Lesson 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE

Note: You'll see fill-in-blanks throughout this chapter. You'll also see a letter in brackets on the right side of each blank. To find the proper word that goes in any blank, check the corresponding letter on the ANSWER SHEET on the last page of the chapter.

The Bible. It's the most remarkable, the most influential, the most loved, and the most despised piece of literature the world has ever seen.

Since it was completed almost twenty centuries ago, untold numbers of men and women have risked being burned alive and beheaded to insure its preservation. Through the ages, countless others have swung from gallows, been drawn and quartered, lashed to whipping posts, and faced unimaginable torture just for a chance to read its powerful words.

It has outsold every other publication in the world . . . *and it still does.* As of September 2022, some portion of the Bible has been translated into _____[a] languages. At least _____[b] of the earth's population now have access to some part of the Bible in their own language (https://www.wycliffe.net/resources/statistics).

It's not an overstatement to say that this extraordinary book has changed the world. The Bible has molded human history for hundreds of years, and I don't just mean it has molded the personal faith of untold millions for hundreds of years. The Bible has also profoundly influenced the art, literature, law, and social policy of nations.

Exactly why has the Bible had such a monumental impact on the world? And why have so many people been willing to be tortured and killed for it? The answer is simple: it's because so many people believe that the Bible is exactly what it declares itself to be—*a* _____-_____[c] (2 Tim 3:16-17). That is, they're absolutely convinced that God himself is the ultimate _____[d] of it. Sure, they know red-blooded human beings actually put the original words of the Bible on paper, but they also believe the Bible's claim that the _____ _____[e] supervised the original writers so that their words were the exact words that God wanted written (2 Pet 1:20-21; 1 Thess 2:13).

Is there any evidence to corroborate the Bible's claim that God is its ultimate author? There sure is, and plenty of it. But this study isn't going to explore that evidence. If you're interested in a study like that, there's a lot of wonderful resources available, and I'd highly recommend that you get online and check out some of those resources at Apologetics Press (https://apologeticspress.org).

In this study, we'll assume that God is the ultimate author of the Bible. And we'll assume that He wrote it for mankind. To put it another way, we'll assume that the Bible is _____[f].

Beginning with that assumption, our goal is simple: *to better understand what God is telling us*.

THE THEME OF THE BIBLE

Let's start with the theme of the Bible. In other words, let me tell you what the Bible is all about. This is super important, so I'm going to put it in bold print. Do yourself a favor and memorize it. Ready? Here's the theme of the Bible: **The world is _____[g] up, and God is going to _____[h] it**. Now, let me elaborate on those two things.

The World Is Messed Up

While the world is filled with incredible beauty and goodness, it's also filled with incredible ugliness and evil. I don't have to tell you that. You already know it. You read the same headlines I do, and you live in the same world that I do. So, you know as well as I do that there are lots of scary, horrible, terrifying realities in our world. You know there are broken homes, broken hearts, broken bodies, and broken minds. You know that we're all going to die, and that safety and security are at the top of everyone's wish list for themselves and their loved ones.

Because there's so much "bad" in the world, most agree that something has gone terribly wrong with the world. Well, the Bible tells us exactly what went wrong. It tells us exactly what the problem is. The problem is something called "_____[i]," and we'll learn what sin is very, very soon.

There's one more very, very important thing to know about our messed up world. When I say the "world" is messed up, we're all included in that. Let me put that in bold print too. **I'm messed up. You're messed up. That is, I'm infected with sin. And you're infected with sin too**. And very soon we'll understand what that means. Fortunately, our brokenness—and the creation's brokenness—isn't the end of the story.

God Is Going to Fix the World

The end of the story is that God has a plan for fixing everything that sin has broken (primarily that means us). The central message of the Bible is how God is going to fix us (and the rest of his creation) through the work of one man. More precisely, that one man is actually a _____-_____[j]. That means he is both fully _____[k] and fully _____[l], and his name, of course, is _____[m].

