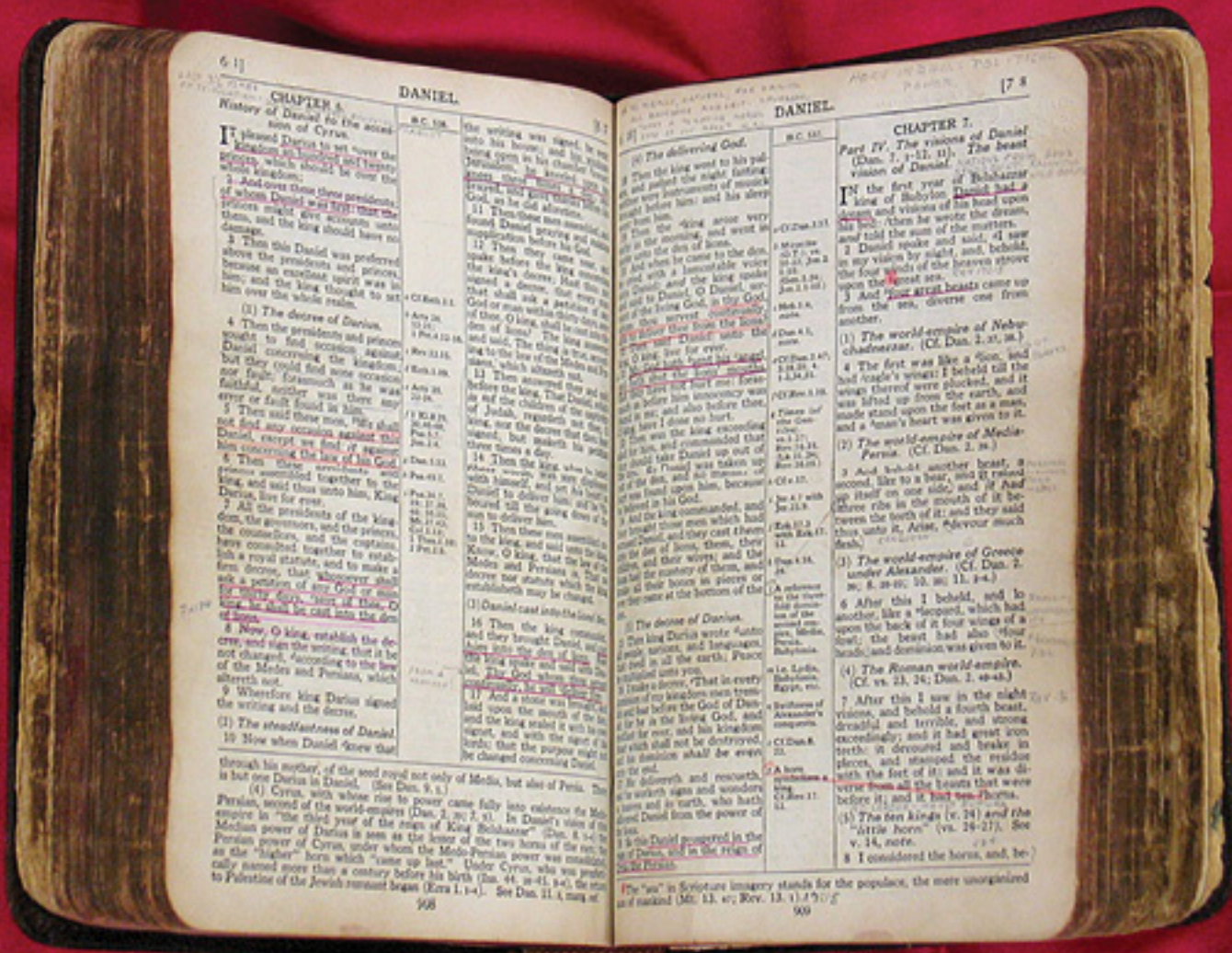


# A Candid Examination of the SCOFIELD BIBLE



ALBERTUS PIETERS (1869-1955)

# A CANDID EXAMINATION OF THE SCOFIELD BIBLE

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This booklet is adapted from a lecture delivered before the Ministerial Association of the Christian Reformed Church, at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, June 1, 1938.

While the cover photograph is a 1967 edition of the Scofield Bible, all references in this booklet are to the Scofield Bible, 1917 edition, as this was the current edition when the author wrote. Therefore, all page numbers will differ from the 1967 and 1984 editions. The publisher believes the references and this booklet as a whole are still valuable, however, in demonstrating to the reader the degree of credibility and accuracy in Scofield's original work. The biblical critique that applies to the original work also will apply to all subsequent editions and to the system of classic Dispensationalism. Please also see *Scofield or the Scriptures* by Paul E. Sisco (1970) and *The Application of the Scriptures: A Study of Dispensationalism* by A. W. Pink (1952), both booklets available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Albertus Pieters (1869-1955), a pastor's son of Dutch decent, was born in Alto, Wisconsin. He attended Hope College and Western Theological Seminary. In 1891, he married Emma Kollen before departing for Japan, where they served as missionaries until 1923. While there, he inaugurated the program *Newspaper Evangelism* and served as vice-president of the General Synod in 1911. Upon his return to the United States, he taught at Hope College from 1923-1926 and at Western Theological Seminary from 1926-1939.

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## Publisher's Foreword

Albertus Pieters (1869-1955) delivered his lecture, *A Candid Examination of the Scofield Bible*, in 1938. The object of his critique was the 1917 edition of the Scofield Reference Bible. Oxford University Press originally published Cyrus Ingerson Scofield's reference Bible in 1909, using the text of the King James Version. In the Introduction, Scofield wrote, "This edition of the Bible had its origin in the increasing conviction of the Editor through thirty years' study and use of the Scriptures...that all of the many excellent and useful editions of the Word of God left much to be desired. Gradually the elements which must combine to facilitate the study and intelligent use of the Bible became clear to his mind."

In his original lecture, Pieters did an excellent job of identifying many problematic aspects of Scofield's doctrine. However, having used Charles G. Trumbull's biography of Scofield,<sup>1</sup> Pieters could not have foreseen the significant debates that would later arise regarding Scofield's controversial life.<sup>2</sup> According to George Marsden,<sup>3</sup> Trumbull, soon after his conversion, became a protégé of C. I. Scofield.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, Trumbull was overly kind and apparently ignorant of many troubling aspects of Scofield's life.<sup>5</sup> And though the Scofield Bible was and is wildly popular,<sup>6</sup> the man responsible for it often remains unknown.<sup>7</sup> In light of this, Chapel Library has removed a few of Pieters' opening statements regarding Scofield and has added this foreword.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Gallaudet Trumbull, *The Life Story of C. I. Scofield* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1920).

