

## **ZIONISM**

[Up to the Balfour Declaration]

[compiled by Philip D. Spiess II (6-19-2024)]

### **What is Zion?:**

Mount Zion has been referred to as Jerusalem itself [the Temple Mount?], as God's people, and as Heaven. Mount Zion is also a hill located in Jerusalem just outside the walls of the Old City. [Cf.: OT: 2 Samuel 5:1-10; 1 Kings 8:1; Isaiah 8:18; Isaiah 24:23; Psalms 2:6; Psalms 74:2.]

### **What is Zionism?:**

"Zionism" is a Jewish nationalist movement that has had as its goal the creation and support of a Jewish national state in Palestine, the ancient homeland of the Jewish people (*"Eretz Yisra'el*, "the Land of Israel").

### **Early History of Zionism:**

In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, a number of so-called "messiahs" came forward, trying to persuade Jews to "return" to Palestine. (Certainly at this time, as through the Middle Ages, European Jews were being persecuted, particularly because of the "Blood Libel.")

### **[Side Note: The "Blood Libel" Against the Jews:**

[There has always been a certain "blood libel" against the Jews because they sought Christ's crucifixion, as this New Testament passage attests: "So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, . . . he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.' And all the people answered, '*His blood be on us and on our children!*'" -- Matthew 27:24-25 (italics mine).

[However, around the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the "blood libel" returned, only *this* time it was a Christian libel against the Jews. It first emerged in England in the mid-1100s before spreading into other parts of Europe, especially France and Germany. The major blood libel against the Jews, described below, was accompanied as well by libels of well poisoning and desecration of the Christians' Communion host (later a commonplace in "Christian" witches' so-called "Black Masses"). All these became a major theme of the persecution of Jews in Europe from the 12<sup>th</sup> century down to modern times.

[*The major "blood libel" (conspiracy myth) is that (1) Jews require human blood for the baking of matzos, the unleavened flatbread which is eaten during Passover; it was said that the blood of Christian children was especially coveted for this. Other versions of the libel were that (2) a Jewish prophecy said that the killing of a Christian child each year at Easter would ensure that the Jews would be restored to the Holy Land; and that (3) the body and/or blood of a Christian child buried in the newly laid foundations of a Jewish temple or synagogue would ensure its stability. All too often these accusations against Jews in communities were made in order to account for the otherwise unexplained deaths or disappearances of local children.*]

### **Early History of Zionism (continued):**

However, the “Haskala,” or Jewish Enlightenment movement of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, opposed this idea of returning to Palestine, urging Jews instead to assimilate into Western secular culture.

Despite the Haskala, eastern European Jews did not assimilate; rather, in reaction to Tsarist pogroms against the Jews, they formed the “Hovevei Ziyon” (“Lovers of Zion”) movement to promote the settlement of Jewish farmers and artisans in Palestine.

Also in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century an interest in a return of Jews to Palestine was kept alive, mostly by Christian millenarians. [Christian Millenarians believe in the 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ on earth.]

### **Theodor Herzl:**

Then in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century an Austrian journalist by the name of Theodor Herzl, who regarded assimilation as desirable but impossible to realize, given rampant anti-Semitism (particularly in Vienna at the time), argued that, if Jews were forced by external forces to form a nation, they could only lead a normal existence by concentrating themselves together in one territory, that territory most likely being their ancient homeland, the land that was once Israel.

### **Origins of the Modern Zionist Movement:**

Therefore, in 1897 Herzl convened the first Zionist Congress at Basel, Switzerland. This Congress drew up the Basel program, which stated that “Zionism strives to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine *secured by public law*” [italics mine].” The movement’s headquarters was in Vienna, where Herzl published the movement’s official weekly, *Die Welt*. Zionist congresses met yearly until 1901; after that they met every two years. Herzl died in 1904, and the leadership of the Zionist movement eventually moved to Berlin. Prior to World War I, Zionism represented a minority of Jews (mostly Russian, but led by Austrians and Germans), but it publicized itself through orators, pamphlets, and its own newspapers. Indeed, it gave impetus to a Jewish “renaissance” in arts and letters; the Modern Hebrew language developed during this time.

### **Zionism and Great Britain:**

When the Ottoman Empire’s government refused Herzl’s request for Palestinian autonomy, he found support in Great Britain. In 1903 the British government offered 6,000 square miles of uninhabited Uganda for settlement – but the Zionists were holding out for Palestine.

**Early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Jewish Emigration to Palestine:**

As a result of the failure of the Russian revolution of 1905 and the pogroms and repressions that followed it, large numbers of Russian Jews, particularly youth, emigrated to Palestine as pioneer settlers. By 1914 (beginning of World War I) there were about 90,000 Jews in Palestine, about 13,000 of them living in 43 Jewish agricultural settlements, many of them supported by the French Jewish millionaire and philanthropist Baron Edmond de Rothschild.

**World War I, the Balfour Declaration, and After:**

When World War I broke out, the leadership of Zionism passed to Russian Jews living in England. Chaim Weizmann and Nahum Sokolow, two such leaders, were instrumental in securing the Balfour Declaration (November 2, 1917) from Great Britain; it promised British support for the creation of a Jewish national homeland in Palestine. The declaration was included in Britain's 1922 League of Nations mandate over Palestine.