Since the central message of the Bible is how God is going to fix us and the universe through Jesus, it's not an exaggeration to say that the entire Bible is really about _____[n]. Even though Jesus isn't born until the New Testament, the Old Testament is all about him too. Let me show you what I mean.

On the day Jesus rose from the dead (in the New Testament), he joined two men who were traveling to a town called Emmaus. These two men couldn't recognize Jesus at first, but they discussed with him the execution of "Jesus the Nazarene" and the reports of his now empty tomb. Finally, Luke says, "Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He [Jesus] explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27).

Notice that Jesus explained to the two men what "*all the Scriptures*" said about him, and "all the Scriptures" is defined as "*Moses and . . . all the prophets.*" The expression "Moses and . . . all the prophets" is a reference to the entire Old Testament. So, Jesus was making it crystal clear that the entire Old Testament is about him.

BIBLE BASICS: THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

Now that we know what the Bible is all about, let's start learning about the Bible.

The word "Bible" comes from the Greek word *biblia* which means "_____[o]." And that's what the Bible is. It's not really one book (singular), but rather a _____[p] of *books* (plural). Specifically, it's a collection of _____[q] books.

The Bible is divided into two major sections: the _____[r] Testament and the _____[s] Testament. In terms of length, the Old Testament is about three times the size of the New Testament. There are _____[t] books in the Old Testament, and the New Testament has _____[u] books. Some books are relatively short, and some are really long.

The Old Testament is the first collection, and it began to be written around _____[v] B.C. It was probably completed between 400 and 300 B.C. As we go through this course, you'll learn when most of the Old Testament books were written.

The Old Testament was first written to the nation of Israel (you'll learn about that very soon), and it describes how God dealt with individuals and nations before the birth of Jesus. As I already mentioned, though, it's really about Jesus. The Old Testament, then, shows us how God prepared to bring Jesus into the world, and why Jesus needed to come.

The New Testament probably began to be written around _____[w] A.D. and was completed by the mid-90s A.D. As we go through this course, you'll also learn when most of the New Testament books were written (or *likely* written; we can't always be sure when each book was written since the writers didn't put a nice, precise date on their books when they originally wrote them).

We Christians acknowledge that the Old Testament is very much God's Word and is very important to us. However, for Christians the New Testament is the most important part of the Bible. That's where we learn about Jesus and what he taught. It also tells us how _____[x] started and what the earliest _____[y] were like.

How the Old Testament is Arranged

The 39 books of the Old Testament covers about _____[z] years of history, was written by a variety of authors, and includes several types of literature. Within its pages we find tedious law codes, engrossing history, great poems and songs, powerful speeches, and dramatic prophecies (special messages that God delivered to his people through special spokesmen).

Because the Old Testament is made up of different kinds of literature, the 39 books of the Old Testament are usually divided into five categories: _____[aa] (the first five books of the OT), _____[bb] (the next twelve books), _____[cc] (the next five books), *Major* _____[dd] (the next five books), and *Minor* _____[ee] (the last 12 books). What makes some prophets "major" and some "minor"? It may sound like "major prophets" are more important than "minor prophets," but that's not the case at all. The only difference between a "major prophet" and a "minor prophet" is the length of the book. "Major prophets" are long books, and "minor prophets" are short books.

How the New Testament is Arranged

The 27 books of the New Testament covers about _____[ff] years of history, was written by 9 or 10 authors (we're not sure who wrote one book), and it's usually divided into four or five categories (I'll use five categories): _____[gg] (the first four books), _____[hh] (the next book), _____[ii] (the next thirteen books), _____[jj] (the next eight books), and _____[kk] (the last book).