<sup>2</sup> That the story of Scofield's life has only ever been told by those aiming at uncritical praise or unrelieved criticism has further muddied the waters of our understanding, making the Southern minister appear a rather shadowy figure. (Sweetnam and Mangum, *The Scofield Bible: Its History and Impact on the Evangelical Church*, 2)

<sup>3</sup> **George M. Marsden** (b. 1939) – American historian who has written extensively on the interaction between Christianity and American culture.

<sup>4</sup> George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 96. According to Marsden, Trumbull eventually wrote "a biography of Scofield in which Trumbull and his teacher are pictured together as 'Paul and Timothy,'" 96.

<sup>5</sup> At least one member of a branch of the Scofield family expressed "astonishment at the level of immaturity in which it was written. The author sounds like a teenager with a severe case of hero worship. I can understand why it was never reprinted." (David Lutzweiler, *The Praise of Folly*, 14)

<sup>6</sup> Within twenty years of its initial release in 1909, it became the first-ever Oxford Press publication to reach a million in sales. (Sweetnam and Mangum, *The Scofield Bible*, 7)

<sup>7</sup> For detailed, critical evaluations of Scofield's life and theology, see David Lutzweiler, *The Praise of Folly: The Enigmatic Life and Theology of C. I. Scofield*, Apologetics Group Media; Joseph M. Canfield, *The Incredible Scofield and His Book*, Ross House Books; Ovid Need, *Death of the Church Victorious*, Sovereign Grace Publishers; for works that challenge these critiques, see Mark S. Sweetnam and R. Todd Mangum, *The Scofield Bible: Its History and Impact on the Evangelical Church*, InterVarsity Press; John D. Hannah, "A Review of The Incredible Scofield and His Book," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147: 587 (Jul 90), 355.

## Darby, Plymouth Brethren, and Revisions

For several years after his conversion, Scofield was mentored by James H. Brookes, a leading Presbyterian dispensationalist and a committed follower of J. N. Darby.<sup>8</sup> During his time with Brookes, Scofield absorbed Plymouth Brethrenism,<sup>9</sup> which was primarily Darby's view of the defeated Church.

The extremely popular Scofield Bible is essentially a Plymouth Brethren publication, finding its roots in the mind of J. N. Darby. "Scofield's *Reference Bible* represents a life-long study of the Scriptures and is hailed in all the world by Brethren as setting forth their views on the interpretation of Scripture, especially of prophecy and 'dispensational'<sup>10</sup> truth.' And naturally: Scofield was for a generation an assiduous<sup>11</sup> and admiring student of Darby's writings."<sup>12</sup> Scofield considered Darby "the most profound Bible student of modern times."<sup>13</sup> Thus, the Scofield Reference Bible is really a detailed systematization of J. N. Darby's newly developed Plymouth Brethren theology.

The Plymouth Brethren have made it well known that the Scofield "Bible" is a compilation of their doctrine. Though the Plymouth Brethren were and are a very small group, they had enormous influence through their writings; and they offered modern Christianity a newly developed millennial doctrine, which evangelicalism eagerly embraced. Their doctrine originally created great turmoil when it was introduced in the mid-1800s; and the established, orthodox churches of that day stood strongly against its infiltration. And while Pieters compliments Scofield's efforts to preserve the "great fundamentals" of the Christian faith, it appears that Scofield's doctrine has tragically influenced many Christians to withdraw from social involvement. Historical orthodox Christian doctrine has been supplanted by Scofield's new "orthodoxy." The result has been the growing impotence of Western churches.

A second edition the Scofield Reference Bible was published in 1917, in which Scofield admitted a certain gratitude for being able to make some changes "to add, here and

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<sup>8</sup> **John Nelson Darby** (1800-1882) – Anglo-Irish evangelist and influential leader among the original Plymouth Brethren. He is considered the father of modern Dispensationalism.

<sup>9</sup> **Plymouth Brethren** – a movement established in the late 1820s in Dublin, Ireland, where several groups of Christians first met for the Lord's Supper. Among these was John Nelson Darby, an Anglican clergyman, who later left Anglicanism for the non-denominational congregations of the Brethren. The first meeting in England was in 1831 in Plymouth; rejecting denominationalism, they became known as "the brethren from Plymouth." The Brethren became well known for their study of biblical prophecy and were associated with the Powerscourt Conferences.

<sup>10</sup> **dispensational** (from *dispensationalism*) – a theological system that began in the nineteenth century with the writings of J. N. Darby. Among the general doctrines of this system are the distinction between Israel and the church as two groups in God's overall plan, the pretribulational rapture of the church, a future literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel, and the dividing of biblical history into seven periods or "dispensations" of God's ways of relating to his people. (Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 1240)

<sup>11</sup> **assiduous** – marked by care and persistent effort.

<sup>12</sup> Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1975), 19.

<sup>13</sup> Dave MacPherson, *The Great Rapture Hoax*, New Puritan Library, 79.

there, such further help as experience has shown to be desirable” (from the Preface to the 1917 edition). The 1917 edition again used the text of the King James Version without alteration.

“It was not until almost forty years later that...the publisher once again decided to undertake a revision. This effort produced *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (NSRB) of 1967” (from the “Introduction to the 1984 Edition”). This is about all we are told currently about the 1967 edition. But this was in fact a major revision of Scofield’s work. From the introduction to the 1967 edition: “Today a revision is past due, with improvements and further helps to the reader—not that the Bible has changed, but that additional light has been thrown upon the Scriptures by textual scholarship, archeological discoveries, and developments on a world-wide scale in the light of Bible prophecy...Among the changes and improvements in this edition are: important word changes in the text to help the reader...revision of many of the introductions to the books of the Bible...clarification of some footnotes, deletion of others, and the addition of many new notes.” In many cases, these changes to the notes served to tone down and render Scofield’s original statements more palatable.

