



# Higher Than the Clouds

Textbook pages 4–17

## Critical Concept

The Torah teaches that God promised Israel to Abraham and his descendants.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Explain why Israel is called the “Jewish homeland.”
- Achieve a greater comprehension of where Israel is located in relation to where they live and of the size of Israel relative to other places with which they are familiar.
- Identify the countries surrounding Israel, as well as the locations of key cities, bodies of water, and regions within Israel.

## Hebrew Vocabulary

**Eretz Yisrael** the Land of Israel

## Chapter Overview

Daniel and his family begin their trip to Israel. Daniel learns that he and another “important person” will take part in a scavenger hunt as they travel around the country. It will turn out that this person is his Israeli cousin Rivkah.

## SET INDUCTION

Seat the children in a circle on the floor. Take a ball of string or yarn and, while holding the loose “tail,” toss the ball to a child so that the string begins to unravel. Have the child who catches it hold on to the unraveled string and toss the ball to another child. Continue until there is a web of string connecting everyone in the class.

Explain that you are now all connected by the string but that there are other things that connect you; for example, you all go to the same religious school, all have a family, and all were given the Torah by God. Invite students to give additional examples (*we are all in the same class, all Jewish, all wearing shoes*). Say, “Even though we are all connected, there are differences among us.” Describe a few (*different color eyes, some wear glasses, different hair lengths*). Continue, “Jews live all over the world” (*China, Canada, France, Mexico, United States, South Africa*). You may choose to locate several of the countries on a world map. “We speak different languages, may sing our prayers to different tunes, and may eat different foods, but there are some things that connect us all. What are they?” (*Torah, Shabbat, belief in one God, Israel*).



Review the biblical story of God’s promise of the Land of Israel to Abraham and his descendants. Explain that all Jews—those of us who were born Jewish and those of us who chose to become Jewish—are descendants of Abraham and Sarah. Therefore, Israel is the homeland of every Jew who has ever lived and ever will live.

## TEACHING OPPORTUNITIES

- Page 4** ■ Use the picture and caption to lead into the lesson. Ask, “What can you learn by looking at the plane?” (*Hebrew letters and Israeli flag show that the plane belongs to Israel*). Show students a larger picture of an Israeli flag, e.g., the photo on page 93 of the textbook. Ask, “What symbol is in the middle of the Israeli flag?” (Magen David, *Shield of David*, *Jewish Star*). “Is there another symbol you would like to add to the flag? Why?” (*a dove, a flower; to remind us that we pray for peace and the people of Israel, to remind us of the beauty of Israel*).



- Enrichment** Take the class to the synagogue’s sanctuary to see the Israeli flag and to look at a blue and white tallit. Explain that the Israeli flag was modeled after the tallit. Compare and contrast the two (*both have blue stripes and a white background; the Israeli flag has a Magen David; the tallit has fringes, or tzitzit, on the four corners*). Have the students put on the tallit. You may want to invite your cantor to sing or teach “Hatikvah,” the unofficial national anthem of Israel.

- Page 5** ■ Invite a student to read the text on page 5. Ask, “How do you think Daniel feels as the plane is about to take off?” (*excited, nervous, happy*). “Have you ever flown in a plane? How did you feel? What do you think is inside the envelope Daniel is holding?”

- Page 6** ■ Ask students, “What are some places you feel at home in even though you don’t live there?” (*best friend’s house, grandparents’ home*), “What makes you feel so comfortable there?” (*know the people, go there frequently*), “Why might Jews feel comfortable in Israel even if they have never been there before?” (*we know about it from Torah, our ancestors lived there, we pray for Israel during synagogue services*).



- Enrichment** Hand each student a prayer book. Within an allotted time, e.g., five minutes, have the students find the name “Israel” or “Yisrael” as many times as they can in the prayer book. Share these references, pointing out, where appropriate, that some refer to the country of Israel and others to the Jewish people. (Your students may be familiar with the term “children of Israel”—*b’nai Yisrael*—which is a reference to our being descendants of the patriarch Jacob who was renamed Israel when he struggled with an angel [Genesis 32:29]). If you want, you can make it a contest: The student or team that finds the most references wins.

