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The Last Crusade and the First Zionists: Religion, Empire, and the Making of Modern Palestine

Roberto Mazza[a]

Abstract

This article examines the neglected religious dimensions of British imperial policy toward Palestine during World War One, arguing that the relationship between the Balfour Declaration and the British capture of Jerusalem represents far more than mere chronological coincidence. Rather than viewing policy through purely strategic lenses, this study demonstrates how Christian Zionism British Israelism, and crusading rhetoric provided essential frameworks for key figures like David Lloyd George and Arthur Balfour. Transnational evangelical networks spanning Britain and America influenced these decisions, functioning as both intelligence-gathering organizations and sources of political support. These networks helped create a "Biblical Palestine"—an imaginary landscape superimposed upon the actual territory—where religious conviction shaped imperial calculations. However, attempts to combine multiple religious frameworks created fundamental contradictions; specifically, Christian Zionist support for Jewish restoration often conflicted with crusading imagery emphasizing Christian dominance. The gap between these evangelical expectations and practical governance realities contributed to ongoing tensions that escalated conflict between Jewish and Arab populations, ultimately undermining British authority throughout the mandate period. The failure of British policy cannot be fully understood without recognizing how religious motivations shaped initial commitments that proved impossible to fulfill. Furthermore, the article posits that these religious networks survived imperial decline, transforming into contemporary movements that continue influencing Middle Eastern politics, particularly regarding American evangelical support for Israel. Ultimately, this examination illustrates both the power and the limitations of religious conviction as a foundation for political action in international relations and the complex challenges of governing diverse societies in an interconnected world.

Keywords: Christian Zionism, British Empire, Balfour Declaration, religious networks, Palestine.

[a] Dr., Keyman Modern Turkish Study Program, Buffett Institute for Global Affairs, Northwestern University, robbymazza@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-3627-9878.

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Son Haçlı Seferi ve İlk Siyonistler: Din, İmparatorluk ve Modern Filistin'in Oluşumu

Öz

Bu makale, Birinci Dünya Savaşı sırasında İngiltere'nin Filistin'e yönelik emperyal politikasının ihmal edilmiş dini boyutlarını incelemektedir. Bu bağlamda çalışma, Balfour Deklarasyonu ile İngilizlerin Kudüs'ü ele geçirmesi arasındaki ilişkinin kronolojik bir tesadüf olmadığını, bundan çok daha fazlasını temsil ettiğini savunmaktadır. Politikayı yalnızca stratejik merceklerden görmek yerine bu çalışma, Hıristiyan Siyonizmi, İngiliz İsrailciliği ve haçlı retoriğinin, David Lloyd George ve Arthur Balfour gibi kilit isimler için nasıl temel çerçeveler sağladığını ortaya koymaktadır. İngiltere ve Amerika'ya yayılan ulus-aşırı evanjelik ağlar, hem istihbarat toplama örgütleri hem de siyasi destek kaynakları olarak işlev görerek bu kararları etkilemiştir. Bahsedilen bu ağlar, dini inançların emperyal hesapları şekillendirdiği ve gerçek toprakların üzerine bindirilmiş hayali bir manzara olan "Kitab-ı Mukaddes Filistini"nin (Biblical Palestine) yaratılmasına yardımcı olmuştur. Ancak, birden fazla dini çerçeveyi birleştirme girişimleri temel çelişkiler yaratmıştır; özellikle, Yahudilerin Filistin'e geri dönüşüne yönelik Hıristiyan Siyonist desteği, Hıristiyan hakimiyetini vurgulayan haçlı imgeleriyle sıklıkla çatışmıştır. Bu evanjelik beklentiler ile pratik yönetim gerçekleri arasındaki uçurum, Yahudi ve Arap nüfus arasındaki çatışmayı tırmandıran ve nihayetinde manda dönemi boyunca İngiliz otoritesini sarsan devam eden gerilimlere katkıda bulunmuştur. İngiliz politikasının başarısızlığı, dini motivasyonların yerine getirilmesi imkansız olan başlangıç taahhütlerini nasıl şekillendirdiğini kabul etmeden tam olarak anlaşılamaz. Ayrıca makale, bu dini ağların imparatorluğun çöküşünden sağ çıktığını ve özellikle İsrail'e yönelik Amerikan evanjelik desteği konusunda Orta Doğu siyasetini etkilemeye devam eden çağdaş hareketlere dönüştüğünü öne sürmektedir. Sonuç olarak bu inceleme, uluslararası ilişkilerde siyasi eylemin bir temeli olarak dini inancın hem gücünü hem de sınırlarını; aynı zamanda birbirine bağlı bir dünyada, farklı toplumları yönetmenin getirdiği karmaşık zorlukları ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hıristiyan Siyonizmi, İngiliz İmparatorluğu, Balfour Deklarasyonu, dini ağlar, Filistin.

Introduction

The relationship between the Balfour Declaration of November 1917 and the British capture of Jerusalem in December of the same year represents far more than mere chronological coincidence. This article argues that both events emerged from a complex matrix of transnational evangelical networks, imperial calculations, and religious imagination that had been developing for over two centuries. Rather than viewing British policy in Palestine through purely strategic or political lenses, we must understand how deeply embedded religious convictions—particularly Christian Zionism and crusading imagery—shaped the decision-making of key figures like David Lloyd George, Arthur Balfour, and their advisors.

This article does not seek to replace strategic, economic, or purely political explanations for British policy in Palestine during World War One with religious ones. Instead, it argues that religious conviction provided an essential—and long-neglected—framework within which other considerations operated. As Ilan Pappe notes in his recent work *Lobbying for Zionism*, for both Christian and Jewish supporters of Zionism, "Palestine as such did not

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exist in their minds; it was replaced by the Holy Land, and in the Holy Land from the very beginning there was no indigenous population—only a small community of faithful Christians and pious Jews remaining after most of their co-religionists were by and large expelled by the Roman Empire." [1] This religious reimagining of Palestine, what Maurice Halbwachs pioneered as "collective memory," created what Pappe describes as "an imaginary landscape conjured up during the Middle Ages in Europe and superimposed upon the landscape of Palestine."[2]

Recent scholarship has revealed the extent to which evangelical networks spanning Britain, America, and Palestine itself created both the intellectual framework and practical channels through which religious motivations influenced imperial policy. The work of Donald Lewis, Jonathan Schneer, Ilan Pappe and Eitan Bar-Yosef, building upon earlier studies by scholars like Barbara Tuchman and Regina Sharif, demonstrates that religious conviction was not peripheral to British policy but central to understanding why Britain committed itself to both supporting Zionism and occupying Jerusalem.[3] It must be clarified from the very beginning that this article is not suggesting, nor looking for the proverbial "smoking gun" which in itself does not exist, but it suggests that given the historical circumstances, the agency of individual characters, we can better explain how history unfolded also including personal religious views applied to the same historical context.

This article examines several interconnected phenomena: first, the development of transnational Christian Zionist networks that provided both theological justification and practical support for Jewish restoration in Palestine; second, the emergence of crusading rhetoric that framed the Palestinian campaign as the fulfillment of medieval Christian ambitions; third, the influence of British Israelism and other mythological frameworks connecting Britain to biblical Israel; and fourth the ways in which these religious currents converged in the specific policies surrounding the Balfour Declaration and the occupation of Jerusalem. Crucially, this analysis reveals how different religious motivations—some complementary, other contradictory—shaped British imperial policy in ways that continue to influence contemporary politics.

The line between imperialism, religious fervor, and even scientific method applied to the mapping of Palestine remained blurred under what we may call "Biblical Palestine." Understanding these religious dimensions remains essential for comprehending both historical developments and contemporary politics, particularly given the survival and transformation of Christian Zionist networks into the twenty-first century.[4]

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1 Ilan Pappe, *Lobbying for Zionism on Both Sides of the Atlantic* (London: Oneworld Publication, 2024), 1-2.

2 Pappe, Lobbying for Zionism, 1-2.

3 Donald Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Jonathan Schneer, *The Balfour Declaration: The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Random House, 2010); Eitan Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture 1799-1917* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Barbara Tuchman, *Bible and Sword: England and Palestine from the Bronze Age to Balfour* (New York: New York University Press, 1956); Regina Sharif, *Non-Jewish Zionism: Its Roots in Western History* (London: Zed Press, 1983); Pappe, *Lobbying for Zionism*; Nur Masalha, *The Bible and Zionism: Invented Traditions, Archaeology and Post-Colonialism in Palestine-Israel* (London: Zed Books, 2007).

4 Lorenzo Kamel, *Imperial Perceptions of Palestine: British Influence and Power in Late Ottoman Times* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 14; Gabriel Polley, *Palestine in the Victorian Age: Colonial Encounters in the Holy Land* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2022), 23.

1. The Historical Foundations of Christian Zionism (1640s-1800s)

The intellectual foundations of Christian Zionism emerged during the religious upheavals of seventeenth-century England, when Puritan theologians began developing new interpretations of biblical prophecy that would have profound implications for later imperial policy. The Puritans, as hardline Protestants, seeking to eliminate Catholic influences from the Church of England, developed a particular fascination with Old Testament narratives that seemed to parallel England's struggles against Catholic powers.[5]

Understanding Christian Zionism requires recognizing that "the starting place for eschatological questions for both Jews and Christians is the call of Abraham as recorded in Genesis chapter 12 verses 1 and 7." However, "this promise was never entirely fulfilled for the Jews—they never occupied all of the area promised to them and their possession of the land of Canaan has not been continuous."[6] At the time of the Reformation, Protestant theologians were forced to rethink many theological issues, and in this process many came to question long-held attitudes toward the Jews and their significance. While medieval Catholic thought had maintained that "the Jewish nation had ceased to exist" and "had no further significance in God's plan for the future," another view maintained that "the Jews would eventually as a people turn to Christianity."[7]

Traditional Catholic theology had interpreted Jewish exile as divine punishment for rejecting Christ, rendering the "Jewish Nation" a relic of biblical history with no future role in God's plan. Puritan theologians, however, began to challenge this supersessionist interpretation, arguing that biblical prophecies promised Jewish restoration to Palestine as a precondition for the Second Coming of Christ.[8] This theological innovation emerged from broader Puritan concerns about eschatology and millenarian expectations that the end times were approaching.

The reign of Oliver Cromwell (1653-1658) marked the first translation of these theological ideas into practical policy. Influenced by Puritan discussions about Jewish restoration and seeking to gain the support of wealthy Jewish merchants excluded from England since 1290, Cromwell effectively ended the medieval ban on Jewish settlement.[9] More significantly, his government received numerous petitions from English Puritans calling for active support for Jewish return to Palestine, by then an Ottoman territory divided into various provinces. The petition of Ebenezer and Joanna Cartwright in 1649 exemplified this sentiment, declaring that "'this Nation of England, with the inhabitants of the

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5 H. Trevor-Roper, *Catholics, Anglicans and Puritans: Seventeenth Century Essays* (London: Fontana, 1989), 156-189; Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), 234-267; Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism, Road-Map to Armageddon?* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 26-105.

6 Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism*, 25-26.

7 Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism*, 27.

8 Regina Sharif, *Non-Jewish Zionism*, 10-16; M. Leppäkari, *The Apocalyptic Representation of Jerusalem in Islamic, Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 20-32; Shaul Magid, 'Christian Supersessionism, Zionism, and the Contemporary Scene: A Critical Reading of Peter Ochs's Reading of John Howard Yoder,' *Journal of Religious Ethics* 45 (2017): 104-141.

9 A. Fraser, *Cromwell: Our Chief of Men* (London: Phoenix, 2002), 234-267; David Katz, *The Jews in the History of England 1485-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 123-156.

Netherlands, shall be the first and the readiest to transport Israel's sons and daughters in their ships to the land promised to their forefathers."[10]

Without reading history backward and without making far-fetched claims, given the historical circumstances, one can say that these seventeenth-century developments established crucial precedents that would influence British policy toward Jews and Palestine for centuries to come. The idea that England had a special role to play in fulfilling biblical prophecy became embedded in Protestant political culture, creating a "theological template" for understanding England's imperial mission.[11] Although the immediate influence of these ideas waned after Cromwell's death, they persisted within dissenting religious communities, then to be known as non-denominational churches, and would resurface with renewed vigor during the evangelical revival of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

1.1. The Nineteenth-Century Revival: Institutional Development

The idea of Jewish restoration and the Second Coming of Christ lay dormant until the beginning of the nineteenth century when European penetration of the Middle East ruptured English Christian fervor toward the Holy Land. The British Empire did not initially regard Palestine as strategically crucial, but to Christian believers Palestine remained the land of the Lord. The Napoleonic invasion of Egypt at the beginning of the nineteenth century and subsequent rule by Muhammad Ali from 1805 increased British involvement in the Middle East, opening doors to Palestine that favored the establishment of religious movements and organizations.[12]

In 1809, the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews (also known as the London Jews Society) was founded by Christian Friederich Frey, a German Jew converted to Christianity.[13] The Society's main aims reflected the complex relationship between conversion and restoration that characterized Christian Zionism: to preach the Messianic role of Jesus to Jews; to teach Christians about their Jewish roots; to encourage the physical restoration of Jews in Palestine; and more generally to encourage the Christian-Jewish movement.[14]

Despite ambitious goals and numerous missionaries dispatched to Palestine, the Society's conversion efforts proved largely unsuccessful. The organization managed to convert no more than seven Jews annually during its first thirteen years of operation, none of whom were religious leaders.[15] The Society's journal, *Jewish Missionary Intelligence*, reported in December 1911 that only two Jews had been converted and baptized between August and December of that year.[16] However, the Society's limited success in conversion masked more

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[10] Quoted in Regina Sharif, 'Christians for Zion 1600-1919,' *Journal of Palestine Studies* 5, no. 3/4 (Spring-Summer 1976): 125.

[11] Lewis, *Origins of Christian Zionism*, 23-45.

[12] Elizabeth Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East 1914-1971* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1981), 23-45.

[13] Yaron Perry, *British Mission to the Jews in 19th Century Palestine* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 12-13.

[14] S.R. Sizer, 'Christian Zionism: A British Perspective,' in *Holy Land Hollow Jubilee*, eds. N. Ateek and M. Prior (London: Melisende, 1999), 189-204.

[15] L.J. Epstein, *Zion's Call: Christian Contributions to the Origins and Development of Israel* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984), 32.

[16] *Jewish Missionary Intelligence* 1, no. 12 (December 1911): 180-181.

significant achievements in other areas. The organization played a crucial role in spreading ideas about Jewish restoration while British Christian Zionists took active political action to support their beliefs.[17] Despite minimal conversion rates, the movement survived by changing focus from conversion to protection of the Jews. The Society, also, proved instrumental in establishing an Anglican Bishopric in Jerusalem and founding schools and educational facilities in mid-nineteenth century Palestine.[18]

By the early twentieth century, the London Jews Society operated one hospital in Jerusalem primarily serving Jewish patients, along with multiple schools including separate institutions for boys and girls.[19] These institutions provided permanent bases in Palestine and created ongoing relationships with both Jewish and Arab communities that proved valuable for intelligence gathering and political influence.[20]

In the long run Anglican institutions in Jerusalem came to be divided reflecting deeper theological and political splits within British evangelicalism. For instance, Christ Church, the Society's headquarters, became and still is the center for pro-Zionist Anglican activity, while St. George's Cathedral emerged as the focal point for anti-Zionist sentiment and mostly attended by local Arabs.[21] This spatial division embodied broader debates within British Christianity about the relationship between Christian mission and Jewish restoration.

1.2. Political Integration: Lord Shaftesbury and Government Influence

Christian Zionism entered British government circles through Lord Shaftesbury (1801-1885), a social reformer and Tory MP who declared that he was always moved by principles of the Second Coming.[22] Shaftesbury's influence extended far beyond individual conviction, encompassing networks that included financial backing from evangelical businessmen who saw economic opportunities in supporting Jewish restoration, creating convergences between religious belief and commercial interest. Shaftesbury's declaration that he was "always moved in his life by the principles of the Second Coming" reflected not merely personal piety but a systematic theological framework that viewed British imperial expansion as fulfilling divine purposes.[23] For clarity, it is important to underline that while Shaftesbury was arguing for the return of the Jews to Palestine, he opposed

17 A. Schölch, 'Britain in Palestine, 1838-1882: The Roots of the Balfour Policy,' *Journal of Palestine Studies* 22, no. 1 (Autumn 1992): 42-43.

18 Barbara Tuchman, *Bible and Sword*, 118; Anthony O'Mahony, 'Christianity in the Holy Land: The Historical Background,' *The Month* (December 1993): 470; Charles T. Bridgeman, 'Michael Solomon Alexander: First Bishop of the Church England in Jerusalem 1841-1845,' *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 12, no. 1 (March 1943): 31-43.

19 Yali Hashash, 'Gender, Religion, and Secularism in the English Mission Hospital of Jerusalem, 1844-1880,' *Journal of Levantine Studies* 7, no. 5 (2017): 9-34; Norbert Schwake, 'Hospitals and European Colonial Policies in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries,' in *Health and Disease in the Holy Land*, ed. Manfred Waserman and Samuel Kottek (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), 231-262.

20 Perry, *British Mission*, 179-183; Yaron Perry and Efraim Lev, 'The Medical Activities of the London Jews' Society in Nineteenth-Century Palestine,' *Medical History* 47 (2003): 67-88.

21 P. Merkley, *The Politics of Christian Zionism 1891-1948* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 42; Daphne Tsimhoni, 'The Anglican (Evangelical Episcopal) Community in Jerusalem and the West Bank,' *Oriente Moderno*, no. 1-2 (1983): 251-258.

22 Tuchman, *Bible and Sword*, 115.

23 Tuchman, *Bible and Sword*, 115.

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Jewish emancipation in Britain, showing how often supporters of Christian Zionism and the return of the Jews to Palestine were also antisemites in some form and shape.[24] This contradiction would prove characteristic of Christian Zionist thought throughout its development—simultaneous support for Jewish restoration and underlying antisemitic assumptions about Jewish place in Christian society.

The evangelical networks supporting Shaftesbury included prominent figures across British society, creating an "evangelical political economy" that viewed commercial expansion and religious mission as complementary rather than competing objectives.[25] It is not then a surprise that from the Crimean War in 1856 onwards the idea of a Jewish client state in Palestine became more and more popular given this state could have served as link to British interests in the region and India.[26] These networks established patterns of support that would influence British political parties attitudes toward Palestine through World War One and beyond.

This second revival of Christian Zionist sentiment during the nineteenth century differed significantly from its seventeenth-century predecessor in its practical orientation and institutional development. Rather than remaining confined to theological speculation, nineteenth-century Christian Zionism developed organizational structures, financial resources, and political connections that enabled it to influence government policy. The movement's success in establishing permanent institutions in Palestine provided both symbolic validation of theological claims and practical platforms for political influence.

A figure representing this shift is Laurence Oliphant, who would require a full volume treatment. Born in 1829 in what is nowadays South Africa, he emerged as a strong advocate for Jewish resettlement in Palestine becoming a revered figure amongst Zionists. Oliphant wrote several books which came to influence figures like Herzl and other Zionist leaders.[27]

2. Transnational Networks and Intelligence Systems (1880s-1914)

The Christian Zionist movement that influenced British policy during World War I cannot be understood as a purely British phenomenon. Evangelical networks connecting Britain, America, and Palestine itself had been developing since the early nineteenth century, creating what Shalom Goldman terms a "triangular relationship" between Protestant missionary societies, Jewish communities, and imperial administrators.[28]

By the 1840s, similar societies to the London Jews Society operated in Berlin, Basel, and across the American Northeast, creating an "evangelical international" that shared personnel, funding, and theological frameworks.[29] These networks proved crucial not

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[24] Stephen Sizer, 'Christian Zionism and the Church of England: Historic Beginnings,' *Journal for the Study of Christian Zionism* 1 (2024): 12.

[25] Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 234-267.

[26] Kamel, *Imperial Perceptions of Palestine*, 8-9.

[27] Shalom Goldman, *Zeal for Zion: Christians, Jews and the Idea of the Promised Land* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 42-87; Thomas Amit, 'Laurence Oliphant: Financial Sources for his Activities in Palestine in the 1880s,' *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 139, no. 3 (2007): 205-212.

[28] Lewis, *Origins of Christian Zionism*, 45-67; Goldman, *Zeal for Zion*, 123-145.

[29] Timothy Larsen, *A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 234-256.

merely for religious activities but for their role as intelligence-gathering organizations that provided British policymakers with detailed information about conditions in Palestine and the broader Middle East.

Yaron Perry's research reveals that missionary societies maintained extensive correspondence networks functioning as unofficial diplomatic channels.[30] The London Jews Society's correspondence files show regular communication with American evangelical leaders like William Blackstone, whose 1891 petition supporting Jewish restoration was signed by prominent industrialists and politicians including John D. Rockefeller and Cyrus McCormick.[31] This American dimension proves crucial for understanding how Christian Zionist ideas gained political traction on both sides of the Atlantic, not to mention that this is crucial for the understanding of the future development amongst evangelical churches in America of Christian Zionism. American evangelical support for Jewish restoration, however, developed independently of British initiatives while maintaining close communication with British Christian Zionists. The relationship between American and British Christian Zionism created a transatlantic network that would prove instrumental in building political support for the Balfour Declaration and subsequent British policy in Palestine.

2.1. Intelligence Networks and Strategic Information

The London Jews Society and similar organizations informed British assessments of Ottoman strength, Arab nationalism, and Jewish settlement potential throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[32] These informal networks worked hand in hand with the official diplomatic institutions, and other organizations like the Palestine Exploration Fund—PEF—established in 1865 which also included the British Consul in Jerusalem as well as the Dean of Westminster Abbey Arthur Stanley.[33]

The intelligence dimension of missionary activity helps explain why figures like Mark Sykes took Christian Zionist arguments seriously despite their own more secular orientations—Sykes was a Catholic. Sykes's agreement with François Georges-Picot was informed by detailed missionary reports about sectarian divisions in Syria and Palestine, information crucial for understanding the political landscape Britain would inherit after Ottoman defeat.[34]

Missionary intelligence networks provided British officials with information unavailable through conventional diplomatic channels. Ottoman restrictions on European diplomatic activity made missionary reports particularly valuable for understanding local conditions,

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30 Perry, *British Mission*, 198-215.

31 Shalom Goldman, *God's Sacred Tongue: Hebrew and the American Imagination* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 145-167; William E. Blackstone Papers, Moody Bible Institute Archives, Chicago.

32 Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East*, 45-67; TNA: FO 371/2767, 'Missionary Intelligence Reports, Palestine 1900-1914.'

33 James Moscrop, *Measuring Jerusalem: The Palestine Exploration Fund and British Interests in the Holy Land* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 2000); M. Vereté, 'Why Was a British Consulate Established in Jerusalem?' *The English Historical Review* 85, no. 335 (1970): 316-345.

34 Schneer, *Balfour Declaration*, 234-256; Roger Adelson, *London and the Invention of the Middle East: Money, Power, and War, 1902-1922* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 156-189; Roberto Mazza and Idir Ouahes, 'For God and La Patrie: Antonin Jaussen, Dominican Priest and French Intelligence Agent in the Middle East, 1914-1920,' *First World War Studies* 3, no. 2 (2012): 145-164.

population dynamics, and political tensions. The London Jews Society's network of schools, hospitals, and religious institutions provided platforms for gathering intelligence that complemented and sometimes contradicted official Ottoman sources.

The transformation of missionary societies from purely religious organizations into intelligence networks reflected broader changes in the relationship between religion and empire during the nineteenth century. The expansion of European imperial control created new opportunities for missionary activity while generating demand for local knowledge that missionaries were uniquely positioned to provide.

2.2. Mythological Frameworks: British Israelism

Alongside organized Christian Zionism, British culture during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed development of more speculative theories connecting Britain with biblical Israel. The most significant was British Israelism, a complex set of beliefs claiming that the British people had descended from the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.[35]

British Israelism emerged from the same cultural milieu that produced Christian Zionism but developed different implications for understanding Britain's relationship with Jewish restoration. While Christian Zionists supported Jewish return to Palestine as fulfillment of biblical prophecy, British Israelites claimed that the British themselves were the true heirs of biblical Israel, making their imperial expansion a form of restoration rather than support for others' restoration.[36]

The theory gained systematic expression in John Wilson's Lectures on *Our Israelitish Origin* (1840), which attempted to trace the migration of the Lost Tribes from Assyrian captivity to the British Isles through linguistic and geographical evidence.[37] Wilson's approach reflected broader nineteenth-century fascination with racial theories and historical linguistics, making arguments that seemed plausible to contemporary readers despite lacking rigorous evidence. British Israelite theories reached peak influence during the 1920s, when the movement claimed approximately five thousand official members and perhaps two million sympathizers.[38] However, the movement never developed the institutional organization or political influence of Christian Zionism, functioning instead as an "unorganized movement" attracting support from middle-class professionals, military officers, and some aristocrats while remaining peripheral to mainstream institutions.[39]

The Foreign Office's 1919 *Handbook on Zionism*, prepared for officials attending the Paris Peace Conference, reflects the ambiguous relationship between British Israelism and official policy. While avoiding direct endorsement of British Israelite claims, the handbook suggested that the Lost Tribes might have migrated to various locations including

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35 M. Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 5.
36 T. Parfitt, *The Lost Tribes of Israel: The History of a Myth* (London: Phoenix, 2002), 52.
37 Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 7.
38 Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 15.
39 Parfitt, *The Lost Tribes of Israel*, 52; R. Gonen, *The Quest for the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel* (New Jersey: Book-Mart Press, 2002), 126.

potentially the British Isles, leaving room for readers to draw their own conclusions.[40] The establishment of a British Israel movement branch in Jerusalem, evidenced by the publication of *The Truth* magazine edited by Solomon Feingold, demonstrates the international dimensions of these speculative theories.[41]

The idea that Britain had special connections to biblical Israel, whether through prophetic role or ancestral descent, provided a theological framework for understanding imperial expansion that complemented conventional strategic and economic justifications. This religious dimension helped creating a sense of "spiritual homecoming" when Britain assumed control over Palestine.[42]

3. Religious Motivations and the Balfour Declaration (1914-1917)

The opening of additional Cabinet papers and private collections since the 1990s has significantly revised understanding of the Balfour Declaration's origins.[43] Rather than arising from a single dominant motive—whether strategic, economic, or religious—the Declaration emerged as a "convergence of interests" that made religious and imperial calculations mutually reinforcing.[44] Cabinet discussions of spring and summer 1917 show Lloyd George and Balfour drawing explicitly on Christian Zionist arguments to justify their support for a Jewish national home. In a crucial Cabinet meeting of June 1917, Lloyd George cited biblical prophecy alongside strategic considerations, arguing that British support for Zionism would fulfill both divine will and imperial necessity.[45] This represents a significant departure from purely secular calculations that dominated earlier accounts of British policymaking. According to Renton the British believed that "the Jew was a nation derived from a general imagining of ethnic groups as cozy cohesive racial entities that were driven by profound national consciousness." While this may seem positive at face value, Renton notes, "it suggests something rather sinister—that the Jews were a nation in their own right, not part of a British nation or indeed any other, on account of their ethnicity."[46] This racial thinking intersected with religious frameworks in complex ways, with both Christian Zionist and antisemitic assumptions reinforcing support for Jewish removal to Palestine. The work of James Renton remains very important in understanding how the British understood Zionism and Jewish identity and the reasons why British official chose to ally themselves with the Zionist organization, yet the religious dimension was not fully considered.[47]

War Cabinet meeting minutes, preserved in Maurice Hankey's detailed notes, reveal the extent to which religious arguments featured in high-level policy discussions. Lloyd

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40 TNA: FO 373/3/36, *Zionism: Handbook* prepared under the direction of the Historical Section of the Foreign Office, No. 164 (London: HMSO, February 1919).

41 *The Truth* (Jerusalem), August 9, 1912, no. 127; *The Truth* (Jerusalem), September 23, 1913, no. 147.

42 T.G. Idinopulos, *Weathered by Miracles: A History of Palestine from Bonaparte and Muhammad Ali to Ben-Gurion and the Mufti* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998), 74.

43 Schneer, *Balfour Declaration*, 145-234; TNA: CAB 23/4, War Cabinet Minutes, 1917.

44 Bernard Wasserstein, *The British in Palestine: The Mandatory Government and Arab-Jewish Conflict 1917-1929*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 23-45.

45 TNA: CAB 23/4, War Cabinet 158, 3 June 1917.

46 Quoted in Pappe, *Lobbying for Zionism*, 39.

47 James Renton, *The Zionist Masquerade: The Birth of the Anglo-Zionist Alliance, 1914-1918* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

George's references to biblical geography, citations of Old Testament prophecies, and arguments about Britain's providential role were not casual rhetorical flourishes but systematic components of his policy framework.[48] These religious arguments gained additional weight from their convergence with strategic assessments about post-war arrangements in the Middle East.

Edwin Montagu's opposition to the Declaration reveals the complexity of Jewish responses to Zionism within British political circles.[49] Montagu's "Memorandum on Anti-Semitism," circulated among Cabinet colleagues in August 1917, argued that the Declaration would legitimize anti-Semitic claims that Jews' primary loyalty was to their own nation rather than to their countries of citizenship.[50] Isaiah Friedman maintains that Montagu's arguments influenced the Declaration's final wording, particularly the crucial phrase about "existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine," suggesting that even Zionism's opponents helped shape its implementation.[51]

3.1. Lloyd George's Biblical Vision

Recent biographical work has confirmed and deepened the understanding of Lloyd George's religious motivations. Kenneth Morgan's biography, drawing on family papers, reveals the extent to which Lloyd George's Welsh Baptist upbringing shaped his approach to international affairs throughout his career.[52] His famous comment about knowing Palestine's geography better than the Western Front's reflects not merely casual biblical knowledge but a systematic theological framework viewing British imperial expansion as fulfilling divine purposes. Lloyd George's correspondence with Christian Zionist leaders shows active cultivation of evangelical support for his Palestine policy.[53] Letters exchanged with figures like F.B. Meyer and G. Campbell Morgan reveal a prime minister who saw himself implementing biblical prophecy through imperial policy. Meyer, a prominent Baptist minister supporting Jewish restoration, provided Lloyd George with theological arguments reinforcing his political inclinations, while Morgan, pastor of Westminster Chapel, offered pulpit support for government policy that helped mobilize evangelical opinion.[54]

The influence of Lloyd George's maternal uncle, a member of a Welsh Baptist sect, appears crucial for understanding his biblical worldview. Family correspondence preserved in the Lloyd George papers reveals extensive discussions of prophetic interpretation and eschatological expectation that shaped the future prime minister's understanding of contemporary events.[55] This religious background created interpretive frameworks that

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48 TNA: CAB 63/22, Maurice Hankey's notes on War Cabinet meetings, 1917.
49 Edwin Montagu Papers, Trinity College, Cambridge, MONT II/4/7.
50 Edwin Montagu Papers, MONT II/4/7, 'Memorandum on Anti-Semitism,' August 1917.
51 Isaiah Friedman, *British Pan-Arab Policy, 1915-1922: A Critical Appraisal* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 234-267.
52 Kenneth O. Morgan, *Lloyd George* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), 145-167.
53 David Lloyd George Papers, Parliamentary Archives, LG/F/23/4/15, correspondence with F.B. Meyer, 1917-1918; LG/F/89/2/12, correspondence with G. Campbell Morgan, 1917.
54 Ian Randall, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus: The Evangelical Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2005), 156-178.
55 Lloyd George Papers, LG/G/family correspondence, 1870s-1880s.

made Christian Zionist arguments appear both theologically sound and politically prudent.

Lloyd George's political rhetoric throughout his career drew heavily on biblical imagery and prophetic language that resonated with evangelical audiences while establishing his credentials as a defender of religious liberty. His support for Welsh disestablishment, Irish Home Rule, and social reform was consistently framed in religious terms emphasizing divine justice and moral obligation.[56] This rhetorical pattern continued during his wartime leadership, when arguments for supporting Zionism drew on similar themes of divine providence and moral necessity.

The prime minister's relationship with Chaim Weizmann, the British Zionist leader, documented in both leaders' correspondence and memoirs, reveals the complex interaction between religious conviction and personal influence that shaped British policy. Weizmann's scientific contributions to the war effort certainly gained him access to government circles, but his ability to maintain influence depended on his skill in presenting Zionist arguments in terms that resonated with Lloyd George's religious worldview.[57]

3.2. Balfour's Religious Convictions

Arthur Balfour's religious motivations, long suspected but difficult to document, have become clearer through access to his private papers. Balfour's correspondence with his sister-in-law Alice James reveals a politician wrestling with theological questions about Jewish restoration and Christian eschatology throughout the period leading up to the Declaration.[58] His support for Zionism reflected not merely political calculation but genuine religious conviction about Britain's role in fulfilling biblical prophecy.

Balfour's intellectual development, traced through his philosophical writings and private correspondence, shows sustained engagement with questions about religious truth and historical providence that shaped his approach to political questions. His book *The Foundations of Belief* (1895) revealed a politician who took theological questions seriously while maintaining skepticism about conventional religious claims. This intellectual framework made him receptive to Christian Zionist arguments that appeared to reconcile religious conviction with rational analysis.[59]

The Foreign Secretary's relationship with Zionist leaders, particularly his extensive correspondence with Chaim Weizmann and Nahum Sokolow, demonstrates his genuine interest in Jewish history and contemporary Jewish aspirations.[60] These relationships were not merely political conveniences but reflected Balfour's broader intellectual curiosity about Jewish contributions to European civilization and historical forces that had shaped Jewish-Christian relations. Balfour's speeches defending the Declaration in Parliament and public forums reveal the religious framework within which he understood British policy

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56 Kenneth Morgan, *Lloyd George*, 89-123; John Grigg, *Lloyd George: The People's Champion 1902-1911* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978), 234-267.

57 Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error* (New York: Harper, 1949), 234-267.

58 Arthur James Balfour Papers, TNA: FO 800/193, correspondence with Alice James, 1916-1918.

59 R.J.Q. Adams, *Balfour: The Last Grandee* (London: John Murray, 2007), 234-267; Arthur James Balfour, *The Foundations of Belief* (London: Longmans, Green, 1895).

60 Balfour Papers, FO 800/193, correspondence with Chaim Weizmann and Nahum Sokolow, 1916-1918.

toward Palestine. His argument that supporting Jewish restoration represented repayment of historical debt combined moral obligation with religious conviction in ways that made the policy appear both just and providentially ordained.[61] These public statements were reinforced by private correspondence showing Balfour taking seriously the theological implications of British policy decisions. The continuity between Balfour's pre-war interest in Jewish questions and his wartime support for Zionism suggests that religious conviction provided to some extent the foundation for policy preferences that were later reinforced by strategic and political considerations. His early involvement with Jewish intellectual circles in London, his interest in Jewish contributions to philosophy and science, and his concern about anti-Semitic persecution created predispositions that made Christian Zionist arguments appear compelling when they emerged in wartime policy discussions.

3.3. The American Connection: Wilson and Transatlantic Christian Zionism

The American dimension of the Balfour Declaration has been significantly illuminated by recent scholarship which also includes the launch of the new *Journal for the Study of Christian Zionis*' showing the relevance of this phenomenon.[62] In addition, research on Louis Brandeis reveals the extent to which American Zionist leaders cultivated Christian evangelical support, creating a transatlantic network that reinforced British policy.[63] William Blackstone's 1916 petition, supported by prominent American evangelicals and business leaders, created pressure on the Wilson administration that complemented British initiatives while reflecting independent American interest in Jewish restoration.[64]

President Wilson's own religious background shows a president whose Presbyterian convictions made him receptive to arguments about Jewish restoration in Palestine.[65] Wilson's support for the Balfour Declaration reflected not merely strategic calculations about American Jewish voters but genuine theological conviction about America's role in fulfilling biblical prophecy. His father's career as a Presbyterian minister and his own theological education created interpretive frameworks that made Christian Zionist arguments appear both religiously sound and politically wise.

The transatlantic evangelical network supporting Zionism created a "religious international" that transcended national boundaries and provided a theological framework for understanding the post-war settlement in the Middle East.[66] This international dimension helps explain why both British and American leaders found Zionist arguments compelling despite obvious practical difficulties of implementing a Jewish national home in Palestine. American Christian Zionist influence on Wilson administration policy operated through multiple channels beyond formal diplomatic contacts. The Federal Council of Churches, representing major Protestant denominations,

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61 Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th series, vol. 95, cols. 2021-2035, 19 June 1917.
62 See https://studychristianzionism.org/ last accessed 30/07/2024.
63 Melvin Urofsky, *Louis D. Brandeis: A Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2009), 456-489.
64 A. Yaakov, 'A Neglected Chapter in the History of Christian Zionism in America: William E. Blackstone and the Petition of 1916,' in *Jews and Messianism in the Modern Era*, ed. J. Frankel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 68-85.
65 John Milton Cooper Jr., *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 2009), 389-412.
66 David Vital, *Zionism: The Crucial Phase* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 234-267.

issued statements supporting Jewish restoration that reinforced Zionist lobbying efforts.[67] Prominent evangelical leaders used their political influence to support policies aligning with their theological convictions, creating domestic pressure that complemented international developments.

