

Christian Zionism and the Balfour Declaration

On November 2, 1917, Lord Walter Rothschild, co-leader of the British Zionist Federation, received the following letter from the London Foreign office:

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 endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object. ¹

In the weeks that followed, Jewish communities around the world celebrated. Thousands gathered outside the London Opera House and downtown London. Over 100,000 Ukrainian Jews celebrated outside the US consulate in Odessa. *The Maccabean*, an American Jewish Zionist newspaper described the statement as, “The Jewish Magna Carta.”² The Balfour Declaration was historically significant for the following reasons, says Dore Gold, president of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs: First, it represented British recognition of the historical connection between the Jewish people and Palestine. Second, it was a statement that theoretically would bind British political policy through changing administrations. Third, it was the first public recognition by a sovereign nation that Jewish people were entitled to their own homeland. Fourth, it was a recognition that the Jewish people were not a religion, ethnicity, or race; but a people with a homeland. Fifth, it was the culmination of effort by Jewish advocates to gain support for a homeland that spanned thirty-five years.³

The Balfour Declaration was also significant to a lineage of Christians whose efforts spanned over three-hundred and fifty years. Before the First World Zionist Congress convened, before Theodore Herzl published *The Jewish Nation*, before Eastern European refugees began fleeing Pogroms, before Britain held any influence in the Eastern Mediterranean; Christians in England discussed the Biblical promises to the Jewish people, and what role they might have in restoring them to their land. A tenet of Judaism is that the Jews will one day return to their land. “However, until the nineteenth century, most plans for a Jewish [homeland] in Palestine [were] Christian.”⁴ This is the story of how Christian Zionists paved the road toward Balfour.

As I began digging into the history of Christian Zionism, I quickly learned that its history is messy. It's a history filled with Bible believers and empire builders; dispensationalists and diplomats; those with missionary theologies and messy theologies. The language of Christian Zionism is troublesome for many today. The term *Jewish restoration* implies a subordinate relationship of the Jews to their Christian saviors. The term *conversion* is understood by most Jews as leaving the Jewish people, an act of betrayal. The association of religion with nationalism, and blood with soil, is particularly troublesome in today's thinking. Finally, while Christian Zionists were concerned about restoring Jewish people to Palestine, critics contend that most disregarded the existing inhabitants. Consequently, I must read this story with humility and acknowledge that God uses imperfect people and inadequate circumstances to direct the course of history.

The Restoration Movement in the Sixteenth Century

The story begins in 16th century with a belief among some English Reformers that before Christ returns the Jews will be restored to their homeland. This became known as the Restoration Movement (not to be confused with the American Campbellite Movement). This movement emerged during the persecution of Protestants under of Mary I. Three forces gave rise to this movement: The circulation of the Geneva Bible, Protestant persecution, and Christian personal encounter with Jewish exiles.

Role of the Geneva Bible

First, the Geneva Bible played a significant role in the emergence of the Restoration Movement. It was probably the most influential English translation of the Scriptures prior to the King James. Over 260 editions were produced before 1611. It was the Puritan's Bible, that of William Shakespeare, John Bunyan, the Pilgrims, and Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell issued pocket versions to his troops during the English Civil War. The Pilgrims brought it to New England. In it, the English encountered the Old Testament for the first time. They learned about the Jewish people, about God's covenantal promises to them in the Old Testament, and that Paul reaffirmed these promises in Romans 11. Readers of the Book of Revelation identified with Christian persecution and associated the described events with their own trials.⁵

During the reign of Mary I, Protestants fled England for the continent. In Geneva, William Whittingham gathered a team of scholars who translated the Bible from Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, rather than the Latin Vulgate.⁶ Immanuel Tremellius, a Hebrew-Christian, assisted in the translation of the Old Testament. His son-in-law, Fransiscus Junius assisted with the New Testament and wrote explanatory annotations.⁷ These marginal notes helped shape Puritan theology and became the seeds for the Restoration Movement. The notes on Romans 11, taught the following: (1) God has not cast away the Jews "the Jews in particular are not cast away...therefore we ought not to pronounce rashly of individual [Jews];" (2) The Jews will nationally embrace the gospel: "The whole nation without exception will come to Christ;" (3) Their salvation will lead to the redemption of the world: "When the Jews come to the gospel, the world will...come to life again;" (4) Therefore, it is the Christian duty to seek the welfare of the Jews: "Do not despise the Jews whom we ought rather to encourage...[as our duty] Gentiles owe the Jews."⁸

