

The title is *Four Wrong Ways to Study the New Testament*. But there's much more implied here than that. *Revolutionary Bible Study* implies also that Bible study previously has not been revolutionary.

But it goes even further...deeper than that. This book is the first of its kind ever written, and the fact that it has taken so long to come up with a new approach to studying the New Testament is nothing less than shocking. The potential is nothing less than the revolutionizing of our faith. Now, what's been going on that was wrong? I want to trace back the roots of that, and then we'll move forward and see just how much is implied in what we are facing.

Please go back to about the year 260 A.D. There were very few manuscripts floating around at that time, but someone had the 13 letters of Paul, which were, by the way, the first to emerge that archaeologists can tell us about, and the ones most frequently reproduced. This gentleman walked into a bookbinder and said, "I would like to have Paul's 13 letters bound together." What happened after that moment was the greatest single tragedy and stumbling block ever to take place in all the history of Christendom. All else pales in the presence of the disaster that took place when that bookbinder got hold of those 13 letters.

Now, he had a heathen mind. He had a pagan way of looking at binding books. It was what they were doing in those days. If you were to walk into that same bookbinder and ask Aristotle's works to be bound together, well, they automatically would put the longest treatise of Aristotle first, then the second, then the third, then the fourth. The same would be of Cicero, of Plato, or of Homer. It didn't matter. They always gave the first place to that which was the longest.

Now, there's a reason for that, and that is because those treaties were not so much history, or at least every writer would write on a different subject, and those subjects were not connected. Aristotle would write on something like how to make speech - we call it rhetoric—and then he would write on something else about government. Paul's letters were treated the same way. All of them were treated as though they were not connected to one another, and yet the truth of the matter is that Paul's letters are more uniquely connected to one another than all the other writings of the New Testament combined.

Anyway, he looked over the letters and correctly decided that Paul's longest letter was Romans. Forget the fact that it was not Paul's first letter; it was his longest letter. The bookbinder then looked to find what would be the second longest, and he measured and measured correctly: it was 1 Corinthians, then 2 Corinthians. And then the next one was Galatians, although I'm told he probably missed it by one word; Ephesians might have had one word more in it. It doesn't really matter. The tragedy was building... Then came Philippians and Colossians, and then, to give you some idea how big a mess that was, the next letters that were sewn together were, in fact, some of Paul's earliest letters. It went all

the way to 2 Timothy, which is the last letter Paul ever wrote. But it's not the last of the 13 letters that were bound together. The last one was Philemon. And why was it last? Because it was the shortest.

Now, from that day forward, all of Paul's letters have been published by length, and for 1800 years, no one has ever questioned doing that. Or if they have, they haven't done it very seriously. Or, at best—and I do believe I own the world's first chronological New Testament—it was in the late 1800s, and it did not sell. In the last 20 years, we have seen a few New Testaments published, but basically all they did was rearrange Paul's letters in their proper order, and none of them sold well. There's been no reason for anyone to understand why we put those letters together chronologically.

Now, let's see if I can explain this.

You're familiar with the three letters of John, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John. There is virtually nothing in them that gives you any ideas as to when they were written, to whom they were written, or where. The book of James—not a clue. No history in it. Jude—a total mystery. First Peter—quite a bit. Second Peter—absolutely no understanding whatsoever of the setting, the context - that is, the surroundings. This is not true of Paul's letters. When you put them in their proper order, they're like a chain brought together, and they tell a story—a story that reaches from the year 50 to the year 63, which just so happens to be also the years when most of the New Testament was written.

Now, what I'm about to say to you is a little difficult to grasp, and it's something we seem to have totally overlooked. The book of Acts is a history book. Paul's letters are epistles, or they are "letter" books. History books, and they're "letter" books. There's a world of difference. The first four books of the New Testament are biographical. The next one is historical. That's the book of Acts. But we tend to forget that Acts was not written in the year 30, 40, or even 50. Acts was probably written by Luke somewhere around the year 63 A.D., which means that Luke, writing Acts, had already read many of Paul's letters before he wrote Acts. He knew the context of at least six of the letters that had been written by the time he closed Luke, closed the book of Acts.

