Chronological Bible Teaching

By Dr. Ed Skowron

An explanation for and history of one of the most popular and effective methods of teaching God’s Word around the world

The chronological foundational method of Bible teaching is a relatively new style of teaching the Bible which since the mid-1980’s has grown in worldwide popularity to become one of the major methods amongst missionaries, pastors, Sunday school teachers, and Christian leaders. It is therefore very important for informed Christians to understand this method of teaching. All Christians should try to understand current trends in global church planting, evangelism, and discipleship as it relates to the foreign missionaries that their own church or denomination supports. They also should consider if this method should be used in their own local context.

In order for a person to be convinced that he or she should switch to a new method of teaching (like the chronological Bible teaching), one needs to understand if there’s a Biblical and practical rationale. Chronological Bible teaching is a method found throughout the Bible. It also is very practical. When considering the advantages in switching to a new method it’s reassuring that thousands of other Christian pastors and teachers have found success using the chronological foundational approach. There are resources available to speakers of most of the world’s major languages. It’s also reassuring to hear or read the testimonies of the teachers and students that have used and are using this method. Seemingly, they have a deeper and more firm conviction of the Gospel than the many shallow and pseudo-Christians that barely know what or why they believe.
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The Need for Chronological Foundational Bible Teaching

The chronological foundational method of teaching God’s Word was principally developed by a missionary to the Palawano Tribe of the Philippines in the mid-1960’s to 1970’s. Over the years, this method of teaching the Bible has spread throughout the world not because of huge successful marketing campaigns, but because it makes Biblical and common sense. This teaching method helps both teacher and student because of the way it reveals and unfolds the incredible doctrinal tapestry of the progressive revelation of God. Teachers like the way that new doctrine is introduced by building on previously taught material. This reduces the need to backtrack through the scriptures. Skeptical students often become convinced of the authority of the Bible because of how they see the one unified and extremely interesting story of God and man. Many people have heard parts of the Bible from evangelists, pastors, and Sunday school teachers, but they are confused about the Bible’s message because they never have had the whole story explained in order and in context. The chronological foundational approach is the remedy for this problem. In this paper I will attempt to prove why this is the best method of evangelism, especially in situations where long term relationships can be developed. The chronological approach should definitely be considered by those that want to see others come to a saving faith in Christ.

Most of the people that promote the chronological approach to evangelism do not discard nor discredit the use of other common teaching methods. Several methods of teaching are used throughout academia and in churches. In Western countries students go to schools where teachers instruct by means of lecture. Sometimes there are group discussions, labs, tutors, etc. (The information that is taught almost always has one thing in common: i.e. course material is divided into topics and subtopics.) The same topical method of teaching that dominates Western academia traditionally has been the most popular method of instruction in Christian churches in Western society, and in the churches that Western missionaries have started in non-Western countries. There are some less popular methods of teaching in churches. For example, many pastors give expository or exegesis sermons (including textual criticism, linguistic, contextual, literary, grammatical, and syntactical features) about passages or entire books of the Bible. Generally speaking, people assume that the method by which they have been taught is the best; hence often they are not even open to consider other methods of effective teaching.¹

Jesus himself practiced effective chronological evangelism as seen in Luke 24:13-25. Evidentially Jesus thought that starting in the beginning and teaching chronologically through the scripture was a good idea. Cleopas and his friend were walking on the road to Emmaus when they met Jesus after His resurrection. These two knew what had happen to Jesus (his arrest and crucifixion) but they didn’t understand the significance of the events. Jesus “beginning in Moses and all the Prophets, expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” The books written by “Moses” are the first five books of the Bible. “All the Prophets” refers to all of the rest of the Old Testament. Jesus started in the beginning of the story and explained Biblical

¹For a discussion of the role of tradition in Western learning see: www.americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/tomorrows-college/lectures/rethinking-teaching.

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history chronologically to these two men, emphasizing himself, even though He had not yet been born. (John 5:39-40, John 8:58) This one instance where Jesus teaches chronologically does not prove that it is the best method to use in all cases, nor should the implication be made that it’s Christ’s only method of teaching. Throughout his ministry Jesus also used many other teaching methods as we see at the Sermon on the Mount. (Mathew 5-7)

Humanly speaking, Jesus probably had an easier time teaching the two men on the road to Emmaus because they were Jews. There is a difference between evangelizing the Jews and “Greeks” (the non-Jews or Gentiles). When Jesus and the apostles shared the Gospel with Jews they could make some assumptions about what the listeners already knew about God, Israel, and the sacrificial system. Presentations of the Gospel to the Jews could progress much quicker because less of the essential background information needed to be explained. On the other hand, the story of Christ sounded like foolishness to the “Greeks.” (1 Corinthians 1:22-24) Why? They didn’t have the important understanding of who the Creator is, why He made the world, why He made us, and why things had gone bad for humanity.

This is similar to today’s religious situation. Generally speaking, a Gospel presentation can progress more quickly for those that have a monotheistic background, and even more rapidly for those that are already convinced that the Bible is the Word of God. Such is the case with many in the Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and liberal Protestant religions. To a lesser extent, it is also true of some Jews that hold what Christians call “The Old Testament” to be God’s Word. While the teacher knows that he or she might be able to assume more doctrinal commonality with these groups, it’s always a good idea to ask many questions to find out what the individual person is thinking. It may differ from the official dogma of the religion that they claim as their own.

Somewhat like Jesus on the road to Emmaus, the Apostle Peter also refers back to what the prophets had foretold about the coming Messiah. (Acts 3:18-26) Steven, the first martyr of the church, also used chronological Old Testament history as a springboard to evangelism. (Acts 7) Paul taught the same way (using the Old Testament) to Jews and God-fearing Gentiles in Acts 13: 13-52. “God-fearing Gentiles” refers to non-Jews that now reverenced the God of Israel, undoubtedly because of the contact and interaction that they were having with the “children of Abraham.” (Acts 13:26) In Acts 17:22 - 31 Paul tried to share the good news with the non-Jews on Mars Hill starting in the beginning. Although the book of Romans is not written chronologically, Paul is constantly using Old Testament examples to teach doctrinal truth such the purpose of the law and circumcision. (Romans 2:25-28) Also in the book of Romans, Paul also speaks of Abraham and David in chapter 4, Adam in chapter 5, and the nation of Israel, Isaac, Esau, Rebekah, the Pharaoh, Isaiah, and Sodom and Gomorrah in chapter 9.

Examples of starting in the beginning and using the Old Testament in evangelism have been in the Bible for thousands of years; yet wide scale, consistent chronological teaching by missionaries worldwide is a relatively recent phenomenon. Since 1985, this style of evangelism and discipleship has grown exponentially. It’s interesting to contrast the evangelism method of Jesus, Peter, Steven, and Paul (using the Old Testament) with popular current methods of evangelism. For example, the famous tract “Four Spiritual Laws” printed by CRU (formerly
known as Campus Crusade for Christ) and written by the late Bill Bright, does little to explain who God is, the origin of sin in the world, the work of Satan, heaven and hell, the commandments, and the need for a blood sacrifice.  

Another well-known evangelism tool is the Bible itself. If people are interested in spiritual things and if the person that’s evangelizing doesn’t have time to teach them, for many years the advice has been to encourage them in their scripture reading journey by starting in the Gospels, and to be specific, usually the Gospel of John. This thinking might be based on John 20:31 which states “but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” Bob Grahmann, Ph.D., InterVarsity’s Link Director wrote, “If you’re digging in for the first time, start with the Gospel of Mark, and then go on to John.” The logic is that since the book of John contains so much great doctrine and history about Jesus, this would be a great place to start reading for the person that really wants to understand the ministry of Jesus.

