



Bible and Sword: England and Palestine from the Bronze Age to Balfour

Barbara W. Tuchman

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From Barbara W. Tuchman, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Guns of August*, comes history thru a wide-angle lens: a fascinating chronicle of Britain's long relationship with Palestine & the Middle East, from the ancient world to the 20th century. Historically, the British were drawn to the Holy Land for two major reasons: first, to translate the Bible into English &, later, to control the road to India & access to Middle Eastern oil. With the lucid vividness that characterize all her work, Tuchman follows these twin spiritual & imperial motives—the Bible & the sword—to their seemingly inevitable endpoint, when Britain conquered Palestine at the conclusion of WWI. At that moment, in a gesture of significance & solemnity, the Balfour Declaration of 1917 established a British-sponsored mandate for a national home for the Jewish people. Throughout this account, Tuchman demonstrates that the seeds of conflict were planted in the Middle East long before the official founding of the modern state of Israel.

“Tuchman is a wise & witty writer, a shrewd observer with a lively command of high drama.”—*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

“In her métier as a narrative popular historical writer, Barbara Tuchman is supreme.”—*Chicago Sun-Times*

Bible and Sword: England and Palestine from the Bronze Age to Balfour Details

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From Reader Review Bible and Sword: England and Palestine from the Bronze Age to Balfour for online ebook

Evan Leach says

After finishing *The Guns of August*, which I thought was a real masterpiece, I was overcome with enthusiasm for Barbara Tuchman (**Tuch-mania?**) and decided to promptly go through her back catalog. *Bible and Sword*, her first published work, has an unusual (and ambitious focus). The book examines the relationship between England and the Holy Land over the past 2,000 years, and how that relationship led to the Balfour Declaration, a 1917 statement by Britain that it intended for Palestine (recently wrested from the dying clutches of the Ottoman Empire) to be a national home for the Jewish people. Tuchman's thesis is basically that two driving influences shaped the relationship between Britain and Palestine, religion and economics (or the "Bible and Sword"), but she has a **lot** of ground to cover with a subject this vast, and the book has much to say on a variety of different topics.

Religion

It is easy to forget, or at least fail to appreciate, the overwhelming importance of the church in the daily life of Europeans for most of the Middle Ages. For centuries, the Bible was the only book that many people would read (if they could read at all), and they would read it over and over and over and over. Those who couldn't read would go to great lengths to have it read to them. The end effect of all this was a mystical reverence for Palestine that (according to Tuchman) bored into the British psyche and led to otherwise irrational acts like long (and often deadly) pilgrimages, monotonous travel diaries becoming huge "bestsellers," and the Crusades. Visitors to the Holy Land, who had read the Bible over and over (and over), often found that they knew the landmarks around Galilee better than, say, Wales.

Ultimately, the importance of the Bible meant that Palestine was considered hallowed ground from an early point in English history. Literal interpreters of the Bible believed that resettling the Jews in the Holy Land would facilitate the Second Coming. But even statesmen who took a less-than literal view of the Bible would often approach the "Palestine question" not from a purely rational perspective, but through the prism of a religious upbringing. Without the Bible, the Balfour Declaration (and ultimately, Israel) might never have happened.

Economics

While religion continued to play a major role in the way the British approached their relationship with Palestine, as time went on economics took on more and more importance. The region was a major trading post throughout the Renaissance, and became a very hot commodity during the Age of Imperialism: the British wanted control to facilitate their connections with India, the Russians wanted access to the Mediterranean, and even Napoleon tried to take it (unsuccessfully). Ultimately, everyone decided the most important thing was that none of the *other* major European powers had it, and they all let the Turks control it until the Ottoman Empire's inevitable collapse. Economic interests kept Britain entangled in Palestinian affairs even during periods (like the 18th century) when religious fervor waned, and gave England a major incentive to keep the region under their thumb after World War I, even as a Jewish protectorate instead of a full-on colony.

Jewry

The Jewish perspective throughout all of this wrangling over the centuries was equally fascinating. Unique throughout human history, the Jews somehow maintained a sense of national identity for **millennia** without an actual nation to call their own. By the time that a Jewish state became a distinct possibility, many Western Jews were actually strongly opposed to it, to the bewilderment of the gentile community. Many of these men and women had become successful in their adopted countries, and were reluctant to overthrow their lives and move to the Palestinian desert. Instead, they thought the best course was to try and rise above the discrimination and occasional abuses they suffered, attempt to assimilate within the Western nations as best they could, and trust that in time they would be fully accepted. It was the Jews of Eastern Europe and Russia, much more impoverished and victimized than their Western kin (at the time), that carried the banner of Zion and enthusiastically supported the dream of a Jewish state. The book also discusses the failed attempt to establish a Jewish state in East Africa, which was completely new to me and fascinating.

Conclusion

Tuchman is as good as they come at making history come alive, and even in her debut the writing is razor-sharp and thoroughly engaging. I also thought that the subject was incredibly interesting. The only complaints I had were that (1) this book covers a *lot* of territory in under 450 pages, meaning that it doesn't feel quite as focused as Tuchman's later works, and (2) the book kind of buries the lead by stopping the narrative in 1917. This second criticism is the big one – in hindsight, the Balfour Declaration was ultimately just a stepping-stone to the creation of a Jewish state. It was admittedly a major stepping stone, but the events of the next 30 years (the decline of imperialism, World War II, and particularly the Holocaust) were to play a much larger role. Stopping the narrative at 1917 feels frustratingly incomplete. But ultimately, this book was very interesting, extremely well-written, and I would recommend it to anyone interested in the formation of Israel as a nation or the historical impact of religion on the British state. **4 stars.**

Sandra says

As always, Tuchman is simply brilliant. I would give it five stars except that as her first book, it suffers a bit style wise compared to the others. It is as much a history of the Reformation as it is a history of the Jews' struggle to survive in Europe without a homeland of their own. An amazing story about diplomacy, politics and war. Read this first and then Exodus.

Erik Graff says

Having read and enjoyed a number of books by Tuchman I picked this up from a sale shelf at The Amarynth Bookstore in Evanston. Being her first book, it isn't as polished as her later bestsellers.

Basically, the book covers relations between Britain and Palestine from an English perspective. Although mention is made of possible prehistorical connections, more important are myths the British spun about such connections from remotest antiquity (the first Britons were a Lost Tribe) to the Balfour declaration at the end of WWI.

While a readable survey, I found some of her claims overstated. For instance, she writes that the Jews were "the only people on earth ever to retain national identity without a national territory" (p.224)--a statement which might upset some Kurds, among others.

Other essays by Tuchman make it clear that she was very pro-Israel and neglectful of the other inhabitants of the land now occupied by that state. While apparent herein, this perspective was not, to my eyes, obtrusive.

Damon says

Meh. I found it difficult to concentrate on this book, and it was a chore to finish. Some of it was interesting. Some passages hinted at an anti-Arab bias. I'm glad I finished. I hope to move on to more interesting books on the subject.

11811 (Eleven) says

It's difficult to study the last 2,000 years of world history without noticing Israel. Just sayin'. This book covers a good chunk of that time while various people, for various reasons, with wildly different interpretations of biblical prophecy, do everything in their power to force the fulfillment of those prophecies. 19 centuries later, it all worked out. I applaud the effort. That kind of determination deserves an honorable mention.

This is fascinating history of Britain's relationship with Palestine. Recommended.

M Bajwa says

I read The Guns of August and decided to read the author's other books as well. I found this book by chance and started at once because of Barbara's prose style. This book also served my interest in Arab-Israel conflict and history in general.

This book takes you on a journey. A journey covering all the ingredients which were necessary for the final recipe known as Balfour Declaration. She likes to uncover the roots of the matter from each and every perspective. This was exactly what i wanted. A clear picture from the beginning.

Moreover I was given an assignment for a book review on any book. I chose this book. Here is my review:

INTRODUCTION:

1. This book was first published in 1956. The author is famous for her history books. Her book The Guns of August won a Pulitzer Prize. This book is about the interplay of Bible and Sword i.e. Religion and Military and the role they played in the arrival of British in Palestine and subsequently the Jews. This book traces out the history of Britain to find out exactly how and when the idea of Jewish return to Palestine came into existence. It all started much before the Zionist Movement.

SUMMARY:

2. This book starts with British people trying to find their ancestors. Who came to Britain in the beginning of time and from where did they come here. Myths were circulated about the first man to be from modern day Palestine. Myths became reality and were accepted as truth. On the other hand priests were trying to find how Christianity came here. This was also somehow attributed to a man who came from Palestine. So the attachment with Palestine was fixated on the minds of British people. This attachment was transformed into pilgrimage to Holy Land with the guarantee of salvation and forgiveness. Then came the time of Crusades to aid their brethren from the wrath of Saracens. Lords Shaftesbury came into the picture around 15th century

as part of Puritan Movement. He was a literal believer of Bible in which it was written that people of the Land of Israel have to be returned before there can be second advent of Jesus Christ. He was part of the government and pushed this idea forward. Puritan Movement ended but this idea remained. The problem was that Jews themselves did not want to return. They believed only Messiah could make them return. This belief took time and rise of anti-Semitism to change. The idea of Jewish return to Palestine was pushed further and further. It was promoted sometimes for religious reasons and mostly for other reasons. It found its way to the British Parliament as well. Baron Rothschild of France funded different settlement projects. Finally in 1882 the pioneer Jewish settlers were established in Jerusalem. But this was all before Theodore Hertzl who was the father Zionist Movement. He wrote Der Judenstaat ("The Jewish State") in 1885. After which he started struggling for the return of the Jews. He failed in several times but didn't back off. Finally he was told that Jews can make an independent state in Africa not in Palestine. He agreed but his supporters didn't. Hertzl died at the age of 44 before even the Balfour Declaration. After him Weizmann took this movement further. Syria which included Palestine at that time was strategically very important to British. It was a passageway to East. Mediterranean Sea to Red Sea was the main passage. British supported dying Ottoman Empire till the very last. This support was stopped in 1914 when the Caliph decided to be with Germans in the First World War. Weizmann had a meeting with Balfour and the former highly impressed latter. Balfour was now convinced that the time had come to fulfill the words of Bible. Balfour had studied Bible since childhood and was an avid believer of Return of the Jews to the Promised Land. After the First World War, Balfour Declaration gave the Jews their promised land. British tried to disown the Declaration later but it was too late. Britain was not able to carry out the Mandate until 1946 when the issue was put forward to United Nations.

CONCLUSION:

3. Barbara has a unique style of telling history like a story. This style maintains a grip on the reader. She remained unbiased throughout the book telling the things the way they happened from different perspectives. Sometimes just for the fear of not missing something she has provided extra details. I wanted to study the roots of the Arab-Israel conflict, which holds a major place in global geopolitics, and this book served my purpose very well.

Dmitry Kuriakov says

«Вопрос о возвращении евреев в Палестину, который был центральным в идеологии сионизма, в последние десятилетия стал предметом оживленных дискуссий. В то время как некоторые считают, что это является естественным развитием исторического процесса, другие утверждают, что это может привести к новым конфликтам. В этой книге автор подробно рассматривает различные аспекты этой проблемы, включая исторический контекст, политические интересы и культурные аспекты. Книга является ценным источником информации для тех, кто интересуется историей еврейского народа и современной политикой на Ближнем Востоке.»

Вопрос о возвращении евреев в Палестину, который был центральным в идеологии сионизма, в последние десятилетия стал предметом оживленных дискуссий. В то время как некоторые считают, что это является естественным развитием исторического процесса, другие утверждают, что это может привести к новым конфликтам. В этой книге автор подробно рассматривает различные аспекты этой проблемы, включая исторический контекст, политические интересы и культурные аспекты. Книга является ценным источником информации для тех, кто интересуется историей еврейского народа и современной политикой на Ближнем Востоке.

Palestine. It continues all the way up to the Balfour Declaration, which was former prime minister's Lord Arthur Balfour's letter to Baron Walter Rothschild, who was a leader of the British Jewish community. This book was originally written in 1953 and therefore misses out on much of the Arab-Israeli wars.

I found the content to be voluminous and certainly appreciated an in-depth view of what has transpired between Britain and Palestine over such a large period of time. However, I would have liked to have heard more about what was happening in Palestine between the original Hebrew exit and the Crusades and then again, between the end of the final crusade and the British mandate.

Unfortunately, this book largely misses the exodus, the fall of the Roman empire in Palestine, the Byzantine empire, Mohommad's conquest of Jerusalem, the Ummayyads, the rise of the Mamluks and the Ottomans.

The other aspect that was somewhat troubling started in the introduction where Ms. Tuchman explains how after researching this topic she comes down unequivocally on the side of the Jews in this conflict. This is not a great way to start a supposed unbiased view on a topic so filled with controversy, even in the 1950s. This view was apparent throughout as she constantly referred to the Jews as the rightful owners of biblical Canaan, which stretched from the Sinai Peninsula through the Euphrates River. She also looked at all Arabs throughout the Levant and Iraq as 1 homogenous people and comparing the inheritance of the Jews to the inheritance of all of the Arabs.

