

Sunday, September 23, 2012—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 72 The Theology of the *Scofield Reference Bible*, Lesson 1

Introduction

- In lesson 71 we studied how Scofield first spoke to Gaebelein in 1901 regarding his idea for the production of the *Reference Bible*. Furthermore, we saw that the formal decision to move forward with the production of the *SRB* was made in 1902. With the project under way, and desirous of a less hectic working environment, in 1903 Scofield was enticed to move back to Dallas TX to his previous pastorate. (Gaebelein, 51) It was while officially residing in Dallas, with the help of a promised assistant, that Scofield worked on the project from 1903 till the publication of the *SRB* in 1909. Work on the project took Scofield away from Dallas after 1905, the first draft was finished while he was in Switzerland in 1907, and final edits were made while C.I.S. was in New Hampshire and New York in 1908. (Hannah, 390-391)
- “As the first copies of the new Bible rolled off Oxford’s New York presses on January 15, 1909, the experiment surely must have seemed something of a gamble. . . The experiment was resoundingly successful, and it generated considerable revenue for Oxford University Press, ensured the lasting fame of its compiler, and played its part in ensuring the popularity and influence of the dispensational theology it expressed.” (Mangum and Sweetnam, 1-2)
- “Nothing, quite like it had ever been offered to the Christian public. It was the first study bible created for the general public—the first commentary to be included beneath the text of Scripture itself. With enough cross-reference material and interpretative help to guide the lay reader, but not so much as to be cumbersome or ideologically partisan, it found a market niche. Within twenty years of its initial release in 1909, it became the first ever Oxford Press publication to reach a million in sales, enabling the publisher to make ends meet through the lean years of World War I. Remarkably, sales continued to climb even through the Great Depression in the 1930s. Such an outstanding reception by the Christian public suggest that *The Scofield Reference Bible* is rightly regarded a phenomenon.” (Mangum and Sweetnam, 7)

Theological Roots of the *SRB*

- When C.I.S. composed the notes for the *SRB*, he expressed his intent was not to promote a distinctive theological system. Consider the following quotation from the preface.
 - “The Editor disclaims originality. Other men have laboured, he has but entered into their labours. The results of the study of God’s Word by learned and spiritual men, in every division of the church and in every land, during the last fifty years, under the advantage of a perfected text, already form a vast literature, inaccessible to most Christian workers. The editor has proposed to himself the modest if laborious task of summarizing, arranging, and condensing this mass of material.” (Scofield, IV)

- That being said, a theological perspective could not have but come through. Readers of the *SRB* can detect several streams of theological thought popular in Western Christianity in the early part of the last century within Scofield's work. Our goal in this section is to survey what these influences were.
- While there can be little doubt that Scofield's treatment of dispensational theology attracts the most attention when considering the roots of the *SRB*, it is important to remember that much of Scofield's commentary is a repackaging of teaching that can be traced to the evangelicalism of the post-Reformation era. Therefore, much of the commentary presented in the *SRB* would have been unremarkable to evangelical Christians in any period. (Mangum and Sweetnam, 54)
- The concept of an annotated Bible with commentary appearing alongside Scripture can clearly be traced back to one prototype: the Geneva Bible which first appeared in 1560. There had been numerous attempts to package Scripture and commentary before the Geneva Bible, but in all these cases, while extra material was included in the physical volume, it appeared as an appendix, not alongside the sacred text. (Mangum and Sweetnam, 55)
- "In addition to the commentary and cross-references he supplied in the first edition, the 1917 revision of Scofield's Bible assigned a date to every event recorded in Scripture. Scofield introduced this chronology at the prompting of his editor. Scofield's use popularized this chronology, but he did not devise it. That honor goes to James Ussher who was a prominent Puritan bishop in the Irish church. Ussher ultimately reached the height of his eminence as archbishop of Armagh. . . He was also appointed vice-chancellor and subsequently vice-provost of Trinity College Dublin. . . Ussher was a consistent voice for the continued reformation of the Irish Church, and the Irish Articles (1615) that he was largely responsible for drawing up were to be enormously influential, eventually proving the basis for *The Westminster Confession of Faith*." (Mangum and Sweetnam, 58)
- "His (Ussher's) most extensive project was his attempt to write a history of the world from creation to contemporary times. This mammoth work was published in two parts: the first, *Annales veteris testamenti, a prima mundi origine deducti* (*Annals of the Old Testament deduced from the first origins of the world*) appeared in 1650; and its continuation *Annalium pars posterior*, followed in 1654. . . Many of his dates have been confirmed by modern research. The scale of Ussher's achievement, however, is often overlooked, and his *Annals* are remembered only for his dating creation at 4004 BC. (Mangum and Sweetnam, 59)
- "It is somewhat ironic, therefore, that the most successful popularization of Ussher's chronological conclusions—in the margins of the *Scofield Reference Bible*—differed with Ussher only in the date assigned to creation. Faced with the apparently implacable demands of geological science and Darwin's theory of evolution for an Earth far older than six thousand years, Scofield retreated to the gap theory: a reading of the first chapter of Genesis that posited the existence of an unknown but very considerable gap between the creation of the universe as recorded in Genesis 1:1 and the supposed re-creation of a world devastated by some divine judgment in Genesis 1:2." (Mangum and Sweetnam, 59-60)

- That Scofield and his Bible was the product of a strong dispensational movement both in the United States and Europe has been well documented throughout the *Grace History Project*. Therefore, it is not necessary that we rehash again these details. Interested parties should consult past lessons to learn the details of these connections. However, we do want to consider how other factors influenced the notes that appear in the *SRB*.
- Scofield’s conversion experience played a powerful role in shaping his theology. “First, Scofield’s understanding of grace was such that he envisioned its rendering null and void any debt, guilt, or obligation on the part of the sinner. Grace, for Scofield, represented a complete absolution from any blame. Furthermore, this gracious acquittal of Scofield’s view is afforded to an individual upon their placing personal faith in Jesus Christ.” (Mangum and Sweetnam, 74)
 - “The condition of the new birth is faith in Christ crucified. . . Through the new birth the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature and of the life of Christ himself.” (Scofield, 1118)
- “Also worth noting is the background Scofield had in the legal profession before his conversion. Several assessments of Scofield’s theology, both positive and negative, observe this point. Scofield seems to have read the Bible with particular concern for what is practically applicable—or legally binding. His theological system, his dispensational template, is derived in part from his desire to discern clearly what a reader should take as directly obligatory (with penalties attached for failure and with benefits attached for compliance). This approach to the bible has much in common with a lawyer’s approach to legal statutes. Likewise, the cross-referencing system that Scofield employed, with its correlation of key terms with past precedents, has much in common with a lawyer’s approach to judicial decisions.” (Mangum and Sweetnam, 75)
- Scofield designed his study Bible to be a tool for those needing or desiring to be self-taught in the content and meaning of the Bible. The inductive approach that emphasized first-thought, plain-sense, and self-evident observation as the key to interpretation became the hallmark of the *SRB*.
- That C.I.S. was heavily influenced by his first spiritual mentor James H. Brookes is beyond contention and has already been well established by the *Grace History Project*. In Brookes we see an amalgamation of Southern Presbyterian Calvinism and dispensational premillennialism. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that a similar phenomenon is observable in the theology articulated by Scofield. Scofield seems to have derived his distinctive brand of dispensationalism from Bookes’ theology. Scofield expanded and simplified the Southern Presbyterian tenant of the spiritual nature of the church into an Israel-church divide, eternally permanent. Old Testament Israel’s role as God’s earthly people as opposed to the New Testament church’s role as God’s heavenly people would become a central point in Scofield’s dispensational theology. (Mangum and Sweetnam, 77)
- In contrast to JND’s doctrine of the ruin of the church, Brookes taught that, in a world gone horribly wrong, the visible church represented a spiritual haven and oasis. For Brookes the

church would stand as a countercultural testimony to the grace of God until Jesus came back to rescue his people out of the world, which, outside of the church, he too believed would grow progressively worse until then. In addition, Scofield's emphasis on God's sovereignty, including God electing and predestining those who would become his, suggests a general Calvinistic influence. (Magnum and Sweetnam, 81-81)

