

Turning Point



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The year 1878 has been considered significant in Bible Student reckoning. It marked the end of the Jewish double or *mishneh* of 1845 years. The first half of favor began with the death of Jacob and blessing of the 12 tribes of Israel and extended to our Lord's death in 33 AD. The second half of disfavor commenced with Jesus' death and extends to the year 1878. Incidentally, this second half of the double also commenced with the death of the founder of the age and identifying of spiritual Israel. Corresponding to the parallel point of our Lord's resurrection, 1878 is also identified as the most likely date for the resurrection of his body members, the sleeping saints. "The Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him." Isa. 40:10; 62:11. This year, 1878, was marked by two events in history: the Berlin Congress of Nations and the founding of the first Jewish settlement in Israel, Peta Tikva.

Just what did the Berlin Congress accomplish and why was it significant? The Berlin Congress was a conference that redrew the map of Europe and reassigned the domains of the Turkish/Ottoman empire **while setting the stage for history ever since**. Much of the negotiating for this congress was done two or three years previous to 1878. The nations came to Berlin to ratify the posturing for power. The decisions made at this congress set the stage that fostered discontent and precipitated World War I and has even extended to the conflicts in Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia (Yugoslavia) today. Most important however, was the positioning of Great Britain for its decision-making role in Palestine which gave greater liberty for Jewish immigration. This was a **marked beginning of Jewish favor**.

The following quotations document this congress as a turning point in world and Middle East history.

A Jewish Homeland

ZWT:November 1887, R:989

"It is not generally recognized, we think, that England has already become the protectorate of Palestine, and indeed all of Turkey's Asiatic provinces, of which it is one. England for a long time has felt a necessity for preserving Turkey for these reasons: first, her wealthy classes are large holders of Turkish bonds; second, if Turkey went to any one of her neighboring nations, or were divided among them, England would get little or none of the spoil, and the other rival nations would thus be lifted more than England into prominence and power in the control of the affairs of Europe; thirdly, and mainly, England realizes that with the Turkish government out of the way, Russian influence would be greatly increased in southern Asia, and would ere long absorb the India Empire, of which England's Queen is Empress, and from which England draws rich revenues in commerce, etc. Hence we find the Royal or Tory party in England strenuously supporting the Turks; and when in 1878 Russia was about to enter Constantinople, England interposed and sent her fleet of gunboats into the harbor. The result was the *Berlin Conference* of June 13, 1878, in which the chief figure was a Hebrew, Lord Beaconsfield [Benjamin Disraeli], Prime Minister of England, and Turkey's affairs were then settled so as to preserve her national existence for the present, and yet so arrange her provinces that in the event of final dismemberment each of the great powers would know which portion they would be expected to seize. It was at this time that all the provinces of Turkey were granted greater religious freedom, and England by secret treaty with Turkey became protector of the Asiatic

provinces. In the language of the historian, Justin McCarthy, “The English government undertook to *guarantee* to Turkey her Asiatic possessions against all invasion, . . . formally pledged herself to defend and secure Turkey against all invasion and aggression, and occupied Cyprus in order to have a more effectual vantage-ground from which to carry on this project.’

“It will be seen, then, that **Palestine is already under England’s care, and accounts for greater laxity on the part of the Turkish government in the enforcement of its laws unfavorable to Jewish interests.**”

DISRAELI by André Maurois, 1928, pages 314-334

“[1877] Russia declared war on Turkey. The Czar sent General Ignatiev on a special mission to England to secure a promise of neutrality... Lord Beaconsfield warned Russia that he would not remain neutral unless the Tsar respected the three points indispensable to the preserving of the Empire: the Suez Canal, the Dardanelles, Constantinople.

“There was another great player who up to that moment had only observed the moves, but was awaiting the moment to enter the contest. That was Prince von Bismarck. Abruptly, on February 19th, he slammed down his cards with a great speech in the Reichstag, a speech that was intentionally obscure, and so very clear. Obligated to choose between Austria and Russia...[Bismarck] sided against Russia. He avowed his distrustedness. The Eastern question was of small import to Germany... What Germany desired was to avoid a conflict. Her role, amidst opposing interests, would be that of ‘the honest broker.’ Naturally the treaty in course of elaboration between Turks and Russians would have to be submitted to the approval of the other European Powers in a Conference, or Congress, which would be held, if they were so willing, at Berlin.

