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## A PLAN OF BIBLE STUDY FOR SUNDAY-SCHOOLS.

By the Editor.

Some Sunday-schools and many Bible-classes are looking about for a systematic scheme of Bible study, which, if diligently pursued, shall produce results more numerous and more definite than those ordinarily obtained. It is too much to expect that any particular plan or system, however excellent, shall prove satisfactory to all. This cannot be claimed even of the International Sunday-school system. Different systems and methods are needed to meet different necessities and demands.\* The plan which is here proposed would include two distinct series of courses: the first, a series of Comprehensive or Outline Courses; the second, a series of Special Courses on particular books or subjects.

## I. A SERIES OF COMPREHENSIVE OR OUTLINE COURSES.

Of the Comprehensive or Outline Courses there might be five. These should be so arranged as practically to cover the main points of both Old and New Testament material. Of each course there should be at least *three* grades or forms, in order that the entire school might be engaged upon the same subject and by the same plan, and the work at the same time be adapted to individuals of different ages and attainments. (1) The first form, for children *five to nine years of age*, should be made as simple as possible, but the entire ground should be covered. No one who has not tested it by a systematic and comprehensive method can appreciate how comparatively

\* In the "Andover Review" for October (1890) the Rev. Erastus Blakeslee has indicated clearly some of the difficulties which beset the system now in general use, and, in a modest and most sensible way, has set forth certain principles and details of a plan which has suggested itself to him in the course of long years of active Sunday-school work. On several occasions the present writer has compared notes with Mr. Blakeslee upon the subject under consideration. Our views both as to the system and method have been practically the same, though differing somewhat in application. The plan herewith presented will be found, therefore, to include also the substance of Mr. Blakeslee's suggestions, and is published with his approval.

easy it is to put a child, five or six years old, into possession of a connected outline history of the life of Jesus. (2) The second form, for children *ten to fourteen years of age*, while still simple, may be made to include at least three times as much material as was contained in the first form. This is possible, because (a) the child has now reached an age when the mind is ready to grasp not only facts but teachings, and (b) the work done four or five years before, developed by the courses which have followed, furnishes a magnificent basis on which to build. (3) The third form of presentation, for young people *fifteen to nineteen years of age*, though still an outline, may be made tolerably exhaustive. It is possible in this form to include (a) many additional facts omitted in previous forms, (b) the detailed bearing of many teachings which in previous forms had only been hinted at, (c) systematization and generalization of facts and principles which had not before been attempted.

The five Comprehensive Courses are as follows:—

1. *Outline of New Testament History: The Life of the Christ.*\*—Of the three forms, (1) The *first* would cover the chief facts of the Christ's life organized into great periods, the emphasis being laid upon the *deeds* of the Christ; (2) the *second* would cover the same ground in greater detail, introducing a larger element of the Christ's *words* in their connection with His deeds; (3) the *third* would make a still more comprehensive study of the same material, the emphasis being laid upon the *words* of the Christ.

2. *Outline of Early Old Testament History and Messianic Prophecy.*—This course should cover the history given in the Bible down to the death of Solomon and the Division of the Kingdom, and should lay emphasis upon the general preparatory character of the history with reference to the coming of a Deliverer: (1) The *first* form of presentation should limit itself simply to the lives of the great men of the period, e. g., Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Saul, David, Solomon, and the points in which these resemble that of the Christ; (2) the *second* should take

\* The outline sketched by Mr. Blakeslee, in the article referred to, will indicate clearly the plan here contemplated.

up (a) the history of the nation Israel, (b) the great events in that history and their significance, and (c) the more important passages containing prophetic truth; (3) the *third* should include (a) still more of the details of the history, (b) a general study of the literature of the period, e. g., the Psalms of David, and of the literature which furnishes the history of the period, and (c) the gradual growth and development of the Messianic idea.