- Scofield's comments on Genesis 9 indicate a strong Southern influence. Scofield states the following regarding the curse of Ham in his comments on Genesis 9:25.
 - "A prophetic declaration is made that from Ham will descend an inferior and servile posterity (Gen. 9:24-25)." (Scofield, 16)
- This point in the *SRB* would give stature and popularity to the theory of the curse of Ham—that black people are inferior to people of other races and destined to be their servants—throughout broad areas of the American fundamentalist-evangelical world . . . It was a common interpretation in the mid-nineteenth century South; its inclusion in the *SRB* played a major role in extending the popularity of this suspect interpretation well into the twentieth century. (Mangum and Sweetnam, 82-83)
- While Scofield did not seek to advance any specific denominational agenda through the *SRB*, he was, however, clearly theologically conservative. "Several of his notes are devoted to defending the Bible's historicity. In fact, his whole dispensational scheme appears to be designed in part to provide a readily understandable means of preserving the unity of the Bible's message, that is, protecting the bible from the charge of teaching contradictory principles. To this extent, Scofield's work seems rooted in the background of the modernist-fundamentalist polarization of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. . . Scofield advocated distinctly dispensationalist positions, but he does not seem to have been aware of their distinctiveness; nor does he seem to have anticipated these positions becoming controversial. Rather, Scofield seems to have regarded his world as reflecting the consensus of a broad coalition of Bible-believing interpreters of Scripture. In this way, his work reflects the influence of the early American fundamentalist-evangelical movement." (Mangum and Sweetnam, 84-85)
- The influence of American premillennialism and the Niagara Bible Conference movement are clearly seen in the eschatology presented by Scofield in the *SRB*. "Scofield sees the divine purpose of the tribulation period being to provide a means for God to pour out his wrath on the reprobate inhabitants of earth, meanwhile simultaneously isolating—thereby purging and reviving—ethnic, national Israel. The millennial period then serves as the period in which all the prophecies to Israel presently awaiting their realization are fulfilled, with Jesus the Messiah-King enthroned on David's throne in Jerusalem. The level of eschatological detail in all this is itself evidence of the significant influence of American premillennialism on Scofield's thought." (Mangum and Sweetnam, 89)
- In summary of this section, Scofield's "law-grace division provided a means of interpreting the Bible in a literal fashion, proving a unity of the Bible's overall message. . . This literalism and

emphasis on seeking direct, individual, personal applicability of New Testament teaching was a prominent feature of early American fundamentalism-evangelicalism. . . the distinction between law and grace underpinned the distinction between Israel and the church, which in turn underwrote a chronology of future events that emphasized a place of special prominence for national Israel during Christ's earthly reign in the future millennium; all of this of course, found support and precedent in the American premillennialist movement." (Mangum and Sweetnam, 91)

- The *SRB* therefore is an illustration of (and primary influence on) the development of twentieth-century American Christianity. Until it became so popular as to become a lightning rod for controversy, the *Scofield Reference Bible* served first as a means of promoting consensus among Bible-believing American Christians. (Mangum and Sweetnam, 91)

Consulting Editors on the *SRB*

- The title page of the *SRB* lists other men with whom Scofield supposedly consulted when preparing the notes. These editors were some of the most prominent fundamental and premillennial leaders in the country. They included:
 - Rev. Henry G. Weston, D.D., LL. D. (President Crozer Theological Seminary)
 - Rev. James M. Gray, D.D. (President Moody Bible Institute)
 - Rev. William J. Erdman, D.D. (Author *The Gospel of John*)
 - Rev. Arthur T. Pierson, D.D. (Author, Editor, Teacher)
 - Rev. W.G. Moorehead, D.D. (President Xenia Theological Seminary)
 - Rev. Elmore Harris, D.D. (President Toronto Bible Institute)
 - Rev. Arno C. Gaebelain, D.D. (Author *Harmony of Prophetic Word*)
 - Rev. William L. Pettingill, D.D. (Author, Editor, Teacher)
- As we saw in Lesson 70, W.G. Moorehead and William J. Erdman were part of the faction within the Niagara Bible Conference that denied the any-moment rapture position in favor of posttribulation view as to the timing of the rapture. Furthermore, Moorehead and Erdman along with Cameron were vocal opponents of Scofield and Gray in December 1901 at the final meeting of Niagara's leadership. Consequently, it is somewhat strange that the names of Moorehead and Erdman are listed by Scofield as consulting editors on the title page of the *SRB*.
- Ernest R. Sandeen comments on this phenomenon in his book *The Roots of Fundamentalism*. Sandeen states:
 - "On the title page of the *Scofield Reference Bible* eight "consulting editors" were named (see above): . . . Just what role these consulting editors played in the project has been the subject of some confusion. Apparently Scofield meant to acknowledge their assistance, though some have speculated that he hoped to gain support for his publication from both sides of the millenarian movement with this device. At any rate it is clear that the *Scofield Reference Bible* was uncompromisingly Darbyite dispensationalist in doctrine

and taught the any-moment coming and secret rapture of the church. Although he consulted posttribulationist scholars, their views about the time of the advent were not reflected in his work.” (Sandeen, 224)

