The Balfour Declaration And A Home For The Jews (1914-1917)

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מה שהיא הולכת , היא רבה והולכת

In 1914 it seemed that the project to obtain a Jewish State of its own had failed (see here). The land of Israel was in the hands of the Ottoman Empire, which did not view with good eyes the increase of the Jewish population in “Palestine”. Nor did we have the minimal international political support needed to create a home for Jews. Immigration stopped and o make it worse: many immigrants who had arrived in Israel in the past decades returned to Europe or emigrated to the United States since the living conditions in old Israel were very precarious. It seemed that the Zionist dream was over.

Then, on July 28, 1914, the First World War broke out. It was a terrible war that claimed the lives of some 40 million people, military and civilians. The war also brought unexpected changes in England and the Middle East. The most important of these changes from Israel’s point of view was that the Ottoman Empire, which had ruled the Middle East for more than 500 years, was now defeated. At the end of the war, in 1918, England was in control of what is today Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and of course, Israel.

THE CHURCH AND THE JEWS

In 1916 Herbert Henry Asquith resigned his post as Prime Minister of Great Britain and in his place came David Lloyd George. The attitude of these two leaders towards the Jews was completely opposite. Asquith, a catholic, opposed a Jewish State. Lloyd George, on the other hand, had a different religious upbringing. To understand his beliefs, I must briefly explain the main differences between the Catholics and

Protestants, as to how each one perceived the Jews and their role for centuries. The Catholic Church was founded on the essential premise that the Church (Latin for "congregation") is the "New Israel". This New Israel REPLACES / DISPLACES ancient Israel – that is, the Jewish people – as the people of God. This New Israel also has a New Testament, that is, a new Covenant (as in Hebrew □□□□□ □□□□) that replaces the Old Testament, which "expired with the imminent extinction of the ancient Israelites." The main problem that this foundational dogma always faced was that *"the stubborn Jewish people, in spite of being permanently in the verge of extinction, persisted in continuing to exist!"*. The Church then changed its narrative and argued that the capricious existence of the Jewish people was a Divine Punishment for deicide (i.e., the killing of a god). And the evidence is that the Jews were now condemned to permanent exile ("The Wandering Jew") and as a consequence, they will NEVER return to their homeland! Therefore, the return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel was (and it largely remains) for the Catholic Church a huge fundamental theological challenge for their faith and religious principles. A good example is the Vatican's hostile attitude towards acknowledging the right of the Jewish People to the Land of Israel, or the refusal of the Pope to recognize a Jewish Jerusalem (see this).

EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS AND THE JEWS

The attitude of many Protestants towards the Jewish people is very different. There is a very big support for a Jewish Israel, and it is not something new. This historical attitude might have begun with Oliver Cromwell (1599 -1658), who supported the return of Jews to Israel, albeit, for their own religious views. Many Protestants today maintain that it is great merit in itself to support the Jewish people and their State since they believe in the blessing that HaShem granted to Abraham Abinu when He said "Those who curse you will be cursed and those who will bless they will be blessed. " Many

Christian Englishmen held this religious belief as well. Among them, were David Lloyd George and his Foreign Minister Arthur Balfour, who were enthusiastic supporters of the Jewish people and understood their aspirations to return home.

ACETONE, AND THE STATE OF ISRAEL

An important factor that enhanced the British predisposition to grant a national home to the Jewish people in the land of Israel was the contributions of the famous Jewish scientist Chaim Weizmann (1874-1952) to the Commonwealth. Weizmann, born in Russia but nationalized British, was a chemist who discovered the formula to produce acetone from grain starch. Until then, acetone used to detonate dynamite was difficult to produce, increasingly expensive, and critical to winning the war. Dr. Weizmann was in charge of producing 30,000 tons of the critical chemical element through the process known as "ABE fermentation". For this and for other discoveries Dr. Weizmann is known in the scientific world as the "father of industrial fermentation". At the end of the war, the British were very grateful to Dr. Weizmann for his invaluable services and asked him how could they repay him for his contributions. It is said that Doctor Weizmann answered: *"I do not want anything for me, but I want a home for my people."* And so it was that in 1917 the Balfour Declaration emerged, and the British officially approved the creation of a national home for the Jewish people in the land of Israel. This was the beginning of what eventually culminated with the miracle of the birth of Medinat Israel in 1948.