The Road to Balfour: The History of Christian Zionism
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Introduction

In this presentation we are going to trace some of the significant events and individuals that led to the Balfour Declaration.

1. Puritanism and the Conversion of the Jews

The road to Balfour began in the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation brought about a renewed interest in the Old Testament and God's dealings with the Jewish people. From Protestant pulpits right across Europe, the Bible was for the first time in centuries being taught within its historical context and given its plain literal sense. At the same time, a new assessment of the place of the Jews within the purposes of God emerged.

Puritan eschatology was essentially postmillennial and believed the conversion of the Jews would lead to future blessing for the entire world. In 1621, for example, Sir Henry Finch, an eminent lawyer and member of the English Parliament, published a book, *The World's Great Restauration (sic) or Calling of the Jews, (and with them) all the Nations and Kingdoms of the Earth, to the Faith of Christ.*

By the late 17th Century and right through the 18th Century, especially during the period of the Great Awakening, postmillennial eschatology dominated European and American Protestantism.[1] The writings and preaching of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758),[2] as well as George Whitefield, were influential in the spread of the belief that the millennium had arrived, that the gospel would soon triumph against evil throughout the world. God's blessings of peace and prosperity would follow the conversion of Israel, prior to the glorious return of Christ.[3]

2. The London Jews Society and Jewish Emancipation

Joseph Frey, a Hebrew Christian arrived in Britain in 1801 from Berlin to serve with the London Missionary Society. Seeing the plight of Jews in East London led Frey to abandon his plans to serve in Africa, In 1808 Frey and a few friends formed a society, ''for the purpose of visiting and relieving the sick and distressed, and instructing the ignorant, especially such as are of the Jewish nation.' This was founded in May 1809 as 'The London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews'. The less accurate description of 'London Jews' Society' (LJS) eventually proved more popular,

Originally an interdenominational body, it was reconstituted in 1815 as an Anglican missionary society. The primary aim was the conversion of Jews to Protestant Christianity. Four individuals stand out as having shaped the priorities and direction of the LJS in its formative years: Lewis Way, Joseph Wolff, Charles Simeon and William Hechler (I'll cover William a little later). The birth of Christian Zionism as a movement can therefore be dated to the founding of the London Jews Society. The LJS emerged as the first proto-Zionist organisation committed to Jewish restoration to Palestine at a time of heightened millennial speculation.

3. Napoleon and the Rise of Adventism

The late 18th and early 19th Centuries saw a dramatic movement away from the optimism of postmillennialism following a sustained period of turmoil on both sides of the Atlantic.[4] There was the American War of Independence (1775-1784), the French Revolution (1789-1793) and then the Napoleonic Wars (1809-1815). In 1804, Louis Napoleon had been crowned Emperor of the Gauls in the reluctant presence of the Pope.

During the Syrian campaign of Napoleon's Oriental expedition, in which he had sought to defeat the Ottoman rulers, cut off Britain from its Empire, and recreate the empire of Alexander from France to India, he become the first political leader to propose a sovereign Jewish State in Palestine:

'Bonaparte, Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the French Republic in Africa and Asia, to the Rightful Heirs of Palestine. Israelites, unique nation, whom, in thousands of years, lust of conquest and tyranny were able to deprive of the ancestral lands only, but not of name and national existence ... She [France] offers to you at this very time, and contrary to all expectations, Israel's patrimony ... Rightful heirs of Palestine ... hasten! Now is the moment which may not return for thousands of years, to claim the restoration of your rights among the population of the universe which had shamefully withheld from you for thousands of years, your political existence as a nation among the nations, and the unlimited natural right to worship Yehovah in accordance with your faith, publicly and in likelihood for ever (Joel 4:20).'

Napoleon believed that with compliant Jews controlling Palestine, French imperial and commercial interests as far as India, Arabia and Africa could be secured. Neither Napoleon nor the Jews were able to deliver. Nevertheless his proclamation 'is a barometer of the extent to which the European atmosphere was charged with these messianic expectations.'

