

An American Evangelist and the Jews

Dwight L. Moody and His Attitudes Toward the Jewish People

by Yaakov Ariel

You know a Jew must have a very poor opinion of a man if he will not do business with him when there is a prospect of making something out of him.⁹

These are the words of Dwight L. Moody (1837–99), the leading American evangelist during the last third of the nineteenth century. In another sermon, however, Moody expressed what seems to have been a very different opinion:

Hasn't God made that a great and mighty nation? Where is there any nation that has ever produced such men as have come from the seed of Abraham? There is no nation that has or can produce such men....¹⁰

Moody's attitudes toward the Jews were indeed marked by ambivalence which reflected both deep-rooted prejudices against them as well as appreciation and hope for that people's glorious future. While Moody's prejudices were influenced by his cultural background, his hopes for the Jewish People resulted from his premillennialist eschatological belief.

The Man and His Way

Dwight Lyman Moody was born in 1837 in Northfield, Massachusetts.¹¹ His father died when he was a young boy and Moody grew up as an orphan in a poor home. In 1885 the 18-year-old lad settled in Chicago, a booming new city

9. Dwight L. Moody, *"To the Work, to the Work!" Exhortations to Christians* (Chicago, 1880), p. 118.

10. Dwight L. Moody, *To All People* (New York, 1877), p. 354.

11. Most biographies of Moody were written from within the Evangelical camp and tend to be hagiographies. A reasonable biography of Dwight L. Moody is that of James F. Findlay, *Dwight L. Moody, American Evangelist 1837–1899* (Chicago, 1969). On Moody's theology see Stanley N. Gundry, *Love Them In: The Proclamation Theology of D.L. Moody* (Chicago, 1976).

that attracted ambitious young men from the East. He became a shoe salesman.

In Northfield Moody's family were members of the Unitarian Church and later the Congregationalist Church. Moody joined the YMCA in Boston in 1854 and continued to be an active member after moving to Chicago. His "conversion" experience occurred during that period. Although Moody was a successful businessman, he became more and more interested in religious and missionary activity, and his first independent enterprise was a Sunday school for children in a socially deprived area. As his involvement in religious campaigns grew, he decided to give up business altogether and devote himself completely to evangelism.

Moody's career as a revivalist developed gradually in Chicago in the 1860s. In 1873 he visited Britain and conducted many revival meetings there together with Gospel singer Ira Sankey. After his return, Moody became America's leading revivalist.

Revival meetings were held in the United States throughout the nineteenth century and occupied an important place in the religious atmosphere of America at the time, especially in what was known as the frontier, the newly settled area of the country.¹² On the spiritual level, revival meetings were designed to bring the "lost sheep" or unconverted to Christ, while the practical aim of the revivalists was to convince the unchurched to join the church. Some major Protestant denominations — Baptists, Presbyterians and especially Methodists — conducted revivals and flourished with them. The process was to convince individuals attending the revivals that they were sinful, that their spiritual situation was hopeless and that they urgently needed to repent, seek forgiveness and accept Jesus as a personal Savior. In a highly emotional atmosphere which did not lack scenes of hysteria, people would step out and publicly declare their sinfulness and their acceptance of Christ and the opening of a new phase in their lives. Henceforth they would lead a life of holiness and become devout members of the church for the rest of their lives.

Until Moody's days revivalism was mostly rural. Evangelists often conducted "camp meetings" where they preached the Gospel to people who came from small towns and farms in the area. Moody's aim was to convert the unchurched in the cities, and he turned revivalism into an urban phenomenon by preaching to industrial and mine workers as well as to members of the middle classes. Like many leading evangelists, Moody did not act on behalf of one particular denomination but aimed at bringing the unchurched to join any one of the mainline evangelical churches. Tens of thousands came to listen to his sermons, and the magnitude of his evangelism was unprecedented. Managing such a large enterprise became very much like managing a big business. In addition to the need to repent, accept Jesus and join the church, Moody's message advocated middle-class morality: being a true Christian be-

12. On revivalism, see William G. McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York, 1959), and *Revivalism, Awakenings and Reform* (Chicago, 1978).

liever also meant being an active and productive participant in the community as well as a good American citizen.

The 1870s saw the beginning of a split in American Protestantism between liberals and conservatives. Among the issues that were debated were biblical inerrancy and evolution. Moody had an expansive, inclusive approach and tried to avoid being engaged in open controversy, often refraining from expressing his opinions on matters that could arouse stormy debates. Yet he was one of the leaders of the emerging conservative camp and played an important role in shaping its character. One of Moody's major contributions to the shaping of the American evangelical tradition was the incorporation of dispensationalism, which was then a relatively new eschatological conviction.

Dispensationalism, the modern premillennialist belief in the second coming of Jesus, was crystallized in Britain in the 1820s and 1830s by John Nelson Darby (1800–82) and the group he led, the Plymouth Brethren.¹³ The term “dispensationalism” comes from the belief that history is divided into different dispensations — ages or eras — for each of which God has a different plan or economy for humanity. The last age is the millennium, the reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years; our age is the one before the last. Unlike the traditional claim of Christianity to be the new Israel, dispensationalists recognize the Jewish People as historical Israel and the object of biblical prophecies about the re-establishment of a Davidic Kingdom in the Land of Israel during the messianic age. Dispensationalism began spreading widely in America in the 1860s and 1870s, gaining ground among members of major Protestant denominations.

Moody had been exposed to dispensational teachings as early as the late 1860s, and he met John Nelson Darby several times during the 1870s. Moody's acceptance of belief in the imminent return of Jesus added strength and prestige to the movement. He became a patron of dispensationalism and invited dispensationalists to the Bible conferences he organized in Massachusetts, thus offering theoreticians of the movement a forum and a place to meet. He was also instrumental in establishing Bible House in Chicago, which became a major center for training activists of the premillennialist-dispensationalist movement in America.

Although Moody did not become a strict, rigid, “orthodox” dispensationalist,¹⁴ this eschatological teaching influenced his understanding of his mission and task as an evangelist. In one of his sermons he asserted:

13. On dispensationalism and on its spread in American, see Clarence B. Bass, *Background to Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1960); Dave MacPherson, *The Incredible Cover-Up: The True Story on the Pre-Trib Rapture* (Plainfield, N.J., 1975); Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1978); Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism 1875–1892* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1983).

14. Moody was sometimes ambiguous even when he discussed life after death. See his *Heaven, Where It Is, Its Inhabitants, and How to Get There* (Chicago, 1881). Even passages in Moody's messages that can indeed be interpreted as premillennialist do not necessarily carry a distinct dispensationalist attribute. Cf. Findlay, *Dwight L. Moody*, p. 410; Gundry, *Love Them In*, pp. 46, 177–78; Sandeen, *The Roots of Fun-*

I look on this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a life-boat and said to me: "Moody, save all you can."¹⁵

He refrained in principle from frightening his audience and did not use the premillennialist theme very often in his sermons.¹⁶ Later evangelists frequently focused on this theme, and the eschatological dispensationalist message, including its distinct understanding of the role of the Jewish People at the end of the age, has become an essential part of mass evangelism in America in the twentieth century.¹⁷

Prejudice Against Jews

Although Moody did not dedicate full sermons to his ideas about the Jewish People, he referred to them extensively in his preaching. His opinions concerning that nation represented many common prejudices against Jews as well as the influence of dispensationalism on his thought.

In Moody's view, the Jews were the sinning Sons of Israel who disobeyed God.¹⁸ They were the people who failed to help their neighbor in the parable of the Good Samaritan.¹⁹ They were the vicious crowd that preferred the execution of Jesus to that of Barabbas,²⁰ humiliated Jesus on his last journey in the Via Dolorosa,²¹ and cried out "Let his blood be upon us and upon our children."²² The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 C.E. came as a prophesied punishment for the wickedness of the Jews.²³ The Jews' worst sin was their unwillingness to recognize Jesus as their Lord and Savior,²⁴ and it was this stubbornness that earned them their position as outcasts: "The Jews were cut off on account of their unbelief. We were grafted in on account of our belief."²⁵

damentalism, p. 180; Martin E. Marty, *Modern American Religion I: The Irony of It All* (Chicago, 1986), pp. 223, 227.

15. Dwight L. Moody, *The New Sermons* (New York, 1880), p. 535.

16. One cannot accept therefore James Findlay's suggestion that Moody found dispensationalism a convenient and useful tool in order to bring his audience to conversion, as it gave, according to Findlay, a notion of urgency to the need to be converted. Findlay, *Dwight L. Moody*, p. 253.

17. Cf. McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, p. 390.

18. See for example, Dwight L. Moody, *Twelve Select Sermons* (Chicago, 1881), p. 118, and *Glad Tidings* (New York, 1876), p. 105.