Here are a couple of charts which show each book of the Old Testament and New Testament in their respective categories:

THE STRUCTURE OF THE

Old Testament

THE LAW (PENTATEUCH)	HISTORY (HISTORICAL)	POETRY (WISDOM)	MAJOR PROPHETS	MINOR PROPHETS
GENESIS	JOSHUA	JOB	ISAIAH	HOSEA
EXODUS	JUDGES	PSALM	JEREMIAH	JOEL
LEVITICUS	RUTH	PROVERBS	LAMENTATIONS	AMOS
NUMBERS	1 SAMUEL	ECCLESIASTES	EZEKIEL	OBADIAH
DEUTERONOMY	2 SAMUEL	SONG OF SONGS	DANIEL	JONAH
	1 KINGS			MICAH
	2 KINGS			NAHUM
	1 CHRONICLES			HABAKKUK
	2 CHRONICLES			ZEPHANIAH
	EZRA			HAGGAI
	NEHEMIAH			ZEPHARIAH
	ESTHER			MALACHI

THE STRUCTURE OF THE

New Testament

THE GOSPELS	APOSTOLIC HISTORY	EPISTLES OF PAUL	GENERAL EPISTLES	APOCALYPSE
MATTHEW	ACTS	ROMANS	HEBREWS	REVELATION
MARK		1 CORINTHIANS	JAMES	
LUKE		2 CORINTHIANS	1 PETER	
JOHN		GALATIANS	2 PETER	
		EPHESIANS	1 JOHN	
		PHILIPPIANS	2 JOHN	
		COLOSSIANS	3 JOHN	
		1 THESSALONIANS	JUDE	
		2 THESSALONIANS		
		1 TIMOTHY		
		2 TIMOTHY		
		TITUS		
		PHILEMON		

FINDING YOUR WAY AROUND THE BIBLE
(For Newcomers to the Bible)

Each book of the Bible is divided into _____[ll] and _____[mm]. These didn't appear in the original writings. They were added several hundred years later to make it easier to study the Bible. Before the Bible was divided into chapters and verses, it could take several minutes to locate a specific statement or passage. Thanks to chapters and verses we can now find the exact location of any statement in the Bible quickly by referring to the *book*, *chapter*, and *verse*.

We call this "_____[nn]" a passage. The generally accepted way of writing a "Scripture citation" or a "Scripture reference" is by putting the name of the book first, followed by the chapter number, then a colon, and then the verse number. So, for example, Genesis chapter one and verse 15 would be written like this: *Genesis 1:15*. And it would be said like this: "Genesis one, fifteen."

In some citations a number precedes the name of a book (e.g., 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 1 Thessalonians, 1 Peter, 3 John). This allows us to distinguish between books that otherwise would have identical names. There are three reasons why two or more books may have the same name:

(1) Three books in the Old Testament are so long that they've been split into two volumes apiece (1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles);

(2) Some books of the New Testament are named for the author. If the same writer gave us two or three books, they all bear his name, like 1 and 2 Peter.

(3) Some books in the New Testament take the name of the recipient. If that recipient received two different letters from the same person, the letters are distinguished with a number preceding it. For instance, Paul wrote two letters to the church in the city of Corinth, so those letters are identified as 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians.

One more thing—when a number precedes the name of a book, the number represents the words "first," "second," and "third." In other words, the book of 1 Corinthians is called "First Corinthians," not "One Corinthians."

Finally, to conserve space when citing a passage, most people and publishers abbreviate the name of Bible books. The most common way to do this is to drop all but the first two or three letters in the book's name.

Instead of writing "Genesis 3:15," we write "Gen 3:15." A reference to 1 Samuel 2:2 would become 1 Sam 2:2. And a reference to 2 Peter 3:13 would be 2 Pet 3:13.

For the rest of this lesson, let's focus our attention on the Old Testament (we'll talk more about the New Testament later in this course).

OLD TESTAMENT GEOGRAPHY

If we want to understand the Old Testament, we need to have some understanding of history and geography since the events of the Old Testament took place in the context of history.

Let's start with geography. To understand the Old Testament there are two maps we need to become familiar with: (1) a map of the ancient middle east, and (2) a map of ancient Israel.

On pages 9 and 10 you'll find two map exercises to help you get familiar with Bible geography. Let me tell you about each one.

