

# Did J.N.Darby Get His Teaching on the Lord's Return from Edward Irving?

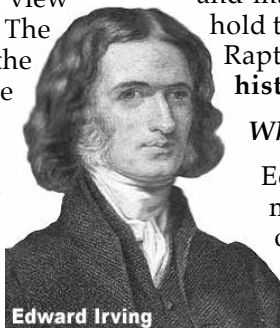
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It has often been stated by opponents of the Premillennial view of Bible Prophecy that a disgraced 19th-century-charismatic minister of the Church of Scotland, Edward Irving, was the source from which J N Darby learned the premillennial, futurist, view of Bible prophecy. The inference is that since the source is corrupt, the premillennial teaching is also corrupt. Like most people who attack the truth, those who make these accusations often have little or no knowledge of the facts.

Having listened to such accusations for years I decided to acquaint myself with the facts and began by reading a 680-page biography of Irving written by one of his supporters. I also read a couple short articles by his critics. One article is written by Dr Thomas Ice, whom I know to be a sound expositor of the premillennial teaching of Scripture.

In addition, I read Irving's introductory comments to his translation of the book entitled, *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty* by Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra, a Jesuit priest from Chile, South America. The result of my

research shows that there is a very different explanation for Irving's views. When Irving's own words are examined it becomes very clear that the accusations made against the premillennial teaching of Scripture are totally unfounded and malicious. Irving did NOT hold the futurist, Pretribulation Rapture view at all; **he was a historicist!**



## Who was Edward Irving?

Edward Irving was a minister of the Church of Scotland which holds to the 1646 Westminster Confession that is sound in many fundamental teachings but holds to infant baptism, calvinism and amillennial teaching. It is still the doctrinal basis of Presbyterian Churches today.

Wikipedia states:

"Edward Irving: 4 August 1792 – 7 December 1834) was a Scottish clergyman, generally regarded as the main figure behind the foundation of the Catholic Apostolic Church."

His biographer states that he was a magnetic person who drew people to his person. He married the daughter of Dr Martin, a Scottish minister who strongly resisted Irving's teaching which only

## *Was Edward Irving a Futurist?*

emerged in the last few years of his short life. In the last four or five years of Irvings life he promoted charismatic doctrine and practice though he himself did not speak in tongues or claim to prophesy. Dr Martin felt strongly about Irvings error and refused to visit his daughter and grand children even though Irving offered to pay his travel expences.

Irving was a school teacher at age 20 and one who knew him said,

“Whether his personal piety originated in any visible crisis of conversion it is impossible to tell. There is no trace of it in his history, neither does he himself refer to any sudden light cast upon his life.”

When his first child was born he expressed his views on baptism as follows:

“We assuredly believe that by baptism we are ingrafted in Christ Jesus.”

He went beyond the symbolism of the Presbyterian Church to a view of baptismal regeneration which was consistent with the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. With such a view and the lack of a clear testimony of conversion, one must question whether Irving understood the Gospel message of salvation by faith although he claimed thousands were “converted” through his ministry.

Irving was licenced to preach in 1815. He was a highly egotistical person who before his ordination in 1822, stated to a clergyman who

expressed surprise at him leaping over a gate,

“Now you shall see what great things I will do yet!”

In 1821 Irving went to London from Glasgow to be the pastor of the Caledonian Chapel and it is there that the rest of his life was played out. He was excommunicated in March 1833 and the doors of the Chapel were locked against his entry. He died in 1834.

Irving saw the deadness of the orthodox Scottish Church and prayed for revival and the restoration of the sign gifts of tongues and prophesying which were manifest in the early Church. The Church of Scotland taught that these gifts ceased with the passing of the Apostles but Irving could not accept this.

As members of the Caledonian Chapel in London began to speak in charismatic gibberish and to prophesy, Irving changed the order of service. In May 1830 Irving was tried for allowing unauthorized persons to take part in the public worship. However, at that time the Moderator in London declared that he was not an unfit person to be a minister of the church. In spite of this, there was growing concern at the strange manifestations of tongues and prophesying in the meetings, usually by women. These mainfestations were even discussed in the secular press.

Irving was finally excommunicated three years later in 1833 on the

grounds of heresy. The heresy with which he was charged was the denial of the sinless humanity of Christ which Irving boldly denied. While he agreed that Jesus never sinned, he taught that Jesus had a sinful body inherited from Adam and overcame His sinful flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The position he took was a denial of the statement by Gabriel to Mary that, *"that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God"* (Luke 1:35). Jesus did not inherit a sin nature from Adam; He was the Son of God!

The services at Caledonian Chapel were rearranged with the seven "elders" seated on the platform. Irving, as the "angel of the church", taking the centre seat. He was considered to be a "priest". Then in front of them were seven "prophets" with the chief prophet in the centre chair. In front of the prophets were seven deacons with the chief deacon in the centre chair. These arrangements were all determined as a result of prophetic utterances supposedly from Jesus. When Irving preached he would pause to allow a tongues utterance followed by a "prophetic" interpretation. He would then continue preaching.

The chief prophet was a Mr Baxter who had great influence and made many prophecies. One in particular claimed that the Rapture of the Christians would occur within 1260 days and that Antichrist would be then judged. Later Mr Baxter

renounced his "gift" of prophecy and stated that all his prophecies were from a "lying spirit". Irving however, continued to believe that Baxter's prophecies were real and from God.