Role of Historical Events

Second, historical events shaped Puritan theology. Protestants fled England during Mary's reign and returned under the reign of Elizabeth I. At that time Puritanism emerged and experienced growth and religious freedom. The Geneva Bible enjoyed widespread circulation. Many Puritans associated the cycles of curses and blessings with those of ancient Israel deepening their fascination with the Old Testament. "English people held a special position in the providential scheme of history analogous to that held by the ancient Israelites...[moreover] The Old Testament authenticated the belief that temporal blessings were proofs of Divine approbation." Consequently, the Old Testament gained popularity among the Puritans. It was in the Old Testament readers learned about the Jewish nation and contemplated the nation's future.⁹ The following theologians explained Protestant persecution in terms of the end times and predicted the future conversion of the Jews.

John Bale (1495 – 1593), author of *The Image of Both Churches* explained that Protestant persecution was the apocalyptic conflict between the true Church, and the false church. At the conclusion of the conflict, the Jews will be converted. "The laste of all [the Gospel] shall returne to the Iewes...that Christes prophyce may be founde true...for he that hath dispersed Israell, shall bringe him again to his folde."¹⁰ Bale contended that the conversion of the Jews is the cosmic goal of history.¹¹ Patrick Forbes (1564 -1635) expanded on this theme by explaining that Jewish restoration would include their return to the Holy Land. He predicted the national conversion of the Jews, a Puritan-Jewish military alliance, who would defeat a Papal-Ottoman alliance followed by the Jews regathered to their land. "Their solemn conversion must bring with it...a gathering from their dispersion."¹² Henry Finch (1558-1625) authored a broadside in 1661 titled *The World's Great Restauration, or Calling of the Jews, and with them of all Nations and Kingdoms*

of the Earth to the Faith of Christ. He argued that the conversion of the Jews is a pre-requisite to the return of Christ and His millennial reign on earth in which the Jewish nation will be re-established in Palestine. “Dwelling in their owne country [Jews] shall inhabite all the parts of the land...in safety...and continue in it forever.”¹³

Readmission of the Jews to England

Third, English encounter with Jewish persons played an important role in shaping Restoration theology. For most English, the Jews were a literary abstraction—characters in the Biblical text. Most Puritans had not met a Jewish person. The Jews were expelled from Britain in 1290 by Edward I. In 1492, Spain expelled her Jews. By the 16th Century, Jewish exiles had settled in Holland. Protestants fleeing Mary encountered them on the Continent. English Separatists fleeing King James encountered them in Amsterdam. During Cromwell’s rule, Puritans deliberated readmitting the Jews to England. Some in Parliament felt it would economically benefit the country, after the devastating English Civil War. Others hoped that Jewish presence in England would expand English influence on the continent. Restorationists believed they could convert the Jews and hurry Christ’s return.¹⁴

Across the channel, Dutch Jews became concerned over news that Spain planned to invade Holland. Manasseh Ben Israel (1604-1657), Amsterdam’s chief rabbi, recognized in Puritan England a potential political sanctuary. Manasseh had studied Kabbalistic Judaism and Messianism. Messianic interest became popular among Jews after the emergence of Shabbetai Tzvi, in Eastern Europe. He proclaimed himself the Messiah and sought to lead Jews to the Holy Land. Manasseh believed that real Messiah will reveal himself when Jews had emigrated to the ends of the earth, and when the Lost Ten Tribes were found. He believed that England represented the end of the earth, and the American Indians were the Lost Ten Tribes. He described this plan in 1650 in *Esperanca de Israel* (The Hope of Israel). Restorationists became excited when they learned of his Messianic beliefs, eager to introduce him Jesus, the real Messiah. Cromwell invited him to London in 1655 for The Whitehall Conference on Jewish Readmission.¹⁵

The arrival of Manasseh stirred up excitement among Restorationists. Henry Jessey (1603-1663), a Christian Hebraist at Oxford, advocated for Manasseh for Jewish readmission. He had written his own monograph, *The Glory and Salvation of Jehuda and Israel* arguing it was England’s historic role to readmit the Jews.¹⁶ Manasseh never succeeded in securing an official invitation from Cromwell for Amsterdam Jews to emigrate to London. Cromwell did allow Manasseh to settle in England and allowed London’s Crypto-Jews practice Judaism openly. After Manasseh’s and Cromwell’s death, Jews freely emigrated to London.¹⁷ The effect of readmission was the Christian realization that the Jews “are real people and not literary abstractions.”¹⁸ Jews found Christian favor in England, religious freedom, and eventual emancipation. Unfortunately, as is shown below, English emancipation worked against Jewish interest in a homeland.

Christian Zionism in the Nineteenth Century

In the nineteenth century Restorationism led to political Christian Zionism. It was shaped by Millennialism, rapidly changing political contexts in Europe, and British political interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. In the late eighteenth-century England had become a global power. Millenarians believed England’s influence made the restoration of the Jews feasible. Increase Mather (1639-1723) in *A Dissertation Concerning the Future Conversion of the Jewish Nation* proposed that British military might could defeat the Ottoman Empire and restore the Jews to the Holy Land. “The Jews [will be] brought into their own land again...and Pope and Turk...shall be utterly destroyed after the Jewish conversion...in the Great Battle of Armageddon.”¹⁹ When he wrote, an invasion of Italy and Turkey seemed remote possibility prior to the arrival of Napoleon.

Role of the French Revolution and Napoleon

First, the French Revolution played an important role in gaining interest in Christian Zionism. The revolution ended Catholic control of France and the French Republic granted Jews citizenship. In 1796, Napoleon defeated the Papal States and went on to invade the Middle East. In 1799, the French newspaper *Le Moniteur* published a manifesto in which Napoleon promised the Jews they could return to their land. However, the Jews of France, enjoying emancipation and religious freedom were uninterested in moving to the Middle East.²⁰ Napoleon invited Jewish leader to establish in Paris a French Sanhedrin. These events stirred up millenarian hopes in England that Jewish return was imminent. However, English millenarians were confused whether this deist dictator was a modern-day Cyrus, or the Anti-Christ himself! Unfortunately, most French Jews were not interested in relocating to Palestine, and Napoleon was defeated by the British Navy.²¹ James Bicheno (1785-1851), in *The Restoration of the Jews, the Crisis of all Nations* contended that God was using Napoleon to accomplish his plan to chastise England. France had beaten England to the punch. “God...in his mysterious providence, is using [atheist] France...as instruments to scourge the nations for their sins...[and] inflict his decisive judgments on Antichristian [Papal] and Mahometan oppressors: That on our [England’s] part...it would have been wise and right to have done everything possible [in restoring the Jews].”²²

Role of Theologians

Second, the emergence of pre-millennialism spurred on by theological interpretations of Biblical prophecy fueled Christian Zionism. John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), the Father of Dispensationalism, popularized a theological framework for interpreting Biblical prophecy. He divided history into seven dispensations. He argued that the Church and Israel are two distinct people. After the rapture of the Church, God will deal directly with Israel to restore them to their land, afterwards they will embrace their Messiah. Christ will return to reign for 1000 years on earth. The Jewish people establish a political nation in their homeland.²³ Darby inspired theological discourse.

In 1830, James Nisbet began publishing *The Morning Watch*, a quarterly journal for theological discourse on Biblical prophecy. The first volume contained papers from the Albury Conference on Biblical Prophecy (1826-1830). These conferences explored prophecy and their fulfillment. Rev. James Doddridge presented the paper, *On the Restoration of the Jews*. He wrote, “The Jews shall be gathered from all parts of the earth where they are now scattered and brought home into their own land.” Moreover, he explained, “they shall be carried by the Gentiles to their place; who shall join themselves with the Jews and become the Lord’s people.”²⁴ He contended that Gentile nations will assist the Jews in their return in a Jewish-Gentile partnership. Attending the Albury conference was Anthony Oliphant (1793-1859), the British Attorney General for the Cape Colony in South Africa. Doddridge’s article so impressed Anthony Oliphant and his family that his son would be instrumental decades later in implementing Doddridge’s proposal.