In 1807 he plotted the division of Europe with the Czar of Russia and began a blockade of British sea trade with Europe. Two years later he arrested the Pope and annexed the

Papal States. He then began the systematic destruction of the Roman Catholic Church in France, seizing its assets, executing priests and exiling the Pope from Rome. By 1815, Napoleon's armies had fought, invaded or subjugated most of Europe and the Middle East, including Italy, Austria, Germany, Poland, Russia, Palestine and Egypt. Napoleon appointed his brothers as kings of Holland, Naples, Spain and Westphalia in what is today Germany. He even gave his own son the title 'King of Rome'. His plan was to create a United States of Europe, each state ruled by a compliant monarch, subject to himself as 'supreme King of Kings and Sovereign of the Roman Empire'.[5] Numerous preachers and commentators speculated on whether Napoleon was indeed the Antichrist.[6] Charles Finney, for example, predicted the imminent end of the world. In 1835 he speculated that 'If the church will do all her duty, the Millennium may come in this country in three years.'[7] William Miller narrowed the return of Christ down to the 21st March 1843, while Charles Russell more prudently predicted that Christ would set up his spiritual kingdom in the heavenlies in 1914. For many years, Russell's popular sermons linking biblical prophecy with contemporary events were reproduced in over 1,500 newspapers in the USA and Canada.[8] This sectarian speculation came to be embraced by mainstream evangelicalism through the influence of J. N. Darby and the Brethren.

4. Edward Irving and the Revival of Premillennialism

The revolution in prophetic and apocalyptic speculation concerning the Jewish people and the return of Christ can be largely attributed to the Scottish, Edward Irving[1], also the forerunner of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements.[2]

Given his growing popularity Irving was invited to preach at the annual service of the London Missionary Society in 1824, and a year later in 1825 to the Continental Society, in which Henry Drummond was already influential. Irving's address on that occasion was provocatively entitled, 'Babylon and Infidelity Foredoomed'. Irving controversially insisted that far from being on the threshold of a new era of blessing, the Church was about to enter a 'series of thick-coming judgments and fearful perplexities' preparatory to Christ's advent and reign.[4] Irving was clearly convinced that the Lord would return in his generation,

> I conclude, therefore, that the last days... will begin to run from the time of God's appearing for his ancient people, and gathering them together to the work of

> destroying all Antichristian nations, of evangelising the world, and of governing it during the Millennium...

Irving's premillennial and prophetic views concerning Israel came to have a profound influence over many Christian leaders and politicians not least John Nelson Darby, the founder of the Brethren and Henry Drummond (1786-1860), a city banker and politician, who later founded the Catholic Apostolic Church.

On the first day of Advent in 1826, the same year Irving was translating Lacunza's work, Drummond opened his home at Albury Park to a select group of some twenty invited guests to discuss matters of prophecy. These included the Revd. Lewis Way who had helped found the London Society for the Promotion of Christianity Among the Jews, or London Jews Society, as it was more commonly named, along with Joseph Frey. Also present was Hugh McNeile, another Anglican who, in 1830, published a book entitled 'The Prophecies Relative to the Jewish Nation,' from Albury Rectory. In this book McNeile made frequent references to 'dispensations' and the future national pre-eminence of Israel.[12] Some twenty men attended the first conference and in the region of forty attended one or more of those held at Albury. The majority were like Lewis Way and Hugh McNeile, were Anglicans, although others were Moravian, Church of Scotland and Nonconformist ministers.[13] Irving was to write of the first such conference,

> ...the six days we spent under the holy and hospitable roof of Albury House, within the chime of the church bell, and surrounded by the most picturesque and beautiful forms of nature... of which I can say is this, that no council, from that first which we convened at Jerusalem until this time, seemed more governed, and conducted, and inspired by a spirit of holy communion.[14]

Similar premillennial prophetic conferences were held at Albury each year until 1830, before proliferating, apparently under the increasing influence of J. N. Darby to other venues including the Powerscourt Conferences in Dublin held in the 1830's.