For instance, take the book of Galatians. Luke read Galatians long before he wrote Acts, and when he got to the area where Acts and Galatians came together, he went out of his way to clarify the background to Galatians, and we don't know that. At least we don't know it unless we stop and say, at this point in Acts, Paul wrote Galatians. So, two points here: we've got to take Paul's letters out of "length" order to "chronological" order—that is, the sequence in which he wrote them—and then, at least up until the year 63, we need to look at every point in Acts, identify that point where Paul wrote a letter. When we do that, a beautiful, sequential, contextual story begins to emerge, giving us insights we have never had before into Paul's letters and, consequently, into a large part of the New Testament.

That's what should have happened back at about 300 A.D. Someone should have put Paul's letters together in the order in which he wrote them, but they never did. So, I would like to acquaint you with what happened and help you understand why we have ended up with four wrong ways to study the New Testament and have not had a proper way to study Paul's letters, nor even a large part of the New Testament.

There are 14 of the 27 books of the New Testament that come together to tell a story that spans from the year 30 A.D. to the year 68 A.D. Everything that happened during that period is of the greatest consequence. Now, folks, most of the New Testament was written also during that same time. In fact, all of the New Testament was written between 30 and 70 A.D., with the possible exception of Revelation. So, it behooves us to know what happened between 30 and 70 A.D. And Paul's letters fall within 30 to 68 A.D. Those two years, by the way, were very easy to fill in.

But let's go back. We now have circulating in the Roman Empire Paul's letters written by length. There is no connection between the letters. Therefore, each letter is treated as a stand-alone document. Now, let's add another ingredient.

Let's say it's the year 300 A.D. Paul's letters are circulating. They are circulating where? They are circulating in the Roman Empire. Now, put yourself in that era, and if you were an educated person during that period of time, you would be exposed to the one and only kind of education that existed in that day, and that was a Greek education. And the heart and soul of a Greek education was a philosophical education. If you were to learn anything in the Greek way of educating the human mind, it would be primarily philosophy. You would study Homer, who was a storyteller, but mostly you would study Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and a few other lesser lights such as Zeno—and I'll not mention the rest of them; that's enough.

Each of these men wrote treaties—shall we call them books—that were stand-alone. They had no father, no mother, no brother, no sister. Each one of them stood alone. Now, here comes Paul's letters. Here are educated people, educated in the Greek world. There are 13 letters by Paul, and they don't make any sense whatsoever concerning their being connected. And, of course, the one that's leading the 13 is the book of Romans, which, by the way, just as bad luck would have it, was the only letter Paul ever wrote that was mostly a treatise.

So now comes the Greek mind. Here's a Greek that is saturated in the writings and education of the Western man. He is converted to Christ and comes to the book of Romans. He looks at it. He treats it as a philosophical work, and with his intellectual, logical, linear mind, he takes that book apart almost as though it had no soul, no context, no surroundings whatsoever. And he overlays his philosophical mind on top of the book of Romans.

Now, dear child of God, that's the way Romans have been treated to this very day. I am a student of and a graduate of...hold on your hat and don't think poorly of me...basically a

Greek education. Or, to put it another way, I'm a seminary graduate, and it's amazing what we could do, even with a simple little book like Philemon, and turn that into a philosophical, and then gradually, over the passing of centuries, it became something new, the daughter of philosophy, which was theology.

You take a little book like Philemon - it's got less than 30 sentences in it - and what do you come up with? Philosophy. Theology. A soulless, cold-blooded, intellectual, logical, didactic look at a very passionate, beautiful letter. And so there arose the first wrong way to study the Bible, or the New Testament: the study of Paul's letters from a philosophical and later theological viewpoint.

Context was not even considered. All those people mentioned at the end—something that was lost to us. From, say, verse 8 all the way to the end, except for chapter 16, we have a theological treatise. The soul is gone. 1 Corinthians—well, there are some personal things in there...a mention of some people who lived in certain places and certain things they did. Most of it's at the end of the letter, most of it's in the last eight or ten sentences, but ah, the philosophical, the theological.