After Irving's excommunication in 1833 the numbers in his church dwindled and only two prophets remained.

Irving died in 1834 after his prophets claimed they had received a message from Jesus instructing Irving to go to Scotland to preach. It was autumn and Irving was now depressed and sick. The doctors warned him not to go to Scotland but he felt compelled by blind obedience to the "spirit" that he must go. As winter set in Irving became ill and called for his wife to join him before he died at 42 years of age.

#### *Irving's Views on Prophecy*

Early in Irving's ministry in the 1820s he came to the conclusion that the Amillennial view of a "spiritual millennium" as taught by the Church of Scotland was not Biblical. He began to interpret Scripture literally and understood the prophecies of a literal 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth after the second coming. He also understood that Israel would be converted and occupy a leading role under Christ in the kingdom. However, that is about as close as he got to the premillennial teaching in Scripture. When Irving began to preach a

literal millennial kingdom after the second coming, he attracted the attention of a Roman Catholic priest who had also been preaching Christ's return and reign on earth. This priest had come to a harbour city in England, for health reasons and brought with him a copy of Lacunza's book, *The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty* written under the pen name of Ben-Ezra because Lacunza's father was a Jew who converted to Catholicism.

Lacunza was born in Chile of noble parents and was educated in a Jesuit school after which he joined the Jesuits as a priest. He was not happy with Jesuit teaching but was put in charge of novices whom he taught with great zeal until he became disinterested and turned to science and astronomy. He had a great interest in the Scriptures and devoted much time to them.

When the Jesuits were expelled from Chile, Lacunza took refuge in Italy where he lived in seclusion devoting himself to his studies and taking a daily walk by the river until 1801 when he was found dead by the riverside.

Lacunza's book was condemned by the Church but was translated into Latin and in 1827, into English by Edward Irving. Lacunza believed the Catholic Church would become apostate and be judged. He understood God's plan for Israel and taught the future conversion of the Jews in the last days before the second coming of Christ and

the 1,000 year kingdom of Christ. He taught a short period of great tribulation immediately prior to Christ's return. His interpretation of the Book of Revelation was very **literal** and, unlike the historicist, Irving, Lacunza believed the 1,260 days, 42 months and time, times and half a time mentioned in Daniel chapter 7 and Revelation chapters 11, 12 and 13 must be a literal period of three and a half years just as premillennialists teach today.

Irving called this teaching error but was greatly impressed by Lacunza's argument from Scripture and so agreed that it could be possible that there was a secondary interpretation of a short period of Tribulation before Christ returned. However, Irving interpreted the Book of Revelation **symbolically** as the course of history from Pentecost to the Second Advent. He believed the judgments described in the seven seals had already occurred and that the "hinderer" in 2Thess.2 was paganism which was removed when Constantine declared Christianity the state religion. He believed the pagan persecutions were the first four seal judgments (Rev.6:1-8). He saw the 5th and 6th trumpet judgments as Islam and he changed the 1,260 days into 1,260 years concluding with the French Revolution at the end of the 18th century. In the 1820s Irving believed the 6th Vial was then being poured out and the 7th Vial was shortly to come. Premillennial teaching is nothing like this.

This strange historicist view spurned false cults such as the Seventh Day Adventists who spiritualized the prophecies of Daniel turning days into years and concluding that Christ would return in 1844.

Opponents of the Dispensational premillennial view of prophecy claim that J N Darby's futurist views had come from Irving but it is clear their respective views were poles apart. Lacunza's views were in line with the futurist teaching but Irving disagreed with Lacunza. At this time there were others teaching the Lord's return. Lacunza refers to "others" in the 18th century who shared his view. The Catholic priest who brought Lacunza's book to Irving was already preaching the premillennial return of Christ. When Irving's English translation of Lacunza's book was done he sent preliminary copies to some of the most Godly and respected ministers of the Church of Scotland **who all approved of it.**

Furthermore, before the translation work was finally completed in Scotland, Irving discovered that another copy of Lacunza's book was circulating in London. At the same time an Anglican minister was teaching prophecy and wrote two publications entitled, *The Palingenesia and Basilicus Letters*.

To suggest that Darby (1800-1882) got his eschatology from Irving is a presumption entirely lacking in fact. Darby was greatly influenced

by William Kelly over a period of 40 years but certainly not Irving. The strange manifestations seen at the Calidonian Chapel in London would have been enough to keep Darby away from Irving and Irving's symbolic interpretation of the Book of Revelation bears no resemblance to Darby's literal, premillennial, pretribulation Rapture teaching.

The fact is that **Irving was a historicist and never taught that the Church would be raptured before the Tribulation.** This seems to have escaped the attention of those amillennialists who want to discredit the Truth of God's Word.

Irving believed in a literal millennium following the Lord's return but his views on baptismal regeneration, his denial of the sinless body of the Lord Jesus, and the lack of any record of his personal conversion, place serious doubts over whether he was a saved person. His love of ritual suggests that he was religious but that is not regeneration.

Perhaps a better conclusion might be that Satan used him to discredit a literal understanding of the millennium by immersing him in charismatic confusion which no doubt sadly brought him to depression and an early grave. When ignorant amillennialists attach Irving to the premillennial view of prophecy they are perpetuating the delusion which Satan began about 1829.