

Sunday, October 7, 2012—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 74
 Publication, Impact, and Legacy of the *Scotfield Reference Bible*

Publication of the SRB

- “Publication of the Reference Bible was still a problem after Dr. Scofield had been at work on it for several years. The brethren who were interested in the Sea Cliff Bible Conference were also interested in a new publication venture. It was called the Gospel Publishing House, located in New York, under the management of Mr. D. Bass. One of the first books published was one by Dr. Arthur T. Pierson, *The Bible and Spiritual Life*. Some of the brethren thought the Reference Bible should become one of its publications. Others, including Dr. Scofield, Mr. Fitch, and the writer, felt that such a small concern, totally unknown, with no capital at all, would spell failure for the Bible. To some it seemed strange that such an important work should be undertaken without a definite assurance as to its publication.” (Gaebelein, 61)
- According to Gaebelein, Scofield was calm about the matter, trusting that God would work providentially in due time, to make the publication possible. (Gaebelein, 61)
- “One of the visitors to the East Northfield Conferences, when Dr. Scofield was pastor of the Congregational church there, was Mr. Scott, of the London publishing house of Morgan and Scott . . . Our friend became acquainted with Mr. Scott, and when Dr. and Mrs. Scofield arrived in England, he entertained them. One day Dr. Scofield told Mr. Scott about the work he had undertaken and Mr. Scott at once raised the question, “Who will act as your publisher?” He was rather astonished when he heard that none had been selected. He impressed upon Dr. Scofield that the right publisher was of the utmost importance. Furthermore, Mr. Scott said that his own firm would gladly undertake the publication, but he feared Morgan and Scott could not give the Reference bible the world-wide introduction it must have. He added, “There is only one publishing house which can handle your Reference Bible and that is Oxford University Press.” (Gaebelein, 62)
- “A few days later, Mr. Scott took Dr. Scofield to the office of Mr. Henry Frowde, the chief of the great Oxford University Press . . . He became at once interested. But the head and manager of the American branch of the Oxford University Press had to be consulted. Mr. Armstrong enthusiastically endorsed the plan and urged the early publication of the Bible. Contracts were later drawn up and signed by both parties.” (Gaebelein, 62)
 - Orion, Mich., June 25, 1907: Addressed to Gaebelein—“After much delay, for which, though unwittingly, I was alone responsible, I followed dear Brother Ball’s counsel and closed an arrangement with the Oxford University Press direct, for the publication of our new Bible. They put their capital into it, and their organization in back of it. . . I feel sure everything their capital, wide experience and the best trade facilities can do to insure its wide circulation will be done. The proofs are to be sent here. I am turning down all invitations and shall devote the summer to this work alone.” (Gaebelein, 63)

- October 23, 1908: My dear Brother (Gaebelein), “As to the date of publication—the typesetters are in John, but are going very rapidly now, and I expect to get through here in about three weeks. The book will not, however, be issued till January 15. The publisher fixes that date. He is importing the paper for both editions, the ordinary Bible paper and the India. It certainly is going to be beautiful from a typographical point of view . . . Yours as ever, Scofield.” (Gaebelein, 63)
- Gaebelein reports that he received his copy in January 1909 and “found that it was a beautiful specimen of Bible printing.” (Gaebelein, 64)

Impact of the *SRB*

- Drawn from a wide range of influences from both sides of the Atlantic, Scofield pulled together material from the Reformation onwards and formed it into his own unique synthesis of biblical teaching. That synthesis, in turn exerted an enormous influence on premillennialism in Great Britain and America. Scofield, by his own admission, was not an innovator of doctrine; rather he portrays himself as a great synthesizer of truth that had been taught by others. (Mangum and Sweetnam, 135-136)
 - “The Editor disclaims originality. Other men have labored, he has but entered into their labors. The result 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 himself the modest if laborious task of summarizing, arranging, and condensing this mass of material.” (Scofield, iv)
- This being duly noted, “What is central is the fact that Scofield was saying nothing that had not been said before. This inevitably results in a distorted picture of Scofield’s influence. Because so many of his annotations contained truth that was already received by so much of the church, it is very difficult to establish how much credit Scofield deserves for its preservation and propagation.” (Mangum and Sweetnam, 137)
- While Scofield’s individual points can be found in other works before the publication of the *SRB*, the compiling of these facts into a single volume is unique to Scofield and the Bible that bears his name.