“Lord Beaconsfield...considered the treaty as impossible of acceptance, and informed Schouvaloff that he would attend the Congress only after a direct Anglo-Russian agreement on the gravest points. His conditions were twofold: no Great Bulgaria, and no Russian Armenia. The [Russian] ambassador leapt up: ‘This was depriving Russia of all the fruits of war’... The Prime Minister was anxious to prepare for war... He proposed the calling up of the reserve, a vote of credit, the dispatch of the Fleet to Constantinople.

“At no price did Russia want war with England. She was much enfeebled by her campaigns. She had no fleet. And further, she much preferred an understanding with Beaconsfield than with Bismarck... Beaconsfield was inflexible. So it was war—unless a guarantee could be given to England in the shape of a Gibraltar in the Eastern Mediterranean... Russia accepted everything. **A secret convention was signed with the Sultan, who agreed to cede the island of Cyprus to England, whilst in return England would assure him defensive alliance** in the event of Russia in Armenia pushing beyond Kars and Batum... In Beaconsfield’s eyes, **the most enchanting point in the affair was the acquisition of Cyprus.**

“[1878] An international Congress: To this Conference, intended for the free discussion of a treaty, every State came armed with secret conventions. England had the London agreement with Russia. Turkey knew that she had ceded Cyprus to England, but was ignorant of the Bulgarian agreement. Austria had promises from England and Germany which gave her, without striking a single blow, Bosnia and Herzegovina...

“Bismarck proceeded with military directness. Forthwith, the division of Bulgaria into two parts separated by the line of the Balkans was agreed to without discussion. Then everything went wrong. The Russians had granted the Turks the frontier of the Balkans, and wanted to refuse them the right to defend it or to maintain troops in that part of Bulgaria which had been left to them... An unoccupied Bulgaria would once again be at the mercy of Russia, and Russia would have her access to the Mediterranean.

“Beaconsfield thundered. St. Petersburg must renounce the illusion that the will of England could be circumvented. Gortchakoff grew obstinate. Lord Beaconsfield solemnly declared that the English terms constituted an ultimatum.

“The episode gave Prince Bismarck a high opinion of Lord Beaconsfield... But Bismarck judged himself the superior, as being still more detached, still more cynical... Bismarck observed his vanities, delighted in opposing them, and exploited his failings... They were standing in front of a large map of the world, discussing the question of colonization, to which Bismarck thought it politic to appear opposed.

“During the third week of the Congress a bombshell exploded. The Schouvaloff agreement regarding Armenia had been divulged by an English newspaper, the *Globe*, to which it had been sold by a copying-clerk in the Foreign Office. The effect on English feeling was great. The acquisition of Cyprus was still secret, and no compensation was in sight to balance the Russian conquests in Asia... The next day the English made public the agreement regarding Cyprus.

“A magnificent welcome was arranged for the return of the negotiators in London... At Downing Street, all draped with red, Lord Beaconsfield found an immense sheaf of flowers sent by the Queen. As the cheering went on and on, he had to appear with Lord Salisbury on the balcony. He said to the crown: ‘We have brought you back, I think, Peace with Honour.’”

BIBLE AND SWORD by Barbara Tuchman, 1956, pages 260-269

“Parliament met and, after hearing Disraeli defend his purchase of the Canal as a vital link in the chain of fortresses along the road to India, voted the £4,000,000 without a division. Thereafter the hinterland of the Canal, ‘from the Nile to the Euphrates,’ was to be an area of acute sensitivity to Britain. To hold the Ottoman gates against any rival intruders was now more than ever essential, **unless Britains were prepared to take over the Nile-to-the-Euphrates region herself.**

