

Notes on The New “Panorama” Bible Study Course

Randall Hardy – Dec. 2008

Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good... 1 Thess. 5:21

The ‘red’ line in this well established booklet and much of the information shown on the panorama pages are very informative, but unfortunately the author included two beliefs which in my opinion misrepresent the Scriptures. First his views on **dispensationalism** are a central theme of the book and this is shown by the notes at the top of each page as well as the study at the back of the book. Secondly, he subscribed to what is known as the “**Gap Theory**” in regard to Genesis 1. Both these are commented on below.

Dispensationalism

This teaching can be traced back to the 1800’s when it became popular amongst groups like the Plymouth Brethren and many American evangelists of the time. It divides history into seven periods:

1. The dispensation of innocence (or freedom), (Genesis 1:1 - 3:7), prior to Adam's fall,
2. The dispensation of conscience, (Genesis 3:8 - 8:22), Adam to Noah,
3. The dispensation of government, (Genesis 9:1 - 11:32), Noah to Abraham,
4. The dispensation of patriarchal rule (or promise), (Genesis 12:1 - Exodus 19:25), Abraham to Moses,
5. The dispensation of the Mosaic Law, (Exodus 20:1 - Acts 2:4), Moses to Christ,
6. The dispensation of grace, (Acts 2:4 - Revelation 20:3), the current church age, and
7. The dispensation of a literal earthly 1,000 year Millennial Kingdom that has yet to come but soon will. (Revelation 20:4 – 20:6).

While these divisions are loosely based to a lesser or greater extent on events, the real problem with this view is that it teaches that each of these dispensations were characterised by the different ways in which God related with man, more specifically the different ways He tested mankind.

Take for example this statement by Cyrus I. Scofield, author of the popular *Scofield Reference Bible*, “*These periods are marked off in Scripture by some change in God's method of dealing with mankind, in respect to two questions: of sin, and of man's responsibility. Each of the dispensations may be regarded as a new test of the natural man, and each ends in judgement - marking his utter failure in every dispensation.*”

A major problem with this view is that the New Testament makes clear that even in the Old Testament believers were saved by faith exactly as Christians are today!

Abraham is a specific example:

Genesis 15:6 *Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.*

Romans 4:1-16 (v2-5) *For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favour; but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness...*

Galatians 3:1-18 (v6-12) *Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, **foreseeing** that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the nations shall be blessed in you.” So then those who are of faith are blessed*

with Abraham, the believer. For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, to perform them.” Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, “the righteous man shall live by faith.” However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, “He who practises them shall live by them.”

James 2:17-26 (v21-23) Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,” and he was called the friend of God.

There are many other examples of pre-Calvary believers being saved by faith – Heb. 11 lists men and women from the periods numbered 2 to 5 above – but studying them is not in the scope of these notes.

Dispensationalism is sometimes portrayed as the non-Reformed (i.e. non-Calvinistic) alternative to Covenant Theology. This is not true and neither is the thought that all pre-millennialists are dispensational in their theology. The teaching that the Church will be raptured off the earth before the Great Tribulation (see 4 below) is closely linked with dispensationalism, but it is not held by all who believe that Christ will return to establish His rule on the earth for a thousand years before this universe is finally discarded in favour of a new and better one.

Other key points of dispensational theology which should be questioned are:

1. A fundamental distinction between Israel and the Church, i.e. there are two peoples of God with two different destinies, *earthly* Israel and the *spiritual* Church;
2. A fundamental distinction between the Law and Grace, i.e. they are *mutually exclusive* ideas, (this is shown to be false above in reference to Abraham);
3. The view that the New Testament church is an afterthought in God's plan and therefore was not foreseen by the Old Testament.
4. A distinction between the Rapture and the Second Coming of Christ, i.e. the rapture of the Church at Christ's coming “in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17) precedes the “official” second coming by 7 years of tribulation.

There is not space here to look at all these points, but as an example, look at point 3. This follows on from the last phrase of the quote from Scofield above, “*marking his utter failure in every dispensation.*” Now whilst this is intended to highlight human failure, which cannot be denied, it must also imply the failure of The LORD's purposes in each dispensation. This easily leads on to the teaching that The LORD did not originally purpose that the Christian Church should exist. The underlying implication of this doctrine is that as each dispensation drew to a close, our Creator had to be thinking up a new plan for the next phase of history. It therefore embodies two major misrepresentations of the truth. The first is that The LORD did not know what the future would hold – even now He cannot be sure if the Church will succeed. Secondly, it puts an undue amount of responsibility on men and women to triumph before He can. In contrast to the first, Rev. 13:8 speaks of “*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*” and Gen. 3:15 prophesies Christ's death at Calvary. On the second matter, and it must be noted, in the context of Israel failure under Moses He promises “*but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD.*” (Num. 14:21) and this is echoed in Hab. 2:14 “*For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.*” Both these speak of His work, not ours.

The truth which the Bible proclaims is that no matter how total human failure has been, our Creator has never been taken by surprise, never had to think up a new plan to rescue the situation and that when His kingdom does fill the earth it will be because of His sovereignty not human ability.