5. John Nelson Darby and the Rose of Dispensationalism

John Nelson Darby is regarded by many as the father of Dispensationalism and the most influential figure in the development of Christian Zionism. He was a charismatic figure with a dominant personality. He was a persuasive speaker and zealous missionary for his dispensationalist beliefs. He personally founded Brethren churches as far away as Germany, Switzerland, France and the United States, and translated the entire Scriptures into English. The churches Darby and his colleagues planted with the

seeds of Premillennial Dispensationalism in turn sent missionaries to Africa, the West Indies, Australia, New Zealand and, ironically, to work among the Arabs of Palestine. From 1862 onwards his controlling influence over the Brethren in Britain waned due, in particular, to the split between Open and Exclusive Brethren in 1848. Darby consequently spent more and more time in North America, making seven journeys in the next twenty years. During these visits, he came to have an increasing influence over evangelical leaders such as James H. Brookes, Dwight L. Moody, William Blackstone and C. I. Scofield.

6. Lord Shaftesbury and Restorationism

Zionism would probably have remained simply a religious ideal were it not for the intervention of a handful of influential aristocratic British politicians who came to share the theological convictions of Darby and his colleagues and translated them into political reality. One in particular, Lord Shaftesbury (1801-1885) became convinced that the restoration of the Jews to Palestine was not only predicted in the Bible,[9] but also coincided with the strategic interests of British foreign policy.[10] Others who shared this perspective, in varying degrees and for different reasons, included Lord Palmerston, David Lloyd George and Lord Balfour. Ironically, this conviction was precipitated by the actions of Napoleon, in the spring of 1799. The European Powers became increasingly preoccupied with the 'Eastern Question'. Britain and Prussia sided with the Sultan of Turkey against Napoleon and his vassal, Mehemet Ali. The necessity of preventing French control had led not only to the battles of the Nile and Acre, but also to a British military expedition in Palestine. With the defeat of Napoleon, Britain's main concern was how to restrain Russia. The race was on to control Palestine.

Stirred by memories of the Napoleonic expedition, Lord Shaftesbury argued for a greater British presence in Palestine and saw this could be achieved by the sponsorship of a Jewish homeland on both religious and political grounds.[11] British protection of the Jews would give a colonial advantage over France for the control of the Middle East; provide better access to India via a direct land route; and open up new commercial markets for British products.[12]

In 1839, Shaftesbury wrote an anonymous 30 page article for the *Quarterly Review*, entitled 'State and Restauration (sic) of the Jews.' In it Shaftesbury advocated a Jewish national homeland with Jerusalem the capital, remaining under Turkish rule but with British protection.[13] Shaftesbury predicted a new era for the Jews:

> ‘ … the Jews must be encouraged to return in yet greater numbers and become once more the husbandman of Judea and Galilee ... though admittedly a stiff-necked, dark hearted people, and sunk in moral degradation, obduracy, and ignorance of the Gospel ... [They are] … not only worthy of salvation but also vital to Christianity’s hope of salvation.’[14]

When Lord Palmerston, the Foreign Secretary, married Shaftsbury’s widowed mother-in-law, he was ‘well placed’ to lobby for this cause.[15] His diary for 1st August 1840 Shaftesbury reads:

> ‘Dined with Palmerston. After dinner left alone with him. Propounded my scheme which seems to strike his fancy. He asked questions and readily promised to consider it. How singular is the order of Providence. Singular, if estimated by man’s ways. Palmerston had already been chosen by God to be an instrument of good to His ancient people, to do homage to their inheritance, and to recognize their rights without believing their destiny. It seems he will yet do more. Though the motive be kind, it is not sound … he weeps not, like his Master, over Jerusalem, nor prays that now, at last, she may put on her beautiful garments.’[16]

Two weeks later, a lead article in *The London Times*, dated 17 August 1840, called for a plan ‘to plant the Jewish people in the land of their fathers’, claiming such a plan was under ‘serious political consideration’. Palmerston commended the efforts of Shaftesbury, the plan’s author as both ‘practical and statesmanlike’. Fuelling speculation about an imminent restoration, on 4 November of 1840, Shaftesbury took out a paid advertisement in *The Times* to give greater visibility to his vision.