- Even Gaebelein is fuzzy regarding how much contact and input Scofield received from the other editors particularly Erdman and Moorehead. Gaebelein writes,
 - “The writer does not know how much correspondence Dr. Scofield carried on with the other consulting editors. More than once did he express his indebtedness to them. . . He (Scofield) told us, that he exchanged many letters with Dr. W.J. Erdman about the term “kingdom” and its use in the New Testament. Nor was there always a full agreement in these consultations. We cannot follow in this sketch other interesting details of these consultations. What we have written are but illustration of the thoroughness with which the work was done.” (Gaebelein, 57, 59)
- There can be little doubt that of the eight consulting editors listed above, Gaebelein and Gray influenced the *SRB* project the most. James Martin Gray (1851-1935) was, for years, president of Moody Bible Institute. In 1901, Gray published *Dispensational Bible Studies* in which he presented the following dispensational outline.
 - Edenic Age
 - Antediluvian Age
 - Patriarchal Age
 - Mosaic Age
 - Church Age
 - Millennial Age
 - “Fulness of the Times” Age
 - Eternal Age (Ehlert, 77)
- “It was in New York City working with the Jewish community that Gaebelein became a premillennialist (ca. 1887). He wrote: “this attempt to bring the Gospel to the Jews led me deeper into the Old Testament Scriptures. I began to study prophecy. Up to this time I had followed in the interpretation of Old Testament prophecy the so-called ‘spiritualization method’ (allegorical).” He realized that only with literal interpretation would Israel mean Israel and not the church. He realized that a promise of redemption back to the land of Palestine still held for the Jews.” (Couch, 120)
- “Gaebelein realized that the differences in Bible interpretation were caused by a conflict in hermeneutics. He followed two basic rules for interpreting the Scriptures. He felt a literal-grammatical interpretation led to a national restoration for Israel’s future. And secondly, this approach led one to see the church as a new entity unrevealed in the Old Testament but clearly outlined in the book of Ephesians.” (Couch, 120)

- “Gaebelein also used a dispensational hermeneutic. He saw three major dispensations: law, grace, and kingdom. . . .He also felt strongly about the doctrine of the rapture of the church. No signs needed to herald Christ’s coming. The church clearly would not go through the Great Tribulation. The coming of Christ in the air to receive the church is a separate event from His coming to the earth to set up His kingdom seven years later. Finally, three crucial doctrines were behind Gaebelein’s dispensationalism: 1) the inerrancy of Scripture, 2) the premillennial coming of Christ, and 3) the pretribulational Rapture.” (Couch, 120)
- Gaebelein’s influence on the *SRB* is most clearly seen when it comes to the subject of Biblical prophecy. In *The History of the Scofield Reference Bible*, Gaebelein states the following:
 - “Dr. Scofield was especially concerned about the sane and scriptural interpretation of prophecy. The writer gave a series of addresses during the second Sea Cliff Conference on “The Harmony of the Prophetic Word.” After listening to these lectures, Dr. Scofield said they expressed the method he intended to follow in the Reference bible, and he urged the writer to prepare material, with additional lectures, for publication in a volume. He declared that such a volume would be most helpful to him in his Bible work.” (Gaebelein, 53)
- Gaebelein states that between 1903 and 1909 he received written requests from Scofield for his input on: 1) dates of the minor prophets, 2) the prophetic interpretation of the books of Daniel and Revelation, 3) the parables, particularly the parable of the ten virgins, and 4) II Thessalonians 2. (Gaebelein, 58)
- “Some time later, Dr. Scofield requested the analysis of a number of the prophetic books and the interpretation of difficult and disputed prophecies from the writer, and after our consent to do so, we received his reply:
 - My beloved Brother—By all means, follow your own views of prophetic analysis. I sit at your feet when it comes to prophecy, and congratulate in advance the future readers of the Reference Bible on having in their hands a safe, a clear, sane guide through what to most is a labyrinth. Yours lovingly in Christ, C.I.S.” (Gaebelein, 55-56)

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