19. Dwight L. Moody, *"To the Work, To the Work!" Exhortations to Christians* (Chicago, 1880), p. 117.

20. Moody, *Twelve Select Sermons*, p. 113; Dwight L. Moody, *Great Joy* (New York, 1887), pp. 454-455.

21. Moody, *Great Joy*, p. 456.

22. M. Laird Simons, *Holding the Fort: Comprising Sermons and Addresses at the Great Revival Meetings Conducted by Moody and Sankey* (Philadelphia, 1880), p. 221.

23. Moody, *Twelve Select Sermons*, p. 65.

24. See for example, Dwight L. Moody, *Daily Meditations* (Grand Rapids, 1964), p. 201.

25. Dwight L. Moody, *Overcoming Life and Other Sermons* (New York, 1896), p. 10.

Moody believed in the stereotype of the Jews as greedy, materialistic people,²⁶ and when he was in need of an example of a rich man he used Rothschild.²⁷

As prejudiced against Jews as he might have been, it would be wrong to refer to Moody as an antisemite. Moody's stereotypical view of Jews was on the whole not a positive one, but it was far from being demonic or diabolic. In his sermons Moody never used the Jews as a scapegoat for America's troubles or faults, nor did he ever launch an attack against the Jews. Furthermore, Moody never suggested that the Jews should be punished for their bad deeds or ugly characters, or that any kind of restrictions, such as stopping Jewish immigration to America, should be placed upon them. Moreover, his attitude toward the Jewish People included elements of appreciation and hope.

Moody was not original in his criticism of the Jews. He followed a long and well-paved route of Christian outlooks on the matter, and his prejudices against Jews probably reflected views that were common in certain segments of Protestant America at the time — he would not have expressed such opinions had he thought his audience would reject them. Moody developed much of his image of the Jews from his reading of the Scriptures. He had very little knowledge of post-biblical Judaism. In one passage he says, "Diana, Apollo, the Pharisee and Sadducee are no more, but the despised Christians yet live."²⁸ He was ignorant of the fact that as far as Jewish self-understanding was concerned the Pharisaic tradition was still alive in the sense that Orthodox Judaism (and in a way also non-Orthodox Judaism) sees itself as a continuation of that tradition.²⁹

Moody had very few personal encounters with Jews, and his stereotype of the Jews of his day was totally divorced from reality. The 1880s and 1890s witnessed vast Jewish immigration to America from the small towns of Eastern Europe. Most of these Jews came to America penniless and inhabited the poor areas of the American urban centers — they were no Rothschilds. The only Jews Moody knew were converts to Christianity. Although he was skeptical of the sincerity of some of the Jewish conversions,³⁰ he nevertheless remained committed to his belief in the need to evangelize Jews and hoped for the eventual conversion of the Jewish People to Christianity. There were Jewish converts whom he highly respected and cherished, such as Joseph Rabinowicz, founder and head of a Christian Synagogue in Kishinef, Russia, whom Moody brought to Chicago in 1893 to participate in his evangelistic work connected with the World Columbian Exposition.

In the winter of 1875–76 an incident occurred concerning Moody's remarks on Jews. The evangelist was quoted as saying that in 1873 Jews in a meeting in Paris boasted about the killing of Jesus.³¹ Jewish leaders in the United States

26. See, for example, the quotation that opens this paper.

27. Moody, *Daily Meditations*, pp. 48, 128.

28. Moody, *Heaven, Where It Is*, p. 13.

29. In Jerusalem the term "Pharisees" has been used to describe extreme Orthodox Jews, of European origin, who are not Hasidic.

30. See Moody's words in the *New York Sun*, 43:181 (March 12, 1876), front page.

31. On this incident, see Naomi W. Cohen, *Encounter with Emancipation: The German Jews in the United States 1830–1914* (Philadelphia, 1984), p. 256. Moody's campaign in Philadelphia, in the winter of 1875–76, was conscientiously recorded by a

protested angrily³² and Moody claimed that he was misquoted, later adding that he respected Jews.³³

Public criticism confronted Moody again in 1893 when he invited Adolf Stoecker, the notorious German antisemitic preacher, to participate in evangelistic work with him in Chicago.³⁴ Moody rejected the newspapers' accusations against Stoecker:

We give you a warm welcome. God bless you. We don't believe the newspapers. We believe the Bible. We have confidence in you. We love you.³⁵

Moody did not bother to check the accusations against Stoecker, and might have believed in good faith that Stoecker was innocent and that the accusations against him were part of a campaign to undermine the German preacher's work.³⁶ He saw him as a fellow evangelist who was doing in Germany the same kind of work as he was doing in America, and therefore trusted him. Jews viewed the matter differently. For them Moody's welcome to Stoecker meant an endorsement, and they developed a suspicious and contemptuous attitude toward Moody. Among other things, Jews associated Moody with missionary enterprises attempting their conversion. For them such attempts were insults to their religious heritage as well as a threat to Jewish survival.³⁷

An illustration of the suspicious outlook that Jews developed toward Moody can be found in Isaac Mayer Wise's reaction to the evangelist. Alarmed by Moody's remarks on the Jewish involvement in Jesus' humiliation and crucifixion, this outstanding leader of Reform Judaism asked Moody to debate the deicide charge with him, but to no avail.³⁸ Wise, it should be noted, treated "proselytizing Christianity" with great suspicion and saw evangelists like Moody not so much as a threat to Jewish survival as endangering the freedom and equality Jews had acquired in America. American democracy depended not only on the separation of church and state but on ideas that emerged from

number of Moody's followers. None of them give any details of such an incident. See Edgar J. Goodspeed, *A Full History of the Wonderful Career of Moody and Sankey* (Ashland, Ohio, 1876), pp. 261–406, reprinted as *D.L. Moody in Philadelphia* (Hammond, Indiana, 1975); Elias Nason, *The Lives of the Eminent American Evangelists Dwight Lyman Moody and Ira David Sankey* (Boston, 1877), pp. 125–153.

32. See, for example, Moody's denunciation by Rabbi Sabato Morais of Philadelphia in the *Jewish Messenger*, January 21, 1871.

33. Loc. cit., note 22 above.

34. H. B. Hartzler, *Moody in Chicago or The World's Fair Gospel Campaign* (New York, 1894), pp. 96–101, 120–125; Richard K. Curtis, *They Called Him Mister Moody* (Garden City, N.Y., 1962), pp. 280–281. On Adolf Stoecker and his role in propagating antisemitism in Germany, see Franklin H. Littell, *The German Phoenix* (New York, 1960), pp. 33–4.

35. Hartzler, *Moody in Chicago*, p. 101.

36. See Hartzler's account, *ibid.*

37. See, for example, a letter signed by J.R. to the editor of the *American Israelite* (December 10, 1875) discussing Moody's revival meetings in Philadelphia.

38. Cohen, *Encounter with Emancipation*, p. 256. Cohen, who is unaware of positive sides in Moody's attitude towards the Jews, treats him negatively.

non-Christian sources.³⁹ In Wise's eyes, evangelical Christianity was a backward and repressive religion which, if it prevailed, would bring about a terrible political regression.⁴⁰ The evangelists were out to Christianize America and therefore threatened to destroy its liberal character, and with it the position of the Jews as equal members in the community. Moreover, the evangelists were keeping alive stereotypical prejudices against the Jews.⁴¹ Wise thus fought evangelists and missionaries to the Jews with great vigor.⁴²

Hopes for the Future of the Jews

The dispensationalist understanding of the place and role of the Jewish People in God's plans for humanity was clearly reflected in Moody's thinking. Although he was prejudiced against Jews, Moody had great hopes for the conversion of Jews and for their restoration to the Land of Israel in their former position as a nation of God. On a few occasions Moody predicted the following future for them:

When Christ returns, He will not be treated as He was before. There will be room for Him at Bethlehem. He will be welcomed in Jerusalem. He will reveal Himself as Joseph revealed himself to his brethren. He will say to the Jews "I am Jesus," and they will reply: "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord," and the Jews will then be that nation that shall be born in a day.⁴³

This passage expresses an understanding of the place of the Jews in God's plan for humanity that is identical to that of nineteenth-century dispensationalists. According to this view, the biblical prophecies for the end of days are meant for the Jews. The place where Jesus is going to meet his brethren according to this passage is in the Holy Land, and it was a common dispensationalist assumption that the Jews would already be restored to their land by then. Moody spoke further on the future of the Jewish People:

I have an idea that they are a nation that are to be born in a day, and when they are converted and brought back to Christ, what a mighty power they will be in the land, what missionaries to carry the glad tidings around the world.⁴⁴

Moody's words in this case reflect the dispensationalist belief that the Jewish nation will be the leading nation in the millennial kingdom and will, among other responsibilities, carry out the task of evangelizing the world.

39. For example, *American Israelite* 5 (July 9, 1858); p. 4; *ibid.*, 33 (May 6, 1887); p. 4. Cf. Robert D. Kully, "Isaac Mayer Wise: His Rhetoric Against Religious Discrimination" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Illinois, 1956), p. 80.

40. For example, *American Israelite* 26 (May 19, 1876); p. 4; *ibid.*, 35 (August 15, 1889); p. 4; Isaac M. Wise, *A Defence of Judaism versus Proselytizing Christianity* (Cincinnati, 1889).

41. For example, *ibid.*, p. 8; cf. Cohen, *Encounter with Emancipation*, p. 69.

42. For example, David M. Eichhorn, *Evangelizing the American Jew* (New York, 1978), pp. 91, 94–95, 99–101, 105, 110–111, 117–118, 129; Jonathan D. Sarna, "The American Jewish Response to Nineteenth-Century Christian Missions," *Journal of American History* 68 (1981), pp. 35–51.

43. Moody, *Daily Meditations*, p. 72; Dwight L. Moody's "The Second Coming of Christ," in *The Second Coming of Christ* (Chicago, 1896); Dwight L. Moody, "The Second Coming of Christ," *Northfield Echoes* 3 (1896); p. 281.

44. Moody, *To All People*, p. 354.

In another instance, while discussing God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 22:17-18), Moody expressed his deep appreciation for the long endurance of the Jewish nation as well as what he considered to be the outstanding achievements of the seed of Abraham:

Hasn't that prophecy been fulfilled? Hasn't God made that a great and mighty nation? Where is there any nation that has ever produced such men as have come from the seed of Abraham? There is no nation that has or can produce such men... That promise was made 4,000 years ago, and even now you can see that the Jews are a separate and distinct nation.... You can bring almost every nation here and in fifty years they will become extinct, merged into another; but bring a Jew here and in fifty years, a hundred years, or a thousand years, he is still a Jew. When I meet a Jew I can't help having a profound respect for them, for they are God's people.⁴⁵

Moody considered the continuing existence of the Jewish People to be proof that God kept his promises to humankind. Like all dispensationalists, he considered the Jewish existence as a separate people to be in accordance with God's plans for humanity. He said:

I challenge any infidel to put his finger on any promise which God has not kept. For 6,000 years the devil has been trying to find that God has broken His word. What a jubilee there would be in hell today if they found God had broken His word! Didn't He keep His word with Adam, and Abraham and Moses? Isn't every Jew a monument of God's word?⁴⁶

Jesus himself, he reminded his audience, was a Jew.⁴⁷ Moreover, when Jesus was on the cross he had sent his disciples back to Jerusalem "to preach the Gospel to the men who had crucified him."⁴⁸ Elsewhere Moody also referred to Christ's "command" that his message be preached first and foremost "to those Jerusalem sinners."⁴⁹

Moody saw no contradiction between the sometimes unpleasant opinions he held concerning Jews and his hopes for their conversion, return to the Land of Israel and rebirth as God's nation. In his view, though the Jews may have treated Jesus viciously and rejected him, Jesus did not abandon hope for them but ordered his disciples to preach the Gospel to them. As wicked as they might have been in the past and as greedy as they may be in the present, Moody saw them as being still Jesus' brethren and believed that in the future they will assume a totally new role when they accept Jesus. In Moody's eyes, the Jews were punished for their stubbornness but God will firmly keep his promises to them, and will restore them to their glory when they recognize their Savior.

Moody's mixed opinions on the Jewish People are one of the early examples of the way premillennialism has shaped the attitudes of a large number of American evangelical Protestants toward the Jewish People. Moody's pattern has been followed by many of America's leading evangelists, and one can find

45. *Ibid.*, p. 354.

46. Dwight L. Moody, *The Home Work of D.L. Moody* (New York, 1896), p. 67.

47. Moody, *To All People*, 355.

48. Robert E. Speer, *D.L. Moody* (East Northfield, Mass., 1931), p. 20; Wilbur M. Smith, *An Annotated Bibliography of D.L. Moody* (Chicago, 1948), p. 141.

49. Moody, *Great Joy*, pp. 212-213.

similar overtones in sermons and writings of leading American fundamentalists from Moody's times until today. On the one hand, they have criticized the Jews for not accepting Jesus as their Messiah and have often described them as being spiritually deprived. On the other hand, they have recognized the Jews as the heirs of historical Israel, expressed appreciation for the endurance of the Jewish People and belief in the glorified future which, in their view, awaits that nation.

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