> ‘RESTORATION OF THE JEWS. A memorandum has been addressed to the Protestant monarchs of Europe on the subject of the restoration of the Jewish people to the land of Palestine. The document in question, dictated by a peculiar conjunction of affairs in the East, and other striking “signs of the times”, reverts to the original covenant which secures that land to the descendants of Abraham.’[17]

The influence of Lord Shaftesbury, therefore, in promoting the Zionist cause within the political, diplomatic, and ecclesiastical establishment in Britain was immense. ‘He single-handedly translated the theological positions of Brightman, Henry Finch, and John Nelson Darby into a political strategy. His high political connections, matched by his uncanny instincts, combined to advance the Christian Zionist vision.’[18] Indeed it was probably Shaftesbury who inspired Israel Zangwell and Theodore Herzl to coin the phrase, ‘A land of no people for a people with no land.’ Shaftesbury, a generation earlier, imagining Palestine to be empty, had come up with the slogan, ‘A country without a nation for a nation without a country.’[19] Like Moses, Shaftesbury did not live to see his ‘Promised Land’ realised. However, through his lobbying, writings and public

speaking he did more than any other British politician to inspire a generation of Joshuas to translate his religious vision into a political reality.

Of those Christian political leaders to take up the mantle of Shaftesbury and achieve the Zionist dream, a small number stand out. These include Laurence Oliphant (1829-1888), William Hechler (1845-1931), David Lloyd George (1863-1945) and probably most significant of all, Arthur Balfour (1848-1930).

7. William Hechler and Theodore Herzl

By 1897, when the first World Zionist Congress met in Basle, Switzerland, Jewish leaders who favoured a Zionist State already had sympathetic support from many more senior British political figures. This was largely due to the efforts of one man, William Hechler. The son of LJS missionaries in France and Germany, Hechler was an Anglican priest and became chaplain to the British Embassy in Vienna in 1885, a position of strategic significance for the Zionist movement.[20] 'Imbued with evangelical millenarianism, he even formulated his own exact date for the re-establishment of the Jewish State.'[21] As with Shaftesbury's slogan, so Hechler's booklet, *The Restoration of the Jews to Palestine* (1894), predated Herzl's *Der Judenstaat* by two years, and spoke of the need for 'restoring the Jews to Palestine according to Old Testament prophecies.'[22] Hechler became Herzl's chief Christian ally in realising his vision of a Zionist State, one of only three Christians invited to attend the World Congress of Zionists. Herzl was not religious but he was superstitious and records a meeting with Hechler on 10 March 1896 in his diary:

> 'The Reverend William Hechler, Chaplain of the English Embassy here, came to see me. A sympathetic, gentle fellow, with the long grey beard of a prophet. He is enthusiastic about my solution of the Jewish Question. He also considers my movement a 'prophetic turning-point' - which he had foretold two years before. From a prophecy in the time of Omar (637CE) he had reckoned that at the end of forty-two prophetic months (total 1260 years) the Jews would get Palestine back. This figure he arrived at was 1897-98.'[23]

In March 1897, the year Hechler expected the Jews to begin returning to Palestine, Herzl described their second meeting at Hechler's apartment. Herzl was amazed to find books from floor to ceiling, 'Nothing but Bibles' and a large military staff map of Palestine made up of four sheets covering the entire floor of the study:

> 'He showed me where, according to his calculations, our new Temple must be located: in Bethel! Because that is the centre of the country. He also showed me models of the ancient Temple. 'We have prepared the ground for you!' Hechler said triumphantly ... I take him for a naive visionary ... However, there is something charming about his enthusiasm ... He gives me excellent advice, full

> of unmistakable genuine good will. He is at once clever and mystical, cunning and naive.'[24]

Despite Herzl's initial scepticism, Hechler kept his word and gained access to the German Kaiser William II, the Grand Duke of Baden as well as the British political establishment for Herzl and his Zionist delegation. Although sympathetic to the evangelistic ministry of the LJS, Hechler's advocacy and diplomacy marked a radical shift in Christian Zionist thinking away from the views of early restorationists like Irving and Drummond who saw restoration to the land as a consequence of Jewish conversion to Christianity. Now, Hechler was insisting instead, that it was the destiny of Christians simply to help restore the Jews to Palestine. David Lloyd George, who became Prime Minister in 1916, was another self-confessed Zionist, sharing similar views to those of Shaftesbury. In his own words, he was Chaim Weizmann's proselyte, 'Acetone converted me to Zionism.'[25] This was because Weizmann had assisted the British government in the development of a new explosive using acetone and Palestine appears to have been the reward.

