

Steps to the State of Israel - 1

The Balfour Declaration

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his redeemer, the LORD of Hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no God... Fear not nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses" (Isaiah 44:6–8).

The Bible is clear: the existence of the people of Israel – the Jews – makes them witnesses to the existence of God. Hence, whilst Christadelphians do not support Israel politically, they have a keen interest in them.

This small nation, which was almost destroyed by the Romans in AD 70, has survived the ravages of time. In fact, despite the wickedness of anti-Semitism over many centuries, culminating in the Nazi holocaust, the Jews have not been wiped out but have seen a modern day revival. Israel is now a nation again after nearly 2000 years of stateless wandering amongst most of the countries of the world.

The Bible prophesied that they would be scattered and that one day they would return to the land God had promised them:

Hear the word of the LORD, O nations... He who scattered Israel will gather him and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock. For the LORD has ransomed Jacob and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him (Jeremiah 31:10–11).

This is clearly an important sign for the world today, and so this series of articles will look at some of the steps that have led to the formation of the

modern State of Israel, as we find them foretold in prophecy, and can read them for ourselves.

2017 marks the centenary of the statement issued by the British Government known as the Balfour Declaration (named after Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour) and it is reproduced in full opposite. A number of reasons have been put forward as to the British Government's motivation, and some are considered below.

British Self-Interest

By November 1917 the First World War had been raging for three years. While many people focus on the carnage on the Western Front, significant fighting had been taking place in the Middle East. Strategists considered that knocking Turkey (Germany's ally) out of the war would open up the "soft underbelly of Europe".

Attempts to do this in the Dardanelles (Gallipoli) and in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) had failed. The Prime Minister David Lloyd George was insistent that there should be another attempt by crossing the Suez Canal and invading Palestine. He considered that this would be an encouragement to the British people and wanted to give them Jerusalem as a gift by Christmas 1917.

Furthermore, the Suez Canal was the main artery of British Trade to and from India. Britain controlled Egypt at the time and wanted to settle people on the canal's East bank that would be favourable to them. So, who better than the Jews?



Foreign Office.

November 2nd, 1917.

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet

"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country"

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

The Plight of the Jews

Persecution of the Jews was not a new thing, but it was evident in the late 19th Century that such anti-semitic sentiment was reaching a new intensity. The trial of a French Jew, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, on trumped-up charges of treason, highlighted the degree of hatred there was for the Jews not only in France but across the whole of Europe.

This resulted in the formation of a Jewish movement called Zionism, led initially by a Viennese newspaper reporter called Theodore Herzl. His book "*Der Judenstaat*" (the Jewish State) acted as a clarion call to Jews to consider forming their own state.

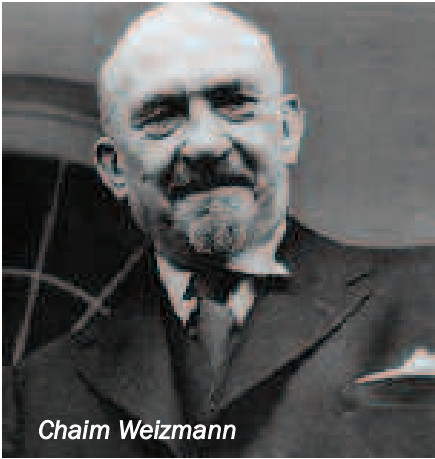
Herzl approached many governments and found a sympathetic ear in Britain. In fact the British offered the Jews a tract of land in Uganda in the early 1900s. This split the Zionist

movement, some wanting to take up the offer, the rest refusing to settle for anywhere other than Palestine, their ancient homeland. In the end this offer came to nothing and it was not until 1917 that Britain was in a position to make an offer of a homeland in Palestine itself.

Reward for Helping the War Effort

A key figure at this time was a Jewish émigré to Britain called Chaim Weizmann. He met Arthur Balfour (then Prime Minister) in 1906 in a private interview and convinced him that Jews would not accept anywhere to settle but their ancient homeland of Palestine.

When he was not furthering the Zionist cause, Weizmann was a research chemist at the University of Manchester and he had discovered a



way to make acetone by fermentation. At the time this was considered a failed experiment, but in the heat of the First World War, when there was a serious shortage of acetone for the manufacture of munitions, Weizmann's invention came to the fore. It was Lloyd George who put forward the idea that the Declaration was a reward to Weizmann for his acetone process.

Propaganda Coup

Another rationalisation for the Declaration is that it would favourably influence the Jews of Russia and America, who would persuade their governments to pursue the Allied cause in the First World War.

The Real Reason

No doubt all these motivations played their part. However, there was a far more significant influence at work in the minds of the decision-makers in government in 1917. This was the English Bible.

Most of these people had been brought up to read and learn the Bible and consequently they were very

favourably disposed to the Jews: the People of the Book. When talking about Palestine, Lloyd George had said that place names kept coming into the conversation that were *"more familiar to me than those of the Western Front"*. Balfour's biographer stated that his interest in Zionism stemmed from his boyhood training in the Old Testament under the guidance of his mother.

In his book *"Trial and Error"* Weizmann recounts his second meeting with Balfour, then First Lord of the Admiralty, who told him *"I believe that when the guns stop firing you may get your Jerusalem."*

Balfour and Weizmann

One of the remarkable aspects of this story is the unlikely friendship that arose between Zionist Chaim Weizmann, and statesman Arthur Balfour.

Weizmann was born in Russia to a relatively poor Jewish family who were involved in the timber trade. He trained as a chemist and worked in research for many years, as well as taking a leading role in the effort to promote Zionism. Balfour was from an aristocratic family: his uncle Lord Salisbury was Prime Minister in the late 1800s. Balfour held high office for over 20 years. Yet both men had grown up to read and learn the Old Testament scriptures and as a result were greatly influenced by it, regarding the Jews as God's people.

In 1925 Balfour was invited to Jerusalem to lay the foundation stone of the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus. By that time he was the Chancellor of the University of Cambridge and he wore his official robes for the occasion, as we can see in the picture opposite.

Five years later, the last non-family member to visit Balfour on his deathbed was Chaim Weizmann. Weizmann lived for another 27 years and became the first president of the newly founded State of Israel.

God at Work

The events in this article could be total coincidence, from a purely human point of view. However, when you read Bible prophecy, it becomes very apparent that God has always been at work directing people and nations to bring about the purpose He had from the beginning:

But you, O mountains of Israel, shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to my people of Israel, for they will soon come home (Ezekiel 36:8).

It is an interesting fact that while people make their own decisions, often for reasons of self-interest, God uses this to further His purpose. In fact most often the people concerned will never realise that they were part of God's plan.

The Declaration of November 2nd 1917 and the subsequent liberation of Jerusalem from Turkish rule on December 8th of that year were important steps in God's plan.

However, while the land had been liberated, much was yet to happen before Israel could become a nation again. We shall consider these next steps in the following instalments.

Simon Collard

