

## 6

## Israel

## Howdy, Pilgrim!

## PART III

**W**hen you think of pilgrims, does your mind's eye conjure up a scene of the Pilgrim's progress to the Celestial City, wallowing and wrestling through the miry Slough of Despond? Or do scenes of Pilgrims setting up a Thanksgiving Feast at Plymouth Rock flash through your mind? Let's close our eyes and become a different kind of pilgrim; one who journeys all the way to the Dome of the Rock in the heart of Israel's Old World.

A **pilgrim** is one who travels or pilgrimages to distant lands, or one who journeys to sacred places. We are going to do both! God's Word promises a blessing to him "*whose heart is set on pilgrimage*" (Ps. 84:5 NKJV). Let's see how God will bless us!

The early church historian, Eusebius, speaks of the first pilgrim, Alexander, (later to become the Bishop of Jerusalem), who traveled to Israel before 213 A.D. "for the purposes of prayer and investigation of the Holy places." That was a mere 200 years after the crucifixion of our Lord. For the following 1,800 years people just like you and me have been strapping on their sandals, filling their water jugs, and coming to see with their own eyes the places where Jesus was born, where He lived and taught, and where He sacrificed Himself for all the world—then staggeringly, rose from the dead! So, would *you* like to go on this pilgrimage?

Can you sing the song with me? "O Little Town of Bethlehem..." Stand here atop one of the rolling Judean Hills, looking out over the white buildings of Bethlehem, and listen to the words the prophet



*Walk the way of the pilgrims through the old streets of Jerusalem. Photo by Nagillum, licensed under CC BY 2.0.*

Micah spoke of this place, *“And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a ruler who will shepherd my people, Israel”* (Matt. 2:6). Ruth, from the Book of Ruth, may have lived in Bethlehem; but it was great-grandson, King David, who was both born in Bethlehem, and rose to shepherd the nation of Israel. Yet the Scripture speaks most importantly of this Bethlehem as the place where God became flesh.

(Can you find Bethlehem on your map of Israel? From the streets of Bethlehem, we can see the buildings of Jerusalem 6 mi [10 km] to the north.) Doesn't it seem fitting that the Good Shepherd,

from our hike up here, we'll never again think of Mary's donkey easily cantering down a flat road into this dusty town. Bethlehem rises up out of the steep rugged terrain in the Judean and Samarian hill country. Our pilgrim road journeys over extremely rocky hills punctuated by deep ravines and plunging gorges that make travel in central Israel a strain on both man and machine.

Past Rachel's tomb, we travel Bethlehem's main thoroughfare, Manger Street, seeking to find the exact spot where Jesus was born. Actually, no one knows the spot for certain! Centuries ago, a certain cave used as a barn for cattle was believed to be where our Lord Jesus spent His first night on

coming to earth, so we too bend low to enter the small doorway of the Church of the Nativity. Built by order of Constantine the Great (A.D. 330), and rebuilt by Emperor Justinian after its destruction during a revolt, this dimmed Church of the Nativity with its ancient stone walls, may be the oldest Christian church in the world. Inside

a population of more than 185,000 people, is a Muslim town. There is however, still a bylaw that requires the mayor of Bethlehem to be a Christian.

We pilgrims now shake the dust off our sandals, and head north out of Bethlehem and up to the northern hills of Galilee to the city of Nazareth, the town where Jesus grew up and



The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem is one of the oldest Christian churches in the world. Photo by Berthold Werner is in the public domain.

Jesus, whose body would be like bread broken for us, would be born in the town of Bethlehem whose name means “the house of Bread?” Breathless

Earth. But if we visit that cave today, on Manger Square, we find a white-stoned church: the Church of the Nativity. As Jesus humbled Himself by



Today we find the “little town of Bethlehem” to be a modern city of more than 60,000 people. Photo by Lux Moundji, licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.

the hushed place of worship, we step down a dark, narrow stairway into a candle-lit space revered as perhaps the manger of Jesus' birth. Don't you marvel that He came at all? We worship too.

Stepping back out into the street and the light of day, we venture past another nearby grotto, or small cave, where during the 5<sup>th</sup> century St. Jerome is said to have spent thirty long years hunched over texts, translating the Scriptures into Latin.

When Jesus was born, Bethlehem was a Jewish town. After the time of St. Jerome, Bethlehem was a Christian town. Today Bethlehem, with

lived most of His 33 years. Why did Jesus live in Nazareth instead of any other town in Israel? The Bible tells us, *“This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: ‘He shall be called a Nazarene’”* (Matt. 2:23).