A sincere inquirer who knows nothing about God, Christianity, Jewish history, salvation, etc. has started to read John chapter 1 because he or she was told by a well-meaning evangelist that the book of John will teach them what they need to understand about God. The problem is that there are many concepts, people, and places that John talks about that are almost impossible to understand unless the reader has at least a basic understanding of the Old Testament, geography, and world history. Here are some of the people, places, and concepts that John mentions in chapter one alone:

the Word, God, the light, the darkness, John, a witness, every man coming into the world, the world, his own, children of God, the One and Only, the Father, the law, Moses, Jesus Christ, the Father’s side, Jews, Jerusalem, priests, the Christ, Elijah, the Prophet, Isaiah, the voice of one, the desert, the Lord, baptism with water, Bethany, the Jordan, the Lamb of God, sin of the world, Israel, the Spirit, heaven, a dove, the Holy Spirit, the Son of God, disciples, Rabbi, Teacher, Andrew, Simon Peter, Simon, the Messiah, Cephas, Peter, Galilee, Philip, Andrew, Bethsaida, Nathanael, the prophets, Nazareth, the son of Joseph, a true Israelite, the King of Israel, the angels of God, and the Son of man.

Other abstract concepts that are alluded to are:

the beginning, things made, darkness that has not understood, testifying, believing, witness, true light, receiving him, natural descent, human decision, husband’s will, born of God, flesh, glory, grace, truth, fullness of his grace, blessing, confession, making straight the way, and unworthiness to untie sandals.

The person that was trying to understand the Bible by only reading the book of John might give up before starting chapter 2.

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2 www.billionbibles.org/four-spiritual-laws.html has an instructive critique of this popular tract.
3 For common thinking on how to study the Bible see: https://studentsoul.intervarsity.org/start-reading-bible.
An Explanation of the Chronological Foundational Teaching

If a person interested in Christianity would start with the book of Genesis and Exodus and then go on to the book of John, most of the most important concepts, places, and people in John could be understood. What are the key doctrines of the Old Testament that need to be understood? What can we speculate that Jesus taught the two men on the road to Emmaus? Starting in Genesis and throughout the Old Testament, we are taught in story after story, doctrines that are essential in understanding and appreciating what Jesus accomplished through his death, burial, and resurrection. The main doctrines are: the nature and character of God, the character of the angelic beings, Satan and the demons, the character of man, the consequence and judgement of sin, the promise of a deliverer (messianic prophesies and types), the need for a blood sacrifice, the role of the nation of Israel, and the law (especially the 10 commandments).

The chronological foundational method of teaching allows the Biblical stories themselves to introduce and reinforce the major doctrinal teachings. Instead of teaching the nature and character of God topically, each story brings out the key doctrines. The teacher does not need to skip from passage to passage all over the Bible when he or she teaches chronologically. For example, God’s holiness, righteousness, judgement, and mercy are all in the story of the fall of man. In the same story, the character of Satan is shown. He is God’s enemy, man’s enemy, and a hateful liar. He’s also judged by God, which shows God’s authority and power. Man is presented as being created in God’s image, but now has fallen into spiritual death which is separation from God. We see man as willfully disobedient and deserving of judgement. The consequences of sin are clearly spelled out. God’s mercy is shown through the hint of a promised Deliverer (Genesis 3:15) and through blood sacrifices. (Genesis 3:21)

Each major Old Testament story will bring out most of these key points, although each story might not contain information about every point. The major stories that can be taught before the presentation of Jesus are the following:

The pre-existence of God, the creation of the angels, the rebellion of Lucifer, the creation, the disobedience and fall of man, Cain and Abel, Noah, the tower of Babel, Abraham, Sodom and Gomorrah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Israel in Egypt, the plagues, the deliverance, the ten commandments, the tabernacle, the judges and kings, the temple, the prophets, and the 400 silent years. Other Old Testament stories can be added by the teacher when he or she feels that particular stories might be helpful to his or her individual audience.

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4 There is no consensus on all of the important O. T. stories. The list here is from pages 92 – 94 of Firm Foundations Creation to Christ by Trevor McIlwain, 1991. Sanford FL: New Tribes Mission, but other authors of chronological Bible teaching books have included and excluded several O. T. stories.
The Old Testament is loaded with messianic prophesies and picture/types (or examples) of the coming Deliverer. Each time one of these arises the instructor makes note of it, because later he or she can show how Jesus is the fulfillment. Teachers usually wait until all of this Old Testament foundational material is taught before they start teaching the life of Christ. As stated before, this makes teaching the life of Christ much easier, because the teacher is not constantly backtracking in order to explain key Old Testament concepts. For example, in John chapter 1, Jesus is called the “lamb of God”. If someone has no understanding of the concept of the blood sacrifices, then this phrase has absolutely no meaning. Likewise, terminology such as “Moses” and “priests” need to be explained and the explanations are in the stories contained in Genesis and Exodus.

An Explanation of the Way a Story is Told

A “story telling” method for teaching is used worldwide but less frequently in Western countries. When people tell stories, they almost always understand that they should begin in the beginning. Then they tell all of the relevant points in order to help the listener to understand what happens in the end. There are a few exceptions. Some books, movies, and television shows have occasionally used a storytelling device called a “flashback” or reverse chronological order. Sometimes suspenseful mysteries are also told in this fashion. This way of telling a story can be effective, but runs the risk of confusing the audience. That’s the reason that most stories are told in chronological order.

Small children learn how to tell short stories. We see this when they tell the punchline to a joke. Many children have tried to skip the “setup” or body of the joke and jump directly to the punchline because they know that people laugh after they hear the punchline. Kids quickly learn that the punchline is ineffective if delivered outside of the context of the whole joke (which in reality is a mini story). For example, if a joke was started by saying “to get to the other side,” no one would understand it. However, if one begins with, “Why did the chicken cross the road?” the “to get to the other side” reply makes sense.

The Gospel of Jesus is no joke but it is a story that has a beginning, middle and an end. To proclaim that “Jesus died, was buried, and rose again” is definitely the Gospel. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8) Yet outside the context of the whole story of the Bible, 1 Corinthians 15: 3-8 may be difficult to understand, appreciate, or even accept as true. It’s similar to a sick person that by chance encounters a doctor. If the person doesn’t understand and intellectually believe that he or she is really sick, then the medicine offered by the doctor will be useless; not because it’s ineffectual, but because it will not be received. (Mark 2:17) The sick person first and foremost needs to know and believe that he or she is sick. Evangelists have “proclaimed the Gospel” to audiences that never really were convinced that they were sinners. Often when they don’t respond to the message, the assumption is that they have hard hearts towards spiritual matters. If Jesus’ death is the remedy to a problem that the listener doesn’t understand, believe, or feel, then why would they trust in Jesus? It is illogical to think that they could, would, or should.
The Benefit of Using the Chronological Foundational Method

Like Cleopas and his friend before their encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus, there are many people that give an outward acknowledgement of being followers of Jesus, but have not understood the significance of His death and resurrection. Apparently these two men had a sincere desire to understand what had happened to Jesus and why. Even though they didn’t yet appreciate why Jesus had died, they were not afraid to talk about Him to a total stranger. This is remarkable because immediately before and after the crucifixion, being a follower of Jesus was to invite persecution. (Mat. 26: 69-74, Acts 8:1, 11:19) It’s still that way today. In most cultures around the world, there is little benefit to claim that one is a follower of Christ, when in reality they are not. That often would be an occasion to invite persecution on one’s self.

