

Welcome to Israel

Living and Learning at the Convergence of 3 Continents

Located at the convergence of three massive continents, the little nation of Israel could be considered the center of the world. Not only does Israel play an integral position in world geography, she has performed a pivotal role in the history of the world and often finds herself at center stage on the evening news.



Israel is also located at the convergence of three of the world's most notable religions – Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Each faith claims this land as their “Holy Land” and has struggled for it throughout the centuries.

What's so special about Israel?

Israel has been referred to as the Promised Land... a land flowing with milk and honey... a country with grapes the size of a man's head... and giants to eat them (Numbers 13)... Israel has been a land of conquest and division... a place of refuge... a country of kings, palaces and one spectacular temple... a land overtaken by pillagers and captors... the birthplace of our Savior... a land of longing... a country to return to... for the remnant... the children of God, His chosen people.

Israel has been in the center of breaking news and international politics since the collapse of Jericho in approximately 1400BC. However, the cities of Jericho and Damascus (located in and near the region of modern day Israel) date back thousands of years before this miraculous event.



In fact, Israel can be considered both a very old country and a very new one. It is so very old because people groups have been living in that region since the year 4000BC and possibly even longer. In the year 2086BC or thereabouts, God called Abraham out of the bustling city of Ur (present day Iraq) to settle in the land of Canaan.

However, we know from history, that the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob eventually found themselves as slaves in Egypt. After the Exodus and the return of the Israelites, the country and its people experienced some relative peace for a few hundred years.

In 770BC, however, the Assyrians conquered Israel, followed by the Babylonians, Persians, Macedonians, Seleucids and then it eventually fell to the Romans in 61BC. It was at this time that this area became known as Judea and then eventually Palestine. During the 7th century AD – after the time of Christ – this region was conquered by the Islamic Empire and then later fell into the hands of the Seljuk Turks, and then the Fatimid rulers of Egypt, and then... well, the list goes on.

As you can see, this tiny land area has been fought over for centuries. The reason why Israel can also be considered a very new country is because it wasn't until 1948, that the nation of Israel became an independent state recognized by the United Nations.



Ann Voskamp, author of *A Child's Geography: Explore the Holy Land*, writes this...

“For 1800 years, if you put your finger on a map of this part of the world, it would not have read the name Israel, but the name ‘Palestine’. Still, in the hearts of the Jewish people scattered around the world, a flame of hope blazed for a revival of their homeland, Israel. Then, in 1948, God made a way for Jewish people dispersed all over the earth to finally return home to this land flowing with milk and honey. As He always does, God has faithfully fulfilled His promise! Nearly 2,000 years later, God has done precisely what He said He would do in the first book of the Bible: ‘To your descendants I have given this land’ (Genesis 15:8). This is how Israel is a very old country – and a very young country – at the same time!”

The Location

Fascinating, isn't it? The land of Israel is as turbulent as it is beautiful, as complex as it is small. Israel is one of the tiniest countries on the face of the planet, measuring about 2 ½ times the size of the state of Rhode Island and comprising only 1% of the land in the Middle East – approximately 8000 square miles. It is only 260 miles long from its northern tip to its southern tip, a distance you could easily drive in an afternoon. It measures 60 miles at its widest distance across and 3-9 miles across at its narrowest!

The geography of Israel is incredibly varied. From the desert region of the Negev in the south to the snow-capped



mountains of the north, from the Dead Sea filled with lifeless salty brine on its eastern border to the energizing life-cultivating waters of the Mediterranean on its western shore, Israel is a diverse land.

Did you know that the coral reef off the coast of Israel's southern-most city of Eilat is host to more species of fish than any other waters in the entire world? Likewise, approximately 1 billion birds migrate through Eilat's skies twice yearly, making Israel the site of one of the greatest concentrations of migrating birds on the face of our globe.

Israel has a Mediterranean climate, meaning that it experiences long, hot, rainless summers and short, cool, rainy winters. Climate conditions vary widely due to extremes in altitude within the state and the fact that Israel sits right at the place where the subtropical and Mediterranean temperatures collide. On a single given day, some cities may be swelteringly hot while other locations enjoy a cooling coastal breeze.

Homeschooling

Are you ready to pack up and move to "the most beautiful of all lands" (Ezekiel 20:6). As an American, it would not be considered unusual for you to homeschool your children if you resided there. However, as an Israeli, it is considered quite unusual... almost unheard of.



However, homeschooling is legal in the country of Israel, as long as you receive permission from the Ministry of Education, who has received dozens of requests in recent months. Many families choose to homeschool without this permission because they do not desire to answer to the state for their children's education. Sometimes this

choice results in harassment from the state and the enforced return of the children back into school. On the other hand, many have had no problems or conflicts whatsoever.

