

Firm Foundations

Creation to Christ

book 1

Chronological Teaching: Why and How

Trevor McIlwain



The Scripture version used in these lessons is the New King James Version (NKJV).

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Firm Foundations Creation to Christ (Revised Edition)
Book 1: Chronological Teaching: Why and How
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What is *Firm Foundations*?

Just what is *Firm Foundations*? It is foundational, chronological Bible teaching.

This method of teaching is patterned on God's progressive revelation of Himself and His plan to rescue people from sin, Satan and death. Lessons start "in the beginning." Moving through the Old and New Testaments, *Firm Foundations* highlights the themes that run through all of God's Word. This builds, from lesson to lesson, an understanding of the Bible as a whole.

This practical approach has been used all over the world, and is proven for:

- Evangelism
- Grounding new believers
- Teaching maturing believers
- Planting churches.

Firm Foundations arose from the experience of Trevor McIlwain in the 1960s. While working cross-culturally with a people group in the Philippines, Trevor saw the need to establish proper biblical foundations. He developed Bible lessons to meet that need. As Trevor states, "The Scriptures were progressively revealed by God within the context and framework of history. Therefore, the best way to teach divine truth in any culture is God's way, within the chronological and historical framework of the Scriptures."

Trevor shared this approach with other missionaries who were also teaching cross-culturally, initially distributing his basic outline and later detailed Bible lessons. They discovered, as he had, that this *Firm Foundations* approach was exceptionally effective.

When these missionaries returned home, their glowing testimonies inspired pastors and other Bible teachers to adopt this method. As a result, the *Firm Foundations* lessons were modified for churches and home Bible studies, and this approach has proven equally effective in English-speaking settings as in cross-cultural settings.

Since that time, adaptations of the *Firm Foundations* materials have been developed for many languages, cultural contexts and age groups.

You are now a part of the *Firm Foundations* legacy!

About This Curriculum

Firm Foundations: Creation to Christ is a set of Bible lessons by Trevor McIlwain.

This curriculum moves through key Bible passages to reveal truth about God and man. It covers Old Testament stories which reveal the holy nature and character of God and show that sinful man is separated from God and totally incapable of making himself acceptable to his perfect Creator. It also emphasizes stories and verses that highlight how God planned from the beginning to rescue man through a Deliverer. The New Testament lessons focus on the fulfillment of God's promises to provide a Savior, and show that the only way of salvation is through the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Firm Foundations: Creation to Christ is presented in five teacher's volumes:

- Book 1 Chronological Teaching: Why and How
- Book 2 Lessons 1-12: Creation — Cain and Abel
- Book 3 Lessons 13-24: The Flood — Ten Commandments
- Book 4 Lessons 25-36: The Tabernacle — Plots against Jesus
- Book 5 Lessons 37-48: Jesus calms the storm — Ascension

The course itself is for the teacher. Students use their Bibles, along with an optional study guide.

***Firm Foundations: Creation to Christ* includes:**

- Teacher's Guide
- Study Guide (complimentary copy for the teacher)
- Illustration posters for classroom use
- Maps, showing the locations referred to in the lessons
- Time Line, covering the events referred to in the lessons
- PowerPoint DVD, with slides of key points and illustrations for each lesson

Supplementary materials:

- Study Guides
- Posters, Maps, and Time Line are part of the Teacher Set, but can also be purchased separately.

Important:

For teaching in a cross-cultural setting, either with rural ethnic people or tribal groups, this curriculum's cross-cultural edition is more suitable and highly recommended.