The word Nazareth is thought to be rooted in the Hebrew word “netser” which means “shoot” or “branch.” And do you remember these words that Isaiah prophesied about the Messiah? *“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse and a Branch shall grow out of his roots”* (Isa. 11:1). Jesus was that branch! How fitting it is that Jesus' hometown was Nazareth, the “branch.”

Cupped as if in a basin, looming **limestone** hills rise around Nazareth. Nazareth's red roofed houses were built of the white limestone from these hills. Now where exactly did Jesus live with

began digging in search of the problem. Come see the startling discovery he dug up! We step down into a beautiful high-vaulted room from which Mr. Shama guides us through underfloor



Nazareth in Galilee with the Basilica of Annunciation. Photo by Daphna Tal, licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.

Joseph and Mary in Nazareth? Or can someone point the way to the carpenter shop where He hammered away? Again, we don't know for sure. We do see a sign directing us to Mary's well. Gaze down into the well's dark eye. Can't you see the boy Jesus drawing up water here for Mary's washing and cooking?

Across the modern plaza in front of Mary's well, we wave hello to Elias Shama, a Christian Arab and owner of the Cactus gift shop. While offering us a cold drink, Mr. Shama explains to us that the floor of the storage room at the back of the gift shop was always damp, so he

heating channels to a white marble floor and tile columns meeting overhead in an array of **arches**. Unbelievably, we are standing in an unearthed **Roman bathhouse**. Is it from the time of Jesus? One pilgrim wrote over 500 years ago, "arriving the next day in Nazareth...[t]he citizens told me that there existed a hot bathhouse where the Mother of Jesus immersed herself." Perhaps this indeed is the bathhouse of Jesus!

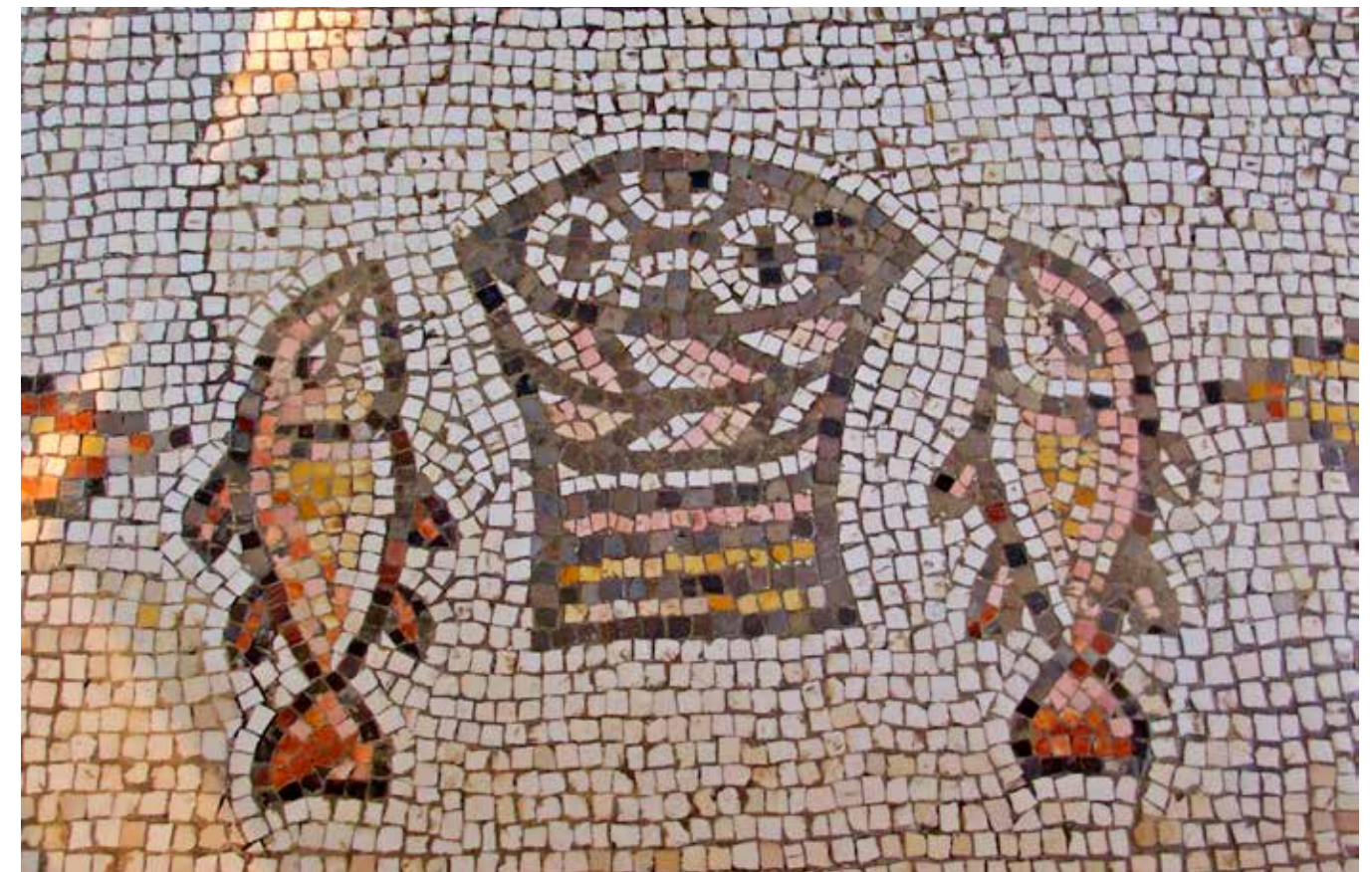
Saying our goodbyes to Mr. Shama, we pass children playing in the streets as we walk up the hill to the **souq**, the Arab Market. Today Nazareth is a city of more than 80,000, half of

