



Educator's Guide

What is the Balfour Declaration?

The land of Palestine was ruled by many nations over the ages. Just before Israel became a state, it was ruled by the British Empire. On November 2, 1917, Lord Balfour of Great Britain wrote a letter promising a “Jewish home” to the Jewish people in the land of Palestine. This declaration was later ratified by the League of Nations in 1922 and was the guiding document for the administration of the land until the UN voted for partition in 1947 and the British mandate was no longer. Why is this document so important? What are the ambiguities in the text? What is the backstory and how did it come to be? Why was it so controversial?

Link to video: <https://unpacked.education/video/what-is-the-balfour-declaration/>

Further Reading

1. Jeremy R. Hammond, “What Was the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and Why Is It Significant?”
<https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2017/11/02/what-was-the-balfour-declaration-of-1917-and-why-is-it-significant/>
2. Bernard Avishai, “The Balfour Declaration Century”
<https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-balfour-declaration-century>
3. Dr. Shlomo Avineri, “Britain’s True Motivation Behind the Balfour Declaration”
<https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-britain-s-true-motivation-behind-the-balfour-declaration-1.5462518>
4. Ambassador Dore Gold, “The Historical Significance of the Balfour Declaration”
<http://jcpa.org/article/historical-significance-balfour-declaration/>
5. Daniel Gordis, *Israel: A Concise History of a Nation Reborn*, chapter 5



Review - Did the students understand the material?

1. To whom did Lord Balfour write his famous letter?
 - a. Lord Lionel Walter Rothschild (correct answer)
 - b. Theodor Herzl
 - c. David Ben-Gurion
 - d. Prime Minister David Lloyd George
2. Who named the Land of Israel “Palestine”?
 - a. The Turks
 - b. The Romans (correct answer)
 - c. The Jews
 - d. The Ottomans
3. What were two major issues with the declaration?
4. Who was Chaim Weizmann, and what was his role in this story?
5. What do the Balfour Declaration and nail polish remover have in common?

Discussion Questions

1. Given the ambiguities you see discussed in the film about the Balfour Declaration, do you think the ambiguity was intentional? If so, why do you think it was ambiguous?
2. One of the important features of the Balfour Declaration is that it was the first time an international superpower and authority gave formal support to establishing a Jewish home in almost 2,000 years. In your opinion, why should the Balfour Declaration continue to matter now, more than 100 years later?
3. In considering the history of Israel, what ultimately put Israel on the map: Zionist visionaries and activists, or diplomatic, international support? Is it a combination, or one more than the other?



Reflection Questions

1. Imagine you were a young adult in 1917. How do you think you would have felt upon hearing the Balfour Declaration? Describe the emotions you would feel when hearing that this declaration was made.
2. Ben-Gurion stated 20 years after the declaration: “I say on behalf of the Jews that the Bible is our mandate, the Bible, which was written by us, in our own language, in Hebrew, in this very country. That is our mandate. It is only recognition of this right, which was expressed in the Balfour Declaration.” After watching this video, do you agree with Ben-Gurion? Explain. Is the right to a Jewish state more due to international law or the Jewish people’s history and Biblical rights?