8. The Balfour Declaration and Promise of Jewish Homeland

Probably the most significant British politician of all, however, was Arthur James Balfour (1848-1930), who pioneered the Balfour Declaration in 1917. Like Lloyd George, Balfour had been brought up in an evangelical home and was sympathetic to Zionism because of the influence of dispensational teaching.[26] He regarded history as 'an instrument for carrying out a Divine purpose.'[27] From 1905 Chaim Weizmann, then a professor of chemistry at Manchester University, began to meet regularly with Balfour to discuss the implementation of that goal. At Balfour's invitation, in July 1917, the Zionist Organisation offered a suggested draft to Balfour:

> '1. His Majesty's Government accepts the principle that Palestine should be reconstituted as the National Home of the Jewish people.
> 2. His Majesty's Government will use its best endeavours to secure the achievement of this object and will discuss the necessary methods and means with the Zionist Organization.'[28]

Balfour amended this to emphasize the prerogative of the British government. On the 2nd November 1917, Lord Balfour made public the final draft of the letter written to Lord Rothschild on the 31st October which became known as the Balfour Declaration:

> 'His Majesty's Government views 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 that object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done, which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing

> non-Jewish Communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.'[29]

Balfour was in fact already committed to the Zionist programme out of theological conviction and had no intention of consulting with the indigenous Arab population. In a letter to Lord Curzon, written in 1919, Balfour insisted somewhat cynically:

> 'For in Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country …the Four Great Powers are committed to Zionism. And Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires or prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land ... I do not think that Zionism will hurt the Arabs … in short, so far as Palestine is concerned, the Powers have made no statement of fact which is not admittedly wrong, and no declaration of policy which, at least in the letter, they have not always intended to violate.'[30]

What the Balfour Declaration left intentionally ambiguous was the meaning of a 'national home'. Was this synonymous with sovereignty or statehood and if so what were to be the borders? Would it occupy all of Palestine or just a portion? What was to be the status of Jerusalem? Furthermore, while it stated that 'the civil and religious rights of the existing population' were to be safeguarded and the territory was designated 'Palestine', there was no reference to Palestinians. 'They were an actual, but awkward non-identity.'[31] It was clearly Balfour's opinion that 'the present inhabitants' need not be consulted, either before or after.[32] That 90% of the population of Palestine were Arabs of whom around 10% were Christian seemed irrelevant to the politicians and Zionists who had another agenda.[33] So the awkward questions were left unanswered and it is these ambiguities which have continued to plague the so called "Middle East peace" negotiations for the last hundred years.

By 1921, Great Britain had created the most extensive empire in world history and become the foremost global super power. The British Empire had a population of about 458 million people, or one-quarter of the world's population. It covered about 36 million km² (14 million square miles), or one quarter of Earth's total land mass. It was in this context that the Balfour Declaration gave Zionism for the first time 'political legitimacy', led to the 1947 Partition Plan and UN recognition of the State of Israel. What followed, and the continuing impact of the Balfour Declaration was no less controversial but can wait for a future conference.

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[1] Cornelis P. Venema, The Promise of the Future, (Edinburgh, Banner of Trust, 2000), pp219-229.

[2] Jonathan Edwards, 'The History of the Work of Redemption', The Complete Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 2 (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1974).

[3] Other leading theologians to espouse this view included J. A. Alexander, Robert Dabney, Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, B.B. Warfield, Loraine Boettner and Charles H,. Spurgeon. See also 'Postmillennialism' in The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views, edited by Robert G. Clouse, (Downers Grove, Illinois, InterVarsity, 1977), pp17ff.