Why then would some people say that they are Christians when they are not? Some claim to be Christians in order to be respected in the Christian community as a whole or in their immediate family. Being seen as a Christian might help them gain or keep business. Some have feigned conversion in order to win over a reluctant girlfriend or boyfriend who will not date or marry a person that is “unequally yoked.” (2 Corinthians 6:14) These types of people can drag down the life of a church because often they work their way into positions of responsibility and yet they themselves do not possess eternal life. (Matthew 13:24-30, 3 John 1:9-11, 1 Corinthians 2:14) The pastor or teacher that uses the chronological approach to evangelism can have the confidence that these “pseudo-Christians” are hearing the Gospel presentation in a way that deals over and over again with the error of spiritual superficiality. Asking questions at the end of each Bible lesson can help a teacher to gauge whether or not the listener understands.

Not all pseudo-Christian’s motives for outwardly responding to the evangelist’s traditional Gospel presentation are necessarily nefarious. People might “come to Jesus” in order to have felt needs met. For example, they may be sick and in need of healing. They may be out of work and need a job. They may be going through a divorce and want reconciliation. They may be lonely. A son or daughter might be an addict, homeless, or involved in prostitution. Often, God uses a crisis to shake the person to the core in order to get them to listen to the preacher. (Matthew 11:28-30)

Others might not have felt-needs that they want God to meet. In other words, there’s no huge crisis in their life. Yet they also are listening to sermons or reading the Bible. They might not respond to the message of the teacher based on true conviction of sin and the message of forgiveness through the cross, yet they like certain aspects of Jesus’ character. They outwardly respond (even with sincerity) because they admire Jesus’ teachings on various topics, his ability and willingness to heal and feed the poor, his goodness and other attractive traits. This type of follower of Jesus is not necessarily following him in order to find forgiveness of his or her sins. (John 6:2) They may be following Jesus because in their mind, he is a great counter-cultural revolutionary similar to Che Guevara but nonviolent. Teachers using the chronological foundational method of teaching trust that God will use a deep understanding of the Gospel,

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5 For a modern day look at how some people compare Jesus to Che Guevara see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Che_Jesus.

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anchored in the key doctrines of the Old Testament, to keep people from a superficial Christianity and a superficial Jesus.

It’s not only the things that people believe about Jesus that makes them qualify as shallow or superficial. It’s also the method that is used in order for them to “get saved.” Some of the things that people have to do in order to show that they have believed in Christ are raising the hand (usually with eyes closed); looking forward at the preacher while everyone else has their eyes closed; standing while everyone else remains sitting; walking down the aisle to the front of the church or stadium; signing a card; and/or being baptized. In the book “Revivals and Revivalism” by Ian Murray, he states that the famous preacher Finney "believed that all that was needed for conversion was a resolution signified by standing, kneeling, or coming forward, and because the Holy Spirit always acts when a sinner acts, the public resolution could be treated as ‘identical with the miraculous inward change of sudden conversion.’"

Many people have done these outward things without admitting to God that they are sinners. Often they are left with a false hope of salvation based on whether they “did it right.” Did they raise their hand or walk the aisle sincerely and correctly? Wouldn’t we rather that they trust that Jesus “did it right” when he died on the cross as payment for sins? The response to the evangelist may be genuine, heart-felt and even emotional, especially when combined with the right type of music and lighting. Do those people really have salvation? God uses a deep understanding of the Gospel anchored in the key doctrines of the Old Testament to keep people from confiding in outward public showings of something that in reality is based on objective facts and intellectually understood. This is not to say that there’s no need for a spiritual appropriation in the inner man, but feelings must be based on facts.

When I was twelve years old, I was invited to go to a Bible Church in the suburbs of Chicago for a pizza night. At the time my parents believed that it was sinful to even go into a Protestant church, let alone listen to a Protestant sermon. I begged and pleaded. I told them that my friend wanted me to go and that they had promised that everybody would stay in the church cafeteria. Finally, my parents relented. Little did I know that after pizza, all of the kids would be marched into the church sanctuary in order to hear a sermon with an altar call. All eyes were instructed to be closed as the visiting preacher from Canada asked, “Who wants to accept Jesus as their Savior tonight?” I raised my hand thinking that the Protestant way that the priest gives out the Eucharist must be by first asking the people if they want it. I cheated and opened my eyes. To my horror, I was the only one with a raised hand. “What a bunch of heathens these Protestants are. None of them want to take communion!” Then I thought, “Well, why bother to have communion when there’s only one kid here that wants it?” In the vocabulary of this Catholic twelve year old, “accepting Christ” meant taking Holy Communion. What else could it have meant? Was I saved because I raised my hand to accept Christ? I know that I was not.

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6 For a discussion on easy believism please see: http://www.rogershermansociety.org/easy-believism.htm.
7 Criticism has been made of Billy Graham’s crusades using these technics, yet in the literature of the Billy Graham Association care has taken to explain the truth regarding facts, faith, and feelings. See: https://billygraham.org/decision-magazine/april-2008/facts-faith-and-feeling-being-sure-of-your-salvation/.
Some say the Gospel is first and foremost an objective set of facts that one must believe. Others emphasize that it’s primarily a mystical, subjective feeling that the Holy Spirit works in the heart. On page 12 of the aforementioned book “Firm Foundations,” Trevor McIlwain states, “Many confuse the Gospel, God’s work FOR us in Christ, with God’s work IN us by the Holy Spirit. The Gospel is entirely objective. The Gospel is not about the change which needs to be made in us and it does not take place within us. It was completed in Christ, quite apart from us, almost 2,000 years ago. The Gospel is not dependent on man in any way.”

In his doctoral dissertation on chronological Bible storying Colgate disagrees. “God cannot be ‘boxed in’”. He sometimes draws individuals to complete surrender to Jesus through unique and personal ways that are subjective in nature. For example, Jesus looked into the heart of individuals and without quizzing them on their understanding of some historical objective creed gave indication of their salvation (e.g.… the Roman centurion, the thief on the cross, and Zacharias).”

The terminology that some preachers use turns the attention to what the listeners must do outwardly, rather than what God has already done on their behalf through Christ. “Accept Jesus into your heart.” “Ask Jesus to wash away your sins.” “Make a decision for Christ.” “Give your heart to Jesus,” “Give your life to Jesus,” “Ask Jesus to give you eternal life.” “Make him your Lord.” “Lay hold of Christ.” “Open your heart to Christ.” “Become a follower of Jesus.” “Celebrate Jesus.” And in Spanish, “Rendirse a los pies de Jesucristo,” which translated means “Surrender yourself to the feet of Jesus Christ.” These are common examples of things people are asked to do in order to be in a right relationship with God. Often people are asked to do these things immediately after the preacher has told them that there’s nothing that they can do in order to be saved. (Ephesians 2:8, John 6:28) It’s no wonder many people get confused. Even correct terminology such as “ye must be born again” was misunderstood by Nicodemus and needed to be explained. (John 3:1-21)

Revelation 3:20 states: “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” The context from verses 14-19 show that Jesus is talking to believers that have turned away from following Christ. It is admirable if an evangelist using this verse wants the unsaved audience to invite Jesus into their lives by opening up the door to their hearts. But if the listener doesn’t understand that he or she is a helpless sinner that deserves judgement, it’s no wonder Jesus will not come into them even if they ask.