Edward Bickersteth (1786-1850) expanded Doddridge’s proposal in *The Restoration of the Jews to Their Own Land* (1840). He argued that, through an international alliance of nations the Jews will return to Palestine. They will establish an independent political state. They will endure a great war and tribulation culminating in Christ’s return and the repentance of Israel. The church failed up until this point because they created “stumbling blocks...which we Christians have thrown in the way of the Jews” such that the church is unable to assist in Jewish return and restoration. These stumbling blocks are (1) persecution of the Jews, (2) contempt of the Jews, and (3) Papal idolatry.²⁵ Bickersteth influenced Anthony Ashley Cooper, the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury who would seek to implement Bickersteth’s teaching as a British politician.²⁶

Role of the Eastern Question

Third, British Christians became aware of Jewish suffering in Eastern Europe. The humanitarian crisis became an occasion for Christian Zionists to propose a solution in a Jewish homeland. Moreover, political events between Russia and Turkey made this solution appealing to British politicians. Throughout the nineteenth-century, Jewish conditions in Eastern Europe declined following Russia's domination of Poland in 1795. Jews suffered under economic deprivation, political restrictions, and devastating Pogroms. Moreover, the Russia's expansion into the Balkans led to a British *Russiaphobia*. The Ottoman Empire, Russia's only check in the Balkans, began a long political and economic decline. Britain and France became concerned for stability in the Eastern Mediterranean and sought ways to bolster the *Sick Man of Europe* to keep Russia in check. This became known as *The Eastern Question*.

Role of Hebrew-Christians

Fourth, Hebrew-Christians played an important role in fueling Christian Zionism in that they bridged Christian beliefs with Jewish humanitarian concerns. In 1809, the Church of England founded the London Jews' Society led by Hebrew-Christian Joseph Samuel Frey. He founded *Benei Abraham*, a congregation of Hebrew-Christians in London. Their presence, and the emergence of a Hebrew-Christian community in London intensified interest among Christian Zionists in the spiritual and political restoration of Jewish people and concern for Jews in Eastern Europe.²⁷ Christian Zionists proposed a solution by which Jewish refugees might be settled in Palestine. This would alleviate their condition in Eastern Europe, allow them to develop Palestine for Turkey, extend British influence into the Levant, and enable Britain to bolster the Ottoman Empire as a check against Russian expansion. The settlements would be funded by Jewish and Christian financiers providing an income to Turkey. Unfortunately, they found little support among Jews in Western Europe who were enjoying emancipation and integration into European society. As Christian Zionists discussed Jewish nationalism and a Jewish State, "Nationalism came to be regarded as a dangerous heresy" among British Jews which would perpetuate their alienation from European society.²⁸

The London Jews' Society succeeded in establishing the first British foothold in Palestine. Egypt's Pasha, Mohammed Ali revolted against the Sultan conquering Palestine and Syria. Britain intervened lending support to the Sultan in recapturing the Holy Land. Prussia and Britain pressed the Sultan to allow a British presence in Jerusalem to protect Protestants. The Sultan declined to allow a government presence but agreed to a Bishopric. The London Jews' Society dispatched the Hebrew-Christian, Michael Solomon Alexander to become the first Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem establishing a British Christian presence in the Holy Land.²⁹

Role of British Politics

Fifth, Christian Zionists proposal for a Jewish homeland became, in the mid-nineteenth century, an appealing solution for many politicians engaging the Eastern Question.

Lord Shaftesbury. Anthony Ashley Cooper (1801-1885), the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury, was an early leading British politician who was a Christian Zionist. He was elected to parliament as a Tory in 1826. Shaftesbury was a dedicated evangelical.³⁰ He had been deeply influenced by Bickersteth's *The Restoration of the Jews to their Own Land*; and by Alexander McCaul's *New Testament Evidence That the Jews Are to be Restored to the land of Israel*.³¹ He wrote in his diary, "Who will be the Cyrus of Modern Times...to restore God's People?"³² In 1839, Shaftesbury published a review of Lord Lindsay's *Travels in Egypt and the Holy Land* for *The Quarterly Review*. In the review, he described the dismal state of Eastern European Jewry and

proposed how it might be alleviated by allowing refugees to immigrate to Palestine. He persuaded Lord Palmerston to dispatch the first British Consul to Palestine, James Finn. In 1841, Shaftesbury published in the *London Times* an open letter to European leaders: A Memorandum to Protestant Monarchs of Europe for the Restoration of the Jews to Palestine. In it, he called on European leaders to help bring Jewish refugees to Palestine.³³ Sadly, European monarchs were uninterested. In a letter to the Sultan he argued that Jewish immigration would benefit the empire and help develop Palestine:

There exists at the present time, among Jews dispersed over Europe, a strong notion that the time is approaching when their nation is to return to Palestine...it would be of manifest importance to the Sultan to encourage the Jews to return...because of the wealth which they would bring them.³⁴

Sir Laurence Oliphant. Unfortunately, the Sultan disregarded Shaftesbury's proposal. Anthony Oliphant's son would endeavor to gather private funds to carry out this plan. Laurence Oliphant (1829 – 1888), was born in Cape Colony. In 1853, he studied in Russia and became aware of the dismal condition of Eastern European Jews. He considered how a Jewish homeland in Palestine would alleviate Jewish suffering. In 1865, Oliphant was elected to Parliament and began seeking ways to establish a Jewish settlement in Palestine as a refuge for Eastern European Jews. He traveled to Constantinople in 1878 and petitioned the Sultan on behalf of England to permit Jewish refugees to settle in Palestine.³⁵

Naftali Imbar. In Constantinople, Oliphant encountered Naftali Imbar (1856 – 1909), a Galician Jew who worked in the capital. He hired Imbar as his personal secretary and imparted to Imbar his Zionist vision. Moved by Oliphant's enthusiasm and vision, Imbar wrote a series of poems including one titled *Tikvateinu* (Our Hope). Sixties years later, that poem became Israel's national anthem, *HaTikveh*, inspired by Oliphant. When Imbar's volume of poetry, *Barkai* (Morning Star), was published in Jerusalem in 1886, he inscribed on the inside cover a dedication to Sir Laurence Oliphant.³⁶

Gilead Plan. Oliphant obtained permission to purchase land in Palestine and traveled to the US to raise money among American evangelicals. While in America, he forwarded to the British government the Gilead Plan in which he proposed an international partnership of nations to assist in settling Jews in Palestine. European, American, and British Christians leased a twenty-five-acre parcel of land in Eastern Palestine from Turkey and settled Russian Jewish refugees.³⁷ When Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli read the plan, he was enthusiastic. The plan attracted praise from London's Jewish community. The *London Jewish Chronicle* declared, "Oliphant would serve as God's representative."³⁸ Other Jewish leaders described Oliphant with Messianic terms. One Zionist leader wrote, "I hope that Laurence Oliphant will be the Messiah of Israel."³⁹ Oliphant successfully purchased land in the Galilee and arranged for Russian-Jewish refugees to settle.⁴⁰ Oliphant and his wife Alice bought a home in Haifa. She died and was buried in there. Oliphant returned to England, remarried, and is buried in England.⁴¹

Benjamin Disraeli. Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881) was remarkable in that he was the first Jewish political leader of a European nation. He was also a self-described Hebrew-Christian. Disraeli was elected to Parliament as a Tory in 1837 and served as prime minister in 1868 and 1874. Disraeli engaged the Eastern Question and privately expressed his support for a plan to settle Jewish refugees in Palestine. He welcomed Oliphant's plan and sought to expand British influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. He never publicly identified himself as a Christian Zionist. However, he expressed views of Jewish nationalism in his novels *Sybil*, *The Two Nations*, and *Tancred*. He gave implicit support for a Jewish homeland. And as Prime Minister he established Britain's direction that would lead to up to the Balfour Declaration.

