



No Land Like Israel

No religion in history has been as closely tied to a Land as has Judaism. That connection goes back almost 4,000 years, from the first words of G-d to Avraham: "Leave your country, your birthplace and your father's house and go to the Land I will show you." No sooner had he arrived than G-d said: "To your offspring I will give this Land." Seven times G-d promised the Land to Avraham, and promised it again to Yitzchak and Yaakov.

The word *teshuva*, often translated as "repentance," literally means "homecoming" in a double sense: spiritually to G-d, and physically to the Land of Israel. For Israel is the Jewish people's place of destiny: a tiny land for a tiny people, yet one whose role in religious history is vast. It is the land to which Moshe and the Israelites travelled across the desert, the land from which they were exiled

twice, the land to which our ancestors journeyed whenever they could and which they never voluntarily left, never relinquished. Jewish history is the story of the longing for a Land.

The holy Land remains the place where Jews were summoned to create a society of justice and compassion under the sovereignty of G-d. And though it was subsequently held holy by Christianity and Islam, the centres of these other faiths were elsewhere: for Western Christians, Rome, for Eastern Christians, Constantinople, and for Muslims, Mecca and Medinah. There are 56 Islamic states today, 82 Christian ones, but only one Jewish State. It is the only place on earth where Jews are a majority, where they enjoy self-rule, where they are able to build a society and shape a culture as Jews.

The Balfour Declaration in 1917, subsequently ratified by the League of Nations, long before the Holocaust, was an attempt to rectify the lingering denial of a nation's right to its land and the subsequent persecution of Jews in country after country, century after century, in a history of suffering that has no parallel.

The Jews who returned were not strangers, outsiders, an imperial presence, a colonial force. They were the Land's original inhabitants: the only people in 4,000 years who created an independent nation there. All other occupiers of the Land – from the Assyrians and Babylonians to the Ottomans and the British – were imperial powers, who ruled the Land as a district of their vast realms. The Egyptians did not offer the Palestinians a state when they ruled Gaza between 1948 and 1967; neither did the Jordanians when they ruled the West Bank during those years. The only nation to have offered Palestinians a state is the State of Israel. And every day, we pray for its peace.



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks זצ"ל was a global religious leader, philosopher, and award-winning author who served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth.