

Lord Arthur James Balfour

Do the right thing. It will gratify some people and astonish the rest.

● Mark Twain, American writer and social commentator



In the long history of people whose stories are central to the Restoration of the Jews to their ancient homeland, none are as important as that of Theodor Herzl - a Jew, and Arthur Balfour - a Christian. Theodor Herzl was the founder of modern political Zionism. He is honored as the founding father of modern Israel. He died in 1904. Herzl described the Jewish return to Palestine as a possibility, “if you dream it, it need not be a dream.” Yet it was a Christian who filled the dream with the authority, the power and the ideals of the British Empire. Arthur Balfour, a former British Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary during WWI, converted Herzl’s dream into a reality.

Arthur James Balfour was born July 25, 1848, on the family estate, Whittingehame, near the tiny village of East Lothian, Scotland. His parents and family were well connected members of the British aristocracy. His

Uncle Robert Cecil, Lord Salisbury, a Prime Minister of Great Britain, used his considerable influence to advance his nephew’s career in British Government.

Balfour was traditionally educated. He attended prestigious schools such as Eton and Cambridge University. At Cambridge he read moral sciences at Trinity College and graduated with a second-class honors degree in 1869.

Balfour, educated with the Bible in his home, his school and as a core of his religious life, knew of the Jews in ancient Israel. He, along with many other Christians of his era, were not necessarily Messianic or fundamentalist in their faith. They believed in the relationship of Jewish Restoration and the Second Coming. They appreciated the Jewish link to Palestine but did not understand the importance of the land

to Jews. Balfour's Christian faith and values were elements of his being, but it did not define his being. Patriotism, justice, morality, doing the right thing and what was best for Britain were more important than man bringing about the Second Coming. If he could be used by God with the latter, he would not object. Nor would many Christians have objected.

Again, his Uncle, Lord Salisbury, intervened in Balfour's meteoric political rise. In 1886, he appointed Balfour Secretary of Scotland with a seat in his Cabinet. A year later, he elevated Balfour to be the Chief Secretary for Ireland and in 1891, the First Lord of the Treasury. Balfour, in the shadow of nepotism, proved himself a very able administrator.

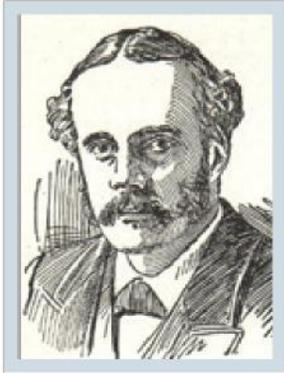
The Conservatives fell in and out of power. Balfour's influence rose and fell as well, but was always present in British government. July, 1902, Balfour became Prime Minister. His position was short and tenuous.

Contemporaneously an obscure political movement, Zionism, was growing amongst some Jews and meeting considerable resistance amongst other Jews. The movement was led by a former Viennese writer and newspaper society column writer, Theodor Herzl. Herzl tried with all his might, all his heart and soul, to find a solution to the Jewish suffering; a permanent home for Jews in Palestine. His Zionist movement was unable to purchase Palestine from

the Turks. They failed even to be granted the right to settle in Palestine. All around Herzl, Russian and East European anti-Semitism rose to blood dripping levels. Jews were being murdered by state sanctioned Pogroms. Jews fled to any place they could. Few would have them.

A desperate Herzl considered a temporary humanitarian solution proposed by the British in 1903, a Jewish homeland established in Uganda. For the British it worked well. It satisfied the desire of the British government to place friendly white settlers in control over a Black peopled colony. The Zionist Congress split but agreed to investigate the Uganda idea. It was ultimately rejected. Jews had no connection to Uganda.

Balfour's Conservatives were seriously threatened in the general election of 1905. It did not look good for them. Balfour's own seat in Parliament was at risk. He sought advice from a close political supporter in his district, Charles Dreyfus. Dreyfus was a member of the Manchester City Council and a leading figure in the East Manchester Conservative Association. Dreyfus was also President of the Manchester Zionist Society. Ironically he was a distant relative of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, whose scapegoating by the French Military was a key factor in Theodor Herzl's embracing of Zionism.