The Fertile Crescent

The key area in the map of the Middle East is what geographers call "the Fertile Crescent"—the band a fertile land that stretches from the Nile River in Egypt in the west, northeast through the land of Israel, and then south and southeast to the plains surrounding the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in what used to be called "Mesopotamia" (which means "middle of the rivers").

This fertile area comprised the centers of power in the ancient world, with Egypt located in the west and Assyria (and later Babylon and Persia) in the east. Israel was wedged between these two empires, and much of the Old Testament is written with the struggles between these world powers in the background. There are also significant times when the threats or activities of these world powers directly involve Israel.

Israel

The first thing you need to know about Israel is that it's very small. The Bible often uses the expression "from Dan to Beersheba" to describe its northern and southern boundaries (Jud 20:1; 1 Sam 3:20; 2 Sam 3:10; 1 Kgs 4:25). The distance from Dan to Beersheba is only about 150 miles.

Israel's east-west distances are even smaller. It's only about 30 miles from the Mediterranean coast to the Sea of Galilee in northern part of Israel, and it's only about 60 miles from the Mediterranean Sea to the

Dead Sea in the southern part of the country. The figure below will help you appreciate just how small Israel is. This is how Israel compares to the state of Alabama.

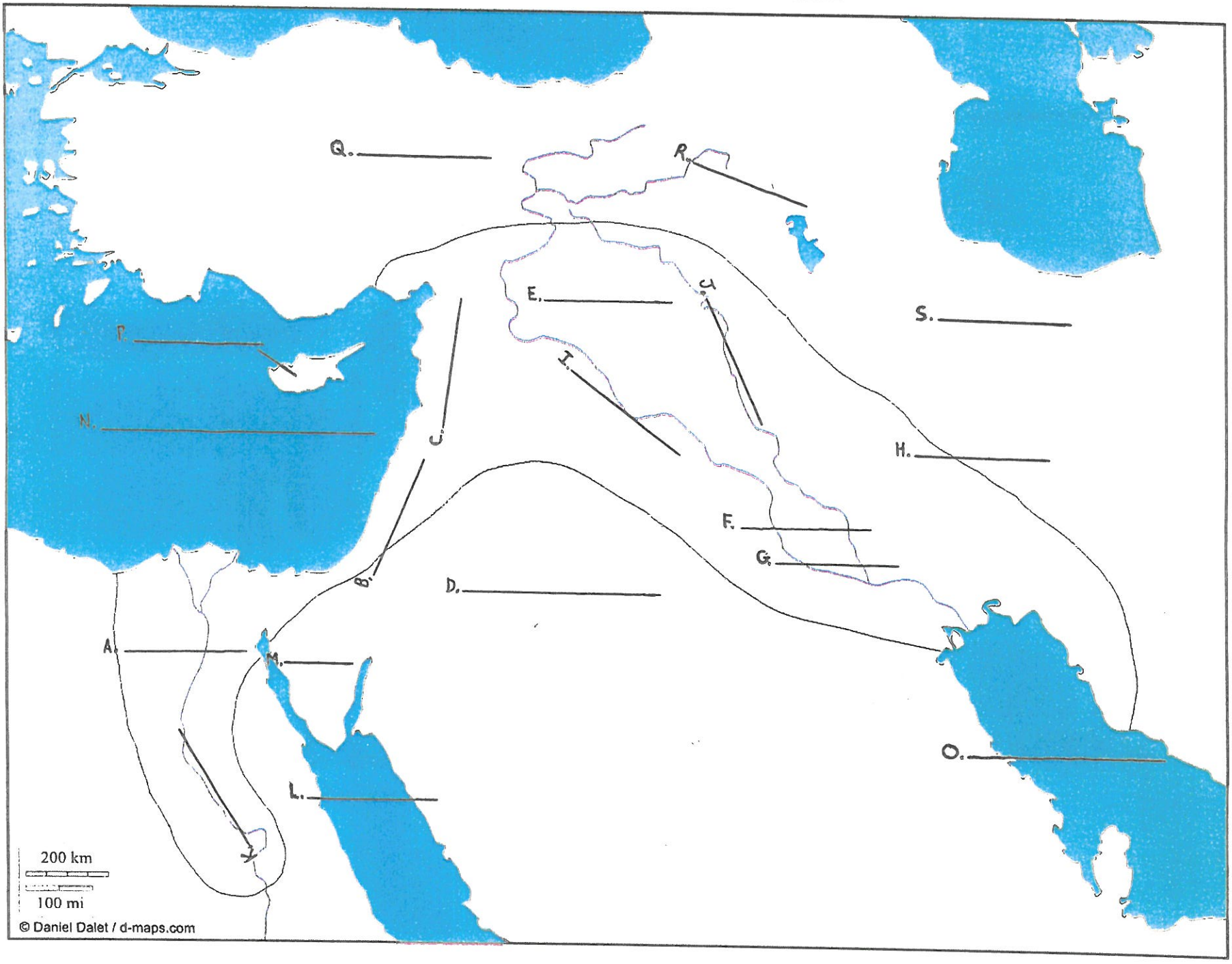
The biblical land of Israel may have been tiny, but what it lacked in size it more than made up for in strategic importance. With the forbidding Arabian desert toward the east and the Mediterranean Sea on the west, Israel was the only trade corridor linking Mesopotamia with Egypt in Bible times.

Israel's neighbors were powerful leaders in the Old Testament world: Egypt to the south, and the nations of Babylon, Assyria, and Persia to the east. These empires were dependent upon each other almost to the extent that the West today depends on Middle Eastern oil.

Israel stood as a natural land bridge between these ancient kingdoms, and millions of foreign traders passed through Israel each year. And when the great western empires of Greece and Rome took control of the land of Israel, the sea ports of Israel became important links between east and west.

Israel, therefore, was at the crossroads of the ancient world, with trade routes arriving from all directions. Israel was truly a bridge between the main civilizations of the ancient near east.

Israel's geographical location, of course, is no accident. It has spiritual significance. God was planting a people at a crossroads where they could be a model of the kingdom of heaven on earth. The whole world could see the blessing that comes to people living under God's rule . . . and they could also see the curse that comes when they disobey God.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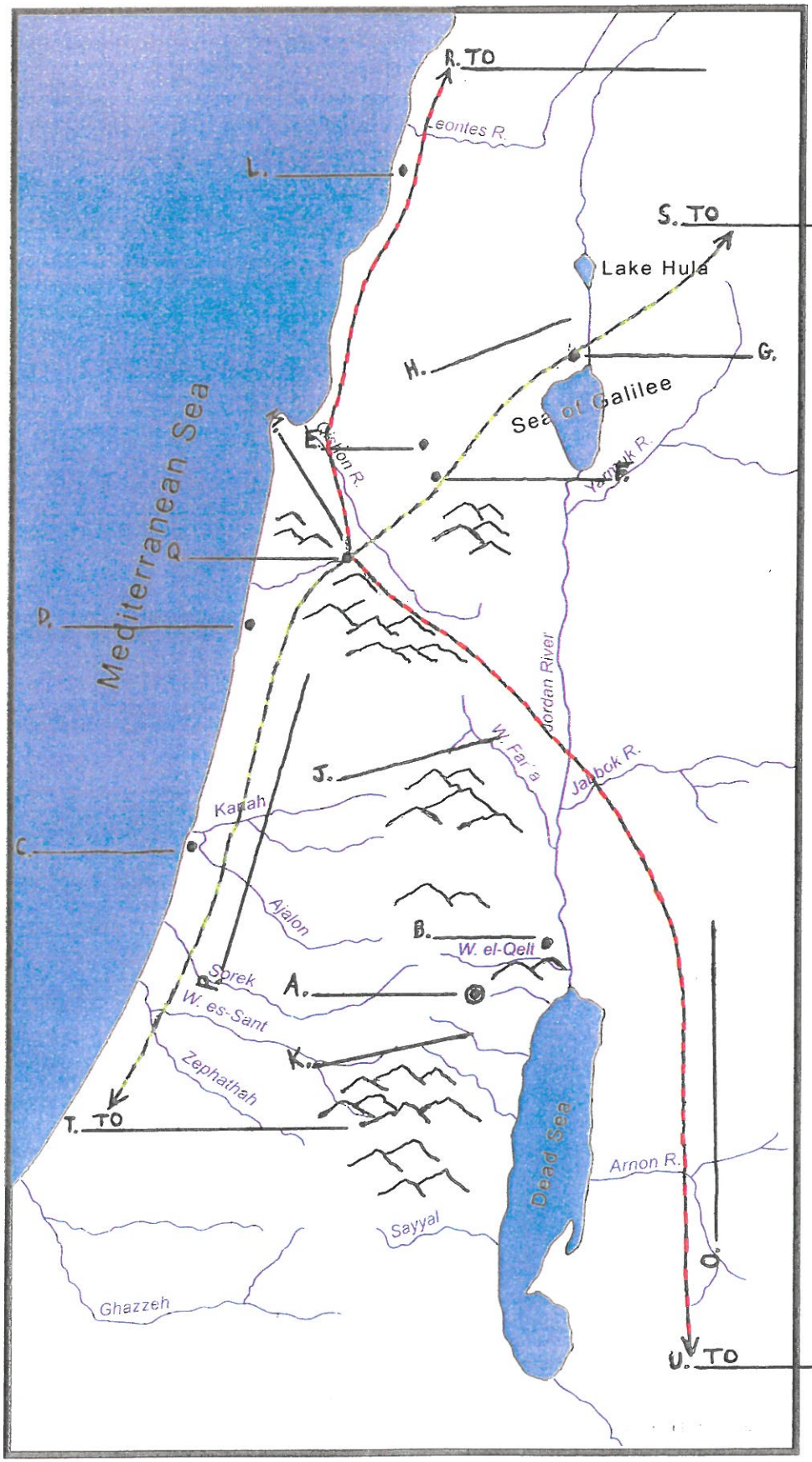
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Sayyal
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BEFORE THE NEXT LESSON (YEP, HOMEWORK):

