

LESSON OUTLINE

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HERITAGE

Civilization and the Jews

§ Into the Future §

Session 17

Episode 9 § Lesson 1

The Jewish State

Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern political Zionism, died in 1904. But the movement that he started gathered strength in the next decades. Leadership passed to the British chemist Chaim Weizmann, who continued Herzl's diplomatic efforts, focusing on the British government, which was to wrest control of Palestine from the crumbling Ottoman Empire in World War I.

Meanwhile, intensifying anti-Semitism in eastern Europe in the early years of the twentieth century encouraged a second wave of immigration to Palestine. Its pioneers created many of the institutions in Palestine and abroad that would form the social, economic, and political infrastructure for the dreamed-of new nation.

As the First World War approached its end, Weizmann succeeded in securing the Balfour Declaration, in which Britain pledged to create in Palestine a Jewish national home. Jewish immigration continued throughout the 1920s and accelerated in the 1930s, as Jews fled Hitler's Reich in central Europe.

Arabs living in Palestine were adamantly opposed to the waves of Jewish immigration and to the British plan to create a Jewish homeland there. Arab anti-Jewish riots broke out periodically, particularly in 1920-21 and 1929. Then, from 1936 to 1939, the Arabs' Great Revolt plunged the Mandate into a virtual civil war. Jewish underground self-defense brigades, notably the Haganah and the Irgun,

were created.

With World War II looming, the Arab leadership coerced the British into issuing a White Paper that effectively revoked the Balfour Declaration and closed down Jewish immigration – just when it might have saved large numbers of Jews fleeing the Nazis. After the war, when Jewish displaced persons in Europe sought to come to Palestine, the gates remained closed.

Finally, the British submitted the question of the disposition of the Mandate to the fledgling United Nations. The UN voted in November 1947 to partition the Mandate into two states with an internationalized Jerusalem. When Israel declared its statehood in May, 1948, the armies of the Arab states – which rejected the UN partition plan – invaded the new nation.

Israel emerged victorious from the war and in its early years, faced two key challenges: defining the sort of state it wished to be and absorbing the hundreds of thousands of Holocaust survivors still languishing in Europe and in British internment camps on Cyprus. To the latter challenge was added a forced exodus of hundreds of thousands of Jews from hostile Arab lands.

Wars and terror attacks continued, as Israel struggled to build a modern, democratic society in the face of constant assaults from surrounding nations and from the Palestinian Arabs who were dispossessed in the War of Independence.

Glimmers of peace appeared in the last quarter of the twentieth century, as Israel concluded peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan, and signed a promising though ultimately failed agreement with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

PART 1

The Second Aliyah and World War I

Triggered by a renewal of vicious pogroms in Russia, and inspired by Herzl's dream, tens of thousands of eastern European Jews flocked to Ottoman Palestine in the decade leading up to World War I. Espousing utopian dreams, these members of the "Second Aliyah" combined a political agenda of creating a Jewish homeland with a desire to "normalize" the situation of world Jewry. Their efforts went into creating egalitarian institutions like the kibbutzim, creating new Jewish cities, and reclaiming the land of the ancient home of their ancestors.

When Britain seized Palestine from the dying Ottoman Empire toward the end of World War I, shortly after the issuance of the Balfour Declaration, it seemed as if Jewish statehood was within sight.

Video: Show 9: Prewar Palestine, Jewish Settlement

When the Ottomans allied with Germany in World War I, their entire empire, including Palestine, was at risk. Britain, aided by the Jewish Legion in the war, defeated the Ottomans, and Palestine became British property.

An 80,000-strong Zionist beachhead had been created there, and was busy building a new society that could form the basis of a state.

- ◆ Play this video segment until "....raised the hopes of Zionists everywhere."

Review and Discussion Questions

- Why would a transfer of Palestine from Turkish to British control have augured well for the Zionists?
- Why were farm labor and other land-renewal efforts considered sacred to the Zionist program of creating the "New Jew" in Palestine?
- Why was the creation of socialist-style institutions a natural direction for members of the Second Aliyah?

Historical Document: Tel Aviv Is Founded

One of the legacies of this group of pioneers was the creation of a Jewish metropolis just north of the Arab city of Jaffa. Founded in 1909 – the same year that the first kibbutz, Deganya, was established – Tel Aviv and its modern suburbs are

V Prewar Palestine, Jewish Settlement

Video > Into the Future > Prewar Palestine > Jewish Settlement

D Tel Aviv Is Founded

Video > Into the Future > Prewar Palestine > Jewish Settlement > Explore Topic > Historical Documents > Tel Aviv Is Founded

now home to about two million people.

- ◆ Read the first paragraph of the text of the document and discuss the philosophy expressed therein.
- ◆ Read the second paragraph and discuss the selection of street-names, clicking the highlighted items as needed to identify the namesakes of Tel Aviv's first thoroughfares.
- ◆ Optionally, read the third paragraph to learn how Tel Aviv's name is linked to Herzl's work.

Review and Discussion Question

- How does the choice of street-names and city-name express the ideals of Tel Aviv's founders?

A Mediterranean: 1914

Atlas > 1789 – 1925 > 1914 >
Mediterranean

Atlas: Mediterranean: 1914

World War I pitted Germany and the Ottoman Empire against the western democratic nations and Russia. In the wake of its 1917 revolution, Russia was to withdraw from the war. In the Middle East, British General Edmund Allenby swept into Jerusalem, ending four centuries of Ottoman rule over Palestine and the rest of the Levant.

- ◆ Point out the area of the Ottoman Empire and its Sinai border with British Egypt, and indicate the location of Palestine.
- ◆ Then zoom out to the World-view and point out Russia and the opposing powers in World War I.
- ◆ Click on the area of Palestine at the eastern side of the Mediterranean Sea to zoom back in.
- ◆ Then, click on **Jerusalem** to zoom in. Show how British troops under Allenby swept across the Sinai and up to Jerusalem to wrest control of Palestine from the retreating and collapsing Ottoman Empire.

PART 2

The Balfour Declaration and the British Mandate

On the eve of its conquest of Palestine, the British government issued the Balfour Declaration, pledging the creation of a Jewish national home in its new Palestine Mandate. But the British conquest of much of the Middle East, ratified by the League of Nations, was not a welcome development for the Arabs of Palestine. The eastern portion of Palestine, TransJordan, was given as an emirate to a Saudi prince, Abdullah, great-grandfather of the current king of Jordan. The remainder of the land (about 25 percent) seemed destined to become a Jewish national home.

Jewish immigration to Palestine from Europe accelerated after the chaos of World War I and the Russian Revolution. As the threat of Nazism spread across Europe during the 1930s, Jews desperately sought Palestine as a refuge from the developing storm. More Zionist immigrants from central Europe resulted in great advances in institution-building in Palestine, but accelerated the hostility of the local Arabs.

The Arabs often rioted against the Jews, inflicting massacres in Hebron and Jerusalem in 1929 and engaging in a full-fledged civil war between 1936 and 1939. To ensure Arab support in the coming war with Germany, Britain issued its White Paper limiting Jewish immigration in the spring of 1939. (Nevertheless, the Palestinian leader, Faisal al-Husseini, spent most of the war in Berlin, counseling the Third Reich and urging Nazi leaders to implement the Final Solution in the Middle East.)

D Balfour Declaration

[Video > Roads from the Ghetto > A New Century > Balfour Declaration > Explore Topic > Explore Topic > Historical Documents > The Balfour Declaration](#)

Historical Document: Balfour Declaration

Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann, a war-hero chemist in Britain, engineered the Balfour Declaration with Foreign Secretary James Balfour and Prime Minister David Lloyd-George. Both British officials were inclined toward millenarianism and believed, moreover, that British support for a Jewish state would ensure the Jewish community's backing of the British war effort against Germany.

Although a watershed event in Zionist history, the Balfour Declaration, upon close examination, says considerably less than its iconic status would suggest.

- ◆ Read the sidebar and the text of the document.

A Near East: 1925

Atlas > 1925 – 2001 > 1925 >
Mediterranean

Review and Discussion Questions

- What precisely is promised to the Jews of Palestine in the declaration?
- What does it say about “non-Jewish communities”? About Diaspora Jewish communities? Why?
- Why did the British government issue it?

Atlas: Near East: 1925

The British gradually granted independence to their post-World War I mandates....with the exception of western Palestine.

- ◆ Point out TransJordan and the remaining part of the Palestine Mandate.
- ◆ Point out the French-mandate areas, including Syria and Lebanon.
- ◆ Grab the Thumbnail Navigation Tool and move the map to the right to show Iraq.

Review and Discussion Question

- Why didn't Britain implement the Balfour Declaration in the 1920s and early 1930s, when it and France were establishing other countries in their mandatory areas?

PART 3

From the Shoah to Independence

As we have seen, the 1939 White Paper effectively shut down Jewish immigration to Palestine throughout World War II and in the years immediately following it. Survivors of that war who desperately sought new lives in Palestine were barred from entry. Zionist organizations smuggled Holocaust survivors to the shores of Palestine while simultaneously trying, through diplomacy and rebellion, to convince Britain to create a Jewish state.

Guerrilla warfare broke out between Arabs, Jews, and the British. Less than two years after the war's end, Britain surrendered control to the UN, which voted to partition the tiny land between Arabs and Jews. The Jews reluctantly agreed. The Palestinian Arabs rejected the partition and were backed up by the nearby Arab countries. Israel was born in the blood of a massive invasion of its land by Arab armies – which Israel repulsed, securing its existence within the armistice lines drawn in 1949.

V Prewar Palestine, British Rule

Video > Into the Future > Prewar Palestine > British Rule

Video: Show 9: Prewar Palestine, British Rule

The greatest urgency for the Zionist leadership in the postwar period was the resettlement of Holocaust survivors in Palestine, something that the British refused to allow.

- ◆ Play the video segment past the phrase “...forbidden shores of Palestine.”

Review and Discussion Questions

- What other choices did the survivors have at the conclusion of World War II?
- After their betrayal by the Palestinian Arab leadership during World War II, why did the British persist in refusing Jewish immigration to Palestine?

V Israel is Born, Illegal Immigration

Video > Into the Future > Israel Is Born > Illegal Immigration

Video: Show 9: Israel Is Born, Illegal Immigration

Britain found itself in the crossfire between Jews and Arabs, each desiring national rights in Palestine. Harsh British measures inspired retaliations by Jews and Arabs alike. Not wishing to be bogged down in a Palestine quagmire in the wake of its sacrifices in World War II, Britain turned the matter over to the United Nations, which voted for the partition of Palestine into two states in late 1947. Six months later, the

V Israel Is Born, Independence and War

Video > Into the Future > Israel is Born > Independence & War

Jewish State was born.

- ◆ Play the video segment to “....to be called Israel.”

Review and Discussion Questions

- What do you think of the conduct and motives of the British? The Zionists? The Arabs?
- What is your evaluation of the Irgun, the Zionist organization responsible for many of the Jewish guerrilla operations, including the bombing of the King David Hotel?
- As the Cold War intensified in the late 1940s, the US and USSR agreed on little. Why did both nations vote in favor of partition in November 1947 at the UN?

Video: Show 9: Israel Is Born, Independence and War

The multi-nation Arab invasion that coincided with Israel's independence threatened to extinguish the infant state. The Israel Defense Forces, consolidated from the Haganah, Irgun, and other underground Jewish militias, were augmented by non-soldiers fighting for the existence of Israel and its population. Survivors of the Shoah joined with Jewish partisans from World War II and other volunteers to repulse the invading armies.

- ◆ Play the video segment to “....as a member of the United Nations.”

Review and Discussion Questions

- How was Israel able to win its War of Independence?
- Why didn't an Arab state of Palestine come into existence in the wake of the armistice?
- Why was the extermination of Israel so important to the surrounding Arab states?

PART 4

Building Israel

In its earliest days, amid the smoke of war, David Ben-Gurion and Israel's leadership wrestled with a series of decisions and challenges. These included the Palestinian Arab refugee problem precipitated by the war; the status of numerous pre-state Zionist militias; the form of government under which Israel would be ruled; and the governmental status of the Jewish religion (and its religious leadership) in the new state.

Deluged with mostly destitute Holocaust survivors once it opened its shores to Jewish immigration, the poor and besieged Jewish state struggled to accommodate the immigrant flood, which doubled its population in the first three years. Immigration remained strong in the next few years, as Arab countries around the Middle East persecuted and drove out their ancient Jewish populations.

M Independence and War, Shaping the Future of Israel

Video > Into the Future > Israel Is Born > Independence and War > Explore Topic > Shaping the Future of Israel

Multimedia: Independence and War, Shaping the Future of Israel

Even as the new country fought for its life, Ben-Gurion and the leaders of the Zionist movement had to wrestle with issues of governance and authority.

Two crucial decisions that needed to be made in the wake of the war dealt with issues that still persist: the status of Palestinian Arabs who fled or were driven out during the war and the relationship of “government and synagogue” in a self-declared “Jewish State.”

- ◆ Click the button **Shaping the Future of Israel** to play the Autoplay.

Review and Discussion Questions

- What do you think about Ben-Gurion's decisions on these topics?
- Why did Israel opt for a parliamentary versus a presidential democracy?
- How does Israel's process of forming a government differ from other countries? What are the underlying reasons for the need for multi-party ruling coalitions in Israeli democracy?

A Near East: 1948

Atlas > 1925 – 2001 > 1948 > Mediterranean

V New Nation, Shaping a Society

Video > Into the Future > The New Nation > Shaping a Society

V New Nation, Waves of Immigration

Video > Into the Future > The New Nation > Waves of Immigration

Atlas: Near East: 1948

Israel found itself in a sea of hostile Arab nations, which remained in a state of war with the new state. They equipped Palestinian Arabs in the hellish refugee camps ringing Israel with the means to continue an indefinite guerrilla war against Israel, which had to defend a land that at its narrowest point is less than 15 miles wide.

- ◆ Point out Egypt and the Gaza Strip, Jordan (including the area west of the Jordan River), Syria, and Lebanon.
- ◆ Click on **Jaffa** to zoom in on Israel.
- ◆ Click on the **Map Legend** tab at the bottom of the map, and point out the mileage scale.
- ◆ Point out the narrowness of Israel in the area of the coastal cities of Hadera and Netanya.

Review and Discussion Question

- How would you address the defense problems posed by Israel's borders and terrain?

Video: Show 9: New Nation, Shaping a Society

As the new nation took shape, issues of civil society and economics also presented themselves. The collectivist inclinations of earlier generations of Zionists helped to create new and idealistic structures like the kibbutz and moshav. Similarly, the reclamation of the land became a driving force for the young nation. At the helm of all this was David Ben-Gurion.

- ◆ Play the video segment past the phrase "...mutual help – another society."

Review and Discussion Questions

- Was the emphasis on agriculture and collectivism a good strategy for the young state?
- Has Israel remained true to this societal approach? Why or why not?

Video: Show 9: New Nation, Waves of Immigration

The young state needed to try to achieve its vision while absorbing a series of mass immigrations that are unprecedented in history. The rickety economic and administrative infrastructure of Jewish Palestine nearly collapsed under the pressure to resettle and assimilate immigrant populations far larger than the existing Jewish population at the time the state was founded.

Questions arose about whether immigration should be

restrained, while the Israeli Law of Return welcomed any and all Jews. The ambiguity of “Who is a Jew?” needed to be resolved. And the diversity of Ashkenazic, Sephardic, and Mizrahi Jews posed challenges that suddenly had to be resolved in the real life of the new heterogeneous nation.

◆ Play the video segment to “....a common purpose.”