the residents Christian, while the other half are Muslim.

Leaving Nazareth behind, we follow Jesus' trail 18.6 miles [30 km] to the east of Nazareth, passing through the little village once known as Cana, now known as *Kafr Kanna*, where Jesus performed his first miracle of turning water into wine and make our way to the Sea of Galilee. In the eastern shore town of Tabgha, let's slip into the Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes. If we look down to the design on the church floor, we see a mosaic of a basket of bread and two fishes, just like Jesus miraculously multiplied for the ravenous crowds! If you visited my home, you'd find that very same tile picture on a plate hanging on my wall, my very own two "St. Peter's Fish," from the Sea of Galilee.

Meandering south along these wave-lapped shores of the blue-green Sea of Galilee, we think of the Beatitudes Jesus spoke on these hills: "Blessed are the poor in spirit." If we peer through the flowers and palm trees, do you see the **octagonal** Church of Beatitudes perched there with a breathtaking view of the lake? Let's follow the other pilgrims into this beautifully domed church with its eight walls, one for each of the **Beatitudes**, and a beatitude inscribed on each of the eight windows.

Are you discovering the two very different kinds of holy sites in Israel? Some sites are churches where devoted pilgrims have worshipped down through the centuries, while other sites remain as God created them and our Lord Jesus actually saw and experienced them. Stepping out of The Church of the Beatitudes,



The Church of the Multiplication of Loaves and Fishes. Photo by Berthold Werner in the public domain.



*The Church of the Beatitudes. Photo taken by Luc Legay, licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.*

into the glorious sunshine of the Mount of Beatitudes, we are struck with the realization that these rolling hills are the same today as when Jesus once stood here; that the water of the Sea of Galilee rocks and rolls today as when our Lord Jesus once preached here; and as Jesus once spoke truth to the crowds on these hillsides, so we too continue to listen to His words.

Let's trek south now to David's city, Jerusalem, where native Israelis mill through congested booths and shops lining narrow streets, where merchants ply their crates of oranges and nuts, and where ancient cobbled-stone streets wind down to modern highways a-blur with cars and tour buses. Valleys drop away on all sides from the perched city of Jerusalem which was the capital of Israel in the time of King David and

is claimed by Israelis today as the capital of the modern country of Israel.

The Palestinian Arabs who lived here before the Jewish people returned to this land consider the eastern section of Jerusalem to be the future capital city of their state of Palestine. Thus, Jerusalem is a contested, disputed city with two nations of people claiming it as their very own capital city. In the midst of this ongoing conflict, pilgrims from three of the world's most recognized faiths—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—pilgrimage to this one city of Jerusalem, dressed very differently, worshiping very differently, and esteeming different locations, yet all seeking to encounter God.

Let us follow these Orthodox Jews, dressed in black suits, some with long side curls wisping out from under their black hats, to their holy

site. Before a looming honey-colored stonewall, the bearded men drape themselves in a white prayer shawl with tassels and bow their heads in prayer. Why do Jews the world over make pilgrimage to this wall built with massive stones? These stones are the last remnant of the Western Wall of Herod's Temple, from the time of Jesus. Jews believe the Western Wall has greater holiness than any other place on Earth to which they are able to pilgrimage. (At the top of the Western Wall lies the area where the hallowed Solomon's Temple once stood. While it is revered as more holy, Jews do not have ready access to this area since it is under Muslim control.) Sometimes the **Western Wall** is referred to as the Wailing Wall—but

neither does the wall wail, nor do Jews cry here. If we listen closely we may hear Jews praying in Hebrew for God to bless the land of Israel. As this wall was once part of God's Temple, Jews believe that to pray before the Western Wall is to pray before the ear of God.

Respectfully standing before this long, expansive Western Wall, with its clumps of grass sprouting up here and there, we are in awe of living during this time in history, when Jewish men, women and children may worship here. From the time of Romans walking around in togas, the Western Wall was not controlled by Israeli Jews but by distant, non-Jewish powers. During a short but fierce six day war in 1967 the Israelites captured the eastern section of



*The Western Wall is the last remnant of the last Temple where Jews come to pray. Photo licensed under CC BY 2.5.*



## Field Notes

*Howdy Pilgrim! Are you ready to take a rest and talk about your travels so far?*

### PRESS RECORD AND TALK TO ME

- ◇ **About Bethlehem :** *Which Biblical people were born here? Can you tell me about the journey Mary and Joseph took to get here? What is the Church of the Nativity? How do we get in? What will we see inside?*
- ◇ **About Nazareth:** *Can you describe the town? Why is Nazareth an important city historically? How many people live here today?*
- ◇ **About the Sea of Galilee:** *What miracle did Jesus do at Cana? What would we see inside the Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes? Can you describe the Church of the Beatitudes?*
- ◇ **About Jerusalem:** *Why do so many pilgrims come to Jerusalem? What is the Western Wall? Can you tell me about the people who pray there?*

Jerusalem and for the first time in 2,000 years, Jews once again controlled the Western Wall. Jews around the world cried tears of joy. We too tuck a scrap of paper with our prayer of thanks in with the other paper prayers stuck between the great stones of the Western Wall.

Just above the Western Wall with its praying Jews, do you see turbaned and veiled Muslims pilgrimage to their holy site: the Mosque of Omar? The Mosque of Omar is *not* actually a Muslim mosque (a Muslim place of worship) but a holy **shrine** (a building that houses items considered holy) and no one named Omar built the mosque, but Omar prayed here! Better known as the Dome of the Rock, don't you think its golden **dome** dazzles and glimmers brilliantly in the Middle Eastern sun? Indeed one of the most famous landmarks of Jerusalem, the dome was once covered in genuine gold, but now is an aluminum dome covered with gold leaf, a gift from a king of the nearby country of Jordan.

Take your shoes off as we step into the Dome and onto its plush carpet. Tiled **mosaics** of paradise decorate walls and ceilings, marble columns supporting artful arches. Inscribed in Arabic on the interior octagon of the shrine are the words, "O you People of the Book, overstep not bounds in your religion, and of God speak only the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, is only an apostle of God, and his Word which he conveyed unto Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from him. Believe therefore in God and his apostles, and say not Three. It will be better for you. God is only one God. Far be it from his glory that he should have a son."

As magnificent as the shrine is architecturally, it is the rock underneath the glittering dome that makes this place holy. Named the Noble Rock, the rock under the golden dome is thought by Muslims to be the place where their founder, Mohammed, ascended up to heaven to the throne of Allah. For Muslims, this Noble Rock is the third holiest site in the world. Jews and Christians revere Noble Rock as Mount Moriah. For Jews and Christians,

this Noble Rock of Mount Moriah is the place where Abraham prepared to sacrifice Isaac and where the Jewish Temple's Holy of Holies, the very dwelling place of God, once stood. Yes, Noble Rock indeed! And now we understand the name, Dome of the Rock.

Emerging from the shrine, we note the expansive area, part of the Temple Mount, between the Western Wall and the Dome of the Rock. Someday, perhaps in your lifetime, another glorious temple, the Third Temple, might once again be constructed on the Temple Mount. Then devout people the world over will make pilgrimage to that spectacular holy site, and maybe *you* will write to tell us all about it!

