

Zionism in One Page

Zionism is a nationalist movement that emerged in the 19th century to enable the establishment of a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine, a region roughly corresponding to the Land of Israel in Jewish biblical tradition. Following the establishment of the modern Israel in 1948, Zionism became an ideology that supports the development and protection of the State of Israel.

Zionism arose out an assertive Jewish response to continued antisemitism, and also the development of independent non-Rabbinic thought within a group of Jewish thinkers called the **Maskilim**. These thinkers (including such famous names a Moses Mendelssohn) developed pride in being Jewish, revived Hebrew as a commonly spoken language, and promoted freedom of thought and enquiry. The period of their dominance in Europe (from around 1760 to 1850) is often called the Jewish Enlightenment or **Haskalah**.

Out of the Haskalah came the consciousness of Jewish global unity, framed as a sense of a people that would be constantly under threat as long as it existed as a diaspora, without a common homeland. Zionism's primary aim was to reunite Jews in their own nation, based in the traditional land of Eretz Israel, located in the Middle East (then a part of the Ottoman Empire). Zionism became an active political movement by 1897, when the first international Zionist Congress happened. Its main advocate, often seen as Zionism's founder, was **Theodor Herzl** (1860 – 1904), who established three concepts:

1. **An end to the diaspora:** the creation of a Jewish State and language.
2. **Ethnic unity**, and descent from Torah/Biblical origins.
3. **A historic claim on the lands of geographic Palestine**, as in Judaic tradition.

Zionism has since come under a series of revisions These have been caused by disagreements over how Zionism should be implemented. Reform Jews rejected Zionism altogether. Some considered the possibility of creating a Jewish state in places other than Palestine (Uganda and Argentina were suggested). Yet others developed Zionism as a political principle of Jewish unity, rather than a religious ideal. By 1917 however, pressure from lobbyists led to the British Government's **Balfour Declaration**. This stated that *"His Majesty's government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object."* The rest, as they say, is history.