I would definately recommend this book as a comprehensive view of the relationship between Britain and the Jews to establish the the nation of Israel, with these caveats in mind.

Ted Dettweiler says

This book, a find among the \$1 bargains at The Word bookstore on Milton St. became my introduction to the superb popular historical writer, Barbara Tuchman. If I took it home from the store it was because it promised to enlarge my understanding of history connecting these dots together: Britain's fable of Brutus / Gomer pre-Celt ancestors, early pilgrimages to the Holy Land, the Crusades, the Bible in English, the Puritans, Lord Shaftesbury, Benjamin Disraeli, Lord Kitchener, Theodore Herzl, Zionists, and finally culminating in the Balfour declaration and the British mandate in Palestine.

The writer had me right from the preface when she explained why she finished this book at the Balfour declaration (2nd of November 1917) and the British mandate and left out the subsequent turbulent history that had evolved before this book was published in 1956. She states "As regards the fortunes of the Jews and of Israel, I am not detached but emotionally involved. That may be permissible - or unavoidable - to a journalist... but it invalidates the work of a historian. I found this out when, at the request of the original publisher, I tried indeed to carry the narrative through the Mandate to 1948. It turned into polemic."

It turns out that I have access to other Barbara Tuchman e-books and audio books through the Ontario Library Consortium (thanks to Baysville library) and the Bibliotheque et Archives Nationales de Quebec. I currently have three of these on loan. Let's just say that Barbara Tuchman is a historical writer well worth reading.

James says

Drags a little toward the end, with the murkiness of British politics. Overall, a fascinating read.

Marc A. says

This is Barbara Tuchman's first significant published work, released in 1956. For once my unfortunate combination of slow reading speed and propensity to be distracted from my reading by the pursuit of other avocations (e.g. I'm currently trying to use a computer program to teach myself to play the piano), has worked to my advantage as - at the time I started reading *Bible and Sword* back in April - conflict between Israel and its Palestinian (and other Arab) antagonists was on the back burner of media attention as Secretary of State Kerry struggled without success to restart some kind of peace process for his boss, Pres. Obama. However, as I was nearing the end of this fine read, the Israel/Gaza conflict was a white hot topic across the media spectrum as hundreds of Hamas missiles slammed into Israeli territory daily and a ground invasion of Gaza (that finally came to pass) was imminent.

Even for someone already fairly well versed in the historical antecedents of the current conflict (see my reviews of "A Peace To End All Peace" by David Fromkin, "Righteous Victims" by Benny Morris, and "Jerusalem A Love Story" by Simon Sebag Montefiore), Tuchman's focused take on the single nation, England, that can arguably be said to have raised the very notion of Zionism well before the Jewish people themselves had reached a point where they could conceive of actually doing anything to get themselves back to the only true homeland they had ever had (rather than just sit and absorb endless abuse while waiting for G-d to fulfill his promise to send the Messiah to bring them home), laid the intellectual and political foundation for it, encouraged in significant ways the growth of the Zionist vision by encouraging its early Jewish advocates, injected an open declaration of support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine and gave it the status of an official treaty obligation by making it part of the League of Nations Mandate, but then, succumbed to the demands of "real politics" to cynically renege on the promises and obligations set forth in the Balfour Declaration by denying further Jewish Immigration into Palestine thus prompting Winston Churchill to say: "This is the breach, this is the violation of the pledge, this is the abandonment of the Balfour Declaration, this is the end of the vision, of the hope, of the dream", ultimately leading to the final shame of an English warship firing on the S.S. Exodus, a private vessel filled with Jewish refugees from the horrors of the Holocaust. All this Tuchman brings to light with what would come to be known as her characteristic command of the primary sources, and a writing style that makes real history as readable and arresting as a novel as she imparts, not just a parade of what events occurred, but the all important motivations - the why - as best as it can be understood from the actual thoughts and deeds of the principals.

This would be a perfect time to read this fine book.

Nicholas says

Wonderfully written.

Vince says

The book is a little unfinished for the modern reader as it ends in 1956 and Ms. Tuchman had no way of knowing how the state of Israel would develop. Still the premise and scholarship are both A1. She traces the history of England's connection to Palestine and the Jewish people from mythical pre Roman times right up to the partition of 1947. The twists and turns are fascinating and I recommend this book which is readable even to those who might not go in with a lot of knowledge on the subjects and figures presented.