While Scofield revised his notes in the 1917 edition, he did not change the KJV text. But the 1967 NSRB changes the KJV with alleged “better readings” in over 6,500 places. In many places, the NSRB agrees with the readings of modern translations rather than the KJV. For example, “a son of the gods” appears in Daniel 3:25, rather than “the Son of God” (KJV). “A random survey of the NSRB margins in Philippians alone revealed a total of 29 changes from the King James Bible. Of these, twenty-one (72%) were traced to either the RSV or the NASB. The skeptic can check it out for himself: Philippians 1:7, 8, 23, 27; 2:1, 15, 25, 27, 28; 3:1, 8, 17, 19, 20, 21; 4:3, 6, 14, 15, 21-22.”<sup>14</sup>

The most recent edition of Scofield’s Bible (1984) is based on the 1967 edition, with most changes stemming from the adaptation of all notes to the New International Version. Modern editions are now generally referred to as the Scofield Study Bible.

In light of the fact that most works about Scofield either venerate or vilify him, a definitive biographical and theological critique is still a crying need. Until then, Albertus Pieters’ 1938 lecture will give modern readers a brief introduction to some of the doctrinal problems of the Scofield Reference Bible.—*Ovid Need*

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<sup>14</sup> Citations in this paragraph are from Dr. William Grady, *Final Authority* (Grady Publications, 1993), 316.

# A CANDID EXAMINATION OF THE SCOFIELD BIBLE

## **Introduction**

Shortly after I returned from Japan in the year 1923, when I was beginning my work as Bible teacher and College Pastor in Hope College, Dr. John E. Kuizenga, then one of the professors in our seminary, remarked to me that no one could be a teacher of the Bible in these days without reckoning with the Scofield Bible, since it was so widely used and so highly esteemed by many Christian people. This was not exactly the first time I had heard of the Scofield Bible. I knew that there was such a book, but had never had any occasion to pay any special attention to it. Upon Dr. Kuizenga's advice, I procured a copy and made myself acquainted with its contents.

## **The Great Influence of the Scofield Bible**

There is no doubt that Dr. Kuizenga was right in his remark to me about the great and widespread influence of the Scofield Bible. It fairly may be called one of the most influential books—perhaps it is the most influential single work—thrust into the religious life of America during the twentieth century. So far as I know, it is not looked upon as a valuable adjunct to Bible study in any of the regular theological seminaries throughout our country, but in numerous “Bible Schools” it is one of the chief textbooks, and in many circles an appeal to the Scofield Bible is the end of all controversy. Through its influence there have arisen here and there “tabernacles” and “undenominational churches,” composed of people no longer at home in the established orthodox denominations because they do not get there the sort of teaching they find in the Scofield Bible. In many other churches, where this development has not yet reached the point of separation, the presence of Sunday-school teachers and others who consider themselves illuminated by the Scofield Bible beyond their pastors, form a troublesome element. Periodicals like the *Sunday School Times* and the *Moody Bible Institute Monthly* frequently refer to it, and always with an air of having spoken the final word if they can quote a passage from it to support their views.

All this constitutes a situation to which we as pastors and Bible teachers need to pay attention, and to do so we must be thoroughly acquainted with the Scofield Bible. The importance of the problem is accentuated by the fact that those who use this work are, in other respects, among the best Christians in our churches, those with the deepest faith in the Holy Scriptures and with the most sincere devotion to the Lord. They need to be very careful and sympathetically dealt with. These good people do not lack faith and zeal, but they sadly lack knowledge; and the tragedy of the situation lies just here, that this is the very thing they think they have obtained from the Scofield Bible! They

are apt to say in their hearts, and not infrequently with their lips, “I have more understanding than all my teachers—because I have a Scofield Bible.”

Dr. T. T. Shields of Toronto, prominent Baptist preacher, said, “From a position of entire ignorance of the Scriptures to the position of oracular<sup>15</sup> religious certainty—especially respecting eschatological<sup>16</sup> matters—for some people requires from three to six months with a Scofield Bible.”<sup>17</sup>

### ***Why so influential?***

How is this great influence of Dr. Scofield’s work to be accounted for? In answering this question, it is right first of all to point out the real excellence of the book. It was written by a man of faith. On the great fundamental issues of the Christian religion, such as the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, the deity of Christ, the atonement, justification by faith, regeneration, sanctification through the Holy Spirit, the resurrection of Christ, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting, it rings clear as a bell. Many Christian people have been profoundly disturbed during the last forty years over the growing denial of these things because of the increasing modernism in the churches. Often they fail to hear any clear testimony of the Gospel from their own pastors, even in Presbyterian and Methodist churches. For such people it is a relief and a most welcome assurance to take up the Scofield Bible and to find in its notes no suggestion that the old Gospel is out of date or that the great doctrines are to be doubted. This is the most vital and valuable service that the Scofield Bible has rendered to the Christian faith and the life of our country, and its importance cannot easily be over-estimated. It has undergirded the faith of God’s people in a remarkable manner, and from that point of view even we who see much fault in it and seriously deprecate<sup>18</sup> its influence in other respects, must thank God for it.

It has excellencies of method, also. Its chain reference system, considered merely as a method apart from the special propaganda to which it is largely devoted, is admirable. The same must be said of its paragraph headings, although in the book of Isaiah, these are abused to present as the content of the prophesy what is at best a most doubtful interpretation!

### ***Authoritative tone***

Another thing that goes far to explain the widespread use and great influence of this work, is the oracular and authoritative tone employed throughout. Here we have come to something we cannot praise, although we admit its effectiveness with superficial Bible students—as most people are. Dr. Scofield never by any chance intimates that he may be mistaken, or that any other view is possible but the one he lays down. In one place I did find him presenting three possible alternative explanations, without deciding which was

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<sup>15</sup> **oracular** – claiming the authority of divine utterances.

<sup>16</sup> **eschatological** – having to do with last things—death, resurrection, judgment, heaven, hell, and the Second Coming of Christ.

<sup>17</sup> *The Gospel Witness*, April 7th, 1932.

<sup>18</sup> **deprecate** – express disapproval of.



right, but this is a rare exception. For the most part, no infallible Pope could speak with greater certainty and authority than he; and this is true no matter what the subject under discussion. Whether dealing with the great doctrines that are the common confession of all Christendom, or with obscure and doubtful points of eschatology<sup>19</sup> where the most learned and competent expositors confess themselves at a loss, everywhere it is the same *ipse dixit*<sup>20</sup> style. Anciently it was said: *Roma locuta est: causa finita est* (“Rome has spoken; the case is closed”); but if you yield yourself at all to the tone and method of the Scofield Bible, you must believe that the message for the present age is: *Scofield locuta est; causa finita est!*

The influence of this authoritative tone upon the untrained and unwary reader is necessarily very great, and this is emphasized in no small degree by the fact that the notes are bound up in the same volume with the sacred text itself, so that the confidence of the reader in writings divinely inspired is unconsciously transferred to and shared by the other remarks on the same page. To be sure, this has been done before, as in the great Dutch *Staten Bijbel*.<sup>21</sup> But that method has passed out of use, precisely because it was recognized that *fallible* interpretation should not thus be associated with *infallible* revelation. Had his notes been published separately, by themselves, as a commentary, they would by this time have been forgotten.

In line with this authoritative attitude, and necessitated by it, is the fact that Dr. Scofield never argues, never explains, never apologizes, and never assigns any reasons for asserting that this or that is true. Not only would it have been difficult to do that within the limits of space available, but it would have detracted very seriously from the impression made upon the reader. Had he given his reasons, the intelligent reader would have begun to judge whether these reasons were convincing; by withholding all reasons he gives the impression that, if he did give them, they would be found satisfactory. Thus, with true psychology he affirms, but never argues.

Now, there are certainly times, places, and circumstances where this is the correct procedure. In teaching small children one must speak thus. The man who proclaims the great Christian doctrines is entitled to speak positively and with authority. He has the Holy Scriptures and the consensus of the Christian Church from the beginning with him and behind him as he preaches these truths. Within the Christian circle, the faith is “the Un-doubtful Holy Catholic Christian Faith.” We don’t mean “maybe” when we proclaim the doctrine of God, of Christ, of righteousness, and of judgment to come. Besides this, any one called to the office of a Christian pastor in a given denomination has both the right and the duty, to affirm in his own pulpit the distinctive doctrines of his own denomination, without qualification or apology. That is what he is there for, what he has been called to do, what his people want him to do, and understand that he is doing. He

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<sup>19</sup> **eschatology** – the part of systematic theology that deals with last things.

<sup>20</sup> *ipse dixit* – “he himself said it.”

<sup>21</sup> *Staten Bijbel* (Dutch: State Bible) – the first Bible translation from the original Hebrew and Greek languages to the Dutch language, ordered by the government of the Protestant Dutch Republic, first published in 1637.

speaks not as an individual but as an official teacher, the mouthpiece of his denomination. You cannot find fault with a Baptist preacher for declaring in his pulpit that infant baptism is a perversion of the sacrament and a great evil; or with a Reformed Church pastor for preaching in his pulpit that it is a precious divine ordinance. Neither can do otherwise and be faithful to his calling.

In the case of the Scofield Bible, however, these considerations do not apply. He is not dealing with children, nor is he speaking in any sense in an official and representative capacity. In his presentation of the great central doctrines, he has the whole Church behind him, but in a large part of his teachings, he represents a minority of a minority, teaching a millennialism which no Christian church has ever admitted to its creed, and of that millennialism a special form of which many of the wisest millenarians repudiate. Yet in all of this, as also in his remarks on chronology and general Bible knowledge, he maintains the same oracular "I know it all" attitude. As a method of inspiring confidence among ignorant people, the method has merits, its effectiveness cannot be denied; but from a moral standpoint, it deserves severe condemnation. Dr. Scofield had no right thus to assume superiority over his brethren, to whom the Holy Spirit was given as well as to him, and many of whom had qualifications of scholarship far beyond anything he could claim.

In the field of Systematic Theology he is good, for there he utilizes the fruits of the standard Protestant and Calvinistic thinking; but in general Bible knowledge he makes many mistakes, and in his eschatology he goes far astray from anything the Church has ever believed. Undoubtedly, this oracular and authoritative manner has been effective, but it is not to be excused for that reason. It seems like a harsh judgment, but in the interest of truth it must be uttered: Dr. Scofield in this was acting the part of an intellectual charlatan, a fraud who pretends to knowledge which he does not possess; like a quack doctor, who is ready with a confident diagnosis in many cases where a competent physician is unable to decide.

Yet this method was truly effective, and accounts in no small degree for the influence and popularity of his work. Dr. T. T. Shields says on this point:

"I readily recognize that the Scofield Bible is very popular with novices, that is those newly come to the faith, and also with many of longer Christian experience who are but superficial students of Scripture. Ready-made clothes are everywhere popular with people of average size...On the same principle, ready-made religious ideas will always be popular, especially with those indisposed to the exertion of fitting their religious conceptions to an ever-increasing scriptural knowledge. That common human disposition very largely explains the popularity of the Scofield Bible."<sup>22</sup>

## **The Distinctive Doctrines of the Scofield Bible**

Let us turn now from questions of method to those of the contents of the work. These we may divide into two sections:

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<sup>22</sup> *Gospel Witness*, April 7, 1932.

- 1) those in line with the common evangelical faith, and
- 2) those outside of, and in some respects, contrary to, the accepted convictions of evangelical Protestant Christians.

Those of the former class will require no special discussion here. As already remarked, in the great standard doctrines of systematic theology, the book is decidedly good. Dr. Scofield gives such instruction mainly through his definitions of pivotal theological terms, such as regeneration, reconciliation, redemption, election, predestination, etc. He assures us in his Introduction that “these definitions have been submitted to and approved by a very large number of eminent students and teachers of all the evangelical bodies,” and the expert nature of the theological craftsmanship manifest in them bears out this assurance. As such definitions and accompanying notes form a considerable portion of the comment of the great Pauline Epistles, it is here that we find the greatest occasion to approve his work. Since these doctrinal conceptions are fully shared by all Presbyterians and Reformed theologians, we need not comment upon them further; except to say again that we believe that they have wrought a great and much needed work among American Christians, who because of the prevailing neglect of catechetical<sup>23</sup> instruction, have usually only the vaguest notions of Christian doctrine.

I should like to devote my remaining time to a brief consideration of four distinctive features of the Scofield Bible, namely,

- 1) Its artificial and extravagant typology.
- 2) Its doctrine of dispensations and covenants.
- 3) Its eschatology.
- 4) Its doctrine of the Church.

### ***1. Artificial and Extravagant Typology***

On page 4<sup>24</sup> we find Dr. Scofield’s definition of a “type,” and on page 100 a statement of the principle of interpretation to be employed of speaking of types. Both are excellent. The definition is this: “A type is a divinely purposed illustration of some truth.” According to this, nothing is a true type unless it was intended to be such by the Holy Spirit in inspiring the Bible. The principle of interpretation is as follows: 1) Nothing may be dogmatically asserted to be a type without explicit New Testament authority; and 2) all types not so authenticated must be recognized as having the authority of analogy and spiritual congruity *merely*.<sup>25</sup>

This is fine; but we must immediately add that if the author had acted according to his own principles, he would, so far as typology is concerned, have written a very differ-

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<sup>23</sup> **catechetical** – consisting in asking questions and receiving answers, particularly in the first principles of the Christian religion, as practiced in prior centuries.

<sup>24</sup> The author used the 1917 edition of the *Scofield Reference Bible*, having written before the 1967 or 1984 editions were available. This obscurity, however, does not detract from the value of the author’s commentary, because reference to Scofield’s original thinking exposes the error in all that is derived from it.

<sup>25</sup> **merely** – solely; only; in no other way.

ent book. This warning, tucked away on page 100, is honored more in the breach<sup>26</sup> than in the observance. Constantly he is dogmatically asserting this or that to be a type for which the New Testament offers no sort of explicit authority.

Let me give you a few samples. He has hardly begun the story of creation, in Genesis 1, before he tells us that the sun is the type of Christ, the moon of the Church, and the stars of the individual believers. A little further on, we are told that Eve is a type of the Church as the bride of Christ; then that Enoch typifies the believers of the last day, alive at the coming of Christ. Noah stands for the Jewish people at the end-time, kept through the judgments of the days of Anti-Christ, and brought as an earthly people into the new heavens and new earth of the millennium. Noah's ark typifies the salvation of Christ—which at first seems a familiar thought, but Dr. Scofield does not mean this in the ordinary way. He adds that in strictness of application this speaks of the preservation through the great tribulation of the remnant of Israel, who will turn to the Lord after the Church has been caught up to meet Him in the air. St. Paul taught us that Sarah and Hagar had typical meanings, but he said nothing about Keturah. Dr. Scofield supplies that omission by telling us that she is a type of the fertility of Israel, as the natural seed after the restoration of Israel under the Palestinian covenant. Jacob away from home in Padanaram, becomes a striking illustration, if not a type of the Jews in the present long-continued dispersion. Asenath, the Egyptian wife of Joseph, is a type of the Christian Church called from among the Gentiles to be the bride of Christ; Amalek, warring against Israel, stands for the flesh, warring against the spirit in the believer.

In the Ark of the Covenant, the wood of the ark typifies the humanity of Christ, because it was acacia wood, a desert plant, and He was as a root out of a dry ground! The gold typifies His deity. The manna was a type of Christ in His humiliation, because it was a little thing; “but the old corn of the land,” eaten after the manna had ceased to fall, means Christ glorified through resurrection and ascension. Aaron's rod that budded was a type of the resurrection of Christ; and smiting the rock to make the water gush forth typifies the crucifixion. That is the reason why it was so serious an offense for Moses to strike twice; for, says Dr. Scofield, “Christ, once smitten (i.e. crucified) needs not to be smitten again. Moses' act exalted himself and implied (in type), that the one sacrifice was ineffectual, thus denying the eternal efficacy of the blood.”

These are only samples. So he goes on, through the book, finding types everywhere. No doubt there are real types, as we all recognize; but this sort of typology throws more light on the ingenuity of Dr. C. I. Scofield than upon the meaning of the Holy Scriptures. It is strikingly similar to the allegorizing of the Church Fathers,<sup>27</sup> and results from the same disposing of mind, namely unwillingness to abide by the results of sober exegesis<sup>28</sup> of the Word of God.

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<sup>26</sup> **honored more in the breach** – the principle is violated more than it is followed.

<sup>27</sup> **Church Fathers** – teachers during the first two centuries after Christ's death, held in high esteem for their leadership, many of whom nevertheless followed an allegorical method of interpretation.

<sup>28</sup> **exegesis** – discovering the meaning of a passage. Right exegesis uses the literal, grammatical, and historical method of interpretation.

## ***2. Dispensations and Covenants***

The Scofield Bible teaches that there are seven dispensations, as follows:

### *The Seven Dispensations*

- 1). The Dispensation of Innocency: in the Garden of Eden before the Fall.
- 2). The Dispensation of Conscience: before the Flood.
- 3). The Dispensation of Human Government: from the flood to various points of time, namely, for the human race as a unit, until the confusion of tongues, which destroyed the racial unity; for the Jews, the captivities; for the Gentile nations, the Second Coming of Christ and judgment of Matthew 25.
- 4). The Dispensation of Promise: from the calling of Abraham until Mt. Sinai.
- 5). The Dispensation of Law: from Mt. Sinai to the cross of Christ.
- 6). The Dispensation of Grace: from the cross of Christ to the Second Advent.
- 7). The Dispensation of the Kingdom: the millennial era.

His definition is as follows: “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.”

Such a use of the word “dispensation,” to indicate a period of time during which some specific aspect of the divine redemptive program is prominent, is familiar in theology. We are all accustomed to the expressions “the old dispensation,” “the new dispensation,” as designating the time before and after the coming of Christ, yet not merely as intervals of time but as periods during which certain distinct religious ordinances were established by divine authority—such as sacrifice and Passover in the Old Testament and baptism and the Lord’s Supper in the New. This is the idea which Dr. Scofield extends to the seven periods named.

For such extension and enumeration of dispensation, however, he gives no scriptural authority—for the simple reason that there is none to be given. Nor does he indicate the grounds upon which he bases the assertion that there are just seven: he merely says so, in his characteristic manner. If this is enough to convince you, no more need to be said; but if you are disposed to scrutinize the idea, and to demand some kind of proof, you will not be easily satisfied. There are many questions to be asked—to which you get no answer.

On the “*Dispensation of Innocency*” we need waste no words. We are all agreed that there was such a period and that the relations between God and man suffered a radical alteration by the coming in of sin. If Dr. Scofield chooses to call this a “dispensation,” let him do so. We will not strive about words to no profit.

The next point however, is far from self-evident. The “*Dispensation of Conscience*,” he says, means this: “Expelled from Eden...man was responsible to do all known good, and to abstain from all known evil, and to approach God through sacrifice...the dispensation ended in the judgment of the Flood.”

“Ended”—what ended? The responsibility of every man to do all known good and to abstain from all known evil?—certainly not, that abides today. The responsibility to ap-

proach God through sacrifice?—that continued until the final sacrifice of Christ. The operation of conscience in the heart of man?—by no means; St. Paul refers to it as operative in his day, and there has been no change since. What, then, that was characteristic of “the Dispensation of Conscience,” ended at the Flood?

The next is the “*Dispensation of Human Government*,” which has three points of termination; but the notion that there was no human government before that Flood has no warrant; and in the case of the Jews human government did not end with the captivities, as he alleges. It is true that they did not regain their complete national independence, except for a short time under the Maccabees;<sup>29</sup> but the exercise of human government by the heads of the Jewish people continued until the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Gen 49:10).

The next is the “*Dispensation of Promise*,” and we are told that it ended with the giving of the Law upon Mt. Sinai. Again we ask: “In what sense did it end then?” and again we get no intelligent reply. Was the promise revoked?—it was not; St. Paul expressly tells us that the giving of the Law had no such effect. Had it already been fulfilled?—we know it was not. Was it then unimportant for an Israelite to believe the promise? Who can entertain such an idea?

The entire “dispensational” scheme, therefore, when subjected to examination in the light of Holy Scripture, breaks down completely—yet it is accepted by multitudes today as the undoubted teaching of the Bible, because Dr. Scofield says so!

### *The Eight Covenants*

Dr. Scofield’s doctrine of the Covenants fares little better. He has eight:

- 1). The Edenic Covenant.
- 2). The Adamic Covenant.
- 3). The Noahic Covenant.
- 4). The Abrahamic Covenant.
- 5). The Mosaic Covenant.
- 6). The Palestinian Covenant.
- 7). The Davidic Covenant.
- 8). The New Covenant.

Five of the eight will be at once admitted by every competent Bible student to be real covenants, namely, those with Noah, with Abraham, on Mt. Sinai, with David, and the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31. For these there is direct and abundant scriptural ground. The Edenic Covenant of Dr. Scofield bears a resemblance of the well-known concept of “the Covenant of Works”<sup>30</sup> in systematic theology. There is nothing in theology to correspond to the Adamic Covenant and to the Palestinian Covenant.

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<sup>29</sup> **Maccabees** – Jewish family that revolted against Greek rule in Palestine during the inter-testamental period and established a form of self-rule.

<sup>30</sup> **Covenant of Works** – the covenant God established with Adam in the Garden of Eden before his fall into sin. It established man’s obligation to obey God, with a continued life of fellowship with God,

The former of these two is of minor importance. It is the Palestinian Covenant that is vital to Dr. Scofield's scheme. He finds this in Deuteronomy chapters 29-31. Under this covenant, he thinks that God has pledged Himself to restore the Jews someday to the land of Palestine. I myself can discover no such promise there, except upon condition of repentance, and it is the established premillenarian<sup>31</sup> teaching that the Jews are to be restored in a condition of unbelief. For making this a separate covenant there is at least a show of scriptural ground in Deuteronomy 29:1, where it speaks of a new covenant, "beside the covenant which God made with the children of Israel at Mt. Sinai." But when we examine the passage with care, it turns out to be no more than a repetition and confirmation of preceding promises, so that it does not, in any real sense, constitute a separate covenant.

Time forbids us to enter upon the argument here. We hasten on to discuss a very important feature of Dr. Scofield's work, namely,

### **3. Eschatology**

To state Dr. Scofield's eschatological position in one sentence, he is a premillenarian of the extreme "Futuristic" school, combined with a "Darbyite" conception of the Church and the kingdom. First, then, he is a premillenarian, or more correctly, a millenarian, or chiliast.<sup>32</sup> That is, he expects that the Lord Jesus Christ, at His second Advent, will establish a political kingdom on this earth [to last 1,000 years], and will personally, visibly rule over it. This is an expectation that had some currency in the early church, although not exactly in the form in which Dr. Scofield holds it. The chiliasm of the early Fathers had no Jewish element, only Christians were to share in the glories of that age—while Dr. Scofield's millennium is first of all a Jewish millennium. The reign of Christ on earth at that time, he thinks, will be a sitting on the throne of David, as King of Jews—as literally, strictly, and politically understood. The Gentile nations that survive the judgment of Matthew 25 will have a part in it, but only as vassal states, under the ruling Jewish power.

In the Christian form, as already remarked, such an idea had some currency in the second and third centuries of our era—exactly how much we do not know. It is often alleged that it was then the prevailing belief, but this cannot be proved by the extant evidence. St. Augustine gave to chiliasm what was practically its death blow in the Church, and it did not revive to any considerable extent until after the Reformation. Since that time, in various forms, it has made a good deal of progress, and gradually there has come into it the Jewish element of which I have spoken, which has transformed it into something quite other than the chiliasm of which the early Christians dreamed. Present day millenarians ought not to appeal to the early faith without recognizing this difference. At present those who hold the premillenarian expectation form a respective group, both

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and if he disobeyed, the penalty of eternal death (Gen 2:16-17). See *The Covenants—of Works and of Grace*, booklet by Walter Chantry available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>31</sup> **premillenarian** – pertaining to the belief that 1) Christ's second coming will occur and 2) Christ will rule in a literal earthly kingdom lasting 1,000 years (known as the *millennium*).

<sup>32</sup> **chiliast** – from the Greek word *chilioi*, thousand.

for learning and for numbers; but they are still only a small minority of the entire Christian Church. Those who are called “postmillenarians” are not really millenarians at all, for they do not believe in the setting up of a visible political kingdom under the personal rule of Jesus Christ, which is the essential point in chiliasm.

Dr. Scofield is not only a premillenarian however, he is a “Futuristic” Darbyite premillenarian. When we call him a “Futurist,” we refer to his interpretation of the Apocalypse, in which he is an adherent of the “Futurist” school, as against the “Historicists” and the “Preterists.” This means that, in his opinion, nothing after the third chapter of Revelation has as yet begun to be fulfilled—all awaits fulfillment within a period of seven years at the end of this dispensation. Also, that he regards the “beasts” of chapter 13 to the end, as a personal Antichrist, who shall then rule over the world. By no means do all premillenarians agree with him in this. The great expositors who did so much, in the previous generation, to win approval for chiliasm—Bengel, Mede, Alford, Lord, Guinness, and others—were “Historicists.” They believed that the Apocalypse was the book of the Christian Church, not of the Jews. They took the Beast to be a symbol for the Roman Catholic Church. Most of them—not Alford—reckoned prophecy by the “year-day” theory, which Dr. Scofield and his school repudiate. Thus, Dr. Scofield belongs to a party within a party, a premillenarian who is also a Futurist.