Impact on Plymouth Brethren Dispensationalists

- In Great Britain the dispensationalism advocated by the *SRB* received a mixed reception. During Darby’s lifetime, the Plymouth Brethren movement suffered a split between the Exclusive and Open brethren. While this split was largely over church governance, Darby’s any-moment or secret rapture also factored into the division. The Exclusive Brethren followed JND so completely, that in many places within Europe, Exclusivists are openly known as Darbyists. It

was amongst the Open Brethren that the *SRB* received the warmest reception within British premillennialism. (Mangum and Sweetnam, 143)

- In contrast, Exclusive Brethren view the *SRB* with dismay if not outright disdain. “. . . It is important to remember that, as well as adopting Darby’s teaching on the interpretation of prophecy, Scofield also adapted it. Thus, the prophetic Scripture contained in his notes is problematic for many conservative Exclusives, who regard Scofield’s deviation from Darby with considerable dismay. . . These Exclusives . . . are inclined to regard it as a popularizing revision, rather than a serious doctrinal work in its own right. For these reasons, the stress on the pure form of Darby dispensationalism has the inevitable effect of reducing *The Scofield Reference Bible* to a poor second place, at best, and this has the inevitable effect of constraining Scofield’s influence.” (Mangum and Sweetnam, 142)
- R.A. Huebner, Darby scholar and Exclusive Brethren supporter is very critical of the *SRB*.
 - “C.I. Scofield’s dispensational age-ism is best known through the many, many copies of the *Scofield Reference Bible* (*SRB*) that have been sold. We are thankful for every bit of divine truth that the saints of God embrace, and many have been helped by the *SRB*—by being kept from covenant theology—and brought to wait for the any-moment coming of our savior. On the other hand, there is much important truth that not only is not brought out in the *SRB*, but aspects of it tend to hinder apprehension of these truths.” (Huebner, 12)
- Huebner takes issue with Scofield’s definition of a dispensation, “A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God.” (Scofield, 5) Huebner argues that Scofield has not defined a dispensation but an age, “this definition of a dispensation really means that a dispensation is an age.” (Huebner, 12) Therefore, Huebner calls Scofield’s system, Scofieldian Dispensational Age-ism.
- Huebner asserts that Scofield did not get his system of seven dispensations/ages from Darby but from Isaac Watts. A comparison between Darby’s system and Watts’ system seems to suggest that Huebner is correct.
 - See PowerPoint slides
- In his book *Dispensationalism*, Charles C. Ryrie states, “If Scofield parroted anybody’s scheme it was Watts’ not Darby’s.” (Ryrie, 69) In another section Ryrie writes, “Except for the exclusion of the Millennium (he did not consider it a dispensation), this outline is exactly like that in the *Scofield Reference Bible*, and it is Watts’ outline, not Darby’s.” (Ryrie, 67)
- Huebner presents Scofield as a great synthesizer. According to Huebner, Scofield borrowed the following concepts from Darby and married them to the age-ism scheme he gleaned from Watts.
 - The distinction between the church as a heavenly people and Israel as an earthly people.

- The Pretribulation rapture.
 - The postponement of the kingdom.
 - The distinction between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. (Huebner, 13)
- Huebner summarizes his comments on Scofield and the *SRB* with the following statement, “Perhaps it was Isaac Watts’ covenant age-ism scheme that formed the basis for C.I. Scofield’s scheme, an age-ism scheme—with teachings borrowed from J.N. Darby, clearing out the covenantism. What would you have without at least those teachings from J.N. Darby?” (Huebner, 13-14)
 - Huebner stands out as a prime example of how Scofield and his Bible are viewed by Exclusive Brethren. Any dispensational scheme that does not follow JND’s to the letter is false. Therefore, Huebner is no friend of mid-Acts dispensationalism. In fact, he views Scofield’s Synthesis as the seedbed for all hyper-dispensationalism.