Firm Foundations Materials Available

***Firm Foundations* by Trevor McIlwain (Teacher Guides and Study Guides available)**

Books 1-5: *Creation to Christ*

Book 6: *Secure in Christ*

Book 7: *Growing in Christ – Acts*

Book 8: *Growing in Christ – Romans*

Book 9: *Growing in Christ – Ephesians*

***Building on Firm Foundations [Cross-cultural Edition]* by Trevor McIlwain**

Volume 1: Guidelines for Evangelism and Teaching Believers

Volume 2: Evangelism: Genesis to the Ascension

Volume 3: Teaching New Believers: Genesis to the Ascension

Volume 4: Teaching New Believers: Acts

Volume 5: Teaching New Believers: Romans and Ephesians

Volume 6: Teaching New Believers: 1 Corinthians, 1 Timothy and Titus

Volume 7: Teaching New Believers: 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Revelation

Volume 8: Teaching New Believers: Galatians and Colossians

Volume 9: Teaching New Believers: 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Philemon and 2 Timothy

Volume 10: Teaching New Believers: Hebrews and James

Volume 11: Teaching New Believers: 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John and Jude

Volume 12: Teaching Maturing Believers: Genesis through the Epistles

Note that the latter BOFF volumes are in the process of revision or development. Check the NTM website for availability.

Information about the above publications, along with information about translated materials, and other resources, can be found at:

Canada: www.ntmc.ca or email bookstore@ntmc.ca or 519.369.2622

United Kingdom: <http://uk.ntm.org/shop> or email books@ntm.org.uk or 44 (0) 1472.387700

USA: www.ntmbooks.com or email books@ntm.org or 800.321.5375

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Dedication

With thankfulness and praise to God, this series of books is dedicated to my parents who, by their words and godly example, taught me that the Written Word and the Living Word are the only solid and lasting foundations for this life and for eternity.

Foreword

Life is filled with storms. That's why you and I prefer to live and work in buildings that have solid foundations; we are more confident that they will endure severe forces.

Spiritual foundations are even more important because they build for eternity. We are daily bombarded with distractions and are tempted to wander from the simplicity that is in Jesus Christ. In order to stand firm in the faith, we need to be solidly anchored in God's Word.

Firm Foundations: Creation to Christ has been a great tool for evangelizing non-Christians and for instructing believers in the whole counsel of God. In this curriculum, each of the 48 lessons is interconnected, building on God's wonderful plan of redemption revealed chronologically in the Old and New Testaments. This systematic teaching of God's story produces spiritual strength in students as they gain an in-depth knowledge of Him.

As you use this tried-and-tested material, your investment in study, prayer and teaching will, by God's grace, reap eternal rewards and give stability in daily life.

Oli G. Jacobsen
Chairman, International Ministries
New Tribes Mission

Acknowledgments

Originally, I wrote the series entitled *Building on Firm Foundations* (BOFF) as source material for New Tribes missionaries who work cross-culturally with unreached people groups throughout the world. The lessons included many illustrations based on my own experiences as a missionary in the Philippines. Later, when some missionaries related to their sending churches and friends how God had wonderfully blessed the teaching of His Word based on the chronological approach laid out in BOFF, pastors and Bible teachers began adapting the lessons for their own congregations. It was against this background that it was decided to produce an adapted version of the earlier books of BOFF that would be better suited for teaching people living in modern societies.

Nancy Everson took up the challenge and offered to work with me on this project. Nancy assisted in adapting the original text and illustrations, developing visuals and adding cross-references. Never did we imagine that these lessons, entitled *Firm Foundations: Creation to Christ* (FFCC), would spread throughout the world and be translated into so many different languages.

Recently, a revised edition of the evangelistic phase of BOFF was published, so it was decided that FFCC should also be revised. I am deeply thankful to Ruth Brendle for her tireless efforts in seeing this project to completion. I also acknowledge the editing contributions made by Paul and Pam Rasmussen, suggestions from Don Pederson, illustrations drawn by Bill Pittenger, map and poster work by Doug Lotz, and the valuable input from my wife, Frances. I know that each one who has contributed in some way to these lessons joins with me in thanking the Lord for His grace and guidance throughout this endeavor. Our prayer is that the Bible lessons in these books will bring great glory to God and lead to the salvation of many.