[4] A small number of 19th Century Postmillennial theologians did continue to espouse a form of Jewish Restorationism but only as a consequence of Jewish people coming to faith in Jesus and being incorporated within the Church. These include Charles Simeon (1759-1836) and David Brown (1803-1897), who was Edward Irving's assistant at Regent Square and who wrote The Second Advent (1849) and The Restoration of Israel, (1861). Erroll Hulse also identifies with this position, The Restoration of Israel, (Worthing, Henry Walter, 1968). Since the Restorationist movement became dominated by Covenant premillennialists and dispensationalists from the early 19th Century, this thesis has concentrated on their contribution. The previous chapter has explored the early intimations of proto-Christian Zionism within the Reformation and Puritan period which was dominated by Postmillennialists. See Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Israelology, The Missing Link in Systematic Theology, (Tustin, California, Ariel Ministries, 1989), pp14-122.

[5] G. H. Pember, The Great Prophecies of the Centuries concerning Israel and the Gentiles, (London, Hodder, 1902), pp236-241.

[6] J. N. Darby, 'Remarks on a tract circulated by the Irvingites', Collected Writings, edited by William Kelly (Kingston on Thames, Stow Hill Bible and Trust Depot, 1962), Doctrinal. IV, 15, p2; Andrew Drummond, Edward Irving and His Circle (London, James Clarke, n.d.), p132; Janet M. Hartley, 'Napoleon in Russia: Saviour or anti-Christ? History Today, 41 (1991); Richard Kyle, The Last Days are Here Again, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker, 1998), p71.

[7] Charles Finney, Lectures on Revival, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1960), p306.

[8] Clouse, Hosack & Pierard, op.cit., p116.

[9] Wagner, op.cit., p91.

[10] Barbara Tuchman, Bible and Sword, (London, Macmillan, 1982), p115.

[11] Lord Shaftesbury, cited in P. C. Merkley, The Politics of Christian Zionism 1891-1948, (London: Frank Cass, 1998), p14.

[12] Wagner, op.cit., p91.

[13] Pollock, op.cit., p54.

[14] Earl of Shaftesbury, 'State and Prospects of the Jews', Quarterly Review, 63, London, January/March (1839), pp166-192, cited in Wagner, op.cit., p91, and http://www.snunit.k12.il/heb_journals/katedra/62018.html

[15] Pollock, op.cit., p54.

[16] Anthony Ashley, Earl of Shaftesbury. Diary entries as quoted by Edwin Hodder, The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, (London, 1886), 1, pp310-311; See also Geoffrey B.A.M. Finlayson, The Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, (London, Eyre Metheun,

1981), p114; The National Register Archives, London, Shaftesbury (Broadlands) MSS, SHA/PD/2, 1 August 1840.

[17] Wagner, op.cit., p91.

[18] Wagner, op.cit., p92.

[19] cited in Wagner, op.cit., p92; also Albert H. Hyamson, Palestine under the Mandate, (London, 1950), p10, cited in Sharif, op.cit., p42.

[20] David Pileggi, 'Hechler, CMJ & Zionism' Shalom, 3 (1998).

[21] Sharif, op.cit., p71.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Theodor Herzl, The Diaries of Theodor Herzl, (New York, 1956), cited in Sharif, op.cit., p71.

[24] Merkley, op.cit., pp16-17; Pileggi, op.cit.

[25] Weizmann had discovered how to synthesize acetone, a solvent used in the manufacture of explosives.

[26] Wagner, op.cit., p93.

[27] Sharif, op.cit., p78

[28] D. Ingrams, Palestine Papers 1917-1922, Seeds of Conflict, (London, John Murray, 1972), p9.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ingrams, op.cit., p73.

[31] Kenneth Cragg, The Arab Christian, A History in the Middle East, (London, Mowbray, 1992), p234.

[32] Edward W. Said, The Question of Palestine, revised edition, (London, Vintage, 1992), p19.

[33] A report to the British Foreign Office in December 1918 revealed that Palestine consisted of 512,000 Muslims, 61,000 Christians and 66,000 Jews. Ingrams, op.cit., p44.