In a 2014 summer camp for elementary age children in Eastern Pennsylvania, the kids had a campfire on the next to last evening. They were told that they were supposed to share with everyone if they had “accepted Jesus into their hearts”. The staff leader was visibly upset when the children described their positive reflections on what the week at camp had meant to them. Some children started by saying that they thanked God for an opportunity to make new friends, ride a horse, or swim. To one young child the leader sternly shouted “So where is Jesus right now?” He was hoping that he would respond, “In my heart.” When the third grader replied “sitting at the right hand of the Father,” he screamed, “You know I’m not meaning that! Isn’t He

8 Jack Colgate’s entire dissertation on storying can be found at: http://africa.shellbooks.org/index.php/download-books/choose-by-category/category/5-bible-storying. His point on the Gospel being subjective can be found on page 13, footnote 8.
in your heart?” I, the author, witnessed this event. One has to wonder why people would pressure others into confessing that they have Jesus in their heart when it’s evident that they do not understand the terminology.

Preachers that use these types of invitations often base what they do on Romans 10:9 which states that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. If this was literally true, it would mean that a person who was mute or on his deathbed and unable to talk would not be able to be saved because they would not be able to “confess.” Verses like this one must be taken in context. There are many people that intellectually believe God raised Jesus from the grave, yet are not saved. I can use myself as an example. When I was a Roman Catholic I would have emphatically stated that I believe that God raised Jesus from the grave and I even would have confessed the Lord Jesus with my mouth, but since I was trusting in my own good works to pay for my sins, Biblically speaking, I was not saved. (Galatians 2:16) People must not only understand the words in the Bible, they must understand what the words mean in Biblical context. Bill Dillon, Founder of the Sonshine Gospel Mission in Chicago, often said, “It is necessary to interpret Scripture in the light of Scripture, not in the light of tradition.” God uses a deep understanding of the Gospel anchored in the key doctrines of the Old Testament to keep people from a false sense of security in spiritual sounding words based in religious tradition that they were told to repeat but often didn’t understand.

The Challenges and Benefits of the Method in a Western Context

The amount of time needed to adequately teach the chronological foundational method is probably its biggest drawback and challenge. It definitely takes time in order to chronologically teach all, or most of the lessons. This seems to be a bigger issue in Western society (and churches) because one of the hallmarks of Western culture is the emphasis on things being “fast.” The 2012 Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project observed that modern hyper-connectivity includes a need for instant gratification, and results in loss of patience when people have to actually wait for something.9

Another challenge can be the inner fight that the teacher often has to “jump ahead” in the story. After all, mature Christians know the “end of the story.” This produces a desire to “get to the good part” of the Biblical narrative which is forgiveness for our sins through Christ’s sacrificial death and His resurrection. Teachers that are convinced that a slow and methodical teaching of the truths of the Old Testament is the best way to teach, are sometimes tempted to

9 To read more about today’s fast pace of life please see: https://www.questia.com/magazine/1G1-294194408/dealing-with-hyperconnectivity
abandon this methodology when they sense that their audience is not willing (or able) to listen to hours and hours of foundational teaching.

A big struggle is keeping the audience more or less “on the same page” when individuals can’t attend the lessons. A solution to this problem can be taping the lessons when they are taught and then distributing the tapes to the people that are absent. Many of the languages that the chronological lessons have been translated into also have been professionally taped. Another fix is to distribute written copies of the individual lessons to those that occasionally cannot attend the studies. There are books that are available in English that have all of the lessons printed, however other languages may or may not have this advantage.

Another drawback to using the chronological foundational method to teach is that it takes a higher level of commitment. It’s much easier for Sunday school teachers to just play a D.V.D. rather than researching and studying for each lesson. The children’s minister at a large church in Florida complained to the author of this paper about the chronological teaching method. She eventually abandoned it, but not because she thought that it was a subpar method of teaching. To the contrary, she felt frustrated because while she knew that it was a superior way of teaching, her Sunday school teachers didn’t want to take the time to prepare. The chronological approach to teaching does take some lesson preparation time (on average three to four hours per lesson), but in the author’s opinion, this doesn’t seem to be excessive. The advantage is that in many major languages of the world (including English), the lessons are already prepared in written form and several also have video versions.

Sometimes those that have tried to use this method have based their assessment of whether or not it is successful by the size of the crowds. Success is difficult to define, because Biblically speaking success doesn’t necessarily mean huge numbers of converts. For example, Noah was successful in preaching but only eight people were saved on the ark. (1 Peter 3:20, 2 Peter 2:5) Once again I quote Bill Dillon in his book God’s Work in God’s Way: “To report so many converts in one year is the devil’s bait to catch the superficial winner of souls. We measure the prosperity of our churches not by the spiritual strength of the members, but by the numerical length of the roll. Evangelists are too often caught in the snare of numbers, and continually tempted to parade mere numerical results as a test of success.” Indeed, statistics show that the chronological approach to evangelism and discipleship has been successful when used to win converts; however it can be argued that the bigger success comes from making disciples that respond to the Gospel message on the basis of solid facts rather than only feelings, emotions, or felt-needs. Those that prefer the chronological method claim that the solidity of the decision for Christ is stronger when a person is first deeply discipled in Old Testament teaching, rather than a much quicker “4 Spiritual Laws” or “How to have a Happy and Meaningful Life” approach.

In that the chronological Bible lessons have been translated into hundreds of languages, a list of the languages that have audio versions would require additional inquiry. One of the best audio versions available in English is: https://www.amazon.com/Stranger-Road-Emmaus-John-Cross/dp/8900820826.

One of the best video versions of the chronological teaching is found at: http://www.goodseed.com/the-stranger-on-the-road-to-emmaus.html-audiovisual.

The 4 Spiritual Laws can be read online at: http://crustore.org/four-laws-english/. For information on how to buy How to have a Happy and Meaningful Life please see: http://www.lifeway.com/Product/how-to-have-a-full-and-meaningful-life-tract-P001116387.
Traditionally teachers have tried to get people saved as quickly as possible. What we call “discipleship” is really then filling this “new believer” in on all the details that idealistically he or she should have known in the first place, even before they made their “decision” for Christ. Those that like the chronological approach have realized that the chronological method “disciples” unbelievers first, and gives them more than enough information to make rational decisions to choose to believe in Christ, or to reject Him. Either way, it is based on objective facts.

If after going through hours and days of foundational teaching, someone does decide to reject Christ, at least the teacher has the confidence that there really wasn’t anything that he or she could have said or taught differently that would have made a difference. The reason for this is because by the time the Gospel is presented after the death, burial, and resurrection has been taught, the student has now seen Jesus presented as the Holy One, Righteous, the only Savior, the Deliverer of sinners, God’s Anointed one, Prophet, Priest, King, God, man, unchangeable, judge, supreme, sovereign, merciful, loving, gracious, all-knowing, Lord, Messiah, and a great teacher. Jesus is shown to be the one that has all authority over sickness, nature, sin, Satan and death. Finally, he’s also illustrated through the types or metaphorical examples such as The Word, the Lamb of God, the Light, the Bread of Life, the Door, the Good Shepherd, and the True Vine. (John, 1:1, 29, 6:35, 8:12, 10:9, 11, 15:1)

Throughout the chronological stories man is shown to be a sinner and helpless to save himself. He must have faith in order to please God and be saved. Man needs God. Man can come to God only according to God’s will and plan. Man who is born once is under Satan’s rule. Satan fights against God and His will. He is a liar and deceiver. He hates man. All of these themes are emphasized over and over again throughout the Gospel narratives. Because the whole Gospel story takes time to tell often the unbelievers willfully drop out of the studies because they become offended at the telling of truth long before the stories of the death, burial, and resurrection are even presented. Teachers using the chronological foundational method testify that of those that finish the studies a high percentage of them choose to believe in Christ as their Savior.