And so it was, we began to study all of Paul's letters in a totally theological way. There was some redeeming grace and mercy there. There were no chapters, and there were no verses, and there were not very many educated people. Most folks were illiterate, and all writing had to be done by hand, which was enormously expensive. So, most treatises of that era had only one or two copies and were lost to us. About the only ones that survived in large numbers were writings by hand—I'm being correct here, many others survived, but not in large numbers—were the writings of Tertullian and a gentleman by the name of Origen, and there was a reason for that.

Origen had an extremely wealthy man backing everything Origen wrote. He had an entire room full of scribes making copies of Origen's writings and paid some people not only to copy those letters...I'm sorry, philosophical treatises...but to distribute them throughout the Roman Empire. So, we've ended up with Origen and Tertullian, both of them with a strong Greek background. Although Origen wrote in Greek, Tertullian wrote in Latin, it still comes out the same way.

And so, we were not too cursed with too much writing of that day until about 1200, when the church stepped in with its money and began backing the writings of a gentleman by the name of Thomas Aquinas largely. Referred to by his students as "the bull" because of his large neck, his books were hand-copied from the coffers of the Roman Catholic Church and distributed throughout its domain. And so there grew up the philosophical, the theological marriage of the writings of Paul, in which every one of Paul's letters was a stand-alone theological treatise. Then, about 1205, a young man named Stephanus had chapters added.

Well, between handwriting and nothing more than chapters being added, we were not in too bad a shape.

So, the second wrong way began to emerge in studying the New Testament. The words of Paul are still in a completely pagan arrangement, that is, by length. Then, in 1455, the printing press was invented. By the year 1500, nobody was handwriting books; they were being printed. Then came the Reformation and the second wrong way to study the New Testament. Now, in 1556, someone, a printer, decided to add little numbers to each sentence so that we could find the sentences. So, the sentences ceased to exist, and it was called... their name was "verses". By the way, ironically, this gentleman's name was also Stephanas. 1205 and 1556. We have, first, the chapters, then the numbers, the printing press, and the Reformation.

Now we have a flood of theological, philosophical interpretations of Paul's letters, always stand-alone, because they're always arranged exactly the way they're arranged in your New Testament. Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, then 1 Thessalonians, then 2 Thessalonians, then 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, and then Philemon.

What a mess. What an absolutely chaotic mess. Now I'm going to add a personal word here. In the book that you have read or are about to read (*Revolutionary Bible Study*), I use the term chaotic and bizarre, and even the word insane, in addressing the crazy way those 16 letters are arranged. Not so much that they're arranged that way, but that it has taken 1,800 years without anybody saying, "Let's stop this madness and arrange those letters in their proper way."

Forgive me if those words sound strong to you. I have been reading my New Testament chronologically for over four decades, and I am awed, shocked, and bewildered that we would let such chaos reign, and what could be the key to a whole new dimension of understanding the New Testament.

Well, what happened during the Reformation was the same thing that had happened previously, except on a massive scale. We now have printing presses. Anyone who could pay for a printer and could sit down and write a treatise could immediately become popular because he had some philosophical view of one of Paul's letters.

The entire European continent and the British Isles were drenched with new writings that did not conform to the Roman Catholic Church. So, we now have two theologies growing up, the Roman Catholic and the Protestant, but they're all philosophical, theological, and they're treating Paul's letters, every one of them, as standalones. You cannot find a book anywhere else in the Reformation period that once addresses context, not a single sentence ever written about the proper order of Paul's letters, nor of the enormous radical change that takes place when you put them together, and they stand up and say, "We have a story to

tell.” So, the second wrong way to read the New Testament is very much like the first one, except it's a Protestant view, very argumentative, and still basically Greek in its mentality.

Now we come to the evangelical era, when we are told constantly to get into the Bible and understand the New Testament and be faithful to it. Now I'm going to make a rash, radical statement that I wish you would not quote me on, because it's a great statement to take out of context.