- There are three packets of food with Hebrew writing in the photograph. The packet on the top contains ketchup (*Hebrew: ketsshop*); the packet on the right is mustard (*Hebrew: ḥardal*); and the packet on the bottom is grape juice (*Hebrew: mitz anavim*).



- Page 7** ■ **Imagine Israel:** Possible answers include: *hot, sandy, sunny, interesting, special*.

- Page 8** ■ Say, “On the *bimah*, or raised platform, of many synagogues there are two flags—one of the country in which the congregation is located, and the other of Israel. What is the significance of this?” (*Both the country we live in and Israel are our homes, we can love both countries, we can care about both countries.*) Contrast this with living in countries where Jews are not allowed to publicly practice Judaism. (*Jews may not be able to pray together, display an Israeli flag, express their love of Israel.*) You may want to take this opportunity to have students place one of their Bonus Stickers on their Israel journal.

- Page 10** ■ **How Far Away Is Israel?** You may want to share these distances of Israel from major world cities: New York, United States—5,600 miles; London, England—2,000 miles; Sydney, Australia—8,750 miles.

- **How Big Is Israel?** Though Israel is a small country (smaller than the state of Maine!), it has an extraordinarily diverse geography and climate. In the north, the land is lush and fertile, watered by rivers and lakes. The south is a desert area—hot and dry for months at a time. The lowest point on earth—the Dead Sea—is located in Israel: 1,300 feet below sea level. It would take about nine hours to drive from the northernmost to the southernmost points in Israel, and about two hours from the east to the west.

**Hands On**



**Map It Out:** On the chalkboard, or using graph paper, draw a map of Israel. Then superimpose a to-scale drawing of your state. Ask your students to compare the two shapes. Alternatively, you can create templates of both maps and either have your students trace the maps, one at a time, on a piece of paper (superimposing one map on top of the other), or have them glue the maps onto the paper, and then label and color them. (You can use the Internet, a geography textbook, or atlas to gather information about your state’s size.)

- Daniel’s grandfather was passing on a family tradition by inviting Daniel to participate in the scavenger hunt. Ask students to describe some of the traditions their families have (*lighting Shabbat candles, birthday celebrations, stories before bed*). Ask, “How do traditions bring the members of our families closer together?” (*shared experiences, common memories*). Ask your students to describe some traditions of our worldwide Jewish “family” (*reading Torah, celebrating holidays, going to Israel*).



- Briefly review the map of Israel with your students, including the neighboring countries. Invite students to read the names of the locations. If you have visited Israel, you may want to bring in pictures of yourself in some of the places that are shown on the map.

The map on pages 14–15 uses a light green typeface to distinguish the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and Golan Heights from the land that formed Israel’s pre-1967 borders. Depending on your students’ intellectual maturity and knowledge base, you may choose to discuss the political issues that surround these territories and Israel’s borders. You may also choose to show your students a map that illustrates the Green Line (Israel’s pre-1967 borders) and then have them draw those borders on pages 14–15.

- Help students identify the Hebrew in the photographs: *ezrah rishonah* (first aid), *beit kneset* (synagogue), *b’ruchim haba’im leyisrael* (welcome to Israel).

**My Israel Journal**



Explain that Israel is always in the thoughts and hearts of the Jewish people. As a class, or individually, have students write a poem or story—or draw a picture—that expresses the Jewish people’s connection to Israel. Remind them that our ties to Israel go back to the time of Abraham and Sarah.

**Family Activity**



Have families compare your state to Israel in at least two ways. For example, they might compare the number of people who live in your state with the population of Israel. They might also compare the number of synagogues in your state with the number in Israel. Or they could compare the major industries of your state with those of Israel. Encourage families to be creative and to use the Internet to gather information. Request that families provide the sources of their information.

Have students share their findings in class and consider including the information in an article for your synagogue newsletter or presenting it as part of a synagogue service or special event.