The History of the Chronological Teaching Method

One great reason for choosing the chronological foundational method is the successful history of its usage around the world. In order to understand why so many people from different denominations and languages and cultures in many countries have fallen in love with this teaching method, it’s helpful to look at its early history.

Australian born missionary Trevor McIlwain tells the story of how God led him to develop the chronological foundational approach to evangelism in the book “Firm Foundations Creation
to Christ.” Over centuries, the Palawano Tribe in the southwest portion of the Philippines was a tribe that had many bad encounters with Muslims. According to Trevor, the Muslims had “oppressed, massacred, and molested” the Palawanos. Filipino settlers who had migrated from other islands also tried to take advantage of the uneducated and peaceful Palawanos because their land was good for growing coconuts and rice. During World War II, the Japanese came and killed many of the Palawanos. The American liberation military forces liked the Palawanos who had helped them fight the Japanese. In return, the Palawanos adored the Americans. When American missionaries came into the tribe after the war, the Palawanos gladly embraced what they thought was Christianity. Trevor states that one man told him, “We would have done anything for that first missionary. If he had asked us to cut our fingers off, we would have gladly done it for him.”

Superficial Christianity based on good works grew throughout the tribe. This is what missionaries call syncretism. According to the Encyclopedia of Religion, religious syncretism is “the mingling of faiths that come in contact one with another.” The Palawanos had “a form of Godliness, but were denying the power thereof.” (2 Timothy 3:5) For many years the missionaries didn’t realize that the Palawanos really didn’t understand the Gospel, because the missionaries didn’t speak their heart language. They had tried to reach them through the trade language. When Trevor and other missionaries learned Palawano, it became apparent that what the Palawanos needed most was to be retaught in their own language and in a way that would minimize confusion. Trevor’s “new” method really was not new at all. As was stated earlier, even Jesus taught this way on the road to Emmaus.

After having so much success in seeing the Palawanos come to a Biblical faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, Trevor began teaching seminars to other church planters with New Tribes Mission (also called NTM). These other missionaries digested Trevors’s ideas and put them into practice. The January 1986 edition of the NTM’s magazine entitled “Brown Gold” tells how Bob Kennell and George Walker shared the Gospel at Sabibi to the Bisorio Tribe of Papua New Guinea, after over 4 weeks of teaching chronologically. Forty-five tribesmen and women had accepted Christ. February’s edition tells about how Merrill Dyck in the Pume Tribe of Venezuela successfully evangelized using the same new method. The March issue has a story about the creative way that Gene Gutwein in the So Tribe of Thailand wrote a book about two fictional tribal men named “Sii” and “Saa.” The So man named “Laud” introduces them to the book of the Creator. This was the means that Gene used to introduce chronological teaching to the literate So people. The same issue has an article about the Higaonon and the Tala Andig in the Philippines trusting God when they heard a presentation of the Gospel using the chronological foundational teaching method.

NTM missionary Don Schlatter wrote about the Lawa Tribe in Thailand being taught chronologically in May’s edition of Brown Gold magazine. The next tribes to receive the Gospel using this new method are the Lamogai in West New Britian, the Iteri in Papua New Guinea, and the Kayung in Indonesia. The NTM missionaries that were using this new method were having so much success that the leadership of NTM decided to make it mandatory that all of their missionaries should begin to translate Trevor’s teaching material into the language of each of their respective tribes. From this time on, almost every issue of NTM’s monthly magazine

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contains stories of various tribes embracing the Gospel through the chronological foundational teaching. This tradition continues to the present day except the name of the magazine has been changed to “NTM@Work.” In December of 1987 Trevor’s English language teaching notes were also offered for sale to the public in book form called “Building of Firm Foundations.” For the first time, the rest of the Christian world was getting a glimpse of this method.

Around the same time that Trevor McIlwain was crafting his teaching method, another NTM missionary couple in the Philippines, Del and Rachel Sue Schultze, developed a similar approach to teaching. They called it “God and Man.” In 1987, they published a 35 lesson book for the Ilongot Tribe. Six attributes of God were emphasized in each lesson: God’s righteousness, God’s omnipotence, God’s omniscience, that God is the source of grace, that He hates sin, and always keeps his promises. “God and Man” was not chosen as the official method of NTM because Trevor McIlwain’s “Building on Firm Foundations” contained more stories and had already proven to be effective in several tribes. Nevertheless, it has been translated into the Indonesian language and used there since 1994.

Other Tools Related Chronological Bible Teaching Methods

Quite possibly the first non-NTM missionary to “tweak” Trevor McIlwain’s book was a Floridian named Bill Perry. Bill had joined a mission organization (called InterFACE) that reaches international students studying in the United States. Bill realized that his mission agency had no successful teacher’s manual or handbook to use in order to teach these students. In the late 1980s, he found out about the new method developed by NTM, but there was one huge problem. Trevor McIlwain’s book contained too many lessons to fit into a fifteen week school semester. With permission from NTM, he combined and reduced the teaching materials producing a twelve lesson book called “Storyteller’s Bible Study for Internationals.” It was first published in 1991 and has sold over 7000 copies in English alone. It has now been translated into eight languages including Spanish, Brazilian Portuguese, Mandarin, Napali, Vietnamese, and Mongolian. A German translation is in development.

Up until June of 1987 the chronological teaching method was widely known within NTM but not many other mission organizations had heard about how it was revolutionizing the way that people were being evangelized and discipled. The lack of knowledge of the chronological method began to change in January of 1990. A 26 minute film called “Ee-Taow” was released showing how the Mok Tribe in Papua New Guinea received the Gospel. Before the missionaries came, they had believed that God was two different birds. In the film Mark and Gloria Zook are shown learning their language and teaching them using the chronological method of evangelism. At the end of the film almost the entire tribe was dancing, jumping up and down, and praising God because they believed in Jesus. The Mok grabbed Mark Zook and threw him up in the air.

13 Storyteller’s Bible Study for Internationals can be purchased at: http://multilanguage.com/feature.htm.
just like a coach that has won a big football game. This film has been translated into many languages and has been shown in churches all over the world. Over the years NTM has highlighted the chronological method of evangelism in several other successful films such as “The Taliabo Story”, “Now We See Clearly”, and “Ee Taow – The Next Chapter”. Trevor McIlwain also filmed a chronological teaching seminar which also has been translated into Spanish.\(^\text{14}\)

As mentioned earlier, “Building on Firm Foundations” by Trevor McIlwain was originally written to teach tribal audiences who have an animistic worldview. It was a seventy lesson, multivolume set mainly used by fellow NTM missionaries. Due to the demand for this material to be used for Western audiences, NTM and Mr. McIlwain decided to rewrite, edit, and print a condensed version of the books and included maps, charts, and posters. This new book was called “Firm Foundations Creation to Christ.”