Not only so, but he is a “Darbyite” Futurist, i.e., he teaches that there was a complete break between the Hebrew development and the Christian Church, as we shall see presently. Not all Futurists are Darbyites. Dr. Abraham Kuyper<sup>33</sup> was a Futurist in his exposition of the Apocalypse, but by no means a Darbyite. Dr. J. A. Seiss, although in most things of the same mind as Dr. Scofield, recognizes more continuity between Israel and the Church than he does. Thus, Dr. Scofield is of the Darbyite section of the Futuristic minority of the premillenarian minority of Christian expositors.

We do not blame him for that. We cheerfully concede to him the right of private interpretation which we claim for ourselves; but we do think that under such circumstances a certain degree of modesty and caution would have been in place, and that decent regard for the common opinion of the rest of mankind demanded from him a statement of the reasons why he differs so radically from so many Christian brethren. We find nothing of the kind. The same oracular self-confidence, the same authoritative tone, pervades the book in its most doubtful eschatological portions as elsewhere. Such a self-confidence is either sublime or else it is—something which we prefer not to name!

In his main outline, Scofield presents an eschatological scheme in his “Bible” as follows:

- 1). At any time there may take place the “rapture,” the sudden noiseless and invisible removal from the world of all true Christians, to meet the Lord in the air. Simultaneously will take place the resurrection of all the redeemed who shall have died by that time,

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<sup>33</sup> **Abraham Kuyper** (1837-1920) – Dutch politician, journalist, statesman, and theologian. He was prime minister of the Netherlands between 1901 and 1905, and was known for practically applying Christian theology in the affairs of state.



of all the past ages. Of all this the unbelieving world will hear nothing and see nothing, except that the people in question have disappeared.

2). Although there is then not a single true believer left in the world, this event will have such a remarkable effect that many hitherto unbelieving or only nominal Christians will turn to the Lord. These form the group called “the tribulation saints.” They will begin to preach “the gospel of the kingdom,” which is not the old gospel of the grace of God unto salvation, but an announcement of the imminence of the “kingdom,” i.e., the earthly rule of Christ. It is thus not a continuation of the Christian message, but a resumption of the preaching of John the Baptist!

3). Immediately now appears the “Beast” of Revelation, the Antichrist, who will bear rule both in church and state throughout the world.

4). Also about this time will take place the re-gathering of Israel, including the Ten Tribes, who, Dr. Scofield teaches, are still preserved somewhere as an independent unit, known to God. To these, together with those we usually call “the Jews,” the land of Palestine will be restored, according to the “Palestinian Covenant.”

5). With these restored Israelites and Jews, the Antichrist will make a “seven-year covenant” for the re-building of the temple in Jerusalem and the re-institution of the Levitical sacrifices.

6). In the midst of the said seven-year period, i.e., after three years and a half, the Antichrist will repudiate his promise and demand for himself divine worship.

7). All the “tribulation saints,” and many faithful Jews not yet Christians, will refuse to render such blasphemous and idolatrous worship, and they will therefore be subject to a terrible persecution, called “the Great Tribulation.”

8). At the end of this period, all nations will come up against Jerusalem to battle—and will almost win. They will take part of the city; but a great earthquake shall cleave the Mount of Olives and a remnant will flee into the cleft for safety.

9). This is the “Battle of Armageddon” frequently referred to in the Scofield notes, although only once in the Scriptures. Christ will come down at this point with a heavenly army, as in Revelation 19, and will overthrow the hostile forces. This appearance of Christ will be visible to the world, and is called “the Revelation,” in contrast with His coming seven years before, which is “the Rapture.”

10). Now occurs the judgment of Matthew 25, that of “the sheep and the goats,” which according to Scofield is not an individual judgment, but of nations—to determine which of them shall be allowed to survive and to have part in the millennial blessings.

11). Thereupon is to follow the conversion of the remaining Jews, who then will become missionaries to the rest of the world.

12). At this time takes place another resurrection, called by this school the “second stage” of the first resurrection. Now are raised to life the “tribulation saints” who were martyred by the Beast.

13). At last comes the establishment of the millennial kingdom, not by persuasion but by force. Thus Christ bears rule over the Jews, who bear rule over the rest of the world.

14). During this period the temple foreseen by Ezekiel is to be built, and the sacrifices prescribed by him will be offered. The Mosaic legislation and Sermon on the Mount will be the law of that kingdom and that period.

15). After 1,000 years of such rule, there will occur a revolt of Gog and Magog, the resurrection of the wicked, the Last Judgment, and the beginning of the eternal state.

It is evident that we cannot discuss this subject in detail here, but even without such discussion it is immediately clear that no such program can be justified except by laborious exegesis of numerous passages of Scripture—each of which is open to different interpretations and most of which have received from the Christian Church at large a very different interpretation from the one held by Dr. Scofield and his school. One doubtful exposition must be piled upon another, and then others again on those, before you can arrive at any such scheme as this. If any can convince himself that it is true, let him believe it; that is his privilege. But no man has a right, without assignment of reasons and without due recognition of divergent views, to present this completed structure to the uninformed as scriptural teaching—thereby to all intents and purposes writing over it, “Thus saith the Lord.”<sup>34</sup> Yet this is what Dr. Scofield does, and an examination of his work shows that this is one of the main objects, if not the chief object, of his writing this book. From start to finish it is a partisan book—definitely, both openly and under cover, an instrument of propaganda in favor of an exceedingly doubtful eschatology.

#### ***4. Doctrine of the Church***

The point at which Dr. Scofield comes most definitely into conflict with the historic Christian faith—as otherwise held by all branches of the Church, both ancient and modern—is his doctrine of the Church and its relation to Old Testament Israel. While in his premillenarianism he has a certain degree of support from the post-apostolic age, there is no such support in this matter. This he himself recognizes, for his announcement of his position is as follows:

“Especially is it necessary to exclude the notion—a legacy in Protestant thought from post-apostolic and Roman Catholic theology—that the Church is the true Israel, and that the New Testament fore-view of the kingdom is fulfilled in the Church.”

Here he says that the doctrine he opposes was taught by the Roman Catholic Church. Certainly it was, and by the Greek Church, and by all the Protestant churches, and by any sort of church of every name, up to the time of John N. Darby—who was born in 1800 and died in 1882, a leader of the sect called the “Plymouth Brethren.” In saying this

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<sup>34</sup> “**Thus saith the Lord**” – the announcement by which God’s prophets identified themselves as bearing an authoritative message from God Himself. This phrase occurs 413 times in the Old Testament from Exodus to Malachi.

we have the concurrence of Dr. Ironside,<sup>35</sup> one of Dr. Scofield's ardent disciples, who says, "In fact, until brought to the fore through the writings and preaching of a distinguished ex-clergyman, Mr. J. N. Darby, in the early part of the last century, it [i.e., the doctrine taught by Dr. Scofield] is scarcely to be found in a single book or sermon throughout a period of 1600 years! If any doubt this statement, let them search, as the writer has in a measure done, the remarks of the so-called Fathers, both pre- and post-Nicene, the theological treatises of the scholastic divines, Roman Catholic writers of all shades of thought; the literature of the Reformation; the sermons and expositions of the Puritans; and the general theological works of the day. He will find the 'mystery' conspicuous by its absence."<sup>36</sup>

By the "mystery" in this quotation, Dr. Ironside means the doctrine that the Christian Church being entirely unrelated to the Old Testament Israel, was unknown to the prophets, and is not referred to in any way in their predictions.

This statement of Dr. Ironside's is true—absolutely true. Among the Church Fathers, Justin Martyr<sup>37</sup> is the earliest from whom we have any extensive writings—and he is very emphatic in teaching the very opposite of the Darbyite doctrine. He asserts over and over again that the Church is the true Israel, the heir to all the promises, and that therefore in her is to be found the fulfillment of all the glorious Old Testament kingdom promises. This is the weapon with which he meets Trypho the Jew, in his controversy with him. It is easy to see how essential it was in those days in Christian apologetics, when the faith had to be defended against Judaism. I believe that there is no dissent to this view of Justin's anywhere to be found in the patristic strings; nor is there any later—up to the time of John N. Darby. Christians might differ on almost anything else, but up to his time, never on this. If Darby and his school are right, the entire Christian Church for 1800 years is wrong on a vital part of the Christian faith. It is most discouraging, if the Holy Spirit has allowed that to happen.

The Darbyite doctrine, briefly stated, is that there was a clean break between the historical development of Israel and the rise of the Christian Church. The promise that the Messiah should sit upon the throne of David, to quote Dr. Scofield's words, "enters the New Testament entirely unchanged" and must be understood in no other way than as the promise of a political sovereignty. So John the Baptist intended it, when he preached that the kingdom was at hand. So Jesus Himself preached and intended it in the early portion of His ministry. The establishment of such a political regime was what Jesus came to do, what He tried to do, and what He would have done if He could. This purpose was frustrated by the refusal of the Jews to accept Him as their king. Thereupon, at a certain point in His ministry, indicated by Matthew 11:28, the offer was withdrawn, and

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<sup>35</sup> **Henry Allen "Harry" Ironside** (1876-1951) – Canadian-American Bible teacher, preacher, theologian, pastor, and author associated with the Plymouth Brethren. He travelled widely and became an evangelist under the auspices of Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, serving as pastor of Moody Church, and later president of the African Inland Mission

<sup>36</sup> Ironside, *Mysteries of God*, p.50.

<sup>37</sup> **Justin Martyr** (c. A.D. 100-165): early Christian apologist and Church Father.

a new offer was substituted, “not the kingdom, but rest and service to such in the nation as are conscious of need.” This withdrawal of the offer to establish the “kingdom” was, however, only temporary. It would be renewed shortly before the “Revelation” of Jesus Christ, i.e., during the dark days of the Antichrist, and will be accomplished in the millennial age. This is what is called the “postponed kingdom theory.”

The renewal of this offer in the last days, therefore, will mark the point at which the fulfillment of prophecy will be resumed. There is, according to this school, no fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy going on now, nor has there been any since the death of Jesus Christ. Dr. Ironside puts it thus:

“The prophetic clock stopped at Calvary. Not one tick has been heard since. From the moment Jesus bowed his head and yielded up His spirit to the Father, all the glories of the kingdom spoken of by the Old Testament seers and prophets have been in abeyance.”<sup>38</sup>

It is easily understood that such views as this must seriously influence, first, the interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies, and then the exegesis of numerous passages in the New Testament. And so indeed they do. It is not uncommon for those who are introduced to the Scofield Bible to testify in great enthusiasm that it has made the Bible a new book to them. It must do so, if they yield themselves to its influence and accept it as authority. Their Bible is then no longer the Bible of the early church; or of the fathers of the Reformed faith. It has been transformed into a Jewish book, in the sense that the traditional interpretation of the Synagogue,<sup>39</sup> not of the Church, must be regarded as correct.

The New Testament—accepted by us hitherto in a simple-minded way, as the Word of God spoken to us, and to be heeded by us—becomes under the guidance of these teachers a jumble of documents, and it requires a Darbyite expert to decide for us which are messages for us and which for the Jews of the millennium. Alas, not even all of the Darbyite experts can agree, for Bullinger<sup>40</sup> follows hard on the footsteps of Scofield and tells us that not even the sacrament of baptism is left for us. It seems that the Pauline epistles are for us, for in them Dr. Scofield finds the mystery of the Church unfolded, but the Apocalypse has little to do with the Christian Church—nothing at all after the close of the third chapter. The Sermon on the Mount is not intended for us. It may, indeed, be used to edification for its general religious and moral principles—as we may use the laws of the “kingdom age,” i.e., the millennium...

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 54.

<sup>39</sup> **Synagogue** – local place of Jewish worship where the community gathered for reading of the Law and prophets, study, and community events. Some believe the system of synagogue worship was organized on a systematic plan during the Babylonian captivity (Eze 8:1; 14:1). After the return of the exiles, synagogues were established all over the land (Ezr 8:15; Neh 8:2). Later, when the Jews were dispersed abroad, wherever they went they erected synagogues and kept up the stated services of worship (Act 9:20 13:5 17:1 17:17 18:4).

<sup>40</sup> **Ethelbert William Bullinger** (1837-1913) – Anglican clergyman, Biblical scholar, and ultra-dispensationalist theologian.

Let me close with the exhortation with which I began, that every minister get a Scofield Bible and study it for himself. For good as the intentions of the author were, and good as the faith and zeal of his followers are, this book must be pronounced—from the standpoint of Reformed theology, and with a view to the peace and prosperity of our churches—one of the most dangerous books on the market. Its circulation is no aid to sound Bible study and true scriptural knowledge, but rather the contrary. Its use should be quietly and tactfully, but persistently and vigilantly, opposed; and our congregations should be diligently instructed in a better interpretation of the Word of God!