Balfour in his youth

Balfour needed to understand the Jewish vote in Manchester. He told his friend, Charles Dreyfus, that he did not understand why the Jews had rejected the humanitarian help offered by the British Conservative government with the Uganda plan.

Dreyfus had a brilliant young chemist, a recent Russian Jewish émigré and Zionist, working for him, Chaim Weizmann. Dreyfus arranged for Balfour to meet with Weizmann.

Balfour and Weizmann first met early in January 1906. It was the first of many meetings that would develop into a lifelong friendship. At the first meeting, Weizmann was not certain that Balfour understood what he was explaining. He had tried to explain Zionism in biblical terms to Balfour. Years later, Weizmann wrote in his memoirs about that first meeting.

I felt that I was sweating blood and I tried to find some less ponderous way of expressing myself. I was ready to bow out of the room but Balfour held me back...

Then suddenly I said: 'Mr. Balfour, supposing I was to offer you Paris instead of London, would you take it?'

He sat up, looked at me and answered: "But Dr. Weizmann, we have London.'

'That is true,' I said. 'But we had Jerusalem when London was a marsh.'"

He leaned back, continued to stare at me, and said two things which I remember vividly.

The first was: 'Are there many Jews who think like you?'

I answered: 'I believe I speak the minds of millions of Jews whom you will never see and who cannot speak for themselves, (Jews being oppressed in Eastern Europe and in the Muslim world) but with whom I could pave the streets of the country I come from.'

To this he said: 'If that is so, you will one day be a force.'

Balfour came to understand that Zionism would benefit more than simply the Jews. The Arab population who were living in the backwater that was a decayed Palestine under the Turks was desperately poor, horribly oppressed, victimized by their fellow

Arabs with little hope of betterment. Balfour saw, with the revitalization brought in by the Restored Jews, all the peoples in the Middle East could benefit.

Balfour's opportunity to right the nearly 2,000 years of injustices against the Jewish people, since the Roman expulsions and Roman obliteration of Jewish memory in Israel by renaming it Palestine, did not occur for many years.

World War I began in the tinder keg of Europe, the Balkans, with the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria. The butchery machines of war slaughtered millions of human beings on both sides. The British were losing the war in 1916. They desperately needed more troops.

Jewish resources were available for manpower but Jews refused to join the British and her hated ally Russia to fight the Germans. No Jew was going to send their son to die to save rabidly, anti-Semitic Russia.

A confluence of incredible events occurred. Balfour became the Foreign Secretary under a new government led by David Lloyd George. Weizmann had maintained steady contact with Balfour over the years promoting a unique solution to the Jewish problem, Zionism. Weizmann believed it was the destiny of Britain to be the midwife for the Jewish return.

Many in the British War Cabinet were

Bible believing men. They all understood the possibility of the Jewish Restoration and the Second Coming. But they were also practical. They were pragmatic. The exigencies of war came first. Weizmann knew that a Declaration by the British government in favor of the reestablishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, assuming they won the war, would have major political importance. A British Declaration would garner worldwide Jewish support for the British war effort. Across the Atlantic Ocean and in concert, Louis Brandeis, working with a Christian minister, William Blackstone, influenced President Wilson to support the British idea. American support was vital to British action.

After much internal War Cabinet rancorous maneuvering, energetically guided through by Balfour, the War Cabinet issued a Declaration in a letter to Lord Rothschild. The Declaration became known as the Balfour Declaration.

Great Britain had committed itself to a high ideal of justice for the Jewish people, fairness for the indigenous population of Palestine, and the hope that through the energy that Zionism would bring, better would come to all.

*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 favor 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, 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.

*Yours,
Arthur James Balfour*

Cynics have long argued that it was fanatical Christian end of time motivation that brought about the Balfour Declaration. Others argue it was cynical military necessity. Still others saw economic greed and colonialism. The Declaration may have had elements of everything but it also came from deep within the British instinct to do the right thing.

An immediate effect of the Declaration was the creation of new Jewish fighting regiments for the British War effort. America was not involved in the War but American Jews volunteered for the British army. The first units of the Jewish Legion were sent to join with the main British army and liberate Palestine from the Turks securing the Suez Canal from Turkish threat. The commander of the Jewish Legion was an Irish career British military officer, Col. John Henry Patterson. British anti-Semitism would destroy Patterson's career.

As the Jewish Legion crossed into Palestine and were deployed against the Turks near Jerusalem, the tide had turned significantly in Britain's favor. The Turks were the first to collapse and soon the Germans followed.

The Balfour Declaration and the British responsibility for the Palestine Mandate to help establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine for the Jews was legally embedded in the League of Nations and the San Remo agreement after the war.

Lord Arthur James Balfour

Balfour and the government of David Lloyd George were voted out of office. Balfour had served in various political offices in government longer than any other man in British history.

July, 1920 at a dinner hosted by Lord Rothschild at the Royal Albert Hall, Balfour said:

“And now, ladies and gentlemen, I have done with the gloomy task of enumerating difficulties, and I have only one more word to say. We are embarked on a great adventure, and I say “we” advisedly, and by “we” I mean on the one side the Jewish people, and I mean, on the other side, the Mandatory Power of Palestine. We are partners in this great enterprise. If we fail you, you cannot succeed. If you fail us, you cannot succeed. But I feel assured that we shall not fail you and that you will not fail us; and if I am right, as I am sure I am, in this prophecy of hope and confidence, then surely we may look forward with a happy gaze to a future in which Palestine will indeed, and in the fullest measure and degree of success, be made a home for the Jewish people.”

Balfour spoke of the joint effort of the British Mandatory Power in Palestine together with the Jews. In reality he spoke of the rebuilding of Palestine as a homeland for the Jews as a partnership of Christians and Jews together. Neither could do it alone. If they attempted to do so, they would fail. Together, as one, they would succeed.

Balfour toured Palestine in 1925. He came to

dedicate the Hebrew University in Jerusalem as a place of higher learning for Christian, Jew and Arab alike. He visited Balfornia, a Jewish community in the Galilee named in his honor and settled largely by American Jews. He toured a truncated British Mandate for Palestine. Britain had cut off 70% of Mandate Palestine to create a Jew free land and a new Arab state– Trans-Jordan in 1922.

On the tenth anniversary of the issuance of



the Balfour Declaration, Lord Balfour spoke in London. He spoke with the eternal optimism of a true Zionist.

“I will most gratefully thank you for the way you have received me. I have gratefully recognized the sympathy you have shown for anything I may have done,

and for the many things I have not done, but which I hope others will do, with regard to the development of this great undertaking. That it will have a reverberation throughout the coming centuries I do not for one instant doubt. If the success which would certainly crown our efforts if we continue in the path which we have already so successfully begun – if those efforts meet with all the degree of success which the Zionists hope for, 1917, will indeed be a date, a blessed date, not merely in the history of Palestine, not merely in the history of Jewry, but, as I think and believe most firmly, in the history of the world itself.”

The British Mandate Government continued to betray the essence of the Balfour Declaration. Soon, the dark clouds of Nazism threatened Europe and all Jews with death. Britain turned her back on the Jews and closed the door of sanctuary, Palestine. Six million Jews were murdered by the Nazis. They had nowhere to escape.

Balfour died in 1930. He mercifully never saw the betrayal of the Jews or the dramatic decline of Great

Britain as a world power. The mantle of leadership passed to the New World. When Balfour died his obituary never even mentioned the Balfour Declaration.

Balfour had a saying that instructed his life:

"Nothing matters very much, and few things matter at all."

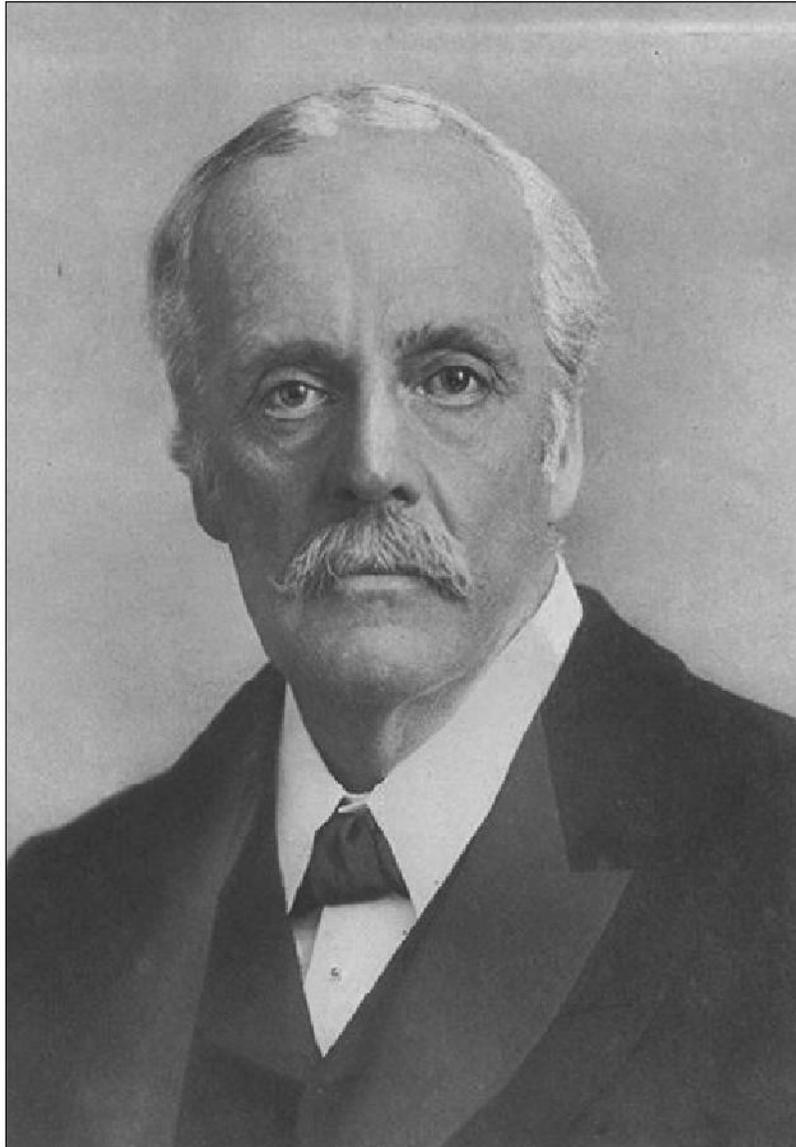
To the end, Zionism and the Zionist ideal mattered for him.

Arthur Balfour did what no Jew could do.

Open your mouth on behalf of the mute, in the judgement of all confused children. Open your mouth on, judge righteously, and obtain justice for the poor and destitute.

-- PROVERBS (31:8-9)

Arthur James Balfour



Foreign Office,
November 2nd, 1917.

Dear Lord Rothschild,

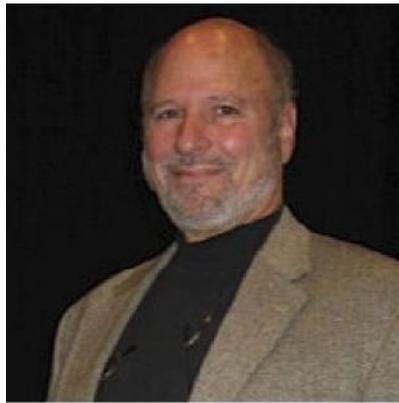
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I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "A. J. Balfour". Above the signature, there is a small, faint mark that appears to be a date or initials, possibly "11.2.17".

Lord Balfour and a copy of the Balfour Declaration



About the Author: Jerry Klinger

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Jerry Klinger is President and founder of the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation. The Society has completed projects in 25 states and in four countries.

He was born in Washington, D C and is the son of Holocaust survivors. Jerry was Yeshivah educated and as a young man served in the Israeli army.

As an Associate member of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, in coordination with Chairman Warren Miller, built the Jewish Memorial at the Buchenwald Concentration Camp. President Obama visited the site in 2009.

Jerry periodically writes for the Jerusalem Post Christian Edition. He is the author of over seventy

articles on American Jewish History and Christian Zionist history. Jerry speaks on Christian Zionism and other topics at Churches, schools and Synagogue communities around the U.S.

He is founder of *To Save A Life*, a charity focused on helping small Israeli and American charities. He is a past President of his Synagogue.

Jerry has a BA, and MA degrees from the University of Maryland. He did Doctoral work at the University of Maryland as well. He recently retired as a senior vice president with Merrill Lynch/ Bank of America. Jerry is married to the former Judith Rice. They have three sons, five grandchildren and a small Cockatzu dog named *Norman*.

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