1. Read the book of Genesis before the next class.
2. Memorize the first 17 books of the Old Testament.
3. Memorize the theme of the Bible.

FILL IN THE BLANK ANSWER KEY:

[a] 3658
[b] 97%
[c] God-book
[d] author
[e] Holy Spirit
[f] God's Word to us
[g] messed
[h] fix
[i] sin
[j] God-man
[k] God
[l] man
[m] Jesus
[n] Jesus
[o] books
[p] collection
[q] 66
[r] Old
[s] New
[t] 39
[u] 27
[v] 1500
[w] 50
[x] Christianity
[y] churches
[z] 2000
[aa] Law
[bb] History
[cc] Poetry
[dd] Prophets
[ee] Prophets
[ff] 100
[gg] Gospels
[hh] Acts (History)
[ii] Paul's Letters (Epistles)
[jj] General Letters (Epistles)
[kk] Revelation (Apocalypse)
[ll] chapters
[mm] verses
[nn] citing

FERTILE CRESCENT MAP:

A. Egypt
B. Canaan (Israel)
C. Aram (Syria)
D. Syrian Desert
E. Assyria
F. Babylonia
G. Sumer
H. Persia
I. Euphrates River
J. Tigris River
K. Nile River
L. Red Sea
N. Mediterranean Sea
O. Persian Gulf
P. Cyprus
Q. Heth (Hittites)
R. Ararat Mountains
S. Media (Medes)

ISRAEL MAP:

A. Jerusalem
B. Jericho
C. Joppa
D. Caesarea
E. Cana
F. Nazareth
G. Capernaum
H. GALILEE
J. SAMARIA
K. JUDEA
L. Tyre
M. Mt. Carmel
O. King's Highway
P. Via Maris (Way of the Sea)
Q. Megiddo
R. TO EUROPE
S. TO DAMASCUS
T. TO EGYPT
U. TO ARABIA