

Zionism 101

להיות עם חופשי בארצנו, ארץ ציון וירושלים

“To be a free people in our land, the land of Zion and Jerusalem”

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## What is Zionism?

Originally coined in 1890 by Nathan Birnbaum, the general term “Zionism” means “the national movement for the return of the Jewish people to their homeland and the resumption of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel”.<sup>1</sup> It is fundamentally a **response to modernity**.

### Key Terms:

- Enlightenment/”Haskalah”
- Emancipation
- Nationalism
- Anti-Semitism

**Enlightenment**- “a philosophical movement of the 18<sup>th</sup> century marked by a rejection of traditional social, religious, and political ideas and an emphasis on rationalism”<sup>2</sup> (Think: Declaration of Independence, French Revolution, John Locke, etc.)

- **Haskalah**- the Jewish movement of Enlightenment beginning with the work of Moses Mendelssohn (1726-1789). Gained traction in Central and Western Europe before impacting Eastern Europe in a different way (i.e. emphasis of Hebrew language, no religious reform)

**Emancipation**- “...has come to mean the liberation of individuals or groups from servitude, legal restrictions, and political and social disabilities. Jewish emancipation denotes the abolition of disabilities and inequities applied specially to Jews, the recognition of Jews as equal to other citizens, and the formal granting of the rights and duties of citizenship”<sup>3</sup>. (Similar to: 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> Amendments)

**Nationalism**- “ideology based on the premise that the individual’s loyalty and devotion to the nation-state surpasses other individual or group interests”<sup>4</sup> (Think: Nation-states like France, Germany, Spain, etc.)

**Anti-Semitism**- “hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious, ethnic, or racial group”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/a-definition-of-zionism>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/enlightenment>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/emancipation>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/nationalism>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anti-Semitism>.



**Timeline of Events (both Eastern and Western Europe):**

1791- **Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen** passed by the Constituent Assembly in France, which included Jews in the establishment of the new French state established in the wake of the French Revolution.

“France...is our Palestine, its mountains our Zion, its rivers our Jordan. Let us drink the water of these sources; it is the water of liberty!” – letter to *La Chronique de Paris*, 1791<sup>6</sup>

1804- Czar Alexander I declares that Jews in the Russian Empire may not move towards the central region of Russia, which leads to the establishment of the **Pale of Settlement**



1814-15- **Congress of Vienna** was an international congress, which sought to reestablish peace and political order following the Napoleonic Wars. This meeting signified the reinstatement of the old order as a reaction to the violent revolutions of the past few decades. It laid the foundation for the modern nation-state and the upsurge of romantic view of nationalism.

1848- Wave of Revolutions throughout Europe emphasizing the rights of minority groups and the desire for the promotion of liberal values. The **language** used in the states is a major issue,

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jewish-emancipation-in-western-europe//>

which leads many Jews of Eastern Europe to begin to emphasize the importance of Hebrew as the language of the Jewish nation.

1855- Czar Alexander II implements new reforms and liberates serfs. Initiates a **period of expectation** among Jews that their emancipation will follow.

1881- Czar Alexander II is assassinated, which instigates widespread **pogroms** and subsequently, the first mass immigration of Jews to Palestine known as the **First Aliyah**

1894- **Dreyfus Affair**- The trial and conviction of a French Jewish officer accused of espionage. It raised issues of conflict of loyalty for Jews in the modern French state.

1896- **Der Judenstaat** or “The Jewish State” is published by Theodor Herzl in reaction to the upsurge of anti-Semitism in modern Europe. According to him, the only viable solution to the “Jewish question” is the establishment of political autonomy for Jews.

1897- **First Zionist Congress** called by **Theodor Herzl** in Basel, Switzerland. First international meeting of Jews to discuss the goals of Zionism. Herzl is elected President of the Zionist Organization and becomes the primary voice of the Zionist movement recognized by governments across Europe and the Middle East.

1905-1914- Political unrest in Russia leads to more pogroms and the **Second Aliyah**, which is significantly more organized and ideologically inspired.

1914-1918- **World War I**, which “changed everything for everyone” (to quote my professor). This war led to the dissolution of major political empires (Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman). The territory of Palestine now fell under the control of the British. Most importantly was the implementation of **national politics and self-determination** (think: Woodrow Wilson).

1917- **Balfour Declaration**- public statement issued by the British government acknowledging its support for the establishment of a “national home for the Jewish people in Palestine”.

1928-1929- Riots in Jerusalem and Hebron including an upsurge in violence between Jewish and Arab factions. This resulted in the **restriction on immigration** of Jews to Palestine.

1935- **Nuremberg Laws** implemented in Germany, which explicitly discriminated against Jews.

1936- **Arab Revolt** throughout Palestine, which leads to the establishment of Zionist defense groups like the **Haganah** and **Etzel**.

1938- **Kristallnacht**

1939- **McDonald White Paper**- significantly restricts the immigration of Jews to Palestine as a way of appeasing Arabs. Essentially “closes the gates” of Palestine.

1939-1945- **World War II**- 136,000 Jews in Palestine join the British army. The end of the war

left Great Britain in a precarious position in relationship to its territories, and the new labor government was significantly more pro-Zionist and anti-Empire.

1945- **Harrison Report** addressing the conditions of the ¼ million displaced persons (majority being Jews) in Europe. Recommends that British government lift the terms of the **White Paper** and immediately evacuate 100,000 displaced persons to Palestine. Great Britain refuses and after two years of resisting, eventually passing the issue on to the newly formed **United Nations**.

November 29, 1947- UN votes yes on **Partition Plan**, which proposed the creation of two nation-states—one Jewish and one Arab. Despite internal dissent, **David Ben Gurion** (leader of the **Haganah**) elects to accept the proposal after furiously petitioning the votes of UN members. The Arab leaders both in Palestine and in the surrounding countries reject proposal, leading to the outbreak of the **Israeli War of Independence**.