

Herzog Global Mini-Course

Bringing Eretz Yisrael into Your Classroom

Rabbi Alan Haber

Many of the events and topics described in the Tanach, the Talmud, and other Jewish sources can be best understood when placed into their context in Eretz Yisrael. In this six-unit self-guided mini course, we will explore different ways to incorporate maps, videos, and photos from Eretz Yisrael, as well as introducing knowledge of topography, roads, and archeology into your classroom, empowering students to explore the insights these tools can yield.

The topics covered will include Torat HaAretz, Emek Yizrael, Biblical Be'er Sheva, Gidon & Shaul, Archeology as a Tool for Parshanut, and Eretz Yisrael in Subjects Other than Tanakh.

Each unit will:

1. Introduce one or more texts with puzzling questions, the answers to which depend on the geography, topography, or other knowledge of Eretz Yisrael.
2. Demonstrate how this knowledge can help students to answer those questions, and
3. Introduce various maps, photos, and internet resources that can help us and our students and demonstrate ways of using them in the classroom.

This course will include:

6 asynchronous study units

1 Final assignment

Course assessment is based on the completion of all course units and the submission of the final assignment for grading.

Course Units

1. Torat HaAretz

Students will deepen their appreciation for the significance of understanding the geography and topography of Eretz Yisrael, as well as its unique climate features. We will discuss topics that can only be understood properly with this knowledge (such as the incident of *shemesh b'givon dom*, the idea of *se'ir la'azazel* and the significance of rain in *Eretz Yisrael*).

MATERIALS used will include maps, photos and short videos of weather radar showing rain patterns.

2. Emek Yizrael

This unit will serve as an introduction to methodology, by choosing one important part of the country (Emek Yizrael) and using technological tools (especially the maps on Hatanakh.com and

Google Maps 3-D views) to understand the geography and topography. The unit will include several short tutorials teaching the students how to effectively use these tools. Specifically, we will expose students to one of the most important valleys (serving as a mountain pass and part of a major international highway) in the Land of Israel. They will understand its economic and military significance, and how this affects many events that happened there, from the earliest historical events through the twentieth century – including several major Biblical stories.

MATERIALS used will include topographical drawings of the land of Israel, Google maps and Google Earth, and short videos.

3. **Understanding a Site throughout Different Time Periods**

Using biblical Be'er Sheva as an example, students will examine a particular city that existed throughout the Biblical period, using knowledge of its geographic location and climate, together with the archeological remains discovered there, to shed light on the biblical stories. They will experiment with the idea of teaching other biblical texts from different periods to help understand whatever text they are teaching.

MATERIALS will include maps, photos including aerial shots, and videos.

4. **Gidon and Shaul**

We will compare two different Biblical events (Gidon's battle against the Midianites in Shoftim, and Shaul's last battle against the Philistines at the end of Shmuel) and note the many military and geographic parallels between these two events, the stark contrast between the outcomes, and the exegetical and spiritual lessons that can be learned from these comparisons.

MATERIALS will include close reading of the two texts with maps, and videos.

5. **Archeology as a Tool for Parshanut**

We will learn how to use the insights gained from archeological excavations to deepen our understanding of the Biblical text, as well as some of the challenges and potential pitfalls of using this information.

MATERIALS will involve photos and videos from archeological excavations including the City of David, the Old City of Jerusalem, and other sites.

6. **Eretz Yisrael in Subjects Other than Tanakh**

In this final unit, we will expand the reach of our discussion beyond Tanakh. We will experiment with applying the methodologies we learned in the previous units to other subjects such as Mishna, Gemara, Halakha, and Jewish History. Along the way, we will learn about a few important subjects where knowledge gained in Eretz Yisrael can be particularly useful, such as an understanding of ancient olive presses and the origins of the synagogue as an institution.

MATERIALS will include historical texts, photos, and videos.

Suggested Readings

Overview of Geography of Israel: <https://bje.org.au/knowledge-centre/israel/geography-of-israel/>

About Emek Yizrael: 2009, אסף זלצר, עורך: "עמק יזרעאל וכל נתיבותיו", הוצאת יד בן-צבי, 2009

For a suggestion on understanding the battle of Barak and Devorah against Sisera: See "דעת מקרא" על "אדם זרטל", "סודו של סיסרא", הוצאת דביר, 2010. For another opinion, see "ספר שופטים, עמודים מז-מח

For an overview of the excavations at Tel Be'er Sheva:

<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/tel-beer-sheva-city-of-the-patriarchs/>

On the possibility that the site known as "Tel Be'er Sheva" is not the main biblical city of Be'er Sheva, see: https://www.antiquities.org.il/article_heb.aspx?sec_id=17&sub_subj_id=461

On the contrast between Shaul and David as seen in the contrast between Chapters 28 and 29 (and the possibility that these chapters are presented out of chronological order):

<https://www.hatanakh.com/sites/herzog/files/herzog/55.pdf>

On the development of ancient synagogues: "בתי כנסת עתיקים: קובץ מחקרים – הוצאת יד בן-צבי תשמ"ח", צבי אילן, "בתי כנסת קדומים בארץ ישראל", הוצאת משרד הבטחון 1991 and