

Audio Bible Studies by Russell L. Harris

Lesson Outline

An Introduction to the Christian Faith :: Prerequisites ::

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1. A Few Essentials regarding Academic Endeavour

Before launching into our course of study, let's take a moment to look at a few essentials having to do with scholastic or academic endeavour. The facts, concepts, and principles presented here ought to be taught every student while he is in the elementary grades; yet many college graduates remain ignorant of them. But these facts, concepts, and principles need to be understood if one is to be successful in an academic course of study.

We look first at the concept of academic discipline, which is at the heart of education, and then at practical matters of classroom decorum. Next we consider the matters of training versus education, knowledge versus understanding, understanding and the frame of reference, the perfection of understanding, and the relationship between vocabulary and thought.

1.1 The Nature and the Necessity of Academic Discipline

Any worthwhile course of study demands a measure of academic discipline. And what, precisely, *is* academic discipline? To begin with, the term 'discipline' simply means a routine which is governed by a set of rules, that is, a manner of conduct. Accordingly, academic discipline is the decorum or manner of conduct which is appropriate to academic study. Reduced to its essentials, academic discipline is a combination of at least four elements, namely, humility, objectivity, concentration, and critical thought:

1. *humility*:

- (a) You cannot learn unless you are willing to admit your own ignorance.

- The man who is unwilling to admit that his knowledge and understanding are incomplete is arrogant.
 - An arrogant man cannot be taught.
 - Arrogance is the mark of a fool.
- (b) You cannot learn unless you respect the teacher.
- Respect for the teacher is a willingness to submit to the authority of the teacher. The authority of the teacher is the right of the teacher to address the class without challenge and without interference; it is based upon the presumed mastery of the subject by the teacher, together with trust or confidence in the faithfulness of the teacher.
 - While there indeed are many teachers who lack mastery of the subjects which they are teaching, the student has no right, within the environment of the classroom, to challenge the understanding of the teacher. The only right of the student is the right to withdraw from the course of study. In essence, to submit to the authority of the teacher is nothing other than to assume that the teacher's understanding of the subject is better than your own understanding of the subject. Challenge in the classroom setting is improper.
 - i. Challenge is disruptive to the class, and therefore is inconsiderate to others in the class.
 - ii. Challenge typically is the result of incomplete understanding on the part of the student, rather than the detection of error.
 - iii. Challenge typically indicates a lack of humility on the part of the student.
 - There *are* teachers who are unworthy of trust. Sadly, most of them appear to have found employment in the religious realm, rather than in the secular realm, and this fact poses a great problem. Thankfully, it is a problem which the Lord has foreseen, and for which he has made adequate provision:
 - i. In each generation, God calls certain men and appoints them as shepherds to feed and care for his sheep.
 - ii. Some of these men prove to be unfaithful shepherds who violate their trust and neglect the sheep.
 - iii. There also are wolves in sheep's clothing, who, given the opportunity, ravage the flock.
 - iv. Discernment in the spiritual realm is required to distinguish between a faithful shepherd, an unfaithful shepherd, and a wolf in sheep's clothing.
 - v. Discernment in the spiritual realm comes only through an understanding of the Scripture.
 - vi. The Christian who is just starting out in the Way of Life has no discernment in the spiritual realm, but is like a babe at the mother's breast.
 - vii. This situation demonstrates the importance of the body of Christ, which is a living organism, of which every Christian is a member: the members of the body are to care for and protect one another, which is nothing other than to love one another.
 - viii. The Scripture commands those who are mature in the faith to expose, refute, and discredit false teachers, whether such teachers be unfaithful shepherds or wolves in sheep's clothing.
 - ix. Consequently, it is important for the new believer to maintain a close association with a local assembly in which there are mature believers—an assembly in which a false teacher cannot gain a foothold.
2. *objectivity*: You cannot learn unless you are willing to discard preconceived notions which the course of study demonstrates to be false. The gaining of understanding is a process in which the ferreting out of error is fully as important as is the acquisition of truth. It is fully as important to recognize and reject error as it is to recognize and accept truth.
 3. *concentration*: You cannot learn if you allow your mind to wander. Passive activities such as watching television condition the mind, ever reducing the concentration span. Many individuals today cannot concentrate longer than a few minutes, and some, only a few seconds. Academic endeavour of itself stimulates the mind and increases the attention span. The game of chess is particularly effective in exercising the mind to increase the attention span and to develop the ability to visualize.
 4. *critical thought*: You are not being educated if you accept as true concepts which you do not fully comprehend; to do so is to be trained, rather than to be educated; while you may be gaining knowledge, you are not gaining understanding. To learn, you must think about a concept and investigate it until you comprehend it.

