

THE CENTENNIAL OF THE *SCOFIELD STUDY BIBLE*
1909–2009

The *Scofield Study Bible* occupies a significant place in the history of modern Christianity. It was the first publication to combine readily accessible study helps with the text of Scripture, putting together in one place the most useful tools for understanding the Bible. In addition, through its unified theological position it has provided a framework for understanding God's purpose in revelation and His plan for the ages. Large numbers of Christians have long recognized these key assets and have continually chosen *Scofield Study Bibles* in their various editions for their own use to help them in knowing God and living for Him.

Originally a lawyer by profession, Cyrus I. Scofield became involved in Christian service in the 1880s. He subsequently developed an interest in producing a study Bible—a project that became financially feasible through the interest of Arno C. Gaebelin, who helped raise support for it through his Bible conference ministry in 1902. The original concept included Bible study tools, along with summaries of Bible teaching and chain references to link key words and topics. Scofield traveled to Europe several times when preparing the manuscripts. On one of his trips a friend introduced him to the head of Oxford University Press, who became an ardent supporter of the publication. Scofield's preparation included research at Oxford University in conference with Bible scholars. The *Scofield Reference Bible* was first published in 1909 by the American branch of Oxford University Press, with sales of that and subsequent editions reaching one million copies by 1930 and two million by the early 1940s.

The Helps

The study helps are an expression of the key principle found in the Bible that we are to maximize the information that we find there (2 Tim. 2:15 “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”). We are to extract as much life-changing material from the Bible as we possibly can, allowing it to speak for itself. God has given special revelation that is Scripture and wants readers to understand all the parts, treat every part with respect, and fit all the parts together. C. I. Scofield understood this and chose tools that would help the user be successful in study and research. For example, the cross references link topics or words that appear in various places in the Bible, helping the reader to see important details and how they compare or contrast with other details. The introductions to Bible books provide concise but highly useful summaries of the topics and themes in each book and serve to relate Bible books to each other. Book outlines identify subjects covered by authors and also enable the reader to see books as a whole. Subheadings within the text highlight topics, chronologies, and events and their relation to other portions of Scripture. The superb system of chain references takes a set of key biblical topics and traces their appearance throughout the Bible—helping the reader to see the unity of the Bible. A remarkably complete concordance is a tool that readers turn to over and over in order to discover occurrences of key words and phrases.

These and other helps enable the reader to identify elements that appear as pieces in the Bible and then come to conclusions about what they mean by themselves or in combination with other parts of the Bible. This helps the student of Scripture to appreciate the details and at the same time put together a big picture of what the Bible is all about. So, for example, we can easily find out the different places where “spirit” is found and then identify what words appear with it, what patterns of occurrence it displays in one or both Testaments, and where it can be found in connection with key events in biblical history. *The Scofield Study Bible* is a great help for young Christians who don’t know where to start in learning the Bible and is also a companion for a lifetime of study, offering helps on each page that can be used for simple or deep research.

The Theological Benefits

The theological features of the *Scofield Study Bible*—as found particularly in the annotations—provide help from a different direction. “Theology” or “doctrine” is simply the gathering or summarizing of what we believe the Bible teaches. It is an essential outcome of all study of Scripture. Without conclusions and summaries our observations are just so many facts. But should a study Bible present theological positions? Any theological system can be accused of being biased, but the real test is whether it corresponds to what Scripture actually says. The *Scofield Study Bible* presents conclusions that flow naturally from the use of its tools. C. I. Scofield offered a theological framework that was the outcome of the approach exemplified by the study helps themselves, so that it was based on careful study of the pieces of Scripture and their relationships. His work in putting together the *Scofield Study Bible* shows two key assumptions or guidelines: (1) the best understanding of the Bible comes when we allow it to speak for itself (something that the study helps do) and (2) the Lord Jesus Christ and His place in the plan of God form the touchstone for understanding all the parts of the Bible.

This approach results in several key emphases in the theological helps found in the *Scofield Study Bible*: (1) Scripture shows that God has a discernible plan for human beings and the universe; (2) The Bible is a record of God’s revelation of Himself to human beings in stages—God has given information “progressively”; (3) God has different purposes for Israel and the Church—they have different histories and different futures; (4) While salvation is the same in all ages—by grace through faith—God has established for human beings different responsibilities toward Him in various epochs; and (5) Jesus Christ is the center of God’s plan for the ages and will return bodily to establish His Kingdom on earth. It is safe to say that these doctrines have had a significant effect on the founding and growth of local churches, the modern Christian missions movement, and the establishment and growth of institutions offering Christian education, including seminaries and Bible colleges.

Useful Service

C. I. Scofield was involved in many avenues of service to God, including Bible conference and pastoral ministry and writing. It is significant that his concern with service found its way into the study helps that he assembled, leading many people to find the *Scofield Study Bible* to be of great help in their own personal walk with God. This spiritual growth comes as people grasp the essentials of the Bible and the sweep of God's purpose for human beings. Doctrinal study and teaching that take the biblical text seriously lead to a more Christ-like life by confidently presenting biblical truth and, as it is centered on Jesus Christ's life, death, and ongoing work for the redeemed, enabling people to find God's will for them in keeping with Scripture. Stated simply, the *Scofield Study Bible* has helped myriads of people to understand better what the Bible teaches and then to put that knowledge to practical use in bearing fruit for God.

The continuing popularity of the *Scofield Study Bible* is shown by the fact that it has been revised (1967) and augmented and updated (1998 and following years), and is now available in six translations: the King James Version, the New King James Version, the New International Version, the New American Standard Bible, the English Standard Version, and the Holman Christian Standard Bible.

After a century of providing assistance to students of God's written Word, the *Scofield Study Bible* continues to play a key role in the lives and ministries of large numbers of Christians. Its study features and its theological helps and orientation are as necessary in this century as they were in the last. Until Jesus Christ returns we will always seek out the most useful tools to get help from the Bible—because our spiritual needs are always with us, and God's written revelation meets those needs perfectly.

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