Impact of the Gap Theory

- Another key feature of the *SRB* that had an enduring impact both in Great Britain and the United States is the inclusion of the Gap Theory in Genesis 1. It is important to realize that the Gap Theory was not original to Scofield. “. . . Catastrophist understanding of the history of the earth had emerged in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Postulated first by geologists like George Cuvier (1768-1832), William Buckland (1784-1856), and Adam Sedgwick (1785-1873), this novel theory was designed to reconcile the biblical account of creation with the very long periods of time that seemed to be demanded by new discoveries in geology. Broadly speaking, these catastrophists suggested that the universe had been created—by supernatural power—at some point in the distant past, probably millions of years ago. In these millions of years, natural processes had gone on, allowing ample time for the development of the puzzling and perplexing features constantly being turned up as a result of geological research. These millions of years were punctuated by a series of natural catastrophes, after each of which God intervened in creating life. The last of these catastrophes, and the only one recorded, was the Noahic flood, which seemed to provide proof that a model calling for recurring catastrophes was not inconsistent with Scripture.” (Mangum and Sweetnam, 152)
- “This account of this history of the earth began to make the transition from scientific debate to theological discussion in 1804 when Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847), a prominent Scottish evangelical and associate of Edward Irving, preached a sermon endorsing the usefulness of the speculations of Cuvier, in particular. From there, the gap theory spread with considerable rapidity, attracting the support of evangelicals and high-church ministers alike.” (Mangum and Sweetnam, 152)
- “When the apparent challenge from geological discovery was augmented by the claims for long periods of time by natural selection and Darwinian evolution, the usefulness of the gap theory seemed confirmed. Any scientific request for long periods of time and challenge from

naturalistic and gradualistic explanations for the existence and state of the world could be accommodated with ease between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2.” (Mangum and Sweetnam, 152)

- “With time the gap theory was clarified and refined until the form embodied in Scofield’s notes was eventually reached. So, when he came to annotate Genesis 1:2, Scofield identified three divine creative acts in the chapter—the creation of the heavens and earth, animal life, and human life. ‘The first creative act,’ he wrote, ‘refers to the dateless past, and gives scope for all the geologic ages.’ ” (Mangum and Sweetnam, 153)
 - “Jer. 4:23-26, Isa. 24:1 and 45:18 clearly indicate that the earth had undergone a cataclysmic change as the result of divine judgment. The face of the earth bears everywhere the marks of such a catastrophe. There are not wanting imitations which connect it with a previous testing and fall of angels.” (Scofield, 3)
- “Scofield’s notes gave an old idea new currency. As science’s challenge to a literal understanding of Genesis became more acute and more aggressive, the gap theory became something of a default position for those evangelical groupings who had not previously abandoned their commitment to a literal interpretation of the Genesis account.” (Mangum and Sweetnam, 153)
- “In 1998 John Rendle-Short published *The Green Eye of the Storm*, an attempt to describe the fury with which Darwin’s evolutionary hypothesis burst on Victorian England and the traumatic effects that it had (and continues to have) for Christians committed to the inerrancy of Scripture.” (Mangum and Sweetnam, 155)
- For Rendle-Short, the success of the gap theory and Scofield’s notes were inextricably linked.
 - “The Gap Theory would have died an early death. . . if it had not been actively promoted in this century by *The Scofield Reference Bible*. Personally, I distrust Reference Bibles. They so easily come to invest the speculations of fallible man with the cloak of biblical authority. (Rendle-Short, 171)

Impact on Individual Bible Study

- “It is difficult to imagine or overstate just how prevalent the influence of this Bible was. It sold over a million copies by the end of the Great Depression and over two million copies by the end of World War II . . . Part of the reason why the Scofield Bible became so popular was that Scofield’s notes seemed to make sense not only of the biblical teaching but also of current events. Scofield’s apocalyptic predictions and assessments of the world’s plight matched uncannily well the situation in which readers of his Bible were living.” (Mangum and Sweetnam, 169)
- “In observing the market design and success of *The Scofield Reference Bible*, we find the first level of significant influence: it encouraged personal, individual Bible reading and Bible study. . . a hundred years ago reading the Bible on your own without any research assistance or guide

would have been an arduous task. . . The guides and helps that the Scofield Bible provided for such a person would have been a godsend. And that is exactly how the Scofield Bible was received by the general Christian public.” (Mangum and Sweetnam, 171-172)