1.2 Classroom Decorum

The term 'decorum' means manner of conduct. Classroom decorum is the manner of conduct which is appropriate to the classroom environment; it includes practical matters, such as study in preparation for a class, the taking of class notes, and review of the class. Tragically, in America students seldom are given instruction in practical classroom matters; they are left to flounder—when it would take only a few statements of fact to

dispel the misconceptions typically held by the tyro, and only a few words of guidance, to deliver him from the pitfalls which often snare the novice.

1. A course of study typically involves a teacher and one or more textbooks.
2. The function of the textbook is to provide an orderly and comprehensive explanation of the subject of study.
3. The function of the teacher is to explain and to expand upon the material which is presented in the textbook.
4. The classroom is *not* the place to read the textbook. Indeed, in the classroom there should seldom, if ever, be need to refer to the textbook. Consequently, it generally is useless to carry the textbook back and forth to class.
5. The student should prepare for each class by reading the pertinent sections of the textbook in advance of the class, so that the class may serve to make clear things which the student did not understand when reading the textbook.
6. If the pertinent sections of the textbook have not been read prior to the class meeting, the student's first exposure to new material comes in the classroom. But the purpose of the class meeting is to clarify the presentation found in the textbook—not to provide a comprehensive presentation. Consequently, the student who has not prepared for a class receives only minimal benefit from attending the class. Indeed, he may become disoriented and unable to follow the presentation of the teacher.
7. Rather than a textbook, the student should bring to class a notebook—or paper and a clipboard or lapboard—to facilitate the taking of notes.
8. Notes taken in a class should be brief. Class notes should serve as a reminder of the points covered in class, rather than be an attempt to preserve a detailed record of the class.
9. Class notes should indicate the points which the teacher emphasizes. It is impossible to transcribe every word of the teacher, and the student who attempts to do so typically is so busy writing that he fails to hear many important comments made by the teacher.
10. Later the same day, or no later than the next day, the student should review his notes, while the class is fresh in his memory. Such a review is vital to retention of the material which is being taught.
11. One of the most effective ways to ensure comprehension of the material taught in a course of study is to gather with one or two fellow classmates after each class in order to review notes and to discuss the class. If one student misses or fails to comprehend a point, it is likely that his classmate can remedy the deficiency.
12. In the event that, after a review of the class notes, questions remain concerning the material being studied, the student should ask the teacher for further clarification; the best time to do this is in advance of the next class. In order to teach effectively, a teacher needs this type of feedback from his students.

1.3 Training versus Education

There is a distinction between training and education:

1. Training pertains only to a specific task or category of activity. Education pertains to life in general.
2. Training is designed to impart to the individual the ability to perform a specific task. Education is designed to impart to the individual the ability to further educate and train himself to accomplish whatever tasks may confront him.
3. The goal of training is immediate productivity. The goal of education is ultimate productivity.
4. Training imparts only limited knowledge—a familiarity with details. Education imparts expansive knowledge—an awareness of resources.
5. Training cares nothing for perspective, for perspective is incidental to training. Education seeks to impart the widest possible perspective, for perspective is vital to education.
6. The essence of training is memorization of detail. The essence of education is visualization of concept or perception of structure.

1.4 Knowledge versus Understanding

There is a distinction between knowledge and understanding:

1. Knowledge is an accumulation of facts. Understanding is an orderly arrangement of facts, together with a visualization of the relationship between those facts.
2. Like knowledge, understanding is a matter of degree.
3. Knowledge does not imply understanding: one can possess knowledge and yet be without understanding.
4. Apart from understanding, one cannot fully and properly utilize the knowledge which he possesses. The greater one's understanding, the greater his ability to properly utilize the knowledge which he possesses.

