not disappoint. The amount of effort, care, and scholarship given to this work is undeniable — and it is highly recommended for anyone interested in the King James Bible's rich and complex legacy.

— Justin Watkins
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J. N. Darby and the Roots of Dispensationalism by Crawford Gribben. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024. xvi + 240 pp., cloth, $39.95.

John Nelson Darby (1800–82) is the great boogeyman, who created dispensationalism without any Scriptural basis according to covenant theologians and other amillennial and postmillennial scholars who reject dispensationalism. However, as Crawford Gribben demonstrated in *J. N. Darby and the Roots of Dispensationalism*, his reputation as the creator of dispensationalism might be undeserved; and there is much more to Darby than dispensationalism, a term that Darby himself never used to describe his theology.

Gribben is a professor of history at Queen's University Belfast who, according to the book's jacket, "writes about the religious history of Britain, Ireland, and North America, focusing on the literary cultures of puritanism and evangelicalism, with special interests in millennial and apocalyptic thought." Gribben is also the author of *Evangelical Millennialism in the Trans-Atlantic World, 1500–2000* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Gribben wrote as an impartial, disinterested historian. Whatever personal religious views he holds are not evident in the book. While there are good biographies of Darby that are available, *J. N. Darby and the Roots of Dispensationalism* is more important because its focus is strictly on his theology as a whole.

After a preface and a long and valuable introduction, there are chapters on "four principal themes in Darby's writing" (p. 31): soteriology, ecclesiology, pneumatology, and eschatology; followed by a conclusion on the roots of dispensationalism, very extensive endnotes and bibliography, and an index. Each chapter begins with an introduction followed by three or four divisions. Based on Darby's principal themes, Gribben described his theology as "Calvinist, catholic, charismatic, and catastrophic" (p. 6). Darby was a scholar and prolific writer who "wrote more than 850 separately publish items, from ephemeral pamphlets to weighty tomes" (p. 2) on a variety of sacred and secular subjects. Gribben relied on the "nineteenth-

century equivalents" (p. xii) of Darby's *Collected Writings*, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, and *Letters*. The 32-volume *Collected Writings* is "neither complete nor conclusive;" the editor (William Kelly) "revised material from earlier parts of Darby's career in order to have it align with his more mature convictions," and Darby himself "revised material that the *Collected Writings* had already published" (p. xiii). *J. N. Darby and the Roots of Dispensationalism* "sets out to challenge assumptions that have become commonplace among historians and theologians and to suggest a new relationship between Darby and the birth of 'dispensationalism'" (p. 33).

Darby believed that "his most important work addressed the doctrine of salvation" (p. 34). Gribben maintained, "Darby's dispensational system was rooted in his revision of a Calvinist doctrine of salvation" (p. 37). However, one revision that Darby did not make was his lifelong view that "new birth preceded faith and repentance" (p. 55). Darby's ecclesiology did not just concern the "sharp distinction between Israel and the church" (p. 67), but also the "combination of catholicity and separatism" (p. 87). Gribben argued, "it was the pursuit of separatism in the name of catholicity that enabled the development of the ideas that would be packaged as dispensationalism" (p. 62).

As for Darby's pneumatology, "Darby was not a cessationist: he did not believe that the extraordinary gifts given to the church by the Holy Spirit had ceased with the close of the canon of Scripture" (p. 90). He argued, "the sealing of the Spirit was an experience that believers enjoyed some time after regeneration" (p. 90). Darby, however, "maintained a life-long opposition to the ideas of sinless perfection" (p. 90). For Darby, the presence of the Spirit in the church proved that "the church was distinct from Israel" (p. 100).

Realizing that Darby began as a historic premillennialist was a new fact for this reviewer, and Darby's "earliest writings included a critique of the futurist interpretation of Revelation upon which his later ideas would come to depend" (p. 113). Gribben argued that Darby combined existing eschatological ideas in a distinctive structure in response to contemporary political and cultural crises as well as his reading of Scripture and that he refined his eschatological thinking throughout his life" (p. 116). One of the key features of this refined thinking that characterizes dispensationalism to this day was that "the difference between Israel and the Church was so fundamental as to constitute two peoples of God with different, but dependent, eternal destinies" (p. 126).

Gribben concluded that Darby is "best understood as a theologian working within and modifying the Reformed theological tradition" (p. 153). He "may be much closer to Reformed tradition than to the cultures of

dispensationalism that his end-times narrative has inspired" (p. 153). Gribben argued that what became to be known as "dispensationalism" is more properly traced to Scofield than Darby, and that one "must distinguish Darby's theology from that of dispensationalism" (p. 153). Although "from his earliest prophetic writings, Darby anticipated that the Jews would be restored to the Promised Land" (p. 136), contrary to most dispensationalists today, he "did not support Zionist policy, nor did he encourage any other kind of political intervention, believing that the church, as God's heavenly people, should have as little as possible to do with the governance of collapsing cultures" (p. 153). *J. N. Darby and the Roots of Dispensationalism* is must-reading for anyone interested in Darby or the history of dispensationalism.

— Laurence M. Vance
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Letters to a Future Saint: Foundations of Faith for the Spiritually Hungry by Brad East. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024. 280 pp., paper, $24.99.

Letters to a Future Saint carries the distinction of being *Christianity Today*'s co-book of the year for 2024, along with *What Does It Mean to Be Protestant* by Gavin Ortland. Assessments of the two books could hardly be more separated. While Ortland's book was overall excellent, Brad East's (an associate professor of theology at Abilene Christian University) book is a mixture of solid theology and much that is errant, as this review will detail.

East used a creative style in which he supposedly dialoged in a letter format with a younger Christian friend in need of theological understanding; rather than a formal catechism, the author chose letters, as an intimate, more conversational, more informal means of religious instruction (p. 8). The goal was "to teach what Christianity is, what Christians believe, and what it means to live as a Christian" (p. 7). The aim was to help his reader become a lifelong follower of Christ (p. 11). The letters are divided into twelve chapters, each of which addresses a particular subject such as life and death, creation, the incarnation, sin and its corruption, or God working through his people. Each chapter is comprised of several short letters to his imaginary reader related to the topic of that chapter.

East addressed his letters to "future" saints because, while Scripture refers to all Christians as saints, the process is not completed until Christ