3. *Outline of Later Old Testament History and Messianic Prophecy.*—This course should begin with the Division of the Kingdom and continue to the close of the Old Testament canon, outlining the history, exhibiting the character of the work of the prophets in that history, indicating the reasons for God's attitude toward Israel throughout the history, and developing the relation of the whole to the coming of the Christ: (1) The *first* form, as in the preceding courses, should take up only the great lives, e. g., those of Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Nehemiah, the teachings of these lives and the points of resemblance, if any exist, with that of the Christ; (2) the *second* form should present an outline of the history, and the place of the prophets in that history; (3) the *third* form should give the history in still greater detail, the teachings of the various prophets, and a general idea of the non-prophetic literature and work of the period, e. g., Job, Proverbs.

4. *Outline of New Testament History: Period of the Apostles.*—Of the three forms of this course, (1) the *first* should cover the Acts and the historical matter in the Epistles, emphasis being laid upon the *deeds* of the apostles; (2) the *second* should cover the same ground in greater detail, embracing more of the *teachings* of the apostles as contained in the Acts and the Epistles, and tracing the growth of the early church; (3) the *third* should make a still more comprehensive study of the same material, the emphasis being here laid upon the Apostolic teachings in the Epistles.

5. *Outline Studies in the Biblical Teaching of Redemption.*—The three forms of this course should be arranged on the following principles: (1) The subject should be presented in its historical growth; (2) each form should cover in a year's study

six biblical periods, (a) the patriarchal, (b) the Mosaic, (c) the early prophetic, (d) the later prophetic, (e) the Gospel, (f) the Apostolic; (3) each form should increase in comprehensiveness, and the emphasis be laid, in the first on the teaching as it appears in biblical *life*, passing in the second and third to its presentation in biblical *preaching*.

*Remarks.* 1. Each course should be, as indicated, an outline course. The entire ground must be covered in order that the more careful work which is to follow may be done intelligently. Is it necessary to have a general idea of a chapter as a preparation for the accurate study of a verse? or of a book, as a preparation for the accurate study of a chapter? Just so it is necessary to have a general idea of the whole scope of biblical history and literature in order to be able to deal satisfactorily with any particular portion of that history or literature.

2. The advantage of covering the same ground in this progressive manner, rather than in taking up in each period an entirely new kind of work, will be apparent to anyone who will but give the matter careful thought. Nothing is truer than that one never really masters a subject the first time he covers the ground. Repetition, not however without variety and progress, is the great principle of education.

3. The fifth course, as will at once be seen, is a review of the four preceding it. This review will serve the triple purpose of (1) fixing more firmly all that has been studied, (2) showing the relation of the various parts to each other, and (3) welding all the parts into a whole, thus giving to it definiteness, vividness and completeness.

4. There should be required from the very first (1) independence in work, and (2) definiteness in results. There is no better method of securing these than the use of the note-book and pencil, or, in the case of younger pupils, such an arrangement of the material in the lesson-leaflet or quarterly as will permit the results of investigation to be written in the leaflet itself. For an older pupil to write out in his own language the substance of a given verse or paragraph, or for a younger pupil to write out the answers to questions, so worded as (a) to require a careful study of the verse before the answer can be determined, and (b) to call for the substance of the verse, is an exercise of the greatest disciplinary value, and one which will arouse the enthusiasm of all who undertake it.

5. The great aim and purpose of all the work should be (1) *to lead the pupil to the Bible*, for it is the Bible which should be studied, and not the opinions of men about the Bible. How often must this truth be reiterated before it shall be accepted in practice by even the majority of those who profess an interest in Bible study? (2) *To familiarize the pupil with the Bible*, its events, its characters, its teachings.

6. If, now, a child were taken at five years of age, and carried step by step three times through these five courses; if from the beginning the habit of independent investigation were cultivated, and, in every form of every course, definite results were demanded; consider (if it is possible for one to do so from the standpoint of the chaos and confusion which now reign over all, or nearly all, popular Bible study) what a person thus trained would be prepared to do as an adult.

## II. A SERIES OF SPECIAL, SUBJECT OR BOOK, COURSES.

Having gained a *general* conception of Biblical history, Biblical literature, and Biblical teaching from beginning to end, one is in a position to do special work. Here no particular order is necessary. The field is a broad one and choice must be made according to personal inclination or special need. The number of subjects is beyond possibility of description. Only a few may be mentioned. These are the courses from which the Bible classes in the Sunday school year after year might select.