I don't care how many times you've read the New Testament in the order it's arranged; you cannot possibly understand what it is saying. Memorize it in the original language, Greek, learn to say it in Greek, but as long as those letters are arranged in the chaotic order that they are in, certain things will not emerge. And therefore, you are denied access to a large part of the understanding of the New Testament.

By the way, I am not speaking theologically. I'm speaking of the discovery of the first-century church's practice. I'm speaking of the emergence of the story, the story of what happened in the first century that has always been denied us. And in a few minutes, I will address the matter of a model, M-O-D-E-L, which we've never even thought of.

Maybe you're used to the term. If you've studied evolution and creationists, each of them demands that the other one produce a model, because everything took place somewhere in the primordial era. Astronomers, mathematicians, and anyone who has to do with physics and science always demand, “Give us a model.” And we have never had a model of the first century.

Rather, instead, we have built what the church is by gathering together verses at our whim, at our capricious grasp, and we're saying, that's how it was in the first century. But it's all verses. It is all human conjecture, whereas the story itself awaits us. The story is clear, and it radically changes everything.

Well, I'm going to tell you now about the third wrong way to read the New Testament, and this is the first time I have ever heard anyone tell us about this way. It's a shameful way. It's an embarrassing way to study the New Testament. It's the kind of thing you would want to hide under a rock or keep under the bed, so nobody discovers what it is, and yet it is universally the most practiced way of studying the New Testament. It has no name, so I'll describe it. It's you, and you open the book of Romans and Corinthians, and then Ephesians or Colossians, and it doesn't make any sense to you, but the writings are beautiful, and every once in a while, you find this beautiful sentence, now called a verse. It's got a little number on it, and you grab your pen, and you underline, and you think, wow, that's so beautiful. That is so beautiful. “Love conquers all things.” “Love is faithful.” “Love endures.” Romans 8: “Neither things past nor present nor anything created shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.”

No context, no understanding of why that was written, but we got a numbered sentence, and we underlined it, and that's how we fulfill the demand made upon us by preachers that we get into the Word; that you can't grow as a Christian spiritually...it's the Word. It's the Word of God. It's the Bible. Study it, study it, study it.

Now, I'm going to confess something...for all of us. Paul's epistles don't make a bit of sense, but we study them, and we read them, and we underline them. *Revolutionary Bible Study* has changed all of that. You're about to find the story. You're going to discover the provocation for every way, reason, every context, every behind-the-scenes crisis that caused Paul to write each one of those letters. You put them in the order Paul wrote them, and they rise up and tell you the first-century story. By the way, that's the fifth way to read the New Testament.

Now, it is my unhappy task to tell you that there is a fourth way. It was invented by a gentleman named John Darby, and it is the most popular way to study the New Testament. And if studying Paul's letters by length was bizarre, wait till you see what John Nelson Darby did with the whole New Testament, which is really bizarre. I want to tell you that he lived around, oh, let's just say around 1840. That's a good midterm time for him. He probably would have been one of the great mathematical geniuses of all time.

He found something nobody had ever found in the Bible. He found seven dispensations, and within each, he found another seven elements. For instance, you and I live in the sixth dispensation, "the dispensation of the church", but there are seven churches. The seventh is the church of Laodicea, the one God spewed out of His mouth. So, John Darby said God spewed the church; the church's age is over. Forget the church. It's irredeemable. And we all believed him, and it became very popular in the Bible schools, which were emerging from around 1850 to the 1930s. His writings were so popular.

That's why you have heard it said the age of the apostles has passed. He "dispensationalized" the apostles out of existence. But Mr. John Darby, when you got rid of the apostles and the prophets, you forgot to tell us what was to take their place. You never told us, and so we have been lost, left without a ship, a compass, or a rudder. We're floating around in the seventh dispensation without a church and with nothing but your writings to tell us what to do. And folks, what John Darby ended up doing was starting chapels where everyone could sit around and...hold your breath...study the writings of John Darby. So perhaps that was the will of God, to get rid of the church, and we'll spend the rest of the time until Jesus comes studying the writings of John Darby.