Dispensationalism is an approach to the Scriptures which proves to be unreliable in many ways.

The Gap Theory

The Gap Theory, or what is sometimes referred to as the ruin-reconstruction theory, finds its roots with Thomas Chalmers in the early part of the 19th century. Thomas Chalmers, founder of the Free Church of Scotland, first presented the gap theory to his congregation in 1804. However it wasn't until 1814 when Chalmers wrote a review of Georges Cuvier's book *Theory of the Earth* (1813) that the gap theory received wider recognition. The idea however can be traced back to the rather obscure writings of the Dutchman Episcopius (1583-1643) who may well have been Chalmers' inspiration. Others such as the Rev. William Buckland, a geologist, also did much to popularise the idea. Later it was picked up by other speakers and was included in the *Scofield Reference Bible* which contributed much to its popular acceptance by evangelicals in the late 1800's through to the early 1900's – though many still hold on to it today. Another notable and influential 19th century writer to popularise the Gap Theory was G.H. Pember, in his book *Earth's Earliest Ages*, first published in 1884 and continuing through to the 15th edition in 1942.

There are many variations of the gap theory, but below is a summary of its core teachings:

Genesis 1-11 is held to be a real historical account, however;

- ◆ The earth is considered to be millions of years old
- ◆ There is a *gap* of undetermined time between Gen. 1:1 and 1:2
- ◆ In the *gap* between Gen. 1:1 and 1:2 a number of incidents occurred
 - 1) The Earth and Heavens had been created perfect
 - 2) Satan was the ruler of the earth
 - 3) The earth was filled with a race of soulless people commonly referred to as Pre-Adamites
 - 4) Satan rebelled against God
 - 5) When Satan rebelled against God sin entered the universe which resulted in God's judgement upon the earth in the form of a flood. This is commonly referred to as Lucifer's flood
 - 6) It was during this undetermined time that most fossils and geologic strata on the earth were formed
- ◆ The events after Gen. 1:2 are seen as the reconstruction of the Heavens and Earth by God
- ◆ The creation days were six consecutive twenty four hour days, but only start with Gen. 1:3
- ◆ There *was* death, disease and suffering *before* Adam's sin
- ◆ Some gap theorists are of the opinion that Noah's flood covered the entire globe but caused very little if any geological formations (as these were made in Lucifer's flood), whilst others argue for a localised flood.
- ◆ In its traditional form the gap theory is opposed to evolution, however some have tried to reconcile them.

The reason for the Gap theory becoming popular was because it was seen as a response to the imagined 'old age' of the earth being postulated at the time by a new breed of geologists. Prominent amongst these was Sir Charles Lyell who also inspired much of Darwin's work. What is not commonly recognised about Lyell is that his 'new' history of the earth was inspired by a religious objective. In June 1830 Lyell wrote to George P. Scrope (parliamentarian and fellow uniformitarian geologist) that if he was careful he could get an article published which was intended to "*free the science from Moses*". He added in a subsequent paragraph, "*I conceived the idea five or six years ago that if ever the Mosaic geology could be set down with out giving offence, it would be in an historical sketch*". As Lyell's influence spread men like Chalmers, seeking to match Biblical history with the latest thinking of the day, failed to appreciate that the now accepted 'Principles of Geology' (the title of Lyell's book which Darwin read on the Beagle) were formed to undermine the Scriptures.

This study booklet unfortunately follows their lead and promotes the Gap Theory in ‘Study 1’. For a Biblical justification it suggests that the ‘without form’ of Gen. 1:2 is best translated ‘waste’ and also quotes Isa. 45:18 and Ps. 104:30. Other proponents of the Gap Theory also cite Isa. 14 and Eze. 28 to identify this ‘gap’ as the time when Satan rebelled against The LORD (see 4 above).

There are many reasons why the Gap Theory does not hold true with the whole testimony of the Scriptures, though here we will not study them in depth. Below is an introduction to some of them:

There is no reason found anywhere in Scripture which requires a *gap* to be inserted between Gen. 1:1 & 1:2. People desired to do so because they sought a place to accommodate the millions of years proposed by modern geologists of their day. In fact The LORD’s own testimony is, “*For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day,*” Ex. 20:11. In itself this statement encompasses the whole of Gen. 1:1 through to 2:3. It is in Gen. 2 that we find an important clarification of what has been going on throughout the previous days. 1:1 states, “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*” whilst 2:1 brings to a conclusion His work over the first six days of history, “*Thus the heavens and the earth were **completed**, and all their hosts.*” At the start of His project The LORD provided Himself with a blank canvass, and then for 6 days through the Word of God He shaped it into something of which by the end He could declare with all honesty that *all* He had made **was very good!** (1:31) If Gen. 1:1 falls outside of creation week, then it is also excluded from Ex. 20:11 and from what was described as very good by its Creator as He prepared for the first Sabbath. The creation of the material of the universe – the heavens and the earth – is included in that first week by The LORD’s own testimony in the Ten Commandments and we should keep it there.