Review and Discussion Questions

- What are some of the multi-ethnic challenges Israeli society had to face in these early years?
- How did Israel pay for the enormous costs of resettlement of hundreds of thousands of Jewish immigrants?
- What other stresses would be placed on the social fabric by having such a large population of poor Jews from Arab countries and survivors of the Shoah?

PART 5

Crises and Opportunities

In addition to fedayeen (terrorist) infiltrators, Israel fought the Sinai Campaign in 1956, when Egypt blockaded its southern port, Eilat, at the Straits of Tiran. Then, in the spring of 1967, Egypt repeated this action, and Syria joined it in feverish mobilization in a self-proclaimed intended war of annihilation against Israel. Despite Israel's attempts to keep its neighbor Jordan out of the war, that country made common cause with Egypt and Syria. Israel struck first by air against Egypt and Syria, and emerged victorious on all fronts. In 1973, though, Israel was surprised by its enemies, and narrowly averted disastrous defeat.

The next couple of decades saw the pan-Arab threat to Israel recede, as peace treaties were signed with arch-nemeses Egypt and Jordan. And, as the 1990s progressed, great hopes for a resolution of the conflict with the Palestinian Arabs dawned in the optimism of the Oslo Accords. The accords were concluded with the same PLO and its terrorist leader, Yassir Arafat, that Israel had driven from Lebanon to Tunis in 1982.

V **New Nation, Six-Day War**

Video > Into the Future > The New Nation > Six-Day War

Video: Show 9: New Nation, Six-Day War

When Egypt and Syria massed their troops and tanks on Israel's borders in May 1967, war was inevitable. The outcome of that astonishing war largely delineates the map and political agendas of the Middle East today.

◆ Play the video segment to “....the effect was profound.”

Review and Discussion Questions

- Was Israel justified in launching the war preemptively? What motivated Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol to make this choice?
- The PLO was founded in 1964. What is the “Palestine” that it was or is intending to “liberate”?
- Israel urged King Hussein of Jordan to remain neutral. Why did it want this? Why didn't he agree? (Note: Jordan lost all of its land west of the Jordan River, including Jerusalem, in the war.)

V **1990s, Arab-Israeli Relations**

Video > Into the Future > 1990s > Arab-Israeli Conflict

Video: Show 9: 1990s, Arab-Israeli Relations

Egypt and Syria launched surprise attacks on Yom Kippur of 1973, with great initial success. Only a massive American airlift

to Israel averted disaster. Arab rejection of Israel reverted to terror attacks, largely orchestrated by the PLO and kindred terror organizations. In 1979, Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in exchange for peace.

In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon, succeeding in ejecting the PLO from that country, but it began a prolonged occupation of southern Lebanon that ended only in 2000. As the 1990s dawned, another immigration flood swept into Israel from the lands of the former Soviet Union, challenging its infrastructure to absorb 800,000 new citizens.

An uprising by Palestinian Arabs in the territories taken by Israel in the Six-Day War underscored the need to attempt a resolution to the status of the west bank of the Jordan and the Gaza Strip. Diplomatic efforts resulted in the Oslo Accords, granting broad autonomy to territories, under the auspices of the PLO. Soon after, Israel and Jordan signed a peace treaty.

- ◆ Play the video segment until "...because of their policies."

Review and Discussion Questions

- Why were Sadat and Rabin assassinated?
- Why did the Oslo Accords fail?

Pointers to the Next Session

Israel was to enter a period of great turmoil as the twenty-first century was born. Peace offers in late 2000 by Prime Minister Barak were met with rejection and the launching of an armed terror uprising by the Palestinian Arabs, involving great loss of life on both sides.

In America, Jews moved more and more into the political, economic, and civic mainstream after World War II. Yet the very success of American Jews in assimilating to their host society has created challenges to Jewish continuity and demographics that are likely to dominate its discourse and communal planning throughout the coming decades.

Our next and final session will also include a discussion of conclusions from the course, and attempt to identify common threads running through the millennia of Jewish history we have reviewed.