Well, folks, believe it or not, almost everything that is preached today in a strong fundamental church has strong overtones of John Darby's writings, and this is what I would like to say. John Darby knew absolutely nothing about the order in which Paul wrote those letters and had no historical context for any of them. Put those letters together, find out

that they are filled with personal references, filled with surroundings, filled with context, and suddenly you've got a revolution on your hands.

So as you read the book, you're going to find a context in which Paul was sitting in one place writing his letter to another place; why he was in that place; what caused him to pick up his pen and write that letter to those people, and what was happening later to those people at that moment. Suddenly, we begin to get names, and those names appear again, a little later and a little bit later, and suddenly, we find out Paul was training some workers.

We go ahead, and we add some dates, and we discover, oh my goodness, Paul was transient. He was constantly moving. He was starting churches. He rarely stayed longer than six months, and then he left those churches. Unbelievable. How could these things be?

Then we have some context not only about where Paul was and where he wrote and what was happening where he wrote and to where and what was happening to the churches he wrote to, but we also find out for the very first time that even the history of what was taking place, the events taking place in the Roman Empire at that very time, were playing major influential roles, in some cases, of what Paul said in those letters. When you finish, you'll have a beautiful tapestry. It has a beginning and an end.

You're not only going to discover where he wrote the letter, where he wrote the churches he wrote to, what was happening, but you're also going to discover something else that's been totally left out, and that was what was happening between those years when Paul wrote nothing at all. Such is the letter and the next letter and the next. And such is *Revolutionary Bible Study*.

And this is what I would like to say to you. We need an army of men and women who will begin teaching the New Testament in its sequence. I foresee a New Testament someday that, oh, this would be radical, wouldn't it? It would blend Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, then continue with Acts, but then it would stop right there, where Paul wrote his very first letter, which was not Romans, but Galatians, and give a complete context of why he wrote that letter.

Then we'd continue reading Acts until we came to Paul's next letter, 1 Thessalonians, and we'd be able to pinpoint the exact place where Paul wrote that letter. And Luke would be helping us a great deal. Remember, he read that letter long before he wrote Acts. It would continue until the year 70 A.D., and we would have a beautiful history, and *voila*, the New Testament would be so clear to us, and those letters would be so clear. We might even put other Bible teachers out of business. I'll say one word briefly.

Most of the Bible classes in homes, most of what we're taught in the Bible in seminaries, leave out a great deal, especially home Bible classes, because there's so much that is controversial. So, we're not even in our home Bible classes getting the whole story.

Now you have a book in your hand. We'll give you all of the books written in the New Testament and pretty much in the order they were written, but especially in those living letters that are so full of, yes, intrigue, so filled with people. You get to know them. They appear and reappear, and you hear a story. And it's just as clear as the Gospels are, the four Gospels.

Then you begin to look at all this and say, wait a minute, that's the first century, and it doesn't fit the 21st century at all. In fact, we've got a 21st-century church that's way off base. Let's go back and do it the way they did it in the first century. So yes, we're on the verge of a revolution here.

And yes, I trust you will take this book apart. You'll read it diligently. It is my hope that there will be two or three more helps that will appear to help you along the way. I'm hoping that we'll have a whole revival of Bible study, and we can throw away the underlining of these disjointed verses that bless us. We'll be able to put the New Testament in front of us and read it so clearly that we will be able to look up and see, before us, a promise made long ago fulfilled: that we will need no man to teach us.

This New Testament has always been easy to read, very gripping, very dramatic, very beautiful, edge-of-your-seat, but we've never known it until now.

So, dear reader, get your pen, get some paper, and start reading the whole story, and let's see if it won't change your life the way it has for others. Perhaps we'll see a whole army of teachers rise up, and maybe in God's good time we'll see the church restored the way she once was. Remember, for the first time, we'll have a model to hold up and say, " Oh, that's what it was like in the first century. Oh, it's not at all like what we have in the 21st century."

Now may the Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit be with you while you read. When you've finished, I'd love to hear from you. And if it so happens that you have heard this a little late and I have passed away, believe there'll be someone else to receive your letter. So, write it to me even though I were dead, that someone will have taken my place here toward a day of full and complete restoration of the church and the centrality of Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.