L. Trevor McIlwain

Part 1

Why the Bible Should
Be Taught Chronologically



1

The Master Builder's Plan

With a thunderous sound, the walls cracked and crumbled. Timbers splintered. The roof buckled, falling into pieces. Floor after floor crashed one upon another, crushing, trapping, killing the tenants. In a few moments, the high-rise apartments were reduced to rubble.

Investigation began to determine the cause of the disaster. Proof emerged, revealing that the builder had not followed proper specifications. Willing to gamble with the lives and the safety of human beings for the sake of money, he cut corners and economized.

The builder had disregarded the design specifications that the architect and engineers provided. He had followed his own way because it was easier and quicker and brought him greater profit.

The results? Sorrow! Destruction! Death!

It's just an example, but it speaks of what is happening all over the world when it comes to building the Church. Whether in evangelism or preaching and teaching of the Word of God, we often carelessly disregard our Master Builder's plans for building His Church. We are so engrossed in our own ideas, schemes and passions that we don't stop to consider if we are working according to God's divine directions or whether our work will pass His final scrutiny.

God's work of building His Church

God is the builder of His Church (Matthew 16:18). But He has chosen His earthly children to be partners together with Him (1 Corinthians 3:9).

The Christian's work in building the Church is similar to that of a building contractor. Just as a contractor is responsible to follow exactly the plans given to him by the architect, so we are responsible to follow God's plans for building His Church.

God is the true builder of all things. *"For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God"* (Hebrews 3:4).

God builds everything according to His eternal plans. He will not change. He will never accommodate man's ideas or modify His plans to go along with current trends. He will never permit any change in the specifications which He has laid down for all He has planned to do in what we call time. His work always has adequate foundations; He builds carefully, patiently and precisely. He refuses to take shortcuts in anything He does, and He never uses inferior materials or methods which are contrary to His holy and perfect nature.

The first account in Scripture of God's building work is when He created the heavens and the earth. *"By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast"* (Psalm 33:6, 9). God was the Creator – builder of all things, seen and unseen. He created everything according to His perfect plan, and He declared that it was all good (Genesis 1:31).

Later in the Scriptures we have the account of God's command to Noah to build an ark. After commanding him to build the ark, God did not leave Noah to formulate his own plans. God told Noah exactly what must be done. Noah, God's faithful workman, did everything just as the Lord commanded him (Genesis 6:22).

When God chose to dwell with Israel, He commanded Moses to build the tabernacle. And how was Moses to build it? *"For He said, 'See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain'"* (Hebrews 8:5). Every detail, from the silver sockets which were the foundations for the boards of the tabernacle to the outer coverings of badger skins, was to be made exactly according to the divine pattern shown to Moses on Mount Sinai. Moses faithfully followed these instructions. (Hebrews 3:2).

God's work of building the heavens and the earth was done by the power of His Word. Noah and Moses followed the words of God in all that they built. Likewise, God's present work of building His Church is also being accomplished through His mighty Word. *"For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"* (2 Corinthians 4:6).

The building of the universe was the work of God alone. He did not use any angelic or human agent. But the great work of building the Church, like the work of building the ark and the tabernacle, has been committed to His children. *"We have this*

treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Corinthians 4:7). *"We are ambassadors for Christ"* (2 Corinthians 5:20). *"You shall be witnesses to Me ... to the end of the earth"* (Acts 1:8). God has chosen to bring His Church to completion through the teaching of His Word by the members of the Church.

If the ark and the tabernacle had to be built exactly according to God's plan, should not the Church also be built according to His plan? Surely the Bride of Christ is of even greater importance than the ark or the tabernacle. The use for the ark came to an end, and the tabernacle was superseded by the temple, but the Church is to last for eternity. Therefore, *"If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are"* (1 Corinthians 3:17). Every man's work, in relationship to the building of the Church, is going to be tried by fire. It will all come under the scrutinizing gaze of the great Master Builder whose servants and co-laborers we are.