“**But already there were rumbles from the North. A Bulgarian revolt in 1875 against the Turkish despotism acted on Russia like that ringing of the bell that makes the dog’s mouth salivate.** It has set ‘everything again in flame,’ wrote Disraeli, ‘and I really believe the Eastern Question that haunted Europe for a century...will fall to my lot to encounter—dare I say settle?’ The ‘peace with honour’ that he brought back with such renown from the Congress of Berlin was the result of this encounter. But to ‘settle’ the Eastern Question was beyond even Disraeli’s power—beyond, it seems, any human power, **for it still haunts the world today.** However, one result of Disraeli’s efforts was the acquisition of Cyprus, 150 miles off the coast of Palestine, as *quid pro quo* for the British guarantee of Turkey’s domains in Asia. The Russo-Turkish War of 1877 provided the opportunity, but, on the useful principle of sidestepping all Balkan wars whenever possible, let us hasten to its conclusion. Turkey was beaten, Russia occupied her European provinces, and the powers called a Congress to limit Russia’s gains.

“Lord Salisbury was the architect of the secret treaty by which Cyprus was acquired and Turkey’s dominions in Asia guaranteed... ‘We shall have to choose between allowing Russia to dominate over Syria and Mesopotamia *or taking the country for ourselves*, and either alternative is formidable.’ I have inserted the italics to mark a moment in history when a decision was being made, a return to the goal from which Richard I, hiding his eyes from Jerusalem, had turned back. Alone at his Foreign Office desk, the black-bearded, frock-coated Salisbury writes it down, his pen scratching in the silence of the room. This alternative, though not then acted on, became inevitable from then on.

“For the moment Salisbury proposed, instead of either alternative, a defensive alliance with Turkey, ‘but for that purpose it is absolutely and indispensably necessary that she [England] should be nearer at hand than Malta.’ Four days sail from Malta to the Syrian coast makes ‘utterly impossible efficient and prompt military action.’ The Turks must cede Cyprus as the price of an alliance.

“On June 4, 1878 the Cyprus Convention was signed pledging Britain to defend ‘by force of arms’ any attempt by Russia ‘at any future time to take possession of any further territories of H.I.M. the Sultan in Asia’—and engaging the Sultan to cede Cyprus ‘to be occupied and administered by England.’

“With this document safely in their pockets Disraeli and Salisbury went off to Berlin to join the other European powers in tightening an international noose that forced Russia to disgorge the gains ill gotten from defeated Turkey... When all delicate issues of the Congress were finally wrapped up in treaties, Disraeli revealed to a stunned but generally appreciative Europe the existence of the Cyprus Convention. It was hard not to applaud this one more daring stroke of the old master that so largely restored British prestige in the East.

“Evidence that Disraeli intended to bring the question of Palestine, together with a plan for restoring the Jews, before the Congress has recently been brought forward. Its authenticity is dubious.* On the basis of newly found memoirs of the period a claim is made that Disraeli was the author of an anonymous German pamphlet published in Vienna in 1877 under the title *Die jüdische Frage in der orientalischen Frage* (The Jewish Question within the Eastern Question)* which proposed that in **any reappportionment of the Turkish territories following a collapse of the Ottoman Empire Palestine should be given to the Jews**, and further that Disraeli proposed to put such a plan on the Agenda of the Congress but was dissuaded by Bismarck. The evidence has been published by Dr. N.W. Gelber in a Hebrew brochure, subsequently translated by T.H. Gaster as *Lord Beaconsfield’s Plan for a Jewish state*, New York, 1947.”

*[Whether Disraeli was the author of this pamphlet or not, he was clearly successful in positioning Britain as the defender of the ancient homeland of the Jews. As early as 1847 he published a novel with *Tancred* as its title. “This was the story of a young Englishman of noble family who makes a pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulcher in an attempt to understand ‘the Asian mystery.’ It served mainly as a pretext for the author to develop his theories of Judaism and the Church. To Disraeli the mission of the Church was to defend, in a materialist society, certain Semitic principles expounded in the Old and New Testaments, the chief of which was the belief in the role of the Divine and Spiritual in this world... In Beaconsfield’s eyes, the most enchanting point in the affair [Congress] was the acquisition of Cyprus. Thirty years earlier, in *Tancred*, he had made clear announcement of this. It pleased him thus to pass his romances and his dreams into history.” —DISRAELI, pages 200, 323]

Setting the Stage for War and Hope

BALKAN GHOSTS by Robert Kaplan, 1993, pages 26, