

# The History of the Twentieth Century

## Episode 154

### “The Balfour Declaration”

#### Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

“His Majesty’s government view 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 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.”

The Balfour Declaration.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 154. The Balfour Declaration.

I want to begin today by picking up a narrative thread that I laid down all the way back in episode 8: the story of Zionism. Zionism, as you will recall, is a political movement that arose in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe to support the establishment of a Jewish homeland. What we mean by “Jewish homeland” and where it might lie would remain open for debate, as there is more than one form of Zionism.

The long and unhappy history of Jewish Europeans has been that they were often treated as foreigners in the nations of their birth. Zionism is in some sense an abandonment of the ideal that Jewish minorities in Europe might one day enjoy the same rights and privileges as their non-Jewish neighbors that replaces it with a vision of a land where Jewish people would be not merely a tolerated—or intolerated—minority restricted to certain social roles, but a people free to take their places in every station of life.

Now, not all Jews were Zionists, and not all Zionists envisioned the same goal. For example, was this Jewish homeland to be in Ottoman Palestine, the historic homeland of the Jewish people,

and the land promised by God to their ancestors, if you believe Jewish scripture? Or would any territory do? The Zionist movement answered that second question fairly early on, when the British government floated the idea of a Jewish homeland in East Africa. The answer was no.

A more difficult question was whether “Jewish homeland” means “Jewish state.” Would it be sufficient to have a Jewish community large enough to sustain its own language and culture and community, within a larger political entity, say the Ottoman Empire? Or would an actual Jewish state be required, an independent nation with a majority Jewish population, in the same way that, say, France is an independent nation with a majority French population?

Hold that thought for a while, because this second question is still up in the air in the early twentieth century, for a variety of ideological and practical reasons. At this moment in history, the biggest problem for the Zionist movement is that the Ottoman Empire controls Palestine, and neither the local rulers in Palestine nor the Ottoman Sultan are much interested in discussing, or supporting, a Jewish homeland.

The strongest argument for a Jewish homeland is that it would serve as a refuge for Jews persecuted in other lands. In this era, the nation with the largest Jewish population is Russia, which is also notorious for its persecutions of Jews. These persecutions led to an exodus of Jews from Russia—if I can use that term—that began in the latter years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some historians like to draw the line at the year 1881 and declare this the beginning of large-scale Jewish emigration from Russia. That was the year the Russian Emperor Alexander II was assassinated, episode 27, and marks the beginning of Imperial Russia’s downward spiral into an increasingly repressive state that lasts until the February Revolution, episode 137. Drawing a line like that is an arbitrary exercise, although it is true that political repression and persecution of Jews go hand in hand in Russia during this period.

In 1881, the population of Palestine was overwhelmingly Muslim Arab, with a significant Christian Arab minority, amounting to maybe 10%, and a smaller Jewish minority amounting to less than 5%, which works out to about 20,000 people, most of whom lived in the city of Jerusalem. But from 1881 to the outbreak of the Great War, the Jewish population of Palestine almost tripled, in part due to Russian immigration. These are still small numbers, and this only represents about one percent of the total number of Russian Jewish emigrants during this period. In fact, over two million Russian Jews emigrated over this period, and about three-quarters of them came to the United States, which saw a dramatic increase in its own Jewish population over this period. Most of the remaining emigrants moved to Western Europe and Canada. Even South America took in more Jewish immigrants over this period than Palestine did.

The reasons for the small number of Jewish immigrants into Palestine are simple. Life was hard in Palestine. It was a poor province. The locals were not welcoming and neither was the Ottoman government. Still, by the time of the Great War, the Jewish population of Palestine was around 60,000, and now constituted about 7% of the population. The Zionist movement did what it

could to encourage and support Jewish immigration into Palestine, and the increased Jewish population allowed for the development of a Jewish community with institutions like schools and synagogues that could potentially form the nucleus of the Jewish homeland of the Zionist dream.

An important element of this was the revival of Hebrew as a living language. In Europe, Yiddish, a Germanic language, was the tongue Jewish people most commonly used among themselves for secular purposes, with Hebrew reserved for religious purposes. Middle Eastern Jews spoke Arabic or Ladino, a Jewish Romance language, in everyday conversation.

Zionists favored Hebrew as the obvious choice for a lingua franca to unite Jews of different linguistic backgrounds. The challenge was that while a few people in Jerusalem spoke Hebrew, otherwise it was all but extinct as an everyday tongue. Still, Jewish scripture was written and read in Hebrew, and Hebrew prayers and rituals had preserved the ancient pronunciations, so revival would be feasible. This was a controversial idea for religiously conservative Jews, who were accustomed to thinking of Hebrew as a sacred language, best suited for godly pursuits and who shuddered at the thought of people haggling in the marketplace or reading trashy romance novels in God's holy tongue.

Enter Eliezer Perlman, born in 1858 in the Russian Empire, in what is today Belarus. A gifted student, he ended up studying at the University of Paris, where he took an interest in Middle Eastern History and in the budding Zionist movement. He met a fellow student from Jerusalem who actually used Hebrew as a spoken language, which inspired him to undertake the revival of Hebrew. He emigrated to Palestine in 1881, which makes him one of the earliest of those Russian Jewish immigrants I was talking about. He took the name Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, and took a teaching position, and dedicated himself to his linguistic project.

The biggest problem with reviving Hebrew as a modern language was the lack of Hebrew words for concepts not known to ancient Israelites—things like tomatoes and electricity and marmalade. Ben-Yehuda developed guidelines for coining new Hebrew words for these modern wonders, usually by devising cognates from words in other Semitic languages. He coined thousands of new Hebrew words, and although many of them never caught on, plenty of them did and Hebrew speakers today look to him as the father of modern Hebrew.

Developing a vocabulary and a grammar for modern Hebrew was just a first step. People needed to be encouraged to speak it, which means they needed friends and neighbors who also used the language. Parents need to speak it to their children, who also need to hear it in their schools. In 1909, a group of Jewish families acquired a plot of land outside the ancient port city of Jaffa in Palestine and divided it up among them, with an eye toward creating the first Jewish town in Palestine. They considered a number of names for the new community, including Hertzliya, after Theodor Herzl, the father of the Zionist movement, but in the end settled on Tel Aviv. A “tel” is a hill or mound that marks the remains of an ancient town. The land of Palestine is dotted with them. *Aviv* is the Hebrew word for the season of spring, so “Tel Aviv” means something like

“Spring Hill,” and metaphorically it evokes an image of new life emerging from the remains of an ancient community.

You’ve probably heard of it. There were other Jewish communities established in Palestine, including Petah Tikva, which means “Opening of Hope,” established in 1878. You are less likely to have heard of this community, but I mention it because it inspired a Jewish Galician poet named Naftali Herz Imber, who lived for a while in Palestine, to publish a Hebrew-language poem, *Tikvatenu*, meaning “Our Hope.”

Because in order for Hebrew to become a living, breathing language once again, it would not be enough merely to speak it and to teach it. There would have to be modern Hebrew literature, Hebrew songs, Hebrew poetry.

And speaking of songs, *Tikvatenu* would be set to music. The melody would be an old one, tracing its roots back to a Renaissance Italian madrigal that by the 19<sup>th</sup> century would be part of the folk music of many European traditions. The Czech nationalist composer Bedřich Smetana, who’s already gotten a shout-out on this podcast, would incorporate this melody into his symphonic poem *Vltava*, or “The Moldau” in English, one of his most famous works. The song version of *Tikvatenu* with this same melody would come to be known as “Hatikva,” meaning simply “The Hope,” and the First Zionist Congress in 1897 would adopt “Hatikva” as the anthem of the Zionist movement.

[music: “Hatikva”]

When the Ottoman Empire entered the Great War in 1914 on the side of the Central Powers, this new circumstance placed these fledgling Jewish communities in Palestine into an awkward position. Most of the Jewish people in Palestine were immigrants from Europe, and most of them from Russia. Few had adopted Ottoman citizenship. These immigrants were leery of the Ottoman government, which was leery of them. Most were still legally subjects of the Russian Emperor, though they were equally leery of him, since he had a habit of persecuting his Jewish subjects. Still, it was an awkward situation, as these residents of Ottoman territory were nominally enemy aliens.

There were other Jewish residents in Palestine, though, who believed that embracing Ottoman rule and becoming loyal subjects of the Sultan offered Zionists their best opportunity for achieving a Jewish homeland. One such was a young man born David Grün in Russian Poland in 1886. He was still a teenager, studying at the University of Warsaw when the Revolution of 1905 broke out. His socialist political activities got him in trouble during the Imperial crackdown that followed and he emigrated to Palestine in 1906, settling initially in Petah Tikva.

But he didn’t stay. He moved to Ottoman Salonika to study and went on to law school at the Imperial University in Constantinople, where he took the name David Ben-Gurion. His

experiences convinced him that Jewish people could and did live happily as subjects of the Sultan and that this was the future of Zionism.

He returned to Palestine in his late twenties, now a vocal proponent within the Jewish community there for embracing Ottoman rule. He went about in a turban, which made him look Turkish, and spoke of the Empire as “our country.” Once the war began, Ben-Gurion continued to preach his message, but the war made this choice more difficult than ever. Remain aliens and risk deportation or internment, or join with the Empire at the price of sending your young men off to fight for the Sultan.

Once the Ottoman Empire entered the war, many Zionists in Europe who had become frustrated with Ottoman resistance to Jewish settlement in Palestine, considered the possibilities for the post-war world and concluded that the best outcome, from their perspective, would be the incorporation of Palestine into the British Empire. The British have been the most liberal of the imperial powers and they rule peacefully over Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists. Why not Jewish subjects in a Jewish homeland in Palestine? Perhaps one day even a Jewish dominion, like South Africa or New Zealand, under British protection but free to run its own internal affairs.

All the way back in episode 8, I told you of a meeting between Arthur Balfour, then the British Prime Minister, and Chaim Weitzmann, a Jewish immigrant from the Russian Empire, a chemist and a leader of the Zionist movement in Britain, in which Weitzmann explained to Balfour the importance of Palestine to the Zionist movement and why the offer of a Jewish homeland somewhere else, like East Africa, was unacceptable.

More than a decade has passed since then. Balfour’s Conservative Party has been in the opposition during this time, although Balfour himself is still a leader within his party. Weitzmann became a naturalized British subject in 1910, although he remained a passionate Zionist, and when the war began, Weitzmann’s expertise in chemistry became valuable to the British war effort for his assistance in ramping up the production of explosives to offset the shell shortage and this offered him opportunities to hobnob with government ministers and press the Zionist cause.

There were Jewish Liberal MPs, and even one Jewish Cabinet minister, but the member of the government who most enthusiastically took up the Zionist argument for a British Palestine was none other than David Lloyd George. As you know, Lloyd George would displace Herbert Asquith as Prime Minister in 1916. Lloyd George was Welsh, as I have told you before, although I neglected to mention that he is the first, and as of the date of this podcast the only, Welsh PM in British history. Lloyd George was raised Nonconformist—Unitarian and Baptist, to be specific, which is the source of his Liberal politics and also likely the source of his support for Zionism. The dispensationalist theology of John Nelson Darby, episode 13, implied that the restoration of Israel was a necessary precondition to the Second Coming, and therefore a

development Christians should support. This idea was known at the time as Restorationism, but by the mid-twentieth century would come to be known as Christian Zionism.

David Lloyd George was probably an atheist by the time he became Prime Minister, but it seems parts of his Baptist upbringing remained. And the Conservative support that allowed Lloyd George to oust Asquith earned Arthur Balfour the post of Foreign Secretary, replacing Sir Edward Grey, meaning Zionists now had allies both at the Foreign Office and at Number Ten.

At the beginning of the war, Britain controlled Egypt, the Ottomans controlled Palestine, and the Sinai Peninsula lay between them. The Sinai is 120 miles of hot, dry, sparsely inhabited land, entirely unsuited for military operations. The British initially made no attempt to station soldiers in the Sinai or defend it, preferring to take their stand at the Suez Canal and rely on the Sinai as a shield against Turkish attacks.

The Turks, as you'll recall, tried to penetrate this shield. The obvious line of advance was along the Mediterranean coast, but the Turks chose instead to attempt to surprise the British by advancing through the interior of the Sinai, using drilling equipment to dig wells for their soldiers along the way. I recounted back in episode 109 how the Turks made an unsuccessful assault on the Suez Canal in early 1915. You might expect the British to strike back at the Ottomans, and so they did, but not into the Sinai. Instead, they chose Gallipoli.

That didn't work out so well either, as you know, but the British were also forced to keep substantial numbers of soldiers, including many Australians and New Zealanders, stationed in Egypt to protect the Suez Canal. Because the Turks may have been beaten once, but they still have that string of wells they drilled across the Sinai, meaning the peninsula is no longer so valuable as a buffer. The Ottomans potentially could attempt another advance at any time.

But two could play at this game. The British had their own technological solution to the obstacle posed by the Sinai desert. They began building a rail line east along the Mediterranean coastal route and also a pipeline to carry drinking water. Over the course of the year 1916, the British gradually pushed the Turks eastward as they extended their infrastructure, and by the end of the year, British troops held the town of El Arish, the largest town in the Sinai, which lies on the Mediterranean coast just thirty miles from the border of Ottoman Palestine.

Meanwhile, in Palestine, the situation was becoming increasingly difficult for the Jewish community there. The Arabs of Palestine were overwhelmingly loyal to the Sultan, in contrast to the Arabs of the Hedjaz; (I'll have more to say about them in a moment.) Jewish residents of Palestine, in contrast, were regarded by Turkish and Arab authorities as a security threat, and ever more so as the British Army got closer. Remember that many of them were technically enemy aliens, and even Jewish Palestinians who were born and raised in Palestine and loyal to the Sultan, even the ones who sent their own sons off to war in the Ottoman Army, were regarded with suspicion. In 1915, the authorities in Palestine began expelling Jews thought to be security threats, including young David Ben-Gurion, who was repaid for his efforts to build

Jewish support for the Empire by deportation. He would live in the United States for the rest of the war.

But life goes on, even in wartime, and if you'll indulge me for a moment, I'd like to digress from the subject of war and say a word about music, and introduce Abraham Tzvi Idelsohn, born in 1882 in what is today Latvia and was then part of the Russian Empire. He was trained as a cantor, a singer who leads a Jewish congregation in chant and prayer. He was also an ardent Zionist and emigrated to Palestine during the Revolution of 1905. There he taught music and dedicated himself to the study of Jewish musical traditions. In 1915, he began with a traditional Jewish chant and, by one account wrote modern, secular lyrics for it, by another account, challenged his students to develop new lyrics for it as a class project.

Either way, what emerged was a cheery little song with simple lyrics that begin: "Let us rejoice, let us rejoice, let us rejoice and be happy." Remember how I said for Hebrew to become a living language, there would need to be Hebrew songs? Here was one, and this particular song is destined to become the most familiar Hebrew-language song in the world, performed and recorded many times by Jewish and non-Jewish musicians alike. You've likely heard it, and will likely recognize its Hebrew title, "Hava Nagilah."

[music: "Hava Nagilah"]

For the sake of context, let me remind you that the year 1916 was the year the British advance into Mesopotamia halted before Baghdad, followed by retreat and the humiliating surrender at Kut in April. The principal failure there was also logistical; British supply lines had been stretched too far. The British were determined to avenge the surrender at Kut by taking Baghdad, though this would first necessitate upgrading the port facilities at Basra on the Persian Gulf and constructing specialized steamboats capable of navigating the Tigris River. This would take the British the rest of 1916 to accomplish, but the year 1917 would begin with British forces poised at El Arish in the Sinai and advancing up the Tigris into Mesopotamia once again.

Remember also that June of 1916 saw the beginning of the Arab Revolt when Hussein bin Ali, the Sharif of Mecca, encouraged by the British, rose up against the Turks and declared himself king of an Arab state. In contrast to the Arabs of Syria and Palestine, who are largely loyal to the Ottoman Sultan, the Arabs of the Hedjaz are taking up arms in a guerilla war against their Turkish overlords.

This is important to the British. The Middle East of 1917 lacks a rail network of the sort all the combatants are relying upon in Europe to move and supply their soldiers, but there is one very good, modern rail line in the region. It runs from Damascus to Medina, in the Hedjaz. It was intended ultimately to extend all the way to Mecca and allow Turkish Muslims to make the pilgrimage to Mecca from the comfort of a railway car, but the war interrupted that project.

Still, this rail line has considerable military value. It runs not through Palestine, but instead follows a route east of the Dead Sea. This matters because any British advance into Palestine is vulnerable to a potential Turkish counterattack against its right flank, a counterattack from soldiers deployed and supplied via the Hedjaz Railway. The British used to underestimate the Turkish Army; the results were Gallipoli and Kut. They are not about to make that mistake a third time.

Enter the 29-year old British archaeologist, Thomas Edward Lawrence. Lawrence had read history at Oxford and had done archeological work in Ottoman Syria before the war, where he also learned to speak Arabic. In early 1914, the British military engaged Lawrence to do an archeological survey of the Negev Desert in southern Palestine in what was actually a cover story for a military survey of the region, which borders on British-controlled Egypt.

After the war broke out, Lawrence became a British Army intelligence officer in Egypt. In November 1916, after Hussein's Arab revolt had begun, Lawrence was sent as a British Army liaison to Faisal bin Hussein, the, uh, son of Hussein, which is what "bin Hussein" means. Lawrence would travel back and forth between the British forces and Hussein's army, help devise strategy, and even personally participate in Arab raids on the railway. He wrote his memoirs after the war, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, which was the basis of a 1962 Columbia Pictures film; yes, I'm speaking of *Lawrence of Arabia*, directed by David Lean, which stands to this day as one of the most popular and critically acclaimed motion pictures of all time.

The Arab attacks on the rail line made it impossible for the Turks to use it effectively, which eliminated a strategic headache for Sir Archibald Murray, the commander of what is now being called the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. The year 1917 opened with British plans to advance both into Palestine and into Mesopotamia, though it has to be said that the military value of these operations was dubious. They were both supported by the British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George. You'll recall that Lloyd George was a so-called "Easterner," one who thought the Western Front was hopelessly stalemated and that the war would be won elsewhere. He'd also lost faith in Douglas Haig, the British commander on that front.

I've already made the case that British operations in Mesopotamia were what we today would call "mission creep." The goal initially had been to protect British petroleum interests in Iran and the Persian Gulf, which had morphed into an advance northwest, into the plains of Mesopotamia for no compelling strategic reason, which led in turn to the humiliating surrender at Kut last year. Now the argument is to avenge the defeat by a renewed offensive aimed at Baghdad, which, Lloyd George and other Easterners argued, would also serve as a propaganda victory and a morale boost to the British cause.

And by early 1917, the same arguments were being applied to Palestine. Mecca is already in rebel hands, and if there's a city in the Near East controlled by the Turks even more historically



and culturally significant than Baghdad, it is Jerusalem. Imagine what a blow the fall of this city would be to the Turks.

Of course, the argument on the other side remains, that neither of these cities is strategically significant, and their capture is unlikely to lead to any kind of Ottoman collapse, let alone to the end of the war. It's hard not to suspect that part of what's going on here is some jockeying for advantage in the postwar world, when the territories of the Middle East will be divided among the victors.

The year began with a British victory at Rafah, an Egyptian town right on the border of Ottoman Palestine. Turkish forces in Rafah were encircled and the town taken in a battle on January 9 that represented the eviction of the Turkish Army from their last stronghold in Egypt.