Impact on Popular American Christianity

- “The theology of *The Scofield Reference Bible* was largely rooted in a populist movement—the preaching conferences of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Scofield’s notes expressed a studied version of these ideas. Put in such a format, the ideas really caught on among the general Christian public.” (Mangum and Sweetnam, 173)
- The impact of the *SRB* upon the Pentecostal movement makes for an excellent case study. “Pentecostalism gained its historic momentum in the United States through the Azusa Street revivals of 1906-15. *The Scofield Reference Bible* became the Bible of choice among the converts of these revivals. This was despite the fact that Scofield’s notes do not consistently support Pentecostal theology. In fact, a couple of points distinctive to Pentecostal theology are actually opposed in Scofield’s notes. Scofield did not advocate tongues as a sign gift for believers, for instance, and Scofield’s explanation of the baptism of the Spirit stands in direct contrast to Pentecostal assumptions.” (Mangum and Sweetnam, 173-174)
- Despite these differences in theology, Pentecostalism generally firmly upholds other aspects of dispensational theology such as the revival of ethnic, national Israel in the last days, a Pretribulation rapture, and sometimes even seven dispensations. None of these points seems a natural fit, really, with Pentecostalism’s general tendencies. In fact, these aspects of Pentecostal theology are probably only explainable in light of the influence of the *SRB*. (Mangum and Sweetnam, 173-174)
- “Scofield’s basic framing of positions was clear and readily understandable and was presented in a way that allowed people the freedom to make adjustments here and there as they were inclined. Such adjusting to taste is exactly what happens all the time, of course, at the popular level. This flexibility in adjustment, in combination with its pragmatic usefulness and clarity allowed for numerous groups and subgroups to use *The Scofield Reference Bible* with appreciation. The number of people proliferated who did not always arrive at the conclusions Scofield specifically affirmed, but who turned to *The Scofield Reference Bible* as their authoritative original source.” (Mangum and Sweetnam, 176)

Impact on Theological Scholarship

- “Initial reception of *The Scofield Reference Bible* by scholars was lukewarm at best. Some were willing to acknowledge that it was a helpful tool for personal Bible study, but few scholars outside the premillennial Bible Conference movement received its distinctive theological content with enthusiasm. Some expressed alarm against what they regarded as its heretical teachings.” (Mangum and Sweetnam, 180)

- The *SRB* galvanized premillennial scholarship and helped to create the next generation of premillennial scholars. This was due to the creation of schools founded through the early twentieth century—as fruit of the Bible Conference movement—to further the Scofieldian viewpoint. By the early twentieth century, the Bible Conference movement, the Bible College movement, and Scofieldianism had all become virtually synonymous. (Mangum and Sweetnam, 181)
- “It’s ideology (dispensational premillennialism) was birthed largely as a populist movement. Premillennial scholarship struggled for credibility for a while in academia and had to labor to make inroads into the larger academic world. With each generation, as more and more premillennialists have appeared among those whose scholarly credentials and accomplishments are beyond question, this complexity had gradually been overcome.” (Mangum and Sweetnam, 181)
- “In 1944 the Presbyterian Church in America (the Southern Presbyterian Church) ruled dispensationalism to be out of accord with the Westminster Standards, the denomination’s doctrinal convictions statement. This was Scofield’s and Chafer’s own denomination and the denominational home of over half of the Dallas Theological Seminary faculty at the time. This ruling culminated in a rift between two prominent theological approaches within evangelicalism (Dispensational Theology and Covenant Theology, see Appendix A for a chart comparing the two systems), which has impacted American evangelical theology and churches to the present day.” (Mangum and Sweetnam, 185)
- “The dispensational-covenantal rift represents, in part, a tension between popular lay-level ministry on the ground and the more theoretical theological work of institution scholarship. . . Part of what irked the scholars was the confidence that laypeople gained in their conclusions from reading and studying *The Scofield Reference Bible*. Dr. Felix B. Gear, and James B. Green professor of Theology at Columbia Theological Seminary. . . gave this description of dispensationalists in the late 1940s.
 - “First, we are confronted with a dogmatism which asserts itself in an arrogant assumption of superior knowledge on the part of really very ignorant people. . . In all the distortions they make of the scripture in their efforts to “squeeze” their system into it or out of it, they seldom ever admit the possibility that they might make a mistake. They come somehow to feel that they have more understanding than all their teachers if they know *The Scofield Reference Bible*, with this superficial system at their finger tips they cannot err.” (Mangum and Sweetnam, 186-187)
- By the 1970s, those opposed to dispensationalism could be heard singing the following lyrics to the tune of Edward Mote’s popular hymn, “The Solid Rock,” “My hope is built on nothing less than Scofield’s notes and Moody Press.”

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