1.5 Understanding and the Frame of Reference

There is a relationship between understanding and a concept called 'frame of reference':

1. A frame of reference is a scheme or system whereby facts are arranged or categorized.
2. A particular set of facts may be viewed from more than one frame of reference.

1.6 Perfection of Understanding

In the human realm, understanding never is perfect: there always are matters which are understood only to a limited extent or not at all, and there always are matters which are misunderstood. Consequently, there is continual need for the perfection of understanding.

1. Understanding is imperfect.
2. Understanding is dynamic—that is, changing. Understanding typically increases with time and with experience:

- (a) Understanding can increase as a consequence of the addition of facts to one's store of knowledge.
 - (b) Understanding can increase as one contemplates his existing store of knowledge, and discovers relationships which previously were not noticed.
 - (c) Understanding can increase as one seeks to reconcile conflicts between his store of knowledge and the frame of reference with which he views that store of knowledge.
3. Error in understanding becomes apparent whenever facts in one's store of knowledge do not fit properly into the scheme of categorization. Perfection or refinement of understanding is accomplished by modifying the scheme of categorization so that it better fits or accommodates the facts. In some cases, it may be necessary to switch to an entirely new scheme of categorization.

1.7 The Relationship between Thought and Vocabulary

Next to textbooks, the most important books for a student are the dictionary and the thesaurus. Sadly, many students do not even own a dictionary, and many do not even know what a thesaurus is. Let us consider why these two books have such a vital, though generally unappreciated, role.

1.7.1 Basic Principles

1. Thought is involved in the processes of perception, interpretation or comprehension, and expression.
2. There are two broad categories of thought process, namely, visualization and verbalization.
3. While some concepts may be visualized and even expressed without the use of words, most thinking and communication is dependent upon the process of verbalization.
4. Thus, in general, it may be said that words are essential to thought, and that vocabulary is central to the thought process.
5. Understanding, which is the result of thought, is dependent upon categorization.
6. Likewise, the processes of perception and interpretation are dependent upon categorization.
7. One's ability to categorize is limited by his vocabulary. It should be obvious that (neglecting combinations of words), a man is able to define only as many categories as he has words in his vocabulary: once he exhausts his store of labels, he cannot proceed until he expands his vocabulary.
8. Thought is characterized by its scope, its depth, and its precision.
 - Scope, range, or breadth is a measure of the spectrum or variety of subjects which are encompassed. A primary purpose of education is to

broaden the scope of a man's thinking—to awaken him to a greater awareness of the world in which he lives, and of the universe.

- Depth or profundity is a measure of the comprehensiveness with which a subject is viewed. Thinking which considers many aspects of a subject or which considers a subject as a whole typically is more comprehensive—and thus, deeper or more profound—than thinking which considers only a few aspects of the subject.
 - Precision is a measure of the degree of detail in which a subject is considered. As precision increases, thinking moves from the general to the specific.
 - There is no essential correlation between depth and precision. For example, in his thinking, an individual may be extremely shallow, yet very detailed—as typically is the case with a woman who closely follows a soap opera on television, or with a man who closely follows the realm of professional athletics. Conversely, it is possible for an individual to think thoughts which are quite deep yet very general, as typically is the case with the philosopher.
9. One's vocabulary limits the scope of his thinking.
 10. One's vocabulary limits the depth of his thinking.
 11. One's vocabulary limits the precision of his thinking.

1.7.2 The Dictionary

1. A dictionary—also called a lexicon—shows the meanings which commonly are assigned to a given word.
2. A dictionary also provides the correct spelling of a word.
3. When reading, the dictionary aids in comprehension.
4. When writing, the dictionary aids in expression.
5. When writing, use of the dictionary can prevent spelling errors, which, at best, are embarrassing, and, at worst, tend to discredit the author.
6. The lexical definition notwithstanding, the meaning of a word is determined by the context in which the word is used.
7. In reality, the compiler of a dictionary does nothing more than investigate and record the meanings which commonly are applied to words.
8. Thus, it is the author of a document, rather than the compiler of the dictionary, who defines the meaning of a word, the context being the mechanism by which the author makes the definition.
9. However, whenever an author defies convention with respect to the meaning of a word, he risks being misinterpreted.

1.7.3 The Thesaurus

1. A thesaurus categorizes words according to meaning.
2. Thus, a thesaurus is useful to the author who, wishing to remain within the bounds of convention regarding the meaning of a word, is seeking a word which precisely expresses a particular concept.

1.7.4 Practical Application of the Dictionary

1. One of the most important things to keep in mind regarding the dictionary is that one seldom makes reference to a dictionary which is closed and residing on the bookshelf. The proper home for a dictionary is a table or, preferably, a podium, with the book kept always open and ready for use.
2. Habitual use of the dictionary is vital to comprehension of written material.
3. Habitual use of the dictionary builds vocabulary.
4. One of the very best ways to foster habitual use of the dictionary is to devote exclusively to the dictionary a podium near the study desk or reading chair. If the room lighting so dictates, a lamp should be mounted on the podium. An opened dictionary should be present on the podium whenever one is reading or studying.
5. It is important to do whatever is necessary to facilitate use of the dictionary. Thus, it is better to keep the dictionary on a podium than to keep it on a desk, in order to eliminate the need and discomfort of bending over or sitting down to consult the dictionary. Likewise, visual discomfort results unless the dictionary is adequately illuminated. Attention to such details pays great dividends in terms of increased comprehension and vocabulary.

1.8 The Fundamental Importance of Reading

While a competent and faithful teacher is an invaluable asset to anyone who strives to become educated, a man who is able to read and who has access to a library should be able to acquire an education entirely through his own study.

It should be obvious that inability to read poses a fundamental barrier to the attainment of an education. However, it must be understood that reading is much more than the mere recognition of words on the printed page. The essence of reading is the process termed 'parsing', whereby sentences and words are transformed into thought. Thus, reading essentially is a matter of vocabulary and disciplined mental process, the eye being but one of several channels through which the process of reading may take place.

As with any form of communication, reading involves a channel, a medium, and a protocol. The various channels through which reading may take place differ in the media and protocols employed. Examples of channel are the eye, the sense of touch, and the ear. Examples of media are the printed page, surface texture, and sound. Examples of protocol are a particular type font, Braille, Morse code, and the spoken word.

Accordingly, a sighted man with his eye may read words and sentences which have been transcribed into the medium of the printed page using the protocol of a specific type font.

A blind man with his fingertip may read words and sentences which have been transcribed into the medium of surface texture using the protocol of Braille. An amateur radio operator with his ear may read words and sentences which have been transcribed into the medium of sound using the protocol of Morse code. And anyone with his ear may read words and sentences which have been transcribed into the medium of sound using the protocol of the spoken word.

Again, the point to be noted is that the ability to read is much more than the ability to recognize words printed on a page. Indeed, in its fullest sense, the ability to read is the ability to comprehend. Thus, there are individuals who are able to make out words and sentences on the printed page, but who are incapable of grasping the thought embodied in those words and sentences. And there are individuals who, while unable to decipher the protocol of a type font, are able to listen to the spoken word and to comprehend in it thoughts which are deep and concepts which are complex.

Thus, the immediate and primary goal of an elementary education must be that of imparting and perfecting the skill of reading. Attainment of that goal entails instruction in matters such as coherent and logical thinking, analysis, vocabulary, and discernment and interpretation of figurative speech. Until the student attains competency in reading, no other academic endeavour is of the least consequence.

2. The Nature and Scope of this Course of Study

2.1 Nature

1. This course is designed to provide a survey of the Christian Faith; this entails detailed consideration of a number of theological concepts.
2. *Why should theology be of interest to the average Christian?* The reason is that theology is integral to the Christian Faith. Every congregation needs to be instructed in the Christian Faith—the Christian Faith needs to be taught from every pulpit. But the Christian Faith which is found in the pages of the Scripture no longer is being taught from the pulpits of the land; it has been replaced with a 'feel-good' religion which stimulates the emotion, soothes the conscience, and makes few demands upon the mind and the body. Paul warned of this state of affairs:

• II Timothy 4:1–4

1 I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; 2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

And this is not a new phenomenon. A rebellious people is unwilling to hear truth, for truth exposes error and indicts sin. Isaiah testifies against his own generation:

- Isaiah 30:9–11

9 For the people is disobedient, false children, who would not hear the law of God: 10 who say to the prophets, Report not to us; and to them that see visions, Speak them not to us, but speak and report to us another error; 11 and turn us aside from this way; remove from us this path, and remove from us the oracle of Israel.