The next major town along the Palestinian coast is Gaza, and it is to there that the Turkish forces retired. The British took some time to rest and replenish their troops and advanced on Gaza, attacking it on March 26, in the First Battle of Gaza. The battle began badly for the British with a heavy fog that delayed the start and impeded reconnaissance. The Turks fought fiercely all day and at sunset the order was given to the British to withdraw.

That was disappointing, but three weeks later and with high hopes, the British tried again at the Second Battle of Gaza, beginning April 17. But the operational situation had changed significantly in the meantime, and not to the British advantage. The Turks had been reinforced, had dug trenches, and had extended their defensive line all the way from Gaza on the coast to Beersheba, about fifteen miles inland, so no encirclement is going to do the job here. The British assaulted the Turkish positions, even employed a few tanks. Yes, this will be the only front in the Great War other than the Western Front on which tanks will be deployed. Not that they helped. The Turks held off the British assaults, suffering fewer than 2,000 casualties to 6,000 for the British.

These two battles were a disappointment to the British, only partially offset by the British capture of Baghdad on March 11. This time the advance up the Tigris had been careful, systematic, and successful. The new British commander in Mesopotamia, Sir Frederick Stanley Maude issued a proclamation a week later, famously declaring to the inhabitants of the region, "Our armies do not come into your cities and lands as conquerors or enemies, but as liberators."

Clarence Darrow is reputed to have said, "History repeats itself, and that's one of the things wrong with history."

Meanwhile, back on the Palestinian front, the British found themselves stymied. With some guidance from German and Austrian advisors, the Turks had constructed a string of entrenched positions extending from Gaza to Beersheba which would lead to a six-month stalemate along this line that very quickly began to resemble the Western Front, and not only because of the trenches and the stalemate. Aerial combat developed on this front, with both sides dropping

bombs on each other and, like the Western Front, the technical superiority of German aircraft gave the advantage to the Turks.

The last thing in the world the British government or military command wanted to see was the Western Front replicated in the Near East. The axe fell on General Murray in June, and as you know from episode 149, he would be replaced by General Edmund Allenby, to the surprise of none more so than Allenby himself, who had recently been relieved from his command on the Western Front and who feared his military career was over. The British spent the next few months resting, reorganizing, and reinforcing the Egyptian Expeditionary Force in preparation for a renewed offensive into Palestine.

The Turks were not idle during this period, either. They reinforced their line in Palestine to a strength of 150,000, organized as the Thunderbolt Army Group, under the command of a German officer, none other than Erich von Falkenhayn, the former chief-of-staff of the German military.

The threat of an enemy army on the doorstep of Palestine also led to the expulsion of Arab civilians from the region, ordered by Djemal Pasha, who was at this moment governor of the region. He may have feared that Sharif Hussein's rebel Arabs had sympathizers among the Palestinian population, although there's little evidence this was true. As the refugees trudged northward, Jewish inhabitants ahead of them, most of whom lived in the region of Tel Aviv, Jaffa, and Petah Tikva were also ordered out of their homes. Rumors flew among the Jewish community that they were being forced out of their homes for the benefit of the Arabs displaced from farther south. As weary civilians trudged northward, the Armenian genocide of two years ago was on many minds. Were the Three Pashas now contemplating a Jewish genocide?

The stalemate was finally broken in late October. Unlike the Western Front, this front had an endpoint, and that endpoint was Beersheba. The rested and reinforced British troops—ANZAC troops, to be precise—assaulted Beersheba on October 31, capturing the anchor of the Ottoman line. Within weeks, the Thunderbolt Army Group was forced to withdraw, with the British in pursuit.

November 2, 1917, two days after the fall of Beersheba, saw the publication of the Balfour Declaration, a short statement from the British government, named for the foreign secretary who announced it, Arthur Balfour. I read the entirety of the declaration at the top of the episode.

For the British government, the Balfour Declaration was useful for a number of reasons. It set out a moral argument for a British invasion of Palestine and British rule there after the war. It guaranteed that there would be a small but very loyal pro-British community in a British-ruled Palestine, which would in turn secure the border of British-controlled Egypt.

It was also a propaganda coup. The British Cabinet perceived that Jewish people in Russia and the United States were at best lukewarm to the Allied cause, while the German government was

actively wooing Zionists. With a stroke of a pen, the Balfour Declaration aligned the Allied cause with the Zionist cause.

It also has to be said that there's a whiff of anti-Semitism in this thinking. It smacks of the old idea of a powerful and secretive international Jewish organization, with the Balfour Declaration amounting to an offer of a payoff to that shadowy group in exchange for support for the Allied war effort.

In fact, the Balfour Declaration was a shot in the arm to the Zionist movement. Zionism had been the quixotic ambition of a small group of idealists pursuing the longest of long shots. Now, one of the world's Great Powers had endorsed their ideal, and not just a Great Power, but a Great Power with an army on the ground advancing into Palestine as we speak. In truth, whatever the British Cabinet may have thought, Zionism had never really caught on among the two million Jews in the United States, at least not until the Balfour Declaration lit the fire. The dream of a Jewish homeland had taken a giant step toward reality.

And even as the world was still absorbing this dramatic news, General Allenby's forces were advancing. On December 9, after a long series of combat actions, the city of Jerusalem surrendered. Two days later, Allenby entered the city, but, sensitive to the delicate political and religious implications, he entered on foot, in a symbolic gesture of humility.

It's worth mentioning here that during Kaiser Wilhelm's visit to Jerusalem in 1898, he rode into the city on a white horse, which at the time invited unflattering comparisons between the pompous German Emperor and the humble one who entered the same city on a donkey nearly two millennia earlier. Thus you can read Allenby's conduct here as an implicit rebuke to Wilhelm.

The capture of Jerusalem was indeed a boost to British prestige and, along with the loss of Baghdad and the fall of Mecca to Sharif Hussein and his Arab uprising, a blow to the Turks. For the first time in nearly seven centuries, a Christian monarch ruled over the Holy City, although the British were careful to tamp down any comparisons to the Crusades. Remember that the British Empire has a substantial Muslim population and can't afford not to look evenhanded.

Nevertheless, the fall of Jerusalem to the British marks the beginning of a new chapter in the history of the Middle East, and the repercussions of this moment will last for the rest of the twentieth century, and on into our time.

But that is a tale for future episodes. We'll have to stop here for today. Thank you for listening, and I'd particularly like to thank Hannah for making a donation, and thank you Tomás for being a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons help keep the lights on and the wheels turning at *The History of the Twentieth Century*, so thank you so much to everyone who helps out. And if you'd like to become a donor or patron, visit the website, [historyofthetwentiethcentury.com](http://historyofthetwentiethcentury.com) to find out how.

Next week is a bye week for the podcast, but I hope you'll join me in two weeks' time, here at *The History of the Twentieth Century* as we get caught up on events in Greece and also take a look at the nation of Iran and the Great War. A Lake of Blood, in two week's time, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. You'll recall that the British had offered Sharif Hussein basically everything south of Anatolia down to the lower end of the Arabian Peninsula, although these promises were inconsistent with the Sykes-Picot agreement, which divided some of these same territories between Britain and France. The British had also promised Hussein Palestine as part of the deal, or at least, that's what some historians will tell you. Others argue that the British only promised to recognize Arab independence in those lands where Arabs revolted against Ottoman rule, which does not include Palestine.

In any case, you can understand the concerns of Arab Palestinians. This is the group who represent more than 90% of the population of Palestine yet who find themselves mentioned only in passing in the Balfour Declaration as "existing non-Jewish communities." Aren't Britain and her allies claiming to be fighting for democracy and self-determination?

These arguments over who promised what to whom and what the legal status of those pledges might be are going to last a long time. In fact, people are going to be arguing over them long after the Great War ends. But hey, I'm sure the astute application of diplomacy will eventually sort it all out.

[music: Closing War Theme]