No one really knows how many families are choosing to homeschool their children in Israel. The best guess is that it is somewhere in the hundreds, but there is no official count by the government or those who lead support groups.

Until this decade, homeschooling was considered very unusual and was not recognized by the state. Although it was possible for families to receive official permission, the way to do so was not always clear. In Israel, the Compulsory Education Law requires families to send their children to school. However, the Ministry of Education has always had the authority to give exemptions when it is deemed justified.

Homeschooling parents in Israel describe their transition from school to home as a type of “awakening” – a shift in their perception of whose responsibility and right it is to educate their children. This choice to home educate is causing parents to change their lifestyle and make some sacrifices as they determine a new set of priorities for their families.

Not too many books about home education have been written in the Hebrew language as of yet, so many parents just choose the method of education that seems to be the best fit for them. Without having all of the resources that English speakers



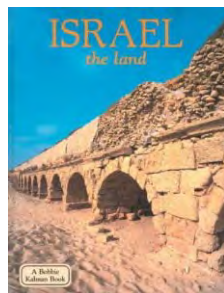
have at their disposal to research the various educational philosophies more in depth, most homeschooling families in Israel choose to un-school their children, as they enjoy this easy-going approach to life and learning at home.

A growing trend in Israel today is the increased involvement of parents in all aspects of their children's education, whether public, private or otherwise. With this in mind, I believe that it is safe to assume that homeschooling will continue to gain momentum in the years to come.

Unit Study:

Now that you have read the chapter, it's time to dive in for some hands-on learning to cement your student's growing knowledge of this pivotal Middle Eastern country.

- 1. READING SELECTIONS** - Let's start with some extra reading. Listed below are some great books about Israel, or set in the Middle Eastern country of Israel, that will provide many hours of enjoyable reading. The links below will take you to Amazon.com for more information, but you may be able to find these at your local library. Read for pleasure alone, or have your kids write a book report on one of these selections.



- [Welcome to Israel!](#) by Lilly Rivlin
- [Israel – The Land](#) by Debbie Smith
- [Israel – The People](#) by Debbie Smith
- [Young Person's History of Israel](#) by David Bamberger

The first book listed here is for younger children, approximately kindergarten through 2nd grade. The next three are for older children, approximately 3rd grade up through 8th.

If you are looking for a couple of books for older students - middle and high school students - you might be interested to take a look at these novels set in Israel during 1967 and then in 1992 for the sequel.



- [One More River](#) by Lynne Reid Banks
- [Broken Bridge](#) by Lynne Reid Banks

Note: I have not read these books, but they have come highly recommended to me. I have read other books by this author - Lynne Reid Banks - and I can attest to her engaging and suspenseful writing style. As with all books, it is always best to preview them before handing them over to your child.

2. **HISTORY & TIMELINES** - Learn more about Israel by compiling historical facts and events from its long and eventful history and adding them to your timeline. If you do not have a timeline already started, you can construct one by following these directions - [How to Make a Timeline Easily](#). Here is a link to a wonderful resource for timeline entries about Israel - <http://contenderministries.org/middleeast/timeline.php>. Here is another one that you may enjoy perusing or using for dates & events - <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Facts+About+Israel/History/Facts+about+Israel-+History.htm>.

PLEASE NOTE - We do not endorse these sites nor have we critically scrutinized each date that is included on these timelines. Biblical dates (any

date preceding 1200BC for that matter) are often under vigorous debate. If you disagree about a date because of a resource that you rely heavily upon or because of your own personal research, that is fine. Just mark in the date that you are most comfortable with.

- 3. MAPWORK** - A unit study would not be complete without taking a good look at the lay of the land. Pages 119 and 120 include both a labeled and unlabeled map of Israel. Have your students mark some of the major cities, the neighboring countries, and the sea to the west, at the least. For older students, have them use your teacher's map and fill in the rest.
- 4. RECIPES** - This is my favorite part - the food from the land! Typical foods of the Middle East include flat bread, lentils, fresh fruit and nuts, raw vegetables, lamb, beef, and dairy products, including goat cheese and many types of yogurt. Some dishes feature grilled meats and fish, stuffed vegetables, and traditional spicy Mediterranean salads and spreads, such as fava bean spread. Typical dishes are stews, schnitzel (veal, chicken, or turkey cutlets), cheese-filled crepes (blintzes), matzo balls (dumplings eaten with chicken soup), and latkes (potato pancakes). Israel was called the "land of milk and honey" in the Bible. Sweets, such as candy made from honey and sesame seeds, are favorites among school children.

Fava Bean Spread

Ingredients

One can of fava beans, drained
1 Tablespoon olive oil
1 Tablespoon lemon juice
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon pepper (more if you like pepper)
Pita bread, torn or cut into triangles

Procedure

1. Drain the can of beans, and empty the beans into a saucepan.
2. Heat over low heat, mashing the beans against the side of the saucepan with a wooden spoon as they heat.
3. Continue mashing until the beans have become thick, pasty, and warm.
4. Add lemon juice, olive oil, and salt and pepper to taste.
5. Serve warm or at room temperature with triangles of pita bread.

Felafel

Note: This recipe involves hot oil. Adult supervision is required. Many grocery stores now sell prepared felafel in the deli section.

Ingredients

- 1 cup canned chickpeas, well-drained
- 1 clove garlic
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ⅛ teaspoon pepper
- ½ cup fine breadcrumbs
- 2 eggs
- 2 Tablespoons oil
- Oil for deep frying, enough to fill the pot about 3 inches
- Pita bread



Procedure

1. Mash the chickpeas in a large bowl.
2. Cut the garlic into tiny pieces. Add the garlic, salt, pepper, and bread crumbs to the chickpeas. Mix the ingredients together.
3. Add the eggs and oil to the mixture and mix thoroughly.
4. Heat oil in the pot until little bubbles rise to the surface.
5. Shape the mixture into 16 balls, each about 1-inch across.
6. With the mixing spoon, gently place a few of the balls in the oil—do not drop them in because the hot oil may splash.
7. Fry a few at a time until they are golden brown—about 5 minutes.
8. Remove the felafel with the slotted spoon. Drain them on a plate covered with paper towels.
9. To serve, cut pita bread in half to make pockets.
10. Put two or three felafel balls into each pocket and drizzle with tahini sauce (see recipe).

Serves 6 to 8.

Tahini Sauce

Some grocery stores stock tahini sauce, already prepared, or packaged tahini mix.

Ingredients

- ¾ cup tahini (sesame seed paste; can be purchased in stores that sell Middle Eastern foods)
- 1/3 cup lemon juice
- ⅛ teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/3 cup water

Procedure

1. Mix tahini, lemon juice, and garlic powder in bowl until you have a smooth sauce.
2. Add the water, 1 teaspoon at a time, until sauce is thin enough to pour.
3. Pour tahini sauce over pita sandwiches; can also be used as a dip for raw vegetables.

Hamentaschen

2/3 cup butter
1/2 cup sugar
1 egg
1/4 cup pulp-free orange juice
1 cup white flour
1 cup wheat flour – no substitutes
2 tsp baking powder
Jam



Beat butter and sugar thoroughly. Add egg and mix until well combined. Add the orange juice and mix again, until well combined. Add flour, 1/2 c at a time, alternating white and wheat, blending thoroughly between each addition. Add baking powder with last addition of flour. Refrigerate until chilled thoroughly – a few hours or overnight.

Roll dough as thin as possible without tearing (you may want to roll it between two sheets of flour-dusted wax paper). Cut out 3-4 in [7.6 – 10 cm] circles. Put a dollop of jam in the middle of each circle and fold up sides to make a triangle, overlapping as much as possible so only a small amount of jam shows in the center. Pinch corners to seal. Bake at 350 F [176 C] for 15 – 20 minutes until golden brown.

Sesame Candy

Ingredients

1 cup sugar
24 ounces honey
24 ounces sesame seeds
Juice squeezed from one orange (or 1/2 cup orange juice)
Grated rind of orange
Peanut oil



Procedure

1. Measure honey and sugar into a saucepan. Heat over medium-low heat until the mixture boils vigorously.
2. Lower the heat just enough to keep the mixture bubbling. Add the sesame seeds, orange juice, and rind.
3. Cook, stirring constantly, for about 10 minutes.
4. Lightly grease a 9 x 13-inch baking sheet with peanut oil.
5. Pour candy mixture onto it and press down on the surface with a wooden spoon to flatten it.
6. Set baking sheet on a cooling rack and allow to cool for about 10 minutes. Cut into rectangles or diamond shapes.

Allow to cool completely. Wrap pieces in wax paper to store.

5. **CRAFTS** - The people of Israel create some amazing and exquisite craft items that they use and sell to make a living. Here are a few fun projects that you can do with your children.

- **Hebrew Calligraphy** - Learn to write like a *Sofer* using these instructions. You can also find some helpful video tutorials on youtube.com.

<http://www.templesofjose.org/JudaismInfo/writing/Calligraphy.htm>

- **Make your own dreidle** - Chanukah Dreidels (spinning tops) are a tradition going back to the beginning of Judaism. Here's the link -

<http://www.chadisrafts.com/fun/claydreidels.html>. Or this one -

http://www.ehow.com/how_5671265_make-polymer-clay-dreidel.html.



God bless your educational endeavors!

Warmly,

Terri Johnson

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