While Christian pilgrims visit Muslim and Jewish holy sites, we also quietly walk the Way of Grief, often called by its Latin name, the **Via Dolorosa**. To walk the Via Dolorosa and its winding cobblestone streets is to follow what many believe to be the same path our bruised Lord Jesus dragged His heavy cross to the crucifixion. As our minds fill with thoughts of our Savior, we pass Israeli children running home from school and Jewish mothers, kerchiefs knotted under their chins, carrying home the groceries from the marketplace. We wonder what Jesus thought as He trod these stones and how He loved the people of this world.

Our Via Dolorosa route leads to a sprawling, domed church, the Church of the Holy **Sepulchre**. This

cavernous church, its dim recesses lit only by lamps and candles, is thought to stand at the location where our Lord Jesus was nailed to the cross. Where once our Lord hung on a rugged cross, today candles glimmer and create shadows before an altar and paintings of the crucifixion. We step into the small inner building housing the place thought to be Jesus' tomb. Leaning low to look into the burial shafts of carved stone, we marvel at the miracle before our eyes: the tomb is empty! Jesus is *alive*! This explains why some Christians refer to the church not as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, but as the Church of the Resurrection!



*Priests still lead pilgrims down The Via Dolorosa each week. Photo in the public domain courtesy of Lewis Larsson.*

Five different Christian denominations share the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, robed priests sweeping this way and that. But until just a few years ago, the church had only one entrance of colossal doors. The five different

church shared by 5 different Christian groups, whose front door is unlocked and locked every day by a Muslim, to see where a Jew died for the sins of the world. Israel truly is a holy land for three different faiths.



The Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Photo by Jorge Lascar, licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.

Christian groups could not agree on who would step up the short ladder to the keyhole, head-height off the ground, to lock and unlock the creaking door. To keep the peace, the door's foot-long iron key was entrusted to a Muslim family, the Nuseibehs. For over eight hundred years, from the time of the Crusades, Nuseibeh grandfathers have passed the key down to their sons. In the blue light of early morning, the Nuseibeh family still comes to unlock the church's massive wooden doors, returning to lock the church door each evening at dusk. Here, at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Christians come to one of Christendom's most holy sites, a

When I was younger, I mistakenly thought Israel remained an ancient place where people today still lived just like they did in Bible times. Pilgrims of the faith may explore Israel's ancient sites, but Israelis themselves are exploring the future, areas of knowledge and education, creative innovations and ideas! Actually, the Bible land of Israel is today one of the most progressive, modern countries in the world! Israel has more scientists and engineers amongst its peoples than any other country on earth. The technology involved in the computer on which I write was first designed in the country of Israel. Computer programs such as Yahoo and MSN Messenger are entirely Israeli products. The



Matam High-Tech park in Haifa – the largest and oldest High-Tech park in Israel. Photo taken by Zvi Roger, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.

scientists and engineers of Israel also invent more medical devices to help sick people than any other country. A medical test at my doctor's office has the words "Made in Israel" printed in small letters on the side. The lands of the Bible are actually very modern!

Do you know someone with a sparkling diamond ring? That diamond may well have passed through Israel! Digging in Israel's dirt will not yield you any diamonds, but more Israelis purchase rough diamonds from other places in the world than any other country on Earth. Israelis operate lasers and robots to cut these purchased rough diamonds and Israeli craftspeople, using sophisticated polishing equipment, work to manufacture many of the world's most beautiful diamonds. Touch the next diamond you see—it may have come from the hand of an Israeli diamond craftsman. And no wonder, as it said about the Israeli people in the Bible: "For they are as the stones of a crown, Sparkling in [God's] land" (Zech 9:16).

We've set our hearts on pilgrimage, traveling throughout Israel, and hasn't God blessed us, just as He promised? Psalm 122:4 declares that "All...the LORD's people make their pilgrimage here. They come to give thanks to the name of the LORD" (NLT). So do we. Yet the "Holy Land" is not only over in Israel; every place where the Spirit comes into a person's heart is holy ground. Oh, to remember: "**The earth is the LORD'S and all...those who dwell in it**" (Ps. 24:1). Amen!

## Field Notes

What a rich and fascinating place Israel is. Have you enjoyed our journeys through Bible lands?

### PRESS RECORD AND TALK TO ME

- ◇ **About the Dome of the Rock:** Can you describe the Dome? What does the inside look like? What is Noble Rock? Why is the rock a holy site for Muslims? What do Christians and Jews call the rock? Why is it important to them?
- ◇ **About the Via Dolorosa:** What does the name mean? Who walked this way?
- ◇ **About the Church of the Holy Sepulchre:** What site is this church believed to be built upon? What is another name for this church? Who holds the key to the door? How is it unlocked each day?
- ◇ **About modern-day Israel:** What kinds of things are made in Israel? Why do so many diamonds travel through Israel? Is Israel a modern place, like your own town or city? Or has it remained as it was in Bible times?