## I. OLD TESTAMENT SUBJECTS.

1. *Early Hebrew History and Institutions*, including (1) a study of the historical material in the Pentateuch, Joshua and Judges; (2) an examination of the origin and significance of the more important ceremonies and institutions, e. g., the Sabbath, marriage, sacrifice, circumcision; (3) a study of the Hebrew State, the various forms of government under which Israel lived; (4) the study of the relation of the Israelitish civilization to the civilization of other Semitic nations.

2. *The History, and Literature of Israel from Samuel to Solomon*, including (1) the Books of Samuel and a portion of First Kings; (2) the period of history which these books cover and the literature of the period; (3) the more important topics connected with these books, this history and this literature.

3. *The History and Literature of Israel and Judah from the division of the Kingdom to the Fall of Samaria*, including (1) the study of the circumstances leading to the division; (2) a general examination of the characteristics of the historical books of Kings and Chronicles; (3) the mastery of the particular events under the Israelitish history of this period; (4) a general study of the work and writings of the prophets who labored in this period, viz., Elijah, Elisha, Joel, Amos, Hosea and portions of Isaiah and Micah.

4. *The History and Literature of Israel and Judah from the fall of Samaria to the Fall of Jerusalem* (B. C. 587). The details need not be specified.

5. *The History and Literature of the Jews during and after*

*the Exile to the close of the Canon.* The details need not be specified.

6. *Old Testament Legal Literature and Legislation*, including a study of (1) the present form of this literature; (2) the contents as classified according to the prevailing element, in each case, whether hygienic, social, civil or religious; (3) the relation of this literature to other divisions of Hebrew literature; (4) the connection of this legislation with the different periods of Israelitish history; (5) the principles underlying this system compared with those of other ancient legal systems; (6) the Divine element apparent in this literature as distinguished from other similar literature.

7. *Old Testament Prophetic Literature and Prophecy*, including (1) the study one by one of the prophets from Joel to Malachi; (2) the growth and development of prophecy in the various periods of Israelitish history; (3) the study of prophetic life and growth, prophetic politics, prophetic history-writing, prophetic ethics and theology; (4) the study of the principles of prophecy; (5) the study of the fulfillment of prophecy in the New Testament.

8. *Old Testament Poetical Literature and Philosophy*, including the study of (1) the lyric element as found in the Psalms; (2) the Book of Proverbs; (3) the Book of Job with the various problems which it presents; (4) the Book of Ecclesiastes; (5) the scope and contents of Old Testament Wisdom.

9. *Principles of Old Testament Interpretation*, including (1) the *general* principles underlying the work of interpretation, e. g., the interpretation of figurative language, the relation of circumstances of person, place, time, etc., to the meaning of the passage; (2) the *special* principles of interpretation, e. g., the principles of typology, of prophecy, the theophanies.

10. *Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, including (1) a study of the teachings of each Book on the more important topics of theology; (2) a study of the growth and development of each of these doctrines in connection with the history of the nation.

## II. NEW TESTAMENT SUBJECTS.

1. *The Synoptic Gospels* including among other points the following; (1) a rapid preliminary outline of each Gospel; (2) a comparison of the three Gospels with a view of ascertaining the differences as well as the characteristic elements of each; (3) on the basis of this comparison a study of (a) the origin and literary relations of the Synoptics, (b) the special type of teaching found in each, (c) the doctrine of the Kingdom of God which all reveal; (4) the study of this last great teaching in the light of the present.

2. *The Writings of John*, including, (1) the consideration of the contents and plan of the Gospel; (2) the view of the Christ which it discloses; (3) this portrait compared with that of the Synoptics; (4) the additional views of truth and life in the early church given in the Epistles and the Revelation; (5) a more or less careful examination of the literary and historical questions connected with these writings; (5) the bearing of the teachings of these writings on current thought.

3. *The Acts of the Apostles*, including the study of (1) the progress of the early church through the several periods which appear in the Acts; (2) the life of the early Christian communities as there revealed; (3) the historical and literary questions arising in connection with the book; (4) the comparison of the church and individual life of to-day in the light of these teachings.