According to missionary Don Pederson of NTM, the teaching method featured in the book “Firm Foundations Creation to Christ” is now being used by some of the missionaries from some of the largest mission organizations in the world. Some of these are:


Almost all of the 160 languages where NTM missionaries are working either have the “Building on Firm Foundations” or the “Firm Foundations Creation to Christ” lesson books already translated or are in the process of having it translated. Here are some of the other languages that now have “Firm Foundations Creation to Christ”:

Afrikaans, Albanian, Amharic, Arabic, Ashaninka, Ayangan Ifugao, Azeri, Bambara, Bengali, Bulgarian, Burmese, Chinese (Traditional and Simplified), Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dendi, Farsi, French (For West Africa), Dutch (For Surinam), Georgian, German, Guarani, Gujarati, Haitian Creole, Hindi, Hungarian, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Kazakh, Khmer, Kikaonde, KiMwani, Korean, Kyrgyz, Lithuanian, Loose leaf, Luganda, Marathi, Mazhar, Mongolian, Nepalese, Pidgin (Papua New Guinea), Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Rukwangali, Runyankore, Russian, Sango, Shangaan, Songhai, Spanish, Swahili, Tamil, Telegu, Vietnamese, Urdu, Ukrainian, and Yupic, and Zulu.

(Most of these are larger languages that are being worked with by mission agencies other than NTM.)

In the late 1980’s, Rick Johnson with International Action Ministries out of San Diego California recorded 30 lessons of chronological teaching in Spanish titled “Edifiquemos Sobre Cimientos Firmes” (which in English would mean “We Build on Firm Foundations”). This grew into a 175 page book which is much smaller than the almost 600 page edition of NTM’s “Firm Foundations” and does not come with all the maps, charts, and posters. Rick has said that one of the major reasons that he created his book was that the “high cost, advanced vocabulary and structure” of the Spanish translation of NTM’s “Firm Foundations” book made it undesirable in poorer Latin American communities. So far he has published almost 20,000 copies. This book has also been translated into the Chatino language of Mexico. He teaches six to ten seminars per year on how to disciple people through teaching chronologically. Usually Mr. Johnson’s seminars last three to four days.

A children’s edition of the “Firm Foundations” material has also been written by Jan Harris of NTM. There are assorted other adult and children’s workbooks, charts, posters, and maps that go along with the “Firm Foundations” books. Currently, NTM is in the process of renaming and adding to the “Firm Foundations” book by including lessons from the book of Acts and the final part of Revelation as a way to complete the picture of the salvation offered to those who believe (not just salvation from the penalty of sin) and the victory that was won at the Cross. According to an internal email sent to the NTM members in March, 2016 the new title will be “Eternity to Eternity.”

Missionaries have found that the understanding of the chronological Bible stories is enhanced when they use some type of Bible picture or art work that shows the audience what they are talking about. In medieval times stained glass windows served to tell Biblical stories to illiterate lay people, as well as making the churches more beautiful. Some have said that these stained glass windows probably had a more of an impact on the people than the sermons themselves. Often these windows had pictures of famous Biblical events such as Eve being tempted by the serpent, or Noah’s ark. It could be said that the artists that created those windows were the forerunners of today’s artists that continue to aid chronological Bible story teachers.

In 1987, artist Caloy Gabuco painted 105 chronological pictures. It was a joint venture between the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (now called the Southern Baptist’s International Mission Board) and NTM. These drawings are used by teachers of the chronological method even to this day. In 1996 the Northern Canada Evangelical Mission Distributors published the same set of 105 chronological pictures but shrunk them down to a booklet size called “The Story of God”. In 2014, NTM switched to using chronological

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17 To read more on the history of stained glass windows see: http://www.americanvisionwindows.com/the-history-of-stained-glass-windows/.
18 Artist Caloy Gabuco’s chronological pictures can be purchased at: http://www.ntmbookstore.com/bible-story-pictures-s/1514.htm.
19 The Story of God booklets can be purchased at: NCMD PO Box 3030 Prince Albert SK S6V 7V4.
Bible pictures from an organization called Foundation Matters from Derby, England. Other chronological Bible cards are available from “The Glory Story”, and “Abeka”.21

There is a unique 325 page color chronological comic book called “Good and Evil” which is published by NGJ Ministries.22 The catalyst for the creation of a chronological Bible comic book comes from an unusual source. Rebekah Pearl was a NTM missionary in the Kumboi Tribe of Papua New Guinea. Rebekah’s father Michael Pearl is the founder and director of a ministry called “No Greater Joy”. The aforementioned NTM/Southern Baptist cards were available to Rebekah, but they were expensive to purchase. Michael Pearl wanted to help his daughter with this problem. Michael and Danny Bulanadi, formerly an artist at Marvel Comics, got together and developed a beautiful colored chronological comic book. It was first printed in 2008 and more than 230,000 copies have been published in English alone.

What was originally an idea meant to bless one small tribe in Papua New Guinea has turned into something much bigger than the Pearls ever dreamed possible. Currently, the “Good and Evil” comic book has been translated into:


“Good and Evil” is widely used in prisons and in outreaches to the military. This chronological Bible comic book can go into places and countries where Bibles are not permitted and also carries the message in a way that can reach people who normally would not be interested in reading a typical Bible.

When it comes to developing the chronological approach to evangelism another noteworthy person is a Canadian named John Cross. In 1996, John and his wife along with seven other people started a mission organization called GoodSeed International. John has written several books including “The Stranger on the Road to Emmaus” which was published in 1997. This book differs from Trevor McIlwain’s books in that it is in novel form, rather than the outline format that Trevor had used. Other GoodSeed books include “All that the Prophets have

20 Foundation Matters chronological pictures can be purchased at: http://www.foundationmatters.org/contact.
22 Good and Evil can be purchased at the following website: www.NoGreaterJoy.org.

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Spoken” in 2001, “The Lamb” in 2004, and “By this Name” in 2007. Each book, in one way or another, relates to the chronological teaching but was written for different types of audiences depending upon their religious backgrounds. So far the GoodSeed books have been translated into:

Amharic, Arabic, Chechen, Chinese, Czech, Dutch, Faroese, Farsi, French, German, Hebrew, Hungarian, Korean, Luxembourgish, Mongolian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Thai, and Turkish.

Many of the missionaries with GoodSeed International teach seminars on how to effectively teach the chronological method. John Cross was filmed teaching all of the chronological lessons. This is a great resource in English. Another product of GoodSeed International is a miniature tabernacle set perfect for teaching the tabernacle lesson.23

Paul Bramson, a missionary to West Africa, learned French and Wolof. In the early 1990’s, he wrote and recorded “The Way of Righteousness,” a 100 program chronological Bible teaching radio series in Wolof. He converted the radio programs into a Muslim seeker-friendly book. He then wrote “King of Glory,” a chronological Gospel, illustrated book and movie.24 The radio series has been translated into 100 languages for broadcast in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. He has a mission called Rock International which stands for: Resources of Crucial Knowledge and Relief, Opportunity & Care for Kids.

Don Osswarde, a missionary to Russia, has adapted all fifty lessons of the Firm Foundations Creation to Christ into worksheets in English. Apparently he reaches out to Russians that are learning the English language. Don found a Russian version of Trevor McIlwain’s book at a Christian book market, and decided to develop a course of study based on these lessons. His materials, when used in conjunction with the “Firm Foundations” book, can be a great blessing.25

One of the greatest evangelistic tools has been the Jesus Film Project. Originally released in 1979, “The Jesus Film” has been translated into more than 1000 languages. It is estimated that 200,000,000 have indicated that they want to follow Christ after watching the movie. Evangelists that show “The Jesus Film” report that they have had even greater success when they first show the film “God’s Story: From Creation to Eternity” or “The Hope,” because both of these films chronologically present key Old Testament stories that help to better understand the message of “The Jesus Film.”26 “God’s Story: From Creation to Eternity” is now available in over 170 languages. It’s the winner of three Golden Halo Awards: best production, best direction, and best screenplay.

23 GoodSeed books, films, and other chronological materials and tools can purchase at: http://www.goodseed.com/tools.html.
24 Paul Bramson’s books, films, and other materials for teaching Muslims chronologically can be purchased at: http://www.rockintl.org/index.php/store.
25 Don Ossewaarde’s questions can be downloaded for free from his website at: http://www.donossewaarde.com/Ministry/literature/Literaturepage.htm.
26 The chronological films God’s Story: From Creation to Eternity and The Hope can be purchased at: http://christiananswers.net/evangelism/methods/chronological.html.

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Light in Action produces materials for communicating the gospel through film. They do this by unveiling God’s Word chronologically through the Old and New Testaments, laying foundations for a clear understanding of salvation through Christ. Their goal is to create dynamic and modern resources for the body of Christ to use. They are dubbing the English audio into Portuguese, and translating subtitles into over 30 other languages. Their goal is to subtitle their films into over 100 languages and to dub their films into the largest language groups of the world.  

The OneStory Quest program is a two to three year program in affiliation with CRU, Pioneers, TWR, Wycliffe, The Seed Company, YWAM, and the CMA. They seek to make a story set of twenty-five to forty chronological Bible lessons. By 2016, they had reached the following languages:


Probably the greatest use of chronological Bible study in the United States is “The Gospel Project” curriculum for Sunday school, published by LifeWay. The project began in 2012. Dr. Ed Stetzer was the one of the original driving forces for “The Gospel Project”, including John Kramp. Trevor McIlwain’s Firm Foundations chronological Bible teaching was perhaps in a broad sense influential in the development of “The Gospel Project,” but the team that produced the original lessons talked more about the “drama of scripture.” “The Gospel Project” consists of ninety-nine essential doctrines of Christian faith presented using a three year study plan, eighteen months in Old Testament, and eighteen months in New Testament. Currently, over one million people throughout North America are using this material, primarily in the Southern Baptist Churches.

“The Gospel Project for Kids” is also part of “The Gospel Project” curriculum. Molly Smith serves as the Director of Children’s Ministries at First Baptist Church, Henderson Tennessee. She writes that she likes the chronological method of teaching children because the course is

27 Light in Action films can be purchased at: http://www.lightinaction.org/.
28 More information about the OneStory Quest program can be found at: http://ywamonestory.org/about/.
29 Lifeway’s The Gospel Project can be purchased at: http://www.lifeway.com/n/Product-Family/The-Gospel-Project.
Gospel centered, kid friendly, encourages retention of important information, is technology savvy, and because it teaches the teachers. 

The second largest audience of chronological Bible teaching in the United States is Awana’s “TruthSeekers” program which is for third to sixth graders. The curriculum is a collaboration between Awana Clubs International and NTM. It was developed by Awana missionaries Terry and Linda Davis in Papua New Guinea. Presenting a clear picture of God, the curriculum explains the basics of God’s Word for children who may have confusing spiritual beliefs. These lessons are perfect for children whose spiritual fundamentals are lacking, because “TruthSeekers” begins with the very foundation of the Christian faith. In recent years, Awana has grown internationally to more than 3,500,000 children participating in 117 countries. Not all of those children are or will be in the “TruthSeekers” division, but the potential for children worldwide to receive chronological Bible training through Awana is huge.

Dr. Michael Claunch is Senior Pastor at Saint Andrews Baptist Church in Panama City Florida. He and his son are developing a wooden walking stick that has chronological Bible story pictures etched into it. By starting at the top and slowly turning the stick the storyteller can show others the pictures of the Bible stories. The walking stick is functional and is a great conversation piece. It has the potential to be a great tool to native evangelists because a walking stick is the type of thing that they would use in developing countries. It comes in two pieces for portability and can be easily screwed together. As of 2016, the prototypical walking stick is still being tweaked with regards to the lazur etchings of the Bible pictures, but Dr. Claunch and his son hope to eventually sell this unique tool for around $125 (U.S.).

Mrs. Iva May and her husband were missionaries in Zimbabwe, Africa with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. At a seminar in Kenya, they heard about the chronological Bible teaching method developed by NTM. When they came back to the United States in 1995, Iva developed a teaching program that divides Bible history into fourteen eras. She teaches seminars all over the United States and her materials (called “Chronological Bible Teaching/Discipleship”) have been translated into Spanish, Russian, French/Creole, and Hindi. She has had much influence with a mission group called Global Outreach International in Tupelo, Mississippi. Her organization is called Chronological Bible Teaching. Much of her materials are particularly helpful for teaching women.

Rev. Malcolm Smith, from San Antonio TX, developed a chronological Bible study course, complete with flash cards. It can be taught from beginning to end in only five days. “The Glory Story” is the radio and television broadcast version of this course and is now used in over fifty countries including many countries in North Africa, the Middle East, and Israel. Wycliffe

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31 More information about the Awana’s Truthseekers chronological curriculum for third to sixth grade age children can be found at: http://truthseekers-us.org/.  
32 More information about Dr. Claunch can be found at: http://www.sabc.org/our-leadership.html.  
33 For more information on Mrs. Ida May’s teaching materials and seminars go to: http://iva-may.blogspot.com/p/teaching-resources.html and http://www.chronologicalbibleteaching.com/.  
34 The Glory Story can be purchased at: http://theglorystory.com/bible-school/.
Bible Translators is helping to translate “The Glory Story” into many other languages of the world.

“Echo the Story” is a program put out by Sparkhouse.\(^{35}\) (Sparkhouse is one of three divisions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s publishing and media wing, the other two being Oxford and Fortress Press.) “Echo the Story” was first developed in a twelve session format in 2013. Later in 2014 and 2015 the thirty-six session format was released. Both formats teach the Biblical narrative chronologically starting in Genesis. Michael Novelli, the creator, geared it for youth and uses storytelling. Echo encourages students to “enter into each story imaginatively—making observations, drawing, writing, and participating in group dialogue.” Sparkhouse has a number of Sunday school curriculum projects that follow the Genesis-to-Revelation approach to presenting stories to kids in engaging ways, such as “Spark Classroom,” “Whirl Classroom,” “Holy Moly,” and “Connect.” Sparkhouse serves an ecumenical market, and as such, they recruit a team with a wide denominational range so that the resources reflect more than only Lutheran doctrine.