Trevor says

In the West we like to think that we are somewhat better than the other peoples of the world. At least one of the reasons we give for this, to us at least, self-evident superiority is our Judeo-Christian heritage. This heritage is what we refer to when we need to explain our sense of justice (and it is also often quoted as the actual source of our legal system as well as our systems of government – despite how diverse these are) while also being seen as the sole (soul?) source of our morality. I've always found this to be a very strange thing – not least because it is so evidently not the case. One might just as well say that Socrates is father of modern Biology because in one of the dialogues Plato mentions birds. When it comes to religion we are much more interested in seeds than we are in other endeavours, even when those 'seeds' weren't actually the seeds that grew into the plants proliferating around us. But then, why let details get in the way of what has proven a remarkably reassuring story?

The questionable glories of the Judeo-Christian contribution to morality are, ironically enough, no where more disturbingly contradictory than in the behaviour of both Jews and Christians in what some like to refer to as the 'holy land'. Think I've gone too far? Well, you really do need to look up how the Jews treated the locals when they first turned up in the holy land. That Moses guy even complained when his brethren only killed all the males and all the females that were not virgins; when clearly the 'moral' thing to do was to kill everything: male, female, child, adult and even their animals and then to also burn their homes. Unfortunately, this has been a bit of a repeated theme in the holy land – right down to the present – by both Jews and Christians. The tragedy that is Gaza today would not be possible without the massive US aid Israel receives - more than any other. Morality is a difficult concept in such circumstances and is probably better spoken about in very general terms, rather than dwelling in specifics.

This book is much more partisan than I have found other of Tuchman's books. We are told at least three times from various sources during this book that the local Arabs had turned the garden that was Israel into the wasteland that was Palestine before the Jews returned. This is repeatedly presented as fact and never explained. The motivations of those stating such are never explored – the lives of the local Arabs are passed over as being temporary squatters on someone else's land. No one is expected to pay any attention to their claims nor their lives. In fact, that is the thing that is so surprising about this book – it glories in the return of the wandering Jew, finally able to complete the prayer, 'Next year in Jerusalem' – while completely ignoring any claim hundreds of generations of Palestinian Arabs may have to the same stretch of land.

This is a terribly strange book. It presents itself as a history of the holy land between the Bronze Age and the Treaty of Balfour – but actually, it is a history with an exclusively Western focus. Don't expect to learn anything from this book about the Arabs who lived on this land during the 1900 odd years while the Jews were absent.

I'm really not the right person to review this book. As someone born in Ireland and now living in Australia – I find the whole question of Nationality and Patriotism deeply troubling and (beware of understatement) quite problematic. In fact, whenever YOU use the P word I can only hear the N word. Patriotism, Nationalism – they are all much of a muchness to me while also being among the most frightening of human emotions.

Now, that being said, there is little question that the Jews have been treated unspeakably badly by Christians for a very, very long time. I've never quite understood why Christians have chosen to get quite so upset with Jews. This book reminds us that Jesus was a Jew, as were all of his original followers. In fact, it wasn't really until Paul converted to the Cult of Christ (bringing with him all the passion of an ex-smoker) that the Jews started getting into trouble with the Christians. Again, I've never totally understood this, as even if the Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus (although, I had always thought crucifixions a Roman, rather than Jewish death), given Jesus had to die to become Christ and thus redeem us of our sins, Jews would seem to have had more to be thanked for than punished over. But then again, such are the contortions of religion which I shall never understand.

One thing this book does make clear is how endlessly 'pragmatic' (that is, brutally amoral) people have been over the years in promising the Jews their ancient homeland. Neapolitan had no problem promising Palestine to the Jews, as did numerous British Prime Ministers, but not so much because they felt the Jews had been treated badly, as because they felt the Jews would act in ways favourable to their ambitions in empire building.

I've never really liked the idea that because we have been bad to the Jews for a very long time that should mean we should ship them off somewhere a long, long way out of our reach – as if Jews are a bit like chocolate to someone on a diet, you can't really expect us to not mistreat them if they are right here among us, so the best solution all round is to hide them out of sight from temptation. As an Irishman I also struggle with the idea that centuries of mistreatment of my people by the English automatically entitles me to special treatment. I'm not very keen on the idea of blood rights – as those who claim them tend to need to enforce them over the blood of others.

As I've said, this book is a very partisan one and it has elicited a partisan response from me. My dream, and like all dreams it is based on impossibilities, is that one day there will be no nationalities and consequently no need for racism – if I thought there was anything I could bring that day closer, I would do it with pride. But people so love to be part of groups, people so desire to belong (particularly if those groups can be at the expense of other groups), I have little faith in my dream.