Whether we are seminary professors, pastors, missionaries, Bible class leaders, Sunday school teachers, youth workers, or concerned parents wishing to see our children taught the Word of God, *"We are God's fellow workers."* We must therefore be wise, taking careful note to make sure we are doing our work in the way He commanded (1 Corinthians 3:9-23).

Building as a wise master builder

Paul refers to himself as a wise master builder (1 Corinthians 3:10). He laid the foundations of the Gospel on which the Corinthians' faith and hope were built, and he warned the Bible teachers in Corinth to be careful how they built on those biblical foundations which he had laid (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

When I began my ministry on the mission field, I realized that I had a similar responsibility to that which Paul had. I was responsible to lay the foundations of the Gospel and then build up

**Teaching Principles
Applicable Everywhere.**

The chronological teaching principles presented in the *Firm Foundations* series grew out of my experiences on the mission field. You will notice as you read this book that many explanations and examples are from a missionary setting.

Please understand that the principles of chronological teaching are true regardless of where a person teaches. So, as you read this book, don't think, "Oh, that's just for missionaries." Following these biblical teaching principles is effective, whether teaching in a primitive jungle hut or in a metropolitan stained-glass church, or to a few people in a suburban home. Just as truth is truth no matter where you teach it, so also these biblical teaching principles are pertinent no matter where you use them.

the individual members of the Body of Christ in a remote island of the Philippines. I desired to be a wise master builder like Paul, but I wasn't sure how to be wise and careful as I built. I prayed for answers as the following questions gripped my mind and guided my search:

- By what standard did Paul judge his building methods and work and thus conclude that he was a wise master builder?
- How can all subsequent builders be sure that they are proceeding in the correct way and that their work will meet with divine approval?
- Has God only told us what to teach in His Word, or has He also shown us how to teach?
- Which is the clearest, most simple, and yet most comprehensive method of teaching the Word of God to prepare people for the Gospel, and to teach them God's way of salvation?
- How can we be sure that the foundations we lay, on which others are to rest their faith, will see them safely into Heaven and stand firm in the great day of testing?

- How should we teach in order to build up God's children and lead them into the knowledge of the whole counsel of God?
- What checklist should we use to determine if we are making headway, and whether the building is being brought to completion in accordance with the divine plan?

Years passed before I understood the answers to these questions. Why did it take so long? Because traditional Bible teaching methods influenced my thinking. I found the answers I needed when I finally looked to God's Word alone.

The effectiveness of biblical principles

After the Lord had shown me the biblical teaching principles that I present later in this book, He then opened opportunities for me to share these principles with others who were also searching. In 1980, I taught a seminar for missionaries in the Philippines. These biblical teaching principles excited and gripped the hearts of my co-workers who were struggling with problems identical to those I had faced in evangelism and in planting and guiding the development of churches to spiritual maturity. These missionaries returned to their work with fresh enthusiasm, for they now had clearer guidelines and precise goals for their teaching ministry.

Seminars were also held in Bolivia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Senegal, Thailand and the USA. These initial seminars provided biblical guidelines for evangelism. The missionaries went back to their ministries and laid down firm foundations for saving faith in Christ by teaching a chronological overview of the Bible story, beginning in Genesis and concluding with the ascension of Christ.

The results were immediate and lasting. Many people from various tribal groups have come to a clear understanding of God's nature and character, their own sinfulness, helplessness and

hopelessness, and Christ's all-sufficient saving work through His death, burial and resurrection. Their understanding of God's plan of salvation and the certainty of their faith far surpassed that of many others who had professed conversion previously. Furthermore, through chronological teaching, many of those sincere tribal people came to realize that they had misunderstood the missionaries' message when they were first taught. They are now trusting in a message which they clearly understand.

One of the first reports of great blessing came from Bob Kennell and George Walker. They had followed these scriptural methods when teaching the story of the Bible to the primitive, and previously unevangelized, Bisorio tribe in the Sepik region of Papua New Guinea. The Bisorio people responded to a message which they clearly understood from the Scriptures. Theirs is no blind faith, based merely on what the foreigner said. Instead, it is based on a clear understanding of the God of the Bible and the history of redemption.

Confusion about laying foundations

Christ and His Gospel are the only foundations which God has ordained as a basis for the faith of guilty sinners (1 Corinthians 3:11; 15:1-2). Nevertheless, there is great confusion, even among Christians, regarding these foundations and the correct way to establish them through preaching God's Word.

In the construction of any building, the foundations are the first part of the structure to be prepared. The majority of Gospel preaching, however, is usually done with very little foundational preparation. This lack has contributed to a multitude of false professions and the uncertainty of many new Christians about the foundations of their faith.

Another mistake Bible teachers tend to make is failing to teach the Bible consistently as one book, just as God has prepared it for us through

progressive revelation. Teachers of the Word carefully devise and prepare outlines, but few stop to consider that the Bible has an inbuilt teaching outline, which, if followed, will give a clear, uncomplicated, comprehensive coverage of the entire Word of God.

Many teachers approach the Bible as if it were a treasure chest full of beautiful, precious gems. We assume that these jewels have not been given a definite pattern or design. We think that the responsibility is ours to arrange the jewels in some order which will enhance their beauty and cause them to be better appreciated. While recognizing the value of the Scriptures, many Bible teachers fail to see that there is a definite, divinely-given teaching outline which runs through the entire Word of God. We therefore proceed to arrange the Scriptures into what we consider to be comprehensive and lucid outlines. This is a basic mistake. Admittedly, good Bible teaching outlines are helpful; but too much time is spent developing methods and theories for Bible teaching, and insufficient time is given to simply teaching the Scriptures as they have been written.

The majority of Christian teaching emphasizes individual doctrines of the Bible rather than presenting the Bible as one complete, interdependent revelation of God. Heresies, misinterpretation, overemphasis of certain Scriptures, and denominationalism can, in most cases, be traced to this lack of chronological and panoramic Bible teaching.

After many years of listening to nonsequential, topical, doctrinal sermons, most of which are based on isolated texts, many church members still do not know the Bible as one book. Often-repeated verses and some doctrines may be known; but the Scriptures, according to their divinely given historical structure, are seldom understood.

This is equally true in Sunday school programs. Children are usually taught stories

from the Bible out of chronological order, and large portions of God's Word are never taught to them at all. Even a faithful Sunday school pupil is unlikely to graduate with an overall knowledge of the Bible.

The approach when teaching the Scriptures in other lands to people without previous Bible knowledge has been similar. Few changes are made to the methods used in the homeland. Insufficient time is generally given to teach the Old Testament background and foundations for the Gospel. Syncretism of heathen and Christian beliefs is often the sad result. Many in foreign lands who have professed Christianity do not understand the Gospel, nor do they understand the Scriptures as one book.

Many missionaries are so eager to preach the Gospel that they feel it is an unnecessary waste of time to teach people too much of the historical portions of the Old Testament Scriptures. Nevertheless, these Old Testament historical sections form the basis for a clear understanding of the coming of Christ and the necessity of His

death, burial and resurrection. The Old Testament Scriptures, correctly taught, will prepare the heart of the believing sinner to receive the Gospel in true repentance and faith.

Objective and overview

The following chapters record my frustrations, my search, and also my joy at discovering divine teaching principles and guidelines in the Word of God. Additional volumes of *Firm Foundations: Creation to Christ* contain clear, simple, yet comprehensive lessons for the unsaved and the children of God which follow the flow of biblical history.

Through my own experiences, but more importantly, on the basis of the truth of God's Word, I will endeavor to show that the Scriptures were progressively revealed by God within the context and framework of history. Therefore, the best way to teach divine truth in any culture is God's way, within the chronological and historical framework of the Scriptures.