The Road to Balfour

William Hechler and Theodore Herzl

Rev. William Hechler (1845 – 1931) was a German pietist whose father brought the family to England to serve as an Anglican missionary. His father worked for the London Jews' Society. In 1870 William was ordained an Anglican clergyman and returned to Germany to serve as an Anglican missionary. Traveling throughout Europe, William became dismayed by anti-Semitism and the dismal condition of Jews in Russia. He secured a position as the chaplain to the British embassy in Vienna. In a Viennese bookstore, he encountered Theodore Herzl's book *The Jewish State*. Herzl, a journalist, had reported on the Dreyfus Trial and concluded that the Jews will never fully integrate into European society. In his book he argued that the Jews need a homeland of their own where they can enjoy self-determination. Herzl became known as the father of Modern Jewish Zionism.⁴² Upon skimming the book, Hechler realized that he was in a diplomatic position to help the writer. He sought out Herzl and proposed that through his connections he could assist him. Herzl wrote:

When he read my book, he immediately hurried to [British] Ambassador Monson and told him: "The fore-ordained movement is here!" Hechler declares my movement to be a "Biblical" one...He wants to place my tract in the hands of...German princes...he knows the German Kaiser and thinks he can get me an audience.⁴³

Hechler and Herzl failed to gain support from the Kaiser. However, they raised interest among European Jews in a national homeland, publicized the Jewish movement, and attracted Chaim Weizman who would become the leader of the British Zionist Federation. After three-hundred years of Christian Zionism, Hechler had helped Herzl birth Modern Jewish Zionism. Chaim Weizmann (1874-1952) was inspired in Berlin by Theodore Herzl. In 1904 he moved to England where he taught biochemistry at the University of Manchester and became a leading British Zionist.⁴⁴ During World War I he developed acetone for the British Army putting him in contact with David Lloyd George.

David Lloyd George, Arthur Balfour, and Mark Sykes

David Lloyd George. David Lloyd George (1863-1945) was raised an evangelical Welsh Baptist, steeped in Pre-Millennialism. He publicly expressed support for a Jewish homeland, and Pre-Millennial beliefs. In an address to the Jewish historical society, he described his Christian education, "I was brought up in a school where I was taught far more history of the Jews than about my own land."⁴⁵ In 1915 Lloyd George became the Minister of the Munitions in which he encountered Chaim Weizman and made use of his invention, acetone, in Europe. During the war Britain wrested control of Palestine from Turkey. Lloyd George became prime minister in 1917.⁴⁶ Upon his election, Weizmann began urgently petitioning the government for a statement of support for a Jewish homeland. Zionist leaders worked directly with Lloyd George, cabinet minister Arthur Balfour, and Mark Sykes.⁴⁷

Arthur Balfour. Arthur Balfour (1848-1930), was raised in an evangelical home with a high view of Jewish people. "His ideas about Jews were rooted in the Old Testament brand of Christianity."⁴⁸ He attended Trinity College and authored a book explaining an evangelical approach to science. In *A Defense of Philosophical Doubt*, he argued that "scientific knowledge depends just as much as theology up on faith." In 1916 he became the British foreign secretary.⁴⁹

In recent decades, Balfour has been severely criticized for his role in introducing the 1905 Aliens Act when he was prime minister.⁵⁰ This act limited immigration and was specifically aimed at Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe.⁵¹ Critics argue that Balfour's decision to support the

declaration was entirely political. In defense of Balfour, those closest to him reported that at the time, intervening on behalf of Eastern European Jewry was closest to his heart. Chaim Weizmann wrote his friend Ahad Ha'am that Balfour visibly wept in front of the delegates.⁵² His niece wrote that at the end of his days he told her that what he had been able to do for the Jews was the most important work he had accomplished in his career.⁵³ He wrote his sister in 1918, "The Jews are too great a race not to count...and they ought to have a place where...[they] could develop on their lines as a nation and govern themselves."⁵⁴ Balfour's life is complex. Whatever moved him to sponsor the immigration act in 1905, the final chapter in his life testified of his Christian love for the Jewish people and concern for their welfare.

Mark Sykes. Mark Sykes (1879-1919) was raised Roman Catholic in Yorkshire. Prior to the war, Sykes disliked Jews. His mother hated "Jews and Freemasons whom she believed wanted to destroy the world."⁵⁵ Sykes served as a Lieutenant in the Boer War. In South Africa he wrote that he was disgusted by Jews and that Jewish financiers whom he believed were responsible for the war.⁵⁶ During World War I Sykes had a political conversion. He became convinced of the importance of Zionism and became interested in Jewish people. In fact, Sykes became "contemptuous of Jewish opponents of Zionism even suggesting that anti-Zionism meant being pro-German."⁵⁷ Some historians argued that Sykes' strange conversion was politically motivated and pragmatic. However, Cecil Bloom convincingly argues that in Eastern Europe, during the negotiation of the Sykes-Picot treaty, he encountered Jewish suffering and persecution, as well as encountering Jewish hatred. His conscience was moved. Sykes acknowledged his own callousness as he recalled the religious intolerance he had endured as a Catholic. "His Catholicism enabled him to understand the tragedy of the Jewish question because Catholics...had suffered so much in England." In fact, he became so pro-Jewish, and enthusiastic about a Jewish homeland that in 1917 he traveled to Rome and petitioned the Pope to ask for his public support for a Jewish homeland.⁵⁸ Prior to Vatican II, the Pope was uninterested in Jewish concerns and had already turned down Herzl decades earlier.⁵⁹

In July, 1917, a drafting team including Balfour, Sykes, and two other officials began drafting the declaration. On November, 1917, Arthur Balfour signed his name to the historical Balfour declaration. Historians will continue questioning the motives of these Victorian diplomats and their complex lives. It suffices to say that they were complex persons and the road to Balfour was a messy path.

Conclusion

Multiple actors played their roles on the road to Balfour: First there were historical events that made it possible for the Jewish people to return to their land. These events included Jewish readmission to England, the Napoleonic Wars, Jewish Emancipation, and the Eastern Question. Second, theological developments led Christians away from historic supersessionism to embrace the belief that God's promises to the Jewish people remain valid and could be imminently fulfilled. Third, the availability of the Bible in the vernacular allowed Christians to personally encounter the Old Testament and learn about God's promises to his people. Fourth, Christians encountered Jewish exiles in Holland where they learned Jews were not literary abstractions but real people. They encountered their suffering in Eastern Europe, realizing they were in a privileged position to intervene.

Critics of Christian Zionism point out that many actors on this road were empire builders and ambitious politicians. They argue what drove evangelicals was their desire to convert the Jews. Some argue that Christian Zionism created an unholy marriage between religion and nationalism, race and soil. Finally, critics point out, as Christian Zionists focused on returning the Jews to their

land, they overlooked the current inhabitants of that land. Sadly, much of this is true. There were empire builders but there but were evangelicals. There were Oliver Cromwells but there were Henry Jesseys. There were Palmerstons but there were Shaftesburys.

The road to Balfour was a complex path. The early Restorationists believed if they converted the Jews, Jesus would return. Some Pre-Millennialists tried to predict when Christ would return. Laurence Oliphant became involved with the Christadelphians.⁶⁰ Mark Sykes hated the Jews before his political conversion.⁶¹ And Arthur Balfour introduced legislation, restricting Jewish immigration from Russia.⁶² What can we conclude? God used a mosaic of people to steer the course of human history. He used Cyrus, an idolater, concerned for national self-interest, to fulfill Jeremiah's prophecy to restore the exiles to Judea. He used a decree of Caesar to bring the Holy Family to Bethlehem where the Messiah was born. He used political events, ambitious politicians, and imperfect people. However, he also used Bible believing Christians filled with a sincere love for the Jews, a humanitarian desire for their wellbeing, concern for their preservation, who believed in God's promises to them by which their return to their homeland became possible.

End Notes

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- ¹² Smith, 81.
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- ¹⁴ Mel Scult, *Millennial Expectations and Jewish Liberties: A Study of the Efforts to Convert the Jews in Britain, Up to the Mid Nineteenth Century* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Academic, 1978).
- ¹⁵ Joseph Jacobs, “Manasseh Ben Israel,” *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1906), 282, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10345-manasseh-ben-israel>.
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- ¹⁹ Increase Mather, *Mystery of Israel’s Salvation Explained and Applied* (London, UK, 1669), 24.
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