4. *The Life and Writings of Paul*, including (1) the study of the biblical material which will give a clear and comprehensive outline of Paul's life, an outline which should be mastered; (2) the filling in of this outline from indirect hints in the Epistles etc.; (3) the taking up in historical order of each of the Epistles to determine (a) the general outline, (b) the circumstances of composition and historical situation, (c) the great teachings; (4) the consideration of how all this bears on the missionary methods and the theological ideas of the present.

5. *Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians*, including (1) a careful and analytical study of the contents of each and their relations to one another; (2) the consideration of questions of author-



ship and of literary character; (3) the effort to obtain a clearer picture of the church-life, therein suggested; (4) the classification of the teachings, the gaining of a familiarity with their contents; (5) the application of this knowledge to the present conditions of life and thought.

6. *Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, including (1) a careful, analytical study of the contents; (2) the consideration of questions of authorship and of literary character; (3) the gaining of a clearer picture of the church life therein suggested; for other points, see above.

7. *Paul's Epistles to the Ephesians, Colossians and Philippians*. The treatment would be similar to that of the two preceding courses.

8. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, including (1) a careful, analytical study; (2) an examination of the historical situation which lies back of the epistle; (3) an interpretation of it in the light of this situation; (4) the classification of the great teachings; (5) the application of them to the present conditions of life and thought.

9. *The Biblical Theology of the Pauline Epistles*. This subject would demand a familiarity with some of those outlined above, viz., Nos. 4 to 8, and should include (1) the collection of biblical statements of doctrine from these epistles and the interpretation of each in view of the context and historical situation; (2) the classification of these statements under appropriate heads; (3) the formulating of statements covering the Pauline teachings on these points.

10. *Biblical Theology of John, Peter and James*. The treatment would be similar to that under No. 9.

*Remarks.* 1. Will some one say that the work outlined is too great in amount? Remember (1) that these *special* courses are named as courses from which a choice is to be made according to one's preference and circumstances; and (2) that allowing a year to each course, the man or woman, who has received the preliminary training furnished by the Comprehensive Courses, could finish *all* the work indicated before the age of forty.

2. Will some one say that the work outlined is too high in its character, too far above the level of the average Sunday school student, a work better adapted to the wants of a theological seminary? Remember (1) that these courses are intended for men and women who have been prepared for them by having studied two or three times each, five comprehensive courses, covering practically the entire Bible: (2) that every subject here indicated may be

treated in such a manner as to be not only intelligible, but fascinating to an ordinary Bible class.

3. Will some one say that the introduction of such a plan into a Sunday school, is the introduction of diversity and confusion? Remember (1) that the day is coming, and the sooner it comes the better for the interests of sacred Scripture, when the Sunday school will be graded, classes separated, and *order* introduced; (2) that an artificial unity is injurious; and often gained only by the sacrifice of what is essential; (3) that a real unity exists when the same great subject is studied, whether all be engaged upon the same phase of that subject or not; (4) that, if it is desired, an arrangement can be made by which the entire school, except the Bible-class, may be at work upon the same subject, and the present uniformity practically be preserved.

4. For such a system as this, leaflets, quarterlies and text-books will be required, to aid in the study of the Book, not as a substitute for it. Let these "helps" be as numerous as there are individuals able and willing to prepare them, or publishers able and willing to issue them. Competition will improve the character of all. Different ideas and methods may thus find a place in the great work of Bible instruction.

5. Imagine a Sunday school which for twenty or twenty-five years has followed some such system as this, with its three "Life of Christ" classes, or its three "Early Old Testament History" classes, or its three "Later Old Testament" classes, or its three "Early Church History" classes, or its three "Redemption" classes, and its one to five Bible-classes doing careful work on special subjects,—imagine, we say, such a Sunday-school. Is it a dream? Is it only a dream?

This is but a rough sketch of what lies in the writer's mind. Are there a few Sunday-schools or Bible-classes which will consent to take a step forward toward something of this kind? At a future time the writer trusts that he may be permitted to present the plan more in detail.