



An Ancient Connection

Israel's detractors in the Middle East are consistently attempting to diminish the Jewish people's historical ties to the Land of Israel. They assert that the Holocaust was the sole reason for the creation of Israel. Unfortunately, this distortion of history is becoming more and more mainstream.

This narrative asserts that the Palestinians were forced to pay for the crimes of the Europeans, and that there is no Jewish attachment to the Land of Israel. This is exactly what Yasser Arafat and his aides did at Camp David in 2000 when they denied that any Jewish Temple ever existed in Jerusalem. A *Jerusalem Post* editorial written at the time explained why. "Without recognizing Israel's ancient connection to Jerusalem, the Palestinians can cling to the notion that Israel exists only by might, not by right."

What, then, is the Jewish attachment to the Land of Israel? The Jewish connection to Israel is rooted in *thousands* of years of history, a significance that was never lost on the Jewish people.

The Hebrew tribes entered the Land of Israel around 1,400 BCE. They were later united under King Saul and his successor, King David, who established Jerusalem as his capital. Except for a brief exile in the 6th century BCE, Jews lived in their land until the Romans crushed the Jewish revolt, in 135 CE.

After suppressing all Jewish resistance, the Roman emperor Hadrian attempted to erase the Jewish connection to the Land of Israel. Hadrian renamed the area Syria Palaestina (later anglicized as "Palestine"), Jerusalem was renamed Aelia Capitolina and Jews were barred from entering.

One could be forgiven for thinking that Jewish history should have ended then. But Roman efforts to eliminate the Jewish people would not be successful. Scattered thousands of miles apart, the Jewish people never gave up their aspiration to return to their ancient homeland. For nearly 2,000 years, Jews in all corners of the world longed for "next year in Jerusalem."

Many Jews fulfilled this hope. By the 9th century, returning Jews revived Jewish life in Jerusalem and the Galilee. Even after the Crusaders massacred many Jews in the Holy Land, Jews continued to return. In fact, there has been continuous Jewish presence in the Land of Israel since Biblical times.

This is the key point. The goal of Zionism was to re-establish a Jewish state in the Land of Israel, which was still inhabited by many Jews when Zionism emerged in the 19th century. When telling the story of Israel we must also emphasize that the Zionist movement sought, and won, international recognition and legitimacy. After World War I, the League of Nations incorporated the British government's 1917 Balfour Declaration—which favored the "establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people"—into the British Mandate for Palestine. The U.S. Congress endorsed the Mandate soon after.

In 1947, the United Nations called for the establishment of a Jewish state alongside an Arab state in Palestine. The Jews immediately accepted the resolution, while the Arabs vehemently rejected it and went to war with the stated aim of destroying the nascent Jewish state. Less than a year later, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion declared the establishment of Israel.

This is the truth about Israel's roots that must be accentuated, even to the most unreceptive listeners.