Lesson Plan – Israel: Why This Land?

The following lesson plan is a suggestion of how some of the resources contained in this unit could be incorporated into a 60-minute class period for a high-school age class. This will focus solely on the question of ‘Why this land?’ in thought of Rabbi Sacks. *There are many other themes and teaching opportunities found in this unit of resources which would take more classroom-time to explore with your students.*

**Goal:** To understand the message held within the geography of the Land of Israel, as identified by Rabbi Sacks in his writings.

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**1-5 minutes: Opening Activity**

Using [Google Earth](https://earth.google.com), have your students explore the geography of the Land of Israel (either individually/in pairs, or as a whole class on a smartboard). Ask them to reflect on the following questions:

- What do you notice about the geography (physical and human/political) of the Land of Israel?
- Do these things make Israel a desirable place to live? What are the benefits and challenges to living here?
- Would this be where you would choose to locate the “Promised Land”?

**6-25 minutes: Where would you rather live, Israel or Egypt?**

Ask your students to look at the following verses and Rashi and Ramban’s commentary on them, and consider the following questions:

- [Devarim 11:10-12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?v=Deut%2011%3A10-12&doi=eng_biblart)
- Rashi on Devarim 11:10
- Ramban on Devarim 11:10
Core Questions:

- Does the biblical description we read in Devarim of the Land of Israel make it sound like a good place or a bad place to live?
- According to Rashi and Ramban, where is a better place to live? Why?
- Having considered both approaches, where would you rather live, Israel or Egypt?

26-35 minutes: The Spiritual Dimension of the Land: The Approach of Rav Kook

Go to this section of the Israel teaching resources on RabbiSacks.org. Ask your students to consider the approach of Rav Kook to why this land was chosen by Hashem to be the Promised Land, and how this compares to the approaches they found in the Rashi and Ramban sources.

36-50 min: Rabbi Sacks’ answer to the question Why this Land?

Ask for volunteers to read aloud the two texts from Future Tense quoted on the Israel teaching resources page, on RabbiSacks.org (pp. 137-138 and 139-140). Using the Core Questions found there discuss with your class Rabbi Sack’s approach to why this land was chosen by Hashem to be the Promised Land, and how this compares to the approaches they saw in Rashi and Ramban.

51-56 min: Activity: Summarising all the approaches

Using the table on the next page, either as a class, or in groups/individually, ask your students to complete all the sections:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Why this land?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Devarim 11:10-12</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rashi on Devarim 11:10</td>
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<td>Ramban on Devarim 11:10</td>
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<td>Rav Kook</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rabbi Sacks</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
56-60 min: Summing up:

In the last few minutes of the class ensure your students have understood the following points:

- **Devarim 11:10-11** seems to suggest the Land of Israel is the “Promised Land” where one would wish to live, but is ambiguous in its description as to why this is
- **Rashi** suggests it is easier to live here agriculturally
- **Ramban** admits this is not the case, but rather it is a land that connects you to God (because it is not easy to live here agriculturally)
- **Rav Kook** describes an inherent holiness and spirituality in the land itself
- **Rabbi Sacks** sees a core message of Judaism built into the physical (and human/political) geography of the Land of Israel. These are some of his key points about the land:
  - Israel is a place from which it is impossible to build an empire
  - Israel has always been a small vulnerable country at the juncture of powerful empires.
  - There is a correlation between geography and spirituality - Israel is a place where people look up to heaven in search of rain/protection, not down to earth for natural water supply/resources.
  - Today, the geo-political reality of the Middle East/world, means Israel is still a place where people look up to heaven for protection (and inspiration) increasing the likelihood of connection and relationship with God.