on *John Nelson Darby and the Origins of Christian Zionism*, which his supervisor, a world authority on Second Temple Judaism, told me was an outstanding, state-of-the-art piece of work. One of Paul's PhD examiners, although not a proponent of pre-millennial pre-tribulationalism, stated that Paul had produced "a fine work of historical and theological reflection." I share these things not to boast, nor to justify or defend our position, but to show that those who are bent on robbing the saints of their pre-tribulational hope are doing so by vilifying Darby, and disregarding the clear historical evidence which proves them wrong. Those so inclined need to take account of the fact that Paul's doctoral research won a coveted university award for exceptional scholarship, and that his work has attracted the support of leading Bible prophecy teachers and Christian film makers. In the light of the present hostile climate, I think we need to be reminded of what some of these highly-respected men have said about *Understanding Christian Zionism* (see below).

Andrew D. Robinson

Senior Pastor

Hazel Grove Full Gospel Church

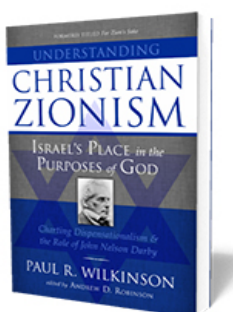
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Book Endorsements



"Dr Paul Wilkinson has done a thorough and masterful job of mining the depths of Darby's extensive theology. [He] clearly demonstrates... that there is no historical basis to link Darby's development of the pre-Trib Rapture with spurious influences like the Scottish lassie, Margaret MacDonald, or Edward Irving and the Irvingites. Instead, he demonstrates that the best explanations of the historical evidence is that Darby was an extremely capable and well-trained student of Scripture, and derived the doctrine of the Rapture from his personal study of the Bible."

Dr Thomas Ice, Executive Director, Pre-Trib Research Center, Dallas, Texas

"Wilkinson's impeccable documentation and reasoning from Scripture thoroughly refute the myth that Darby got his doctrine of the Pre-tribulation Rapture from a Scottish girl and two Jesuit priests. Primary historical sources cited herein clearly demonstrate the contrary truth. I highly recommend this excellent treatment of a controversial subject that has confused many."

Dave Hunt, Founder of The Berean Call, Bend, Oregon

"Due to the personal attacks on John Nelson Darby, many believers are confused on whether they should support Israel.... This work by Dr. Wilkinson is a work greatly needed to clarify these issues for many believers and it should be read by all to understand Darby, Zionism, and Israel."

Dr Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, Director of Ariel Ministries, San Antonio, Texas

"Few dedicated Christian scholars with an evangelistic ministry have been attacked more unfairly than John Nelson Darby, who did more to promote the doctrine of the pre-tribulation Rapture of the Church than any other person. Darby did not invent it, of course, for it is both Biblical and ancient, but he popularised it during the nineteenth century. This well researched and readable book carefully sets the record straight and makes a valuable contribution to prophetic studies."

Dr Tim LaHaye, Chairman of the Pre-Trib Research Center, Dallas, Texas

"In the final analysis, Dr. Wilkinson has restored Darby's reputation as having been a pious visionary used by God at a crucial time in history to formulate for His Church a comprehensive and coherent theological system that provided the Biblical foundation for Christian Zionism. For any student of ecclesiastical and political history, as well as systematic and historical theology, this book is essential reading."

Dr Randall Price, Distinguished Professor of Jewish Studies, Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia

"With so much confusion and misinformation today concerning dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and the role of J.N. Darby, Wilkinson's work is a breath of theological and historical fresh air. I am deeply grateful for his fine scholarship and the balanced way in which he makes his case. This work should quickly become a standard on Christian Zionism and Darby's influence on this important movement."

Dr. Mark Hitchcock, Senior Pastor of Faith Bible Church, Edmond, Oklahoma

"This groundbreaking book debunks decades of misrepresentation and scholarship, exploding the myth that Darby stole the doctrine of the pre-tribulation Rapture from his contemporaries. By revealing the man and his message, Paul Wilkinson vindicates Darby and spotlights the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ as the centerpiece of his theology."

Cover of the book, Understanding Christian Zionism

UK Orders

Copies of the book are available either in paperback (£10 incl. p&p) or audiobook format (CD box set - £10, MP3 disc - £5; incl. p&p) from:

Hazel Grove Full Gospel Church, 68 London Road, Hazel Grove, Stockport, Cheshire, SK7 4AF

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