The Catholic Church has a chronological Bible product which is unlike the aforementioned Lutheran “Echo” curriculum in that the Catholic’s entrance into this chronological market is unashamedly Catholic. The doctrine taught has a Catholic viewpoint and is aimed at a Catholic audience.\(^{36}\) It is called “The Great Adventure Storybook” and is written by Emily Cavins, Lisa Bromschwig, Regina Neville, and Linda Wandrei. It is part of the “Great Adventure Bible Study Program”. It emphasizes six covenants: one holy couple – Adam and Eve; one holy family – Noah; one holy tribe – Abraham; one holy nation – Moses; one holy kingdom – David; and one holy church – Jesus Christ. It does follow the Bible’s chronological order except for having the Nicene Creed posted in the Old Testament. (The Nicene Creed mentions Jesus by name and of course Jesus arrives much later in the story, with the exception of theophanies.) There are places throughout where the authors note the supposed origin of various Catholic sacraments and the Rosary. On the question of evolution, this Catholic children’s Bible storybook presents the story of creation just as it is written in the Bible, which is important because the Catholic Church permits belief in theistic evolution. The apocryphal books are also part of this book because the Catholic Church teaches that these extra books are part of the Bible. It also comes with a color-coded timeline, and is beautifully illustrated.

\(^{35}\) *Echo the Story* can be purchased at: http://www.wearesparkhouse.org/teens/echothestory/36/.

\(^{36}\) More information about this book and how to purchase it can be found at: https://shop.ascensionpress.com/products/the-great-adventure-storybook.

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Chronological Bible Storying, and the Orality Movement

Just like a mother, chronological Bible teaching, (sometimes referred to as CBT), has given birth to children that are similar, and yet distinct. **Chronological Bible storying** (or CBS) could be called a subdivision of CBT. “CBS is unlike CBT in that it explicitly avoids mixing the stories with teaching. Instead, CBS seeks to present Biblical stories as directly as from scripture as possible with minimal explanation.”

Chronological Bible storytellers are very interested in getting the Gospel to unreached people groups that haven’t learned to read (what is sometimes called pre-literate). Bible storytellers do desire that these unreached people groups someday learn to read and have the Bible translated into their language. They feel that their strategies in evangelism, discipleship, and church planting actually help to encourage the desire for literacy in the long term. One of the largest organizations that encourage their missionaries to consider CBS strategies is the IMB of the Southern Baptist. Two other organizations that are working with many primarily illiterate unreached people groups are **Simply the Story** and **Share the Story**. Share the Story is a ministry of the New Frontiers USA family of churches.

Chronological Bible storying groups and Bible storying groups that are not necessarily telling Bible stories in chronological order have two things in common. First of all, most of these groups are part of what is called the “orality movement” and secondly, to a greater or lesser degree have been influenced by chronological Bible teaching groups. Some of the orality movement’s main groups are **NBS International** which stands for the Network of Biblical Storytellers International, and the International Orality Network. The **ION** is a network of over 2000 organizations that started in 2004 and grew out of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism. ION wants to “radically influence the way oral preference learners are evangelized and discipled in every people group.” There are some major differences of opinions between groups that teach the Bible chronologically and the groups that are in the storying and orality movements. It is good to see when appreciations for other viewpoints are expressed, such as on page 23 of J. O. Terry’s “Bible Storying Handbook for Short-Term Church Mission Teams and Mission Volunteers”. Here he thanks NTM missionary Dubby Rodda (who uses the chronological Bible teaching approach) for his help in developing his list of necessary doctrines to emphasize in the Bible stories in order to understand salvation. Mr. Terry, an IMB missionary to the Philippines, was greatly influenced by Trevor McIlwain.

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37 Quotation is taken from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chronological_Bible_Storying.
38 For more information on the storying method as used by the I.M.B. please see: https://storytogether.imb.org/.
40 For more information on orality groups please see: www.nbsint.org, and https://orality.net/about/.
41 O.J. Terry’s Bible Storying Handbook for Short-Term Church Mission Teams and Mission Volunteers can be found online at: https://orality.imb.org/files/1/409/BibleStoryingHandb.pdf. He also has several other books on Bible storying available through www.churchstarting.net
Testimonials of Converts and Teachers

The impact of the chronological Bible lessons, movies, and comic books is undeniable. Not only the depth of understanding of the Gospel is increased, but the walk of the believers that have been taught using the chronological method seems to be more solid than others. The chronological foundational Bible studies personally touched my life when my very own mother, Angie Skowron, asked me to teach her using this method. This is how it happened: One day my mom asked me to teach her the Bible. Up until then she never had wanted to hear anything that I had to say about God or the Bible. Seemingly it didn’t matter to her that I was a minister and missionary. She had always been very upset that I had left Catholicism when I was a teenager. When she said that she wanted to learn about the Bible’s true message, I could hardly contain my joy. She was now seventy-one years old and for many years my wife and I had prayed that God would do a work in her heart to make her hungry for God’s Word. We started in Genesis and studied every Friday evening for a year. We could tell that she understood each lesson. When we finished, I asked her if she was “born-again.” She answered in the affirmative. I asked her when that had happened and she answered very matter-of-factly “about 3 months ago.” I asked her to elaborate. She replied, “It was when we were studying the 10 commandments. I realized for the first time that following the 10 commandments can’t get me into heaven. I’ve broken every one of them. I’ve had other things in my life that I considered more important than God. I’ve thought badly of other people which Jesus says is like murdering them in my heart. I’ve coveted and lied. So the thing that I trusted in (the 10 commandments) showed me how far away from God that I really was. I thought, ‘I’m going end up in Hell’. Then the thought came to me… ‘There has to be more to Christianity than condemnation. Maybe if I trust only in Jesus and not at all in my own goodness… maybe then God will forgive me of my sins.’” She went on to say, “At that moment, I knew that all my sins had been forgiven. Then I thought, ‘This is probably what it means to be born-again!’” Had we not taken the time to start in the Old Testament, and study chronologically, she probably would never have understood the message.

People from almost every religious background have now studied God’s word chronologically. Of the many websites of organizations that promote chronological Bible teaching or storying there are a few that also contain testimonies of people that have converted to true Christianity that originally came from Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, Animistic, and Atheist backgrounds. Through this method many who are from liberal mainstream Christian denominations, Catholicism, Anglican, and Orthodox Christian have also come to rest solely in Christ’s provision for them on the cross rather than trying to establish their righteousness through their own good works. (Titus 3:5) On the website of GoodSeed International at www.goodseed.com/blog/category/testimonies/ there are over twenty-four pages of testimonies from all over the world including many from the United States. At NTM’s website they have over four hundred articles on tribes that have trusted Christ through a chronological presentation of the Gospel. 42 YWAM also has a few testimonies on their website. 43

42 NTM’s testimonies are found at: https://usa.ntm.org/global-search?q=chronological
43 YWAM’s testimonies are found at: http://ywamonestory.org/.

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The Past, Present, and Future of Chronological Bible Teaching

Even though chronological Bible teaching and storying has grown and continues to grow into a huge worldwide phenomenon, there are still many church leaders, and pastors in the United States that have never heard of it. Nevertheless, just about every year since 1985, some new idea, Bible curriculum, book, manual, workbook, device, movie, website, or tool has been developed to further the teaching of the Bible chronologically. Given the plethora of mission organizations, denominations, and individual churches that are promoting the need for chronological Bible teaching, and the creativity with which God has blessed His body, it seems as though it’s just a matter of time before this style becomes the predominant method of Bible teaching worldwide. Testimonies exist of hundreds of mature believers that were evangelized and discipled using this method and are now using the same approach to lead others to the Lord. The rediscovery of how Jesus taught the two men on the road to Emmaus is a shining path forward for pastors, missionaries, evangelists, and Bible teachers that are committed to global evangelization, deep personal discipleship, and church planting.

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