# Travel Log

## USING YOUR GLOBE OR ATLAS, DRAW AN OUTLINE MAP OF TURKEY

*We've seen things today that simply must be mapped, so that they will never be forgotten!*



### Map Notes:

Let's record the locations of:

- ◇ Bethlehem
- ◇ Nazareth
- ◇ Kafr Kanna
- ◇ Tabgha
- ◇ Sea of Galilee
- ◇ Jerusalem
- ◇ Mount Moriah



If you'd like, draw pictures or symbols on your map representing:

- ◇ **The stable where Jesus was born** (*perhaps a star?*)
- ◇ **Jesus' home in Nazareth** (*maybe a hammer to represent Joseph's work as a carpenter?*)
- ◇ **Jesus' miracles** (*a basket of bread and fish in Tabgha? A jug of wine in Kafr Kanna? A Man walking the Sea of Galilee?*)
- ◇ **Western Wall** (*a scroll of paper to represent the prayers?*)
- ◇ **The Dome of the Rock** (*a shining gold dome seems appropriate!*)
- ◇ **Via Dolorosa** (*a cross?*)
- ◇ **Church of the Holy Sepulchre** (*an empty tomb? A long metal key?*)
- ◇ **Modern Israel** (*perhaps a computer? Or a diamond ring?*)

**Travel Notes:** Geographers write what they've seen in order to share the adventure with others—and so they can revisit the places in their memories! **On the next page of your travel log, record three important sights you want to remember from your photos of Israel.**

# Bringing It Home

## SIMPLE IDEAS TO BRING THE WORLD TO YOUR DOOR

**Using These Forms:**

**ART | BOOKS | FOOD | MUSIC | POETRY**

### Food:

#### Bagels and Lox

The bagel may have originated in Poland in the 1600s and been brought to America by immigrating Jews, but today it is customarily associated with Jewish cuisine. Top a poppy-seed or sesame-seed bagel with cream cheese and lox (smoked salmon) and enjoy! (If you don't have smoked salmon, your store should carry salmon-flavored cream cheese.)



*Bagels and lox.*

#### Hamentaschen

These triangular shaped cookies are baked and enjoyed during the feast of Purim, which celebrates the salvation of Israel through Queen Esther's heroic act. The name comes from the Hebrew words *osnei haman* (literally, Haman's Ears).

- 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 of your choice*

Beat butter and sugar thoroughly. Add egg and mix until well combined. Add the orange juice and mix again, until well combined. Add flour, ½ 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.



*Photo of Hamentaschen*

# Go into all the world..

## *a walk of prayer*

**A**s we've journeyed through tiny Israel we've been amazed to walk the land of the Bible and see that all the places we've read about really exist! And we've discovered that Israel is full of boys and girls not so different from us at all. They were created by a God who loves them dearly—just as He loves you.

**Will you and your family join me in praying for the Israeli people?**

Lord, give us Your love for the peoples of the world, and help our family to live in a way that shows our love for them.

Father, we think of this little country that is the center of so much attention, and we think of how much You love her people. We pray for **peace** and Your purposes for the nation of Israel.

~As the holy land for 3 major religions, Israel is continually being wrestled over. Lord, may the people who live within her borders live at **peace with their neighbors**. May they learn to **love each other** as You patiently love us. We pray for godly wisdom for the world's governments as decisions are made regarding this region of the world and may Your will be accomplished.

~We think of the families, mothers and fathers, children and grandparents, cousins and aunts and uncles, who must live their lives in the midst of such turmoil. **We ask that You keep families safe**. We ask that You **provide for their needs** in the middle of conflicts. May there be food for their tables and warm houses to find safety. May they find joy in You.



~We pray for the thousands of **immigrants** who leave other countries behind to embrace Israel as their homeland. Many are without jobs or homes. Please provide for their needs. May no one go hungry or live in the cold.

~We pray for the **pilgrims** who make their way to Israel each year. As they travel, may they discover You, and make their pilgrimage complete.

We love you, Lord, and the people who are living in Israel today. May the Light of our Savior dawn over all nations today. Draw us all closer to You, Father. In Jesus name, Amen.