By translating the Hebrew of v.2 as ‘had become waste’ (Study 1) or ‘now waste’ (first panel of the panorama), the author – though he is following the conventional view of those who hold the Gap Theory – puts questionable emphases on both the Hebrew verb ‘*hayetah*’ (translated ‘was’ in most versions of the Bible) and also ‘*tohu*’ normally translated as ‘without form’, but as ‘waste’ in this study. Waste has a very different meaning from ‘without form’ which easily implies ‘blank’ rather than ‘destroyed’ or ‘worn out’. These words have been discussed at length in many places and a detailed study is not possible in these notes. It is however worth noting that Is. 45:18 offers no real support to the gap theory. In context this chapter deals with God’s restoration of the nation of Israel. Just as God says that he did not choose His people Israel to destroy them, Isaiah draws an analogy with God’s purpose in creation; talking about the earth the verse reads ‘*He created it not in vain [tohu], he formed it to be inhabited.*’ While proponents of the gap theory say that this verse means that as God did not create the world *tohu* (as in Genesis 1:2), so it must have become *tohu* at some later date, they miss the mark altogether. Isaiah 45:18 is not talking about the original state of creation, but rather God’s purpose for creation, and we know that the world was not created to be empty, but rather filled, which it was and is.

My final comment is on what is perhaps the major mistake of the Gap Theory. Whether or not its supporters try to incorporate some aspects of evolution into it, its desire to accommodate the perceived old age of the earth into Gen. 1 necessitates that many living creatures dwelt on the earth in that ‘gap’. This is because the rocks secular geology claims to be older than the Bible will allow them to be, also contain fossils of many plants and animals. Some of the fossilised creatures are extinct but many are not. Here I will not discuss the problems for the Gap Theory of living fossils, nor of human fossils, but I do want to focus on the fact that fossils are a record of things which were once alive but by the time rocks were formed they were dead. Romans 5 is plain; death did not enter creation **until** Adam sinned, v12, “*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.*” See also 1 Corinthians 15:21, “*For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead.*” Adam’s rebellion is recorded in Gen. 3 which details events which happened an unstated length of time after Gen. 1! This means that there could be no death between Gen 1:1 and 1:2 if the Scriptures are reliable. It would also mean setting aside Gen.

1:31 as an earth which bore testimony to a global disaster which had annihilated millions of animals and 'early' humans could not be described as 'very good' by its Creator. This criteria also requires that Satan's rebellion had to take place between the start of the end of the sixth day and the day which is recorded in Gen. 3 and not in any imagined 'gap' at the start of Gen. 1. (It should be remembered that Gen. 2:4-25, does not follow in time after 2:3, but is a description from a different perspective of events recorded in outline by Gen.1:26 -30.) If Satan had already rebelled by Gen. 1:31, The LORD could not have said that **all** that He had made was **very good**, because at least one archangel no longer was.

I will finish by restating that whilst the time line in this popular booklet is of interest, those using it should remember that the author has put into his work two views which are not found in the Scriptures. Don't take my word for it though, but as Paul instructed the church in Thessalonica:

Test everything. Hold on to the good, avoid every kind of evil [bad]. (1 Thes. 5:21-22 NIV)

Notes:

The New "Panorama" Bible Study Course by Alfred Thompson Eade (1891-1988), has been available for many years being originally published by Fleming Revell/Baker Book House.

The best know of these books, the one which is commented on in these notes, was later given the subtitle "Panorama No.1: The Plan of the Ages" because three others were to follow. These are: "Panorama No.2: The Study of Angelology", "Panorama No.3: The 2nd Coming of Christ" & "Panorama No.4: The Book of Revelation". For some years they were out of print, but have now been republished in the USA by Oak Knoll Publishing, a company which is owned and operated by Dr. Eade's family. Originally published in black and white, apart from the red line, the new editions are in full colour. Oak Knoll Publishing's web site is: www.oakknollpublishing.com

The new versions cost US\$24.99 each, but amazingly copies of the early black and white editions are selling on Amazon for anything from a few pounds to over two hundred dollars!

The Expanded Panorama Bible Study Course is a paperback, which sells quite cheaply, published by Fleming H. Revell / Baker Book House USA as recently as 2007. It appears to be a standard paperback size, with just the text of the original panorama edition.

Research these days is much easier because of the Internet. Whilst I did not rely on it for my understanding of these topics, the compiling of these notes was made much easier by using some material, particularly the lists, from the following pages.

<http://www.theopedia.com/Dispensationalism>
<http://www.christiananswers.net/q-aig/aig-c003.html>
<http://www.allaboutcreation.org/gap-theory.htm>

For those wishing to study these subjects further a web search on either will produce an endless number of sites where arguments for and against these two views of the Scriptures can be found. There has also over the years been many books written about these subjects.

I can be contacted via email at [info\[at\]amen.org.uk](mailto:info@amen.org.uk)

A version of this paper can be found on the Internet at:
http://www.amen.org.uk/studies/rh/new_panorama.htm