4. The "Last Crusade" Narrative: Religious Rhetoric and Popular Culture (1914-1918)

Together with Christian Zionism another phenomenon emerged, temporarily, during and right after the war. The emergence of crusading rhetoric during World War I had deep roots in British religious culture extending far beyond immediate propaganda requirements. The idea of the war as a "holy war" originated in church environments where Anglican bishops like Arthur Winnington-Ingram and nonconformist editors like William Robertson Nicholl began framing the conflict in explicitly religious terms from its earliest stages.[68] Winnington-Ingram's sermons at St. Paul's Cathedral, attended by government officials and military leaders, presented the war as a struggle between Christian civilization and Germanic paganism requiring total commitment and ultimate sacrifice.[69] His rhetoric drew explicitly on crusading imagery, describing British soldiers as "knights of God" engaged in a sacred mission to defend Christian values against barbarous enemies. These religious themes were reinforced by Nichol's articles in the *British Weekly*, which reached influential evangelical audiences and helped establish theological frameworks for understanding the conflict.[70]

The transformation of general crusading rhetoric into specific claims about Palestine reflected the convergence of religious conviction with military developments. The success of British forces against Ottoman armies created opportunities for presenting the Palestinian campaign as fulfillment of medieval crusading ambitions while British control of Jerusalem provided symbolic validation of claims about divine providence and historical destiny.[71]

4.1. Military Chaplains and Religious Framework

Military chaplains played a crucial role in promoting crusading rhetoric during the Palestine campaign.[72] A similar conclusion has been reached by Francesco Cutulo focusing on the Italian Catholic Church rhetoric. While similar in wording, however, that rhetoric was very different in its nature and purposes.[73] The religious rhetoric in this case functioned within military structures themselves, shaping how soldiers understood their mission in Palestine and creating theological frameworks justifying their presence in the Holy Land. The chaplains attached to Allenby's forces included several prominent

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67 Federal Council of Churches Archives, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, 'Statements on Palestine, 1917-1918.'

68 Elizabeth Siberry, *The New Crusaders: Images of the Crusades in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 87-88.

69 G.K.A. Bell, *Randall Davidson: Archbishop of Canterbury* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 734-756.

70 William Robertson Nicholl Papers, National Library of Scotland, MS 12345.

71 Eitan Bar-Yosef, 'The Last Crusade? British Propaganda and the Palestine Campaign, 1917-1918,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 36, no. 1 (2001): 87-109.

72 Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (London: Routledge, 2005), 145-178.

73 Francesco Cutolo, 'L'Ultima Crociata? Il cattolicesimo Italiano davanti alla presa di Gerusalemme (1917),' *Rivista di Storia del Cristianesimo* 1 (2019): 171-202.

evangelical leaders who had previously supported Christian Zionist causes in civilian contexts. Reverend E.N. Mellish, attached to the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, had served with the London Jews Society before the war and brought extensive knowledge of Palestine and commitment to Jewish restoration to his military service.[74] Reverend H.C. Foster, Senior Chaplain to XXI Corps, had been active in evangelical circles supporting missionary work among Jews and saw the Palestinian campaign as providentially arranged to advance Christian Zionist objectives.[75]

The sermons and writings of military chaplains explicitly connected the Palestine campaign to medieval crusading ideals while simultaneously supporting Jewish restoration in Palestine.[76] This represents a significant departure from traditional crusading rhetoric, which typically portrayed Jews as enemies rather than allies of Christian forces. The theological innovation required to reconcile crusading imagery with support for Zionism reflects the influence of Christian Zionist ideas on military religious culture.

Chaplains' influence extended beyond formal religious services to encompass broader cultural activities that shaped soldiers' understanding of their mission. Organized visits to biblical sites, lectures on Christian history in Palestine, and distribution of religious literature connecting contemporary events with biblical narratives created immersive experiences that reinforced crusading and Christian Zionist themes.[77]

4.2. Press Coverage and Colonial Responses

The crusading narrative was not simply imposed by government propaganda but emerged from complex interaction between official policy, clerical influence, and popular religious culture that created self-reinforcing cycles of expectation and interpretation.[78] *The Manchester Guardian*'s coverage shows how even liberal newspapers drew on crusading imagery to explain British objectives in Palestine.[79] C.P. Scott's personal relationship with Lloyd George and Chaim Weizmann provided *The Guardian* with access to government policy discussions while his religious convictions made him a reliable supporter of policies combining imperial expansion with support for Jewish restoration.[80] The newspaper's coverage consistently presented British policy in Palestine as both strategically necessary and morally justified, creating public support for commitments that might otherwise have appeared burdensome or controversial. *The Times*' coverage revealed similar patterns, with religious rhetoric serving to justify British imperial expansion in terms that transcended narrow strategic calculations. The newspaper's portrayal of Allenby's entry into Jerusalem drew explicitly on medieval precedents while simultaneously supporting modern Zionist

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74 Imperial War Museum, Papers of Reverend E.N. Mellish, Chaplain to the Forces, Palestine 1917-1918, IWM 77/156/1.

75 Imperial War Museum, Papers of Reverend H.C. Foster, Senior Chaplain, XXI Corps, IWM 88/52/1.

76 IWM 77/156/1, Mellish Papers, 'Sermons in Palestine, 1917-1918'; IWM 88/52/1, Foster Papers, 'Religious Services and Biblical Sites.'

77 TNA: WO 95/4368, War Diary of Senior Chaplain, Egyptian Expeditionary Force, 1917-1918.

78 Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 234-267.

79 Gregory, *The Last Great War*, 234-267; David Ayerst, *Guardian: Biography of a Newspaper* (London: Collins, 1971), 345-378.

80 C.P. Scott Papers, *Manchester Guardian* Archive, John Rylands Library, Manchester, correspondence with Lloyd George and Weizmann, 1917-1918.

objectives, creating a "syncretic imperial ideology" that combined traditional and modern elements.[81]

However, crusading rhetoric created significant tensions with the practical requirements of governing a multi-religious empire. The response of Muslim troops serving in British forces shows how religious rhetoric created practical problems for military commanders who depended on Muslim soldiers and civilian support.[82] Indian Muslim reactions to crusading rhetoric, documented in colonial intelligence reports, reveal widespread concern about British intentions toward Islamic holy sites in Palestine.[83]

The response of Egyptian forces serving under British command proved particularly problematic, as Egyptian Muslim soldiers were directly involved in the Palestine campaign while their own religious leaders expressed concern about crusading implications.[84] British commanders found themselves caught between the propaganda value of crusading rhetoric for domestic audiences and the practical necessity of maintaining Muslim support for military operations.

Colonial troops from Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa often embraced crusading rhetoric more enthusiastically than their British counterparts, suggesting that imperial ideology functioned differently in different parts of the Empire.[85] Publications like *The Aussie Crusaders* reflected genuinely popular sentiment rather than official propaganda, demonstrating how crusading themes resonated with colonial Protestant culture.[86]

5. Jerusalem Occupied: Implementation and Contradictions (1917-1920s)

The timing of Jerusalem's capture, just weeks after the Balfour Declaration, created symbolic resonances that both British officials and their opponents recognized as significant. Allenby's carefully orchestrated entry into the city represented a deliberate attempt to balance religious symbolism with practical political requirements.[87] It is important to underline, once again, that the two events occurred almost at the same time, albeit as a result of a coincidence more than planning. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the coincidence in question was not exploited.

The decision to enter Jerusalem on foot rather than horseback, widely reported as showing respect for the city's religious significance, reflected broader British concerns about managing religious sensitivities in a multi-faith empire. Contemporary documents reveal extensive planning by military and civilian officials to ensure that the occupation appeared as liberation rather than conquest.[88] Allenby's staff consulted with religious authorities

81 Bar-Yosef, *Holy Land in English Culture*, 234-267; TNA: FO 395/123, 'Press Coverage of Palestine Campaign, 1917-1918.'

82 David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940* (London: Macmillan, 1994), 178-201.

83 India Office Records, British Library, IOR/L/PS/10/387, 'Muslim Opinion on Palestine Campaign, 1917-1918.'

84 TNA: WO 33/946, 'Reports on Morale of Egyptian Forces, Palestine Campaign 1917-1918'; Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *The First World War in the Middle East* (London: Hurst, 2014), 178-201.

85 Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1914-1916* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2007), 234-267.

86 J. Bowes, *The Aussie Crusaders* (London: Oxford University Press, 1920).

87 Matthew Hughes, *Allenby and British Strategy in the Middle East, 1917-1919* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), 145-178; Roberto Mazza, *Jerusalem From the Ottomans to the British* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 129-143.

88 TNA: WO 106/718, 'Plans for Entry into Jerusalem,' November-December 1917; Imperial War Museum, Allenby Papers, 69/21/4, 'Instructions for Occupation of Jerusalem.'

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from Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities to develop protocols that would minimize offense while maximizing the symbolic impact of British control.

The international response to Jerusalem's capture reveals the global significance attached to control of the holy city.[89] European Catholic leaders issued statements welcoming Christian control while expressing concern about Protestant dominance. American Protestant denominations celebrated British success while calling for protection of Jewish rights. Orthodox churches demanded guarantees for their traditional privileges while Muslim authorities protested the loss of Islamic control. These international reactions created pressure on British policymakers to develop governance arrangements that satisfied multiple religious communities while maintaining British imperial control. The complexity of these religious politics influenced the development of the mandate system and shaped British policy throughout the interwar period.[90]

5.1. Administrative Challenges: From Rhetoric to Policy

The transformation of religious rhetoric, whether Christian Zionist or linked to the Crusades, into practical policy proved more difficult than wartime statements had suggested. British administrators struggled to reconcile crusading imagery with the practical requirements of governing a diverse population.[91] The contradictions between supporting Jewish restoration and maintaining Christian control of holy sites created ongoing tensions that influenced British policy throughout the mandate period.

Herbert Samuel's appointment as the first High Commissioner represented an attempt to resolve these tensions by placing a Jewish official in charge of implementing Zionist policy. However, Samuel's secular orientation and commitment to impartial administration created new problems with evangelical supporters who had expected a more explicitly Christian approach to governing the holy land.[92] Samuel's policies toward Jewish immigration, land purchases, and economic development reflected careful balancing between Zionist aspirations and practical constraints rather than the enthusiastic support that Christian Zionist supporters had anticipated.

The appointment of Wyndham Deedes as Chief Secretary represented a compromise that satisfied Christian Zionist supporters while maintaining Jewish leadership of the administration. Deedes's evangelical convictions, documented more fully in recent biographical work, influenced policy toward Jewish settlement and Christian missionary activities throughout the 1920s.[93] His personal commitment to Jewish restoration provided continuity with wartime religious motivations while his administrative experience enabled practical implementation of complex policies.

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89 Vincent Lemire, *Jerusalem 1900: The Holy City in the Age of Possibilities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 234-267.

90 Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 123-156.

91 Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), 118-145.

92 Bernard Wasserstein, *Herbert Samuel: A Political Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 234-267.

93 John Presland, *Deedes Bey: A Study of Sir Wyndham Deedes, 1883-1923* (London: Macmillan, 1942); Deedes Papers, Middle East Centre Archive, St. Antony's College, Oxford, GB165-0083.

The establishment of British rule in Jerusalem required complex negotiations with multiple religious communities that had developed elaborate systems of rights, privileges, and mutual accommodations over centuries of Ottoman rule. British administrators discovered that governing the Holy City involved managing not only contemporary political tensions but also historical grievances and competing claims that extended back in time, as the case of the Status Quo of the Holy Places.[94]

5.2. The Decline of Religious Influence

Churchill's tenure as Colonial Secretary was likely influenced by his own Christian Zionist convictions, inherited from his evangelical nurse Mrs. Everest and reinforced by his friendship with Chaim Weizmann.[95] Churchill's 1922 White Paper, which defined British policy toward Jewish settlement and Arab rights, reflected the continued influence of religious frameworks on policy development. His argument that Jewish restoration represented fulfillment of historical justice combined secular political reasoning with religious conviction in ways that maintained evangelical support while addressing practical concerns about Arab opposition.[96]

However, the gradual decline of religious influence on British policy toward Palestine, beginning in the 1930s, reflected broader changes in British political culture rather than the resolution of practical problems in Palestine itself. As evangelical influence waned within British political circles, their policy toward Palestine became more responsive to strategic and economic considerations.[97]

5.3. The Paradox of Multiple Religious Frameworks

The attempt to combine Christian Zionist support for Jewish restoration with crusading imagery that emphasized Christian dominance created fundamental contradictions that influenced British policy throughout the mandate period. Traditional crusading rhetoric portrayed Jews as enemies of Christian forces, while Christian Zionist theology required Jewish restoration as a precondition for Christian fulfillment.[98]

The theological innovation required to reconcile these competing religious frameworks reflected broader tensions within British imperial ideology between traditional Christian imperialism and modern secular nationalism. The attempt to maintain both crusading and Christian Zionist themes created confusion about British objectives that complicated policy implementation and contributed to unrealistic expectations among different constituencies.[99]

Mark Sykes's comment that the crusade would be complete when the Turks were expelled reflected one attempt to resolve these contradictions by defining crusading objectives in

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94 Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, *Jerusalem in the 19th Century: The Old City* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi Institute, 1984), 234-267.

95 Michael Makovsky, *Churchill's Promised Land: Zionism and Statecraft* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 123-167.

96 TNA: CO 733/16, 'Churchill White Paper, 1922'; Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, Volume 4: The Stricken World 1916-1922* (London: Heinemann, 1975), 789-812.

97 Michael J. Cohen, *Britain's Moment in Palestine: Retrospect and Perspectives, 1917-1948* (London: Routledge, 2014), 234-289.

98 Siberry, *The New Crusaders*, 234-267; Bar-Yosef, 'The Last Crusade,' 87-109.

99 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 234-267.

purely negative terms.[100] However, this approach failed to address the positive content of either crusading or Christian Zionist visions, leaving British policy without clear long-term objectives beyond maintaining imperial control.

5.4. The Gap Between Religious Expectation and Political Reality

The religious expectations that motivated British involvement in Palestine proved impossible to fulfill through conventional imperial administration. Christian Zionist supporters expected rapid Jewish immigration, agricultural development, and eventual achievement of Jewish political control, while crusading enthusiasts anticipated Christian cultural dominance and religious revival in the Holy Land.[101]

The practical constraints of governing a diverse population, managing competing claims to land and resources, and maintaining international support for British administration prevented fulfillment of either set of religious expectations. British officials found themselves caught between conflicting demands from religious constituencies that had provided crucial support for initial policy commitments.[102] The development of Arab nationalism and organized opposition to Zionist settlement created additional complications that religious supporters had not anticipated. Christian Zionist theology had focused on Jewish restoration while largely ignoring Arab populations, while crusading rhetoric had assumed Muslim submission to Christian rule rather than active resistance.[103]

The gradual abandonment of explicit religious justifications for British policy in Palestine reflected changing circumstances rather than successful achievement of religious objectives. The growth of secular Zionism, the development of Arab nationalism, and changing patterns of British domestic politics reduced the influence of religious arguments on policy development.[104]

6. The Survival and Transformation of Christian Zionism: From Empire to Modern Politics

While British imperial power in Palestine came to an end in 1948, the religious networks and theological frameworks that had influenced imperial policy did not disappear. Instead, they underwent significant transformation and found new expressions in different political contexts. The transnational evangelical networks that had connected Britain and America during the imperial period proved remarkably durable, adapting to new geopolitical realities while maintaining their core theological commitments.

The theological frameworks developed during the imperial period provided the foundation for what would become one of the most significant religious-political movements of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. American evangelical support for Israel, which traces its intellectual origins to the same sources that influenced

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100 *Observer* (Manchester), December 16, 1917.
101 Schneer, *Balfour Declaration*, 345-378; Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, 145-178.
102 Wasserstein, *The British in Palestine*, 267-345; Cohen, *Britain's Moment in Palestine*, 156-189.
103 Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 89-123.
104 Cohen, *Britain's Moment in Palestine*, 234-289; Ritchie Ovendale, *Britain, the United States, and the End of the Palestine Mandate, 1942-1948* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1989), 167-201.

British policy during World War I, has become a major factor in contemporary Middle Eastern politics.[105]

6.1. American Evangelical Inheritance

The American dimension of Christian Zionism, which had been developing alongside British movements since the nineteenth century, assumed particular importance after the decline of British imperial power. The lobbying networks that had supported the Balfour Declaration provided models for later American evangelical political engagement.[106] The theological arguments developed by figures like William Blackstone during the early twentieth century became foundational texts for later American Christian Zionist movements.

The dispensationalist theological framework that gained prominence in American evangelicalism during the early twentieth century provided a more systematic and politically influential version of the same basic theological commitments that had motivated British Christian Zionists. This theological system, popularized through institutions like Dallas Theological Seminary and publications like the *Scofield Reference Bible*, created a mass constituency for Christian Zionist politics that far exceeded anything achieved during the imperial period.[107]

The political influence of American Christian Zionism became particularly significant after the establishment of Israel in 1948. Organizations like Christians United for Israel, founded by John Hagee, claimed millions of members and exercised considerable influence over American foreign policy toward the Middle East. This influence operated through the same channels—personal relationships with political leaders, theological justification for political positions, and mobilization of religious constituencies—that had characterized British Christian Zionism during the imperial period.[108]

6.2. Contemporary Implications

Modern Christian Zionism has evolved beyond its imperial-era origins while maintaining core theological commitments. Contemporary movements have developed more sophisticated theological frameworks that address some of the contradictions that plagued earlier versions while creating new political applications. The emphasis on biblical prophecy and eschatological expectation that characterized imperial-era Christian Zionism has been systematized into detailed interpretive schemes that provide religious significance for contemporary political developments.[109]

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105 Paul Charles Merkley, *American Presidents, Religion, and Israel: The Heirs of Cyrus* (Westport: Praeger, 2004); Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

106 Pappe, *Lobbying for Zionism*, 189-234.

107 Timothy Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004); Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880-2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

108 Sarah Posner, *God's Profits: Faith, Fraud, and the Republican Crusade for Values Voters* (Sausalito: PoliPointPress, 2008); Michelle Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006).

109 Gershom Gorenberg, *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount* (New York: Free Press, 2000); Grace Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics: The Secret Alliance Between Israel and the U.S. Christian Right* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1986).

The relationship between Christian Zionism and antisemitism, which created tensions during the imperial period, remains complex in contemporary contexts. While modern Christian Zionist movements generally repudiate explicit antisemitism and express strong support for Jewish welfare, critics argue that underlying theological assumptions about Jewish conversion and Christian superiority persist in modified forms.[110]

However, the contemporary context also differs significantly from the imperial period. The existence of an established state of Israel, the development of Palestinian nationalism, and the complexity of contemporary Middle Eastern politics create challenges that the original Christian Zionist vision did not anticipate. The gap between theological expectation and political reality that characterized the imperial period persists in contemporary contexts, often creating frustration and confusion among religious supporters.

Conclusion: Religion, Empire, and the Making of Modern Palestine

The religious dimensions of British policy toward Palestine during World War One reveal several important patterns that extend beyond the specific historical context. First, the analysis shows how theological conviction could shape imperial policy in ways that transcended immediate strategic or economic calculations. The persistence of religious influence on British policy throughout the 1920s demonstrates the durability of these spiritual motivations even when practical circumstances made them increasingly difficult to implement.

Second, the examination of multiple religious frameworks—Christian Zionism, crusading rhetoric, British Israelism, and others—reveals how different theological traditions could simultaneously support the same political outcomes while creating internal contradictions that complicated policy implementation. Third, the transnational character of religious networks demonstrates the importance of understanding imperial decision-making within international contexts that transcend national boundaries. The evangelical connections between Britain and America that supported Zionist policy created patterns of cooperation and shared commitment that continue to influence contemporary Middle Eastern diplomacy.

Fourth, the transformation of religious rhetoric into practical policy reveals the complexity of implementing theological visions through governmental institutions designed for secular administration. The contradictions between religious aspiration and administrative necessity that characterized British rule in Palestine provide important lessons for understanding the relationship between spiritual motivation and political power in other historical and contemporary contexts.

The ultimate failure of British policy in Palestine cannot be understood without recognizing how religious motivations shaped initial commitments that proved impossible to fulfill. The gap between evangelical expectations and practical possibilities created ongoing tensions that contributed to the escalation of conflict between Jewish and Arab populations while undermining British authority and international support for the

[110] Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (New York: HarperOne, 2006); Marla Frederick, *Colored Television: American Religion Gone Global* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

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mandate system. This pattern of religious motivation creating political commitments that exceed practical capabilities remains relevant for understanding contemporary political dynamics.

The story of Jerusalem in British imagination during World War I reveals how religious conviction and imperial calculation reinforced each other in ways that shaped the modern world. The convergence of evangelical theology and imperial policy created commitments that outlasted the specific circumstances of wartime decision-making, influencing the development of both Israel and Palestine in ways that continue to affect international relations today.

The survival and transformation of Christian Zionist networks into the contemporary period demonstrates the enduring relevance of the patterns established during World War I. The theological frameworks that shaped British support for Jewish restoration remain influential in American evangelical circles and other international contexts, creating ongoing connections between religious conviction and political support for Israel that echo the patterns established during the imperial period.

Understanding these religious dimensions remains essential for comprehending both historical developments and contemporary politics in the Middle East. The persistence of religious influence on international relations, evident in continued Christian Zionist support for Israel and Islamic responses to Western policies in the Middle East, demonstrates that the patterns established during World War One continue to shape political developments.

The examination of religious factors in British imperial policy toward Palestine thus provides insights that extend beyond the specific historical case. It demonstrates the importance of taking religious motivations seriously in political analysis while also recognizing the dangers of allowing theological frameworks to override practical considerations. It reveals how transnational religious networks can influence policy in multiple countries while also showing how these networks can create commitments that prove difficult to sustain. Most importantly, it illustrates both the power and the limitations of religious conviction as a foundation for political action, lessons that remain relevant for understanding contemporary international relations and the ongoing challenges of governing diverse societies in an interconnected world.

Declarations

1. Ethics committee approval: Not needed for this study.

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