3. *Why does anyone need a 'survey' of the Christian Faith, or an 'introduction' to the Christian Faith? Why not simply launch right into study of the Christian Faith itself?* The reason is that theological concepts which once were familiar to every Christian no longer are common knowledge. Matters which once were discussed in the home, the shop, and the marketplace today are discussed only in the classrooms of the theological seminary. The student needs to gain perspective before he delves into advanced concepts, so he that does not become disoriented; before he engages in the study of a particular piece of the puzzle, he needs to have at least a general idea of how all the pieces of the puzzle fit together.

2.2 Scope

Here is a list of subjects to be covered in this course of study; a lesson is devoted to each subject:

1. Prerequisites (this lesson)
2. The Nature of the Godhead
3. The Purpose of Mankind
4. The Creation Account
5. The Nature of Life and the Nature of Death
6. The Fall of Adam
7. The Consequence of the Fall
8. The Seed of the Woman, the Seed of the Serpent, and Justification
9. Human Government and its Handmaiden, Religion
10. The Flood in the Days of Noah
11. The Promises Made to Abraham
12. The Old Covenant
13. The Davidic Throne
14. The New Covenant and the Regathering of Israel
15. The Gospel
16. The Kingdom of God and its Relationship to the New Covenant
17. The Role of the Jew: Counterfeits, Leaven, Ploys, and Persecution

18. Prophecy, Eschatology, and Current Events
19. Routine Functions in the Christian Way of Life
20. Baptism for the Remission of Sin
21. Biblical Giving and Support of the Ministry
22. Race, Interracial Marriage, and the Gospel
23. Bible Versions and Translations
24. The Assault of Television Programming, Hollywood Movies, Popular Music, and Talk Radio
25. Freemasonry and Secret Societies
26. The Reformation, Reformation Theology, and Protestant Denominations
27. Miraculous Healing

3. The Need for an Introduction to the Christian Faith

At least three factors argue for the need of an introduction such as this:

- No subject can be comprehended apart from a proper frame of reference; this includes the Christian Faith.
- Within contemporary society, there is general and abysmal ignorance of the Scripture.
- Even among those who profess to be Christians, there is general confusion regarding the elements of the Christian Faith.

3.1 Provision of a Frame of Reference

1. A frame of reference is a scheme or system whereby facts are arranged or categorized.
2. A frame of reference is needed to understand the relationship between the various entities found in the Scripture—entities which include:
 - (a) the components of the Scripture, that is, the documents or books which comprise the Canon of Scripture
 - (b) the structure or divisions of the Scripture, namely, the Law or 'Moses', the prophets, the Psalms, the Gospel accounts, and the epistles or letters
 - (c) the Old Covenant
 - (d) the New Covenant
 - (e) the various categories of Israel, including the nation, the physical seed, and the 'Israel of God'¹
 - (f) the various categories of Jerusalem or 'Zion', namely, the old, the new, and the respective daughters
 - (g) the Church, in her various portrayals, such as the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, and the new, everlasting living temple of God

¹Galatians 6:16.

- (h) the Gospel, with its various designations, such as the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, the Gospel of peace, the Gospel of the grace of God, the Gospel of Christ, the Gospel of God, and so forth
 - (i) the Kingdom of God
 - (j) the throne of David
 - (k) the ‘Gentiles’
 - (l) the various entities designated by the term ‘Jew’
 - (m) the elements of the Christian Faith—theological, practical, and ritual
 - (n) the various prophetic utterances
 - (o) the various historical events
3. As the Scripture itself declares, and as evidenced by the multitude of interpretations which men have applied to the Scripture, men require guidance in their study of the Scripture.
 4. In every generation, God appoints men to shepherd his flock. A principal duty of the shepherd or pastor² is to feed the flock from the Word of God—that is, to instruct the sheep in the Scripture. In order to fulfill that duty, the pastor must provide the sheep with a frame of reference for their study of the Scripture.

3.2 Contemporary Ignorance of the Scripture

1. There is within contemporary society a general ignorance of the Scripture. Contrast the present age with epoch of the Incarnation, at which time it seems that almost everyone within the remnant of Israel possessed at least a rudimentary knowledge of the Scripture. Or contrast the present age with the epoch of Tyndale, who was the first to translate the body of New Covenant Scripture directly from the Greek into English. In that period of history, the work of Tyndale gave the English populace the Bible in their own language, and the advent of moveable type printing brought ownership of a copy of the Scripture within the reach of the ordinary family. The result was that the Bible rapidly became the focus within the daily life of many English homes, and knowledge of the Scripture flourished.
2. Apart from an understanding of the Scripture, the Christian has no discernment.
3. Apart from an understanding of the Scripture, it is impossible for the Christian to live the Christian Way of Life: it is necessary to *know* the commandments in order to *obey* them; it is necessary to *understand* the instructions in order to *follow* them.
4. The immediate sources of this ignorance are:
 - (a) general illiteracy within the populace, the primary contributing factors being:
 - the public school system

²The term ‘pastor’ is an Old English word meaning shepherd.

³Ephesians 6:4

- disruption of the home
 - television
 - video games
 - organized athletics
- (b) a general ‘dumbing-down’ of the populace, the primary mechanisms being:
 - the public school system
 - television
 - the closing of municipal libraries
 - newspaper articles which are written at third-grade reading level
 - (c) disruption of the influence of the home, the primary contributing factors being:
 - the economic necessity that the mother seek employment outside the home
 - capricious divorce
 - the influence of television
 - the influence of psychology
 - the ever-growing insularity of public education with respect to the family and to society as a whole
 - organized athletics for children
 - destruction of the concept of the neighborhood
 - (d) Local churches today have become emporiums in which one may purchase assuaging of guilt, reinforcement of self-esteem, stimulation of emotion, and entertainment, the primary contributing factors being:
 - the low esteem in which man typically holds the things of God
 - the proclivity of man toward rebellion and sin
 - the lust of man for pleasure and novelty
 - false shepherds: greedy, lazy, treacherous men who have no calling to the ministry and are but hirelings—men who are willing to do anything for money; men who have no fear of God
 - (e) incorrect priorities, the primary contributing factor being the failure of parents to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord³.

3.3 General Confusion regarding the Elements of the Christian Faith

Few contemporary Christians have a clear understanding of the elements of the Christian Faith, and thus they are ignorant concerning subjects which every Christian should understand, such as:

- the nature of the Godhead
- the nature of the incarnate Christ Jesus

- the purpose of life
- the proper goal of life
- the nature of life and the consequence of death
- the significance of the sin of Adam
- the means of justification
- the historical adversary of God and of the Righteous
- the promises to Abraham
- the origin of the 'Gentiles'
- the origin of the contemporary Jew and Talmudic Judaism
- the Old Covenant
- the New Covenant
- the Gospel
- the nature and the significance of the Kingdom of God
- events which are future and their sequence
- routine functions pertaining to the Christian Way of Life and the proper conduct of the Christian Way of Life

4. Frames of Reference for Study of the Christian Faith

A course of study is made from the perspective of a particular frame of reference or scheme of categorization. There typically are several different frames of reference which are valid for a given subject. When studying matters of the Scripture, at least four frames of reference are in common use:

1. the dispensational scheme
2. the covenantal scheme
3. the theological scheme
4. the chronological scheme

4.1 The Dispensational Scheme

A dispensation is a historical period characterized by a particular group of humanity (a race, a nation, or other entity) and a particular system of law and protocol, members of the group being the official representatives or agents of God throughout the course of the period.

- The principal modern proponent of the dispensational scheme is Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder of Dallas Theological Seminary. His scheme is rather primitive and is lacking in vital detail; moreover, it is characterized by numerous and serious errors. According to Chafer, the dispensations are:
 - the dispensation of innocence
 - the dispensation of conscience
 - the dispensation of human government
 - the dispensation of promise
 - the dispensation of law
 - the dispensation of grace

– the dispensation of kingdom rule

- R. B. Thieme, Jr., refined the dispensational scheme of Chafer. Nevertheless, the scheme of Thieme remains rather primitive, lacking in vital detail, and characterized by numerous and serious errors. According to Thieme, the dispensations are:
 - the dispensation of the gentiles
 - the dispensation of the jews
 - the dispensation of the incarnation
 - the dispensation of the Church
 - the dispensation of the tribulation
 - the dispensation of the millennium
 - the dispensation of the eternal state

4.2 The Covenantal Scheme

In the context of the Scripture, a covenant is either (1) a mutual agreement between men, (2) a mutual agreement between God and man, or (3) an unconditional promise of God to man. The covenants typically cited in the covenantal scheme are:

- the Adamic Covenant
- the Noahic Covenant
- the Abrahamic Covenant
- the Old Covenant, aka the Mosaic Covenant
- the Davidic Covenant
- the New Covenant

4.3 The Theological Scheme

Theology is the study of God and the entities and concepts which have to do with the relationship between God and man. According to Chafer, the primary categories of theology are:

- bibliology: the study of the origin and transmission of the Bible
- theology proper: the study of the nature of the Godhead
- angelology: the study of angels
- soteriology: the study of salvation
- ecclesiology: the study of the Church
- eschatology: the study of prophecy regarding the end times
- Christology: the study of Christ
- pneumatology: the study of the Spirit of God

4.4 The Chronological Scheme

The chronological scheme has several factors to recommend it, namely:

- The Scripture itself essentially is chronological in its presentation.
- The dealing of God with man has progressed with time, becoming increasingly comprehensive.
- The revelation of truth has been progressive with time, increasing in detail.

4.5 The Scheme Chosen for this Course

The organizational scheme chosen for this introductory course is a hybrid of the dispensational, covenantal, theological, and chronological schemes.

5. Selection of a Bible Version or Translation

In this course, the general policy is that citations of Old Covenant scripture shall be made from the Brenton translation of the Septuagint, and citations of New Covenant scripture shall be made from the King James version of the Bible. In both cases, errors in the translation shall be addressed by reference to the Greek.

We shall discuss the matter of translations in greater depth in later lessons of this course⁴.

5.1 The Brenton Translation of the Septuagint

The course text for Old Covenant scripture is the Septuagint. Specifically, we shall use the English translation of the Septuagint which was made circa A. D. 1850 by Lancelot C. L. Brenton and published by Bagster & Sons of London. Concerning this translation, several things should be noted:

1. The Septuagint is the official canon of Old Covenant scripture.
 - It is from the Septuagint and not the Masoretic Hebrew Text that Jesus and the writers of New Covenant scripture quoted when citing Old Covenant scripture.
 - The Masoretic Hebrew Text is a counterfeit, which was produced relatively late in the Christian era, somewhere in the period of approximately A. D. 500 to A. D. 1400.
2. The Brenton translation is readily available, as a hard-cover edition which costs about twenty-five dollars U.S.
3. The standard edition of the Brenton translation includes the Greek text.
4. The only alternative at the current time is the Thompson translation, made circa A. D. 1770.
5. However, the Thompson translation is not readily available.
6. Moreover, the only edition of the Thompson translation which is in print does not include the Greek text.

5.2 The King James Version

The course text for New Covenant scripture is the King James version, which was translated circa A. D. 1611; any edition shall suffice. Concerning this version, several things should be noted:

1. The King James version is universally available; even in a synthetic leather binding, it can be had for as little as ten dollars.

2. The King James version is inferior to most other English translations.
3. The Old Covenant portion of the King James version is based upon the counterfeit Masoretic Hebrew Text.
4. The New Covenant portion of the King James version is based on relatively-recent Greek manuscripts of relatively poor quality.
5. Historically, English-language Bible study tools have been keyed to the King James version; this remains the case for most of the tools which today are in print, including most of the tools which are available for use with the personal computer. These tools are critical to serious study of the Scripture, and their availability more than compensates for the many and serious deficiencies of the King James version.
6. No translation can eliminate the necessity of consulting the Greek.

Russell L. Harris

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⁴See the lessons titled, “*The Role of the Jew: Counterfeits, Leaven, Ploys, and Persecution*”, and, “*Bible Translations and Versions*”

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*These, having put the world in commotion,
are also here present...and these all do contrary
to the decree of Caesar, saying another
to be king—Jesus.*

– Acts 17:6–7

We ought obey God rather than men.

– Acts 5:29
