

# Maps and Charts

## Exploring the Geography and Chronology of the Bible

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Stories that start out with “Once upon a time” are just that—stories. We expect them to be fictional. The Bible, on the other hand, is not a book of fiction. Rather, it reflects the real history (chronology) of the real world (geography). Proper use of maps and charts will drive this fact home with your learners.

Most Bibles include a set of maps. So-called “Study Bibles” may go deeper in providing elaborate chronological charts. Often, these include not only the events recorded in the pages of Scripture, but also parallel events from secular history. The rise and fall of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, etc., are important to the salvation-historical flow of the Bible narrative.

The problem, however, is that these maps and charts are so commonplace that we may take them for granted, forgetting their significance. Bible events intersect with real-world events! This fact will strengthen our faith if approached properly.

### Using Maps in Teaching Scripture

Many church classrooms have a set of Bible maps. But often it stands in a corner of the classroom untouched. They may be so old and frail that they are almost unusable. Here are three suggestions for using maps in Bible teaching.

1. Use large, colorful maps. I realize that some maps are in black-and-white and that some maps are designed for use on tabletops. But colorful maps that are visible from anywhere in your learning space will add to the learning experience, far more so than small, colorless ones.

2. Identify on the map movements and locations noted in the Bible text as your lesson progresses. Demonstrating the path of the exodus journey is an

example. An inexpensive laser pointer works well for doing this. While you're at it, be sure to note the significance of locations that play more than one role in the Bible. For example, Bethlehem was not only the birthplace of Jesus, it was also the boyhood home of King David.

3. Project maps on a wall or screen. This is ideal for classrooms that do not have a set of maps or may be too large for a printed map to be seen from the back. You can do this in two ways. One is to use digital mapping technologies. This will require a bit of an investment, but several software packages are available that have excellent map functions. One such package not only contains projectable Bible maps, but also allows the user to draw lines, circle items, and show distances with an automatic display. A cheaper, low-tech method is to use the overhead projector. Transparencies can be made by hand or by photocopying. Then it is easy to trace a journey or circle a city name with a marker.

## Using Charts in Teaching Scripture

Charts include timelines, figures, and tables. Here are three suggestions for using charts in Bible teaching.

1. Use charts to explain. Concepts difficult to explain verbally may be grasped more easily by using a chart to clarify. A timeline of the period between the Old and New Testaments is an example.

2. Use charts to simplify. A chart can help your students comprehend a complicated subject that involves intersecting threads. A chart of the kings and prophets of Israel and Judah is an example.

3. Use charts to organize. A chart can help your learners see how a large mass of information fits together. For example, the Old Testament Jewish calendar is a dizzying mix of major and minor feasts, overlapping religious and civil calendars, unfamiliar month names, and Scripture references. Such information placed in a table of rows and columns will allow comprehension "at a glance."

## Final Thoughts

Good teaching accounts for the fact that we live in a visual age. While maps and charts cannot replace Bible content, they can make that content memorable for your learners.