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Palestinian-Israeli Conflict 101 - Part 1

Wiser World Podcast

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What is the ancient history of the land that is currently called Israel? How long did Jews live on the land, and what caused them to leave? When did the Arabs come onto the land, and why was it called Palestine? What were the Crusades, and how did they impact relations in the area? What is the Ottoman Empire? What is antisemitism, and how did it affect Palestine? What is Zionism, and the Balfour Declaration, and how did these lay the groundwork for future conflict? We'll answer these questions and many more in today's episode, Part 1 of 3, the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict 101.

Welcome to Wiser World, a podcast for busy people who need a refresher on all things world. Here we explore different regions of the globe, giving you the facts and context you need to think historically about current events. I truly believe that the more we learn about the world, the more we embrace our shared humanity. I'm your host, Alli Roper. Thanks for being here.

Hey! Welcome to Part 1 of a 3 part series on the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict. This has been a long time coming. I have been studying this conflict for years, and I have been making these episodes for about eight months, so I am really happy to be getting them to you! But before we get into it, I do have a few quick announcements.

The first is that starting next month, September 2023, I'm going to be scaling down to one episode a month for a time, because I have some new things in my life that are taking up a lot of extra time.

I do still have a Patreon, and I really appreciate anyone who is willing to donate monthly to help support the podcast. Thank you so much to my Patreon supporters. If you'd like to sign up for it, there's options for \$3, \$5, or \$10 a month. You can go to patreon.com/wiserworldpodcast, and you get a post every episode that's sent to your email with additional resources, like books and movies, all sorts of things to help deepen your knowledge of that topic of the episode of the month. And these Palestinian-Israeli episodes have a lot of great resources that I'm going to be sharing with Patreon members. So this is a good time to sign up.

I also have a free email list, where once a month I email out the episode of the month, kind of as a reminder, and I also share any additional announcements there. So you can sign up for that by going to my website, wiserworldpodcast.com. That's free. Okay, enough announcements, let's get to it.

Before we launch into this extremely complicated sliver of the world, I want to say that in making these episodes I had a particular audience or person in mind. And this person knows little to nothing about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, maybe feels a little ignorant about the history. They might be considering a trip to Israel, or preparing for a study abroad. This person in my mind is not a religious scholar; they don't have a ton of knowledge of the Bible or Torah or Quran. This person is also not a historical scholar on the region. This person is also not a Palestinian or an Israeli. Basically, I designed these three parts as kind of an intro series for those who need a foundation to build on, and even at the most basic level you will find that it is very meaty stuff.

There is really an enormous body of information about this issue out there. In fact, the scholar Ian Blake wrote, "The Israel-Palestine conflict has a strong claim to be the most studied conflict on Earth. Voluminous does not even begin to capture the sheer quantity of material about it. The range and depth reflect its importance, complexity, and contentiousness." So there's a lot to study here, and it's interesting, there are a lot of academic and news articles on this topic which are shorter. And then there are a lot of really long, extensive, scholarly books on it. And I haven't found a lot of middle ground material. So my hope is that these three episodes fill in that gap for people who want more than a short article but also aren't gonna pick up a thousand page, you know, academic non-fiction either. So that's kinda my goal. I think it may be impossible, but I'm-I'm really shooting for the impossible here.

As I said, Israel is a highly complex region and doing it justice is a really—a pretty monumental task. I studied abroad in Jerusalem, Egypt, and Jordan for about four months when I was a young adult. I lived in East Jerusalem. And I took classes and met many Jews, both religious and non-religious, as well as Muslims and Arab Christians. And I learned the history of that area while traveling through it. So I have to admit that figuring out what to keep, what to leave out of these episodes, was really tricky for me—again, why it took me so long to record them. I really do my best in these episodes to present information in a neutral way. Showing you many different perspectives. But I also recognize, I fully recognize, that this is an extremely fraught topic. I will never be able to share it without offending someone, somewhere. Because there are, you know, millions of different perspectives on this.

However, I still stand with the goal of showing you different sides of the history in a way that doesn't tell you what to think, or what opinion I have, or what opinion you should have. I really want you to create your own opinion based on the history that we know right now. And while I know that bias is truly inevitable, I do my best here. And I really love this area of the world, and I hope that you feel that love come through.

So let's talk about language for a minute. When it comes to the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, words alone are complicated and controversial, and it's

really impossible to share all of the nuance in such short episodes. But a little context for you: before the current country, or State of Israel, became a thing in 1948, it was called Palestine. And today there are several countries, most of them members of the Arab league or Muslim majority countries, like Iran, that do not recognize the State of Israel, or have no diplomatic relations with it. And we will explore that in these episodes, but just be aware that just the name of the place alone is controversial to some people.

You may have seen slogans or signs that say "Free Palestine," for example, and that is a political statement that indicates a preference for Palestine. Some say, you know, some might even take this so far as to believe that if you say "Free Palestine" that means you don't believe Israel should have a right to exist. So you can see how this gets really tricky—complicated very quickly. And for purposes of this episode, I have chosen to call the State of Israel, "Israel," simply because I live in the United States, which does recognize Israel as a nation. So I'm not saying Israel as a political statement, rather I am using it to avoid confusion for you, alright?

So lastly, these 101 episodes are chock-full of information. I do stop often to sum things up, simplify the content, make it understandable. But please don't feel pressure to remember it all. I personally believe that education is really not about memorizing things, but rather about opening up our perspective, and no one is testing us on this! So the goal of these episodes really is to give you a basic, historical education, skim over. So that you can find the pockets you want to learn more about, and then you can deepen your study where you're most interested, because there's really a lot that I leave out. Okay, alright—with all that said, let's do this.

Okay, Israel is a tiny slice of land, only slightly larger than the US state of New Jersey, and it's on the east side of the Mediterranean Sea, so its west coast is all Med Sea. Port cities like Haifa and Tel Aviv are really important for trade in Israel. Israel shares a southern border with Egypt; northern borders with Syria and Lebanon; and its Eastern side borders Jordan, which was once called Transjordan. And the northern part of Israel has a more Mediterranean climate, more green rolling hills; Sea of Galilee is there. The southern part is a bit more dry, less rain, more desert. The average temperature in the winter is in the 50s and 60s, and in the summer it can get pretty hot, like 90s and warmer, Fahrenheit.

I lived in Jerusalem in the winter and spring months, and it was—I was very surprised at how beautiful it really is. It's gorgeous, there are flowers growing up the walls of the city, and there's green hills up north—it's really beautiful. It's not all dead desert like I had imagined in my head. There's plenty of that too, but it's not all that way. And there's quite a lot of agriculture in Israel. They grow impressive citrus, like oranges are particularly famous there, avocados, mangoes, grapes, dates, wheat. Farmers in this land have learned to drain swamps, as well as learn to grow things in the desert, and

they've become very skilled over centuries. However, Israel does rely a lot on imports because it's very small, right, and it cannot grow it all. Also, the Dead Sea is considered the lowest point on Earth, and it's so salty you can float in it, and that is also in that country.

The history of this land is extensive, largely because there are really many records about it; the Bible and Jewish holy books are just some of the many. Dates that I use here are gonna be approximates because again, this is really ancient stuff.

But approximately four thousand years ago, there was a man named Abraham. He is seen as a prophet in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. And it is said that God made a special promise, or called a covenant, with Abraham. And he and his descendants were said to be chosen people who would one day become a great nation. And over time Abraham moved into the land called Cannan, which is roughly the area that's now called Israel, okay.

So Abraham had two sons of note, one's named Isaac and the other's named Ishmael. I'm not gonna go deep into the story, but basically Jews trace their lineage to Isaac, and Muslims trace their lineage to Ishmael. So both the Jews and the Muslims trace their lineage back to Abraham and see him as a very important leader—prophet.

Alright, so Abraham's descendants move on this land. Off and on they have periods of exile here and there, but they live on this land for roughly two thousand years, no one knows exactly for sure how long. But in that time there were lots of other kingdoms, the Jebusites, the Philistines, many others.

And Abraham's descendants became known as the Hebrews, and they practiced a religion that involved many things. Some of the most important components are they were monotheistic, they believed in one God. And this is unique in a time when believing in many Gods was a lot more popular. They also built temples for worship, and they offered animal sacrifices to their God. They had prophets, or leaders, sometimes these prophets were just prophets that just testified of God, sometimes they also were kings. And the Old Testament of the Bible and the Torah are essentially the stories of these prophets and other believing people, and their interactions with each other and with God. And some of the most well known are Moses—this is like Ten Commandments stuff—Elijah/*Ēlīyāh*, David, Solomon, Isaiah, just to name a few, okay?

So one of the very early descendants of Abraham was a man named Jacob, whose name was later changed to Israel! Okay, so now we're getting into the names of things. Israel or Jacob, he had twelve sons, and their families became what is called the "Twelve Tribes of Israel." Over time as these families grew, they took on many different nicknames like Israelites, Hebrews, Twelve Tribes of Israel, or Jews.

And the term "Jew" actually originates from the Tribe of Judah, one of these twelve sons. Um, but these terms are more less, just kind of another way of saying descendants of Abraham and people who followed this monotheistic religion. And over time Jew became the most popular term for this group of people regardless of what tribe they belonged to. And today the terms, you know, "Israelites" or "Hebrews" are much much less common, right. [Israelites or Hebrews] mostly just describe, kind of, the ancient ancestors of the modern Jews. Tracing lineage through the House of Israel is a real thing, right. And Jesus Christ came through the Tribe of Judah. We'll get to that in a minute.

So this group of religious people, these ancient Israelites, they settled in this area, and over time a great city called Jerusalem was built up. It's such an old city, there's a lot of different theories on who were the first people to settle it, but ultimately it's thousands and thousands of years old. And what's critical to know is that Jerusalem was conquered and inhabited by lots of different civilizations and empires. And the city changed hands multiple times throughout history. Including periods of rule from the Jebusites; ancient Israelites—this is like King David, King Solomon; the Babylonians came in; the Persians came in; the Greeks, under Alexander the Great; the Romans. It has been destroyed and built back up multiple times, making Jerusalem an archaeological gold mine.

The Jews first built a Temple in roughly 1000 BC under King Solomon. And this Temple was destroyed in around 586 BC, when a neighboring empire called the Babylonians, they came in and they destroyed it. And they took many Jews captive, this is called the "Babylonian captivity." And then the Persians came in and conquered the Babylonians, and the Persian Shah was much more tolerant to faith, and so he allowed the Jews to come back to their homeland and build a Second Temple. And this is a significant moment in Jewish history to come back and build this Second Temple.

Then in roughly 63 BC, the Roman Empire conquered Jerusalem and surrounding areas, which at the time was called Judea, and they ruled this area for roughly 400 years, the first 100 years being exceptionally rough for the Jews. It was during this time that Jesus Christ is said to have been born, taught his ministry, and died. And the religion of Christianity was born out of that.

So for a long time, the city of Jerusalem had been very important to the Jews because it was the location of their Temple. And now we're adding another religion, Christianity, right, to the mix. So now Christians see the city of Jerusalem and the land around it as very important since this is where Jesus Christ had lived and died. So now the Jews and the Christians see this place as very holy.

Okay, so back to the Romans, right, the Romans have Judea. And the Jews revolted many times against them, but one particular revolt led to Rome destroying much of Jerusalem—and they destroyed the Temple in 70 AD, this is critical. The Romans

destroy all of the Temple, except for one portion of the western wall of the Temple Mount. We'll talk more about that soon.

So this was devastating for the Jews, and it's a significant moment in history because the Jews were exiled to other places throughout Europe, the Middle East, Asia; they were killed, or they were taken slaves. This is why you may hear of Jews in Spain, in Portugal, Germany, France, Russia, Poland, Iran, North Africa. Just to name a few, right. Another name for this spreading out is called the "Jewish diaspora." It's where Jews settled throughout the globe, usually in pockets close to each other, and in very close knit communities. And any Jews that were left on the land became a total minority. They were actually completely banned from the city of Jerusalem for a time. However, the desire to return back to Jerusalem really remained with the Jews, and this will become super important in a minute.

So in about 135 AD, Rome renamed the land Palestine. And within a few hundred years, Christianity began to be more popular in the Roman Empire, because the Christians had been persecuted pretty terribly in the Roman Empire for a long time. But then Christianity becomes more popular, and it begins to come to Palestine. And Christians begin building churches at locations where Jesus was said to have performed miracles. Some of the churches are still around today, and are some of the oldest Christian churches on the planet.

In fact if you travel to Israel as a Christian pilgrim you will likely see some of these places and may, you know, many of these date back to the Roman Empire. They make churches in other parts of the world look like baby stuff, like young little tiny churches by comparison to these old ancient churches.

And over time the Roman Empire changed, and part of it became known as the Byzantine Empire. And the Byzantine Empire had control over Jerusalem for about 300 years. And Christianity became much, much more popular, spreading all over, okay.

So 300 years go by, and in the 600s AD the Sasanian Empire or the Persians—this is modern day Iran—they were arch enemies with the Byzantines, the Byzantine Christians, okay. The Persians come in and they destroy most of Jerusalem.

And right around this time, in 610 AD, a man from Saudi Arabia, named Muhammad, becomes the founder and prophet for the religion of Islam. And the majority of his preaching was done in Arabia. But at the end of his life, he is believed to have been transported on a winged creature from the city of Mecca, which is found in Saudi Arabia, to Jerusalem in Palestine. And there, there is a rock where the Jewish Temple had once stood. Remember that Jewish Temple had been destroyed by the Romans, right. And on this rock where the Jewish Temple had once been, Muhammad is said to have ascended

into Heaven. This rock will become really important in just a minute, so remember the rock.

Now the religion of Islam begins to spread throughout the region, through trade and commerce, also through conquest. And in 637 the Arabs, coming from Arabia, come into Jerusalem, they lay siege, they win. Now Jerusalem is part of what's called the Arab caliphate. Basically, Jerusalem and the surrounding area is gonna be ruled by Arab Muslims. Different Arab caliphates ruled over Jerusalem until the 1500s, so a really, really long time, hundreds and hundreds of years. Natives to Palestine were free to convert to Islam, or remain Christians and Jews.

But in this time period, Islam really goes through what's called a "Golden Age." The religion of Islam and Arab culture really expanded throughout North Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, even into parts of Southern Europe. Through trade and conquest, you really can see evidence of Arab culture all the way into Portugal and Spain, in just the architecture. Science, art, commerce, all flourish during this time. The libraries alone are incredible.

And during these years, the Muslims built two important buildings on the site where the Jewish Temple had once been. The Jews called this the "Temple Mount." And one of the two buildings was called the "Al-Aqsa mosque," this is a very important mosque in Islam. And the other building is the "Dome of the Rock," which is this beautiful building built over that rock that we were talking about where Muhammad is said to have ascended into Heaven, right. This building, the Dome of the Rock, is known for its golden dome, and also it has these magnificent blue tiles that it's covered in. And it's still there today, you can look up a picture of it.

So for the last, you know, 1400ish years, the Temple Mount was called by its Arab name, "Haram al-Sharif," or "Noble Sanctuary." So now we have two religions who have very special ties to this spot. The Jews have the tie, they call it the Temple Mount, it's where their Temple used to be. And the Muslims call it Haram al-Sharif, and now it has a very holy mosque, called the Al-Aqsa mosque. And it also has the Dome of the Rock, which is an important holy site for Muslims. All in the same very square footage, right.

This expansion of Arab culture naturally means a lot of wars, right, between all different kinds of nations who now have Islam as their primary religion. So even though many of them have the same religion at the core, they're still fighting amongst each other. The Turks, the Syrians, the North Africans, you know they're not all united. Sultans are attacking Sultans, there's slavery between themselves and also with Africa, different tribes are fighting each other. You get the idea.

But during this Golden Age, from the 1000s to the 1200s, Christians from Western Europe, they begin what is called the "Crusades." The basic idea was that they wanted to

secure the holy sites of Christianity, and who had control of those sites? The Muslims, right. So basically these Crusades were religious wars. In fact the Catholic pope sent out many different calls, and over the next 200 years, there were roughly eight Crusades.

So let's stop for a moment here and consider this, right—the United States is considered by most to be about 247 years old, at the time that I am recording this episode. The Crusades lasted 200 years. So that's so many generations of people being raised under a time of war and animosity with both the Muslims, and the Christians, and even some Jews that were affected by this.

These wars, these Crusades, were pretty brutal, and over time became less about religion, and more about land, and conquering the Middle East. And both sides called the Crusades, holy wars, because both felt that they were defending or conquering in the name of God, for holy sites. Jerusalem was conquered by the European Crusaders, for a time; they massacred many Jews and Muslims as they entered the city. But in the end, the end of the Crusades, Saladin's army overthrew the Crusaders in Jerusalem, and the Muslims won. And the Mamluks, who were mostly of Turkish descent, they ended up having 300 more years of ruling over the area.

In time another group, the Ottoman Turks, came in and conquered again. And from 1517 to 1917—okay so we're getting into modern times, right—the Ottoman Turks controlled Palestine. This is what we call the Ottoman Empire. There were various groups of people who tried to conquer the land during this time. But ultimately what you gotta know is that the Ottomans held up.

And most people living in Palestine under the Ottoman Empire were Arabs. So their ancestry came from Arabia and they called themselves Palestinians, since they were living in Palestine, right. Most of these people were Muslim, some were Christian, some were other religions. Their villages and towns were often agricultural in nature. Some people were nomadic. By this point in time some Palestinian families had lived on the land for generations, spanning hundreds and hundreds of years. There were still some Jews living there too, though it was definitely not the majority. Jews, Arab Muslims, Arab Christians, Christians from other, you know, ethnic groups all lived on this land together quite peacefully. Mostly farming in smaller communities and villages as people did back then.

However, the majority of Jews were still living in other parts of the world. Mostly in Europe from that diaspora that we talked about, after the Romans destroyed the Temple in 70 AD, right. Everyone got spread out. And these Jews living in Europe during the Middle Ages were often treated pretty terribly. There are many European countries who persecuted or killed Jews that lived in their borders. And this is called "antisemitism." So the definition of antisemitism is hostility or discrimination against Jews.

And at this time in history, antisemitism was largely due to religious reasons. Many Christians were biased against Jews, because the Jews had been the catalyst for the death of Jesus Christ. So Jews as a general whole do not believe that Jesus Christ was the son of God like Christians do. And so this disagreement was not, you know, generally viewed with much tolerance. And the history of antisemitism, or hostility towards Jews, is a very long and painful one but it's gonna take a forefront in Part 2 when we get there.

Okay, so let's just pause here for a second because that was a lot. If you're swimming in dates and names, don't panic. I shared them because if you travel to Israel these names do come up. I want you to just recognize them. However, the basic concept to know is this: the land of modern day Israel today is ancient. It has many different groups that conquered it over the years. The land has had many different names over the years too. But the Jews made their home there for thousands of years, they have a lot of history there. Eventually their Temple is destroyed by the Romans. The Jews are forced out to live in other parts of the world. Arabs move in, they build holy sites at the same location where the Jewish holy sites, their Temple, used to be. Wars between Christians and Muslims called the Crusades happen, it ain't pretty. The Ottoman Turks come in and control the land of Palestine, and the majority of the people who live there are Arabs, but other groups are able to live there peacefully as well.

So it's now the 1800s, 'kay, we're back in Palestine, it's ruled by the Ottoman Turks. With the sultan in Istanbul, callin' all the shots, okay. Now remember again, the land is still very holy to three religions. The majority of Jews do not live there, but they do consider it their homeland. And they have parts of their culture that are very deeply tied to Jerusalem. For example, there are even specific prayers in Judaism about the idea of returning there.

At this time, late 1800s, there are more than 11 million Jews in the world. Nearly 7 million of them are living in Eastern Europe, 2 million in Central and Western Europe, and about 1.5 million in North America. Anywhere else in the world there are less than a million. So Asia, North Africa, Middle East, less than a million Jews. And they've been scattered for a long time, trying to hold on to their ancient heritage, in nations that really weren't always friendly to them, and in many cases were very prejudiced.

On the other hand, we have Arabs that have now lived on this land for centuries now. And the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa mosques are holy sites for them. And then we also have the Christians who see it as holy, as Jesus Christ had his ministry there, and there are many Christian churches and holy sites there too.

It's late 1800s Palestine, and there are fewer than a million people living in Palestine. Remember, really small slice of land 'bout the size of New Jersey. The people living there, the Palestinians, are mostly Arab Muslims, some Arab Christians, and a small number of Jews. And they have lived there together, largely untroubled, as the

Ottomans had kind of a system of religious autonomy. So people could practice their religion. They weren't all equally treated and taxed. But there was generally tolerance between the three groups.

But toward the end of the 1800s, antisemitism begins to grow in Europe. And all Jews are becoming more and more aware of it, especially in Eastern Europe. Eastern European Jewish leaders begin worrying about the intense persecutions. There are systematic killings of Jews, called "pogroms," that are beginning to happen again. And as Jewish writer Ari Shavit writes, "A new breed of ethnic-based anti-Semitism is superseding the old religious-based anti-Semitism. Waves of pogroms befall Jewish towns and townships in Russia, Belarus, Moldova, Romania, and Poland." Okay, so big issues going on in Eastern Europe for Jews.

In Western Europe, Jewish leaders aren't so much worried about their lives yet. But they're worried that their people are assimilating too much into local cultures. In largely Christian societies, these Jews stand out as distinct, and so as generations passed, these Jewish leaders are worried about the watering down of their culture and religion over time. There's also some discrimination of Jews because many of them were very financially successful. Not only were they different from a religious standpoint, but they also controlled a lot of the economy.

So as Ari Shavit says, "These Jewish leaders realize that they are faced with a radical problem: the coming extinction of the Jews. And they realize that a radical problem calls for a radical solution: the transformation of the Jews, a transformation that can take place only in Palestine, the Jews' ancient homeland." So during this time of antisemitism, there is also a rising longing, this desire among many Jews, to return to this homeland and have a nation for themselves to escape persecution in many cases.

And small groups of Jews begin to move into Palestine. Again, less than a million people are living there at the time. And these Jews are creating Jewish neighborhoods outside the city walls of Jerusalem starting in roughly the 1860s. And in the 1880s, like we said earlier, Russia begins really persecuting its Jews. And the first area that many of them want to flee to is Palestine.

A movement to reestablish a Jewish state in Palestine begins to kinda take shape, and this movement is called "Zionism." So the word "Zion" is associated in the language of Hebrew with the city of Jerusalem. So what is Zionism? Basically, it's a movement that advocates for the Jews to have a Jewish homeland in their ancestral land, at this time in history it's called Palestine, and to establish a place where Jews could live freely and exercise self-determination.

So let me repeat it again, because that's a mouthful. It's a movement that advocated for Jews to have a Jewish homeland in the land of Palestine, and establish a place where Jews could live freely and exercise self-determination.

And a man named Theodore Herzl hits the stage. He becomes very influential in the modern Zionist movement, and pushing this idea that the Jews need a Jewish national home. And Herzl believed that there had to be a place where Jews would not be persecuted or rounded up, and forced to convert to another religion or any other persecution that had happened for a very long time. In fact Herzl said, quote, "The Jews who wish for a State will have it. We shall live at last as free men on our own soil, and die peacefully in our own homes. The world will be freed by our liberty, enriched by our wealth, magnified by our greatness. And whatever we attempt there to accomplish for our own welfare, will react powerfully and beneficially for the good of humanity."

So Herzl begins to teach this idea and publish pieces about the idea of a Jewish state. Both Jews and non-Jews begin to kinda believe in this idea. He actually sends a group of people to Palestine with the job to write a report on Palestine, and see if it's possible to colonize it. Like who's living there? What's going on there? Is it possible?

In the late 1800s the economy of Palestine again, pretty rural. The vast majority of Palestinians live in humble villages. There were roughly twenty cities and towns, and hundreds of villages at the time. There were also a lot of Bedouin nomads, so moving around all the time. There also was a high poverty level, as was very common in many countries throughout the world in the late 1800s, especially in the Middle East. And much of the land was being farmed. But there also was a lot of land that was not being farmed. And so some people began to see Palestine as a land of opportunity for Jews to come in, buy the land, work it.

Theodore Herzl believed in diplomacy, and actually met with many big country leaders at the time. Including the Ottoman leaders. The sultan of the Ottoman Empire naturally turned down the idea of a Jewish state in Palestine, right. He is not a fan. So Herzl organizes rallies, he meets with other groups of powerful Jews in England. He talks in Britain, Austria, Germany. Not every Jew is team Zionism, right. It was a complicated issue. Not all Jews believed in the idea of a Jewish state. It was complicated and controversial back then, just like it is now. Some Zionists believed at the time, in diplomatic ways of making this happen, you know, working with major powers to find a way.

But there were other brands of Zionism too, like one was groups of young Jews who came to Palestine in the late 1800s and they built these huge communal farms where everything was shared amongst each other. These are called "kibbutz" or "kibbutzim." If you're interested in learning more about it, I highly recommend it, it's fascinating.

In 1897, the first Zionist Congress met in Switzerland, with Herzl as the president. And they discussed ways to settle in Palestine, to work with governments, to make it happen, to unite the Jews under one nation. Ideas were thrown around and Jerusalem was discussed as a possible capital for a future Jewish state. The Ottomans were obviously, like, not keen on this idea. And Jerusalem received additional security during this time. Jews began to move more and more into Palestine, in relatively small numbers. There were some issues and fights as new migrants came in. Some violence between the new Jews and the Arab Palestinians is documented. But really not much, and nothing like about what's to happen. But in 1903 it was even proposed to create a Jewish homeland in Uganda, Africa, which was ruled by the British at the time. This idea was shot down. The Jews wanted Palestine.

Herzl died in 1904, other leaders took over, making progress little by little. But from 1880 to 1920 the Jewish population in the United States 10x'd, as European Jews began fleeing for their lives due to antisemitism. The question of what to do about it came up within almost every government who were receiving these Jewish refugees.

And in 1914 World War I starts. We got two groups fighting, the Allies versus the Axis Powers. The big countries of the Allies are Britain, France, Russia, the United States. The Axis Powers are Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire. Okay, it's all coming together, right?

Toward the end of World War I, in November of 1917, the British foreign secretary, Arthur Balfour, drafts up a statement called the "Balfour Declaration." This is one to really remember. In it he says:

His Majesty's Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country. I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Yours sincerely,

Arthur James Balfour

Okay, so basically what has Great Britain done? They have essentially pledged to help establish a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. This is a significant policy statement, and a total triumph for Zionism. The Zionists now have a major world power supporting their cause, and it has also led to more Jewish immigration to Palestine.

The Balfour Declaration was controversial from the moment it was proposed. In fact, the only Jew in the British Parliament at the time, was against Zionism! And was very concerned about how this news would be received by the Muslim world. Not to mention that by promising the Jews a national home, the current Jews in Palestine and the Arab population began to have some tensions and conflicts. This laid the groundwork for more conflict that is still ongoing today, and that we will get more deeply into in Parts 2 and 3.

So I'm gonna stop there. I laid the groundwork, and there's a lot of context for the next two episodes. Which is when everything heats up. So we're kinda building up, right. Though, without this context, the rest really won't make any sense. So it's critical that we know this background. So let's review.

First we have Abraham, key prophet, who comes into the land that's now called modern day Israel. The Twelve Tribes of Israel come through the lineage of Abraham. Jews live on this land for thousands of years, off and on. Various captivities from other empires. But they build the Temples as part of their worship. This is very important to them. The Romans come in, they conquer the area. Jesus Christ has his ministry there. Shortly after, the Jewish Temple is destroyed. And Jews are forced to leave and go all over the world. In the 600s, Arab Muslims move into the area. The Crusades happen. Finally the Ottoman Turks control Palestine, under the Ottoman Empire. Then antisemitism, or hostility towards Jews, grows in Europe. Jews begin more actively working to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine. This is called Zionism. Theodore Herzl is an important leader of this movement. World War I happens. During it something called the Balfour Declaration is written. It states that Great Britain, arguably the most powerful empire in the world at the time, will support a Jewish homeland in Palestine. And the seeds of conflict are being sown, right.

I'm going to keep my takeaway for this episode brief, and just say that it's scale. I will admit that my favorite history really isn't ancient history. I really enjoy studying more modern history, like 1800s and to present day. But when it comes to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the ancient history is important. Because the land itself has such rich history. And both the Palestinians and the Jews, that we will talk about in Part 2 and 3, have strong ties to it. And it becomes really important in how the conflict kind of erupts, which I tell you about in Part 2. But for me, I think that understanding the immensity and the scale of the history, even to a really small extent, is so humbling. It's one of the reasons I love studying world history, especially Middle Eastern history. It just makes me feel really small. And I actually love that feeling, it's like very rooting for me to think that I'm just a tiny cog in a giant human race that's been around for thousands of years, and it just gives me perspective. Anyway, so, scale, this is, we're scaling up to a big conflict, and this is just the background to get us going.

In Part 2, which is gonna come out in two weeks, we're gonna to talk about how everything erupts. And in the meantime, I hope you can listen to Part 1 as many times as you need, to wrap your head around it. But I'll see ya in Part 2.

If you learned anything in the episode, please consider sharing it with someone you know. It helps me spread the word about the podcast. And special thanks to my research assistant, Rachel, for her help on this episode. She is so helpful to me. Feel free to check out our sources in the show notes.

And I'll see you with Part 2 in a couple weeks. And in the meantime, let's go make the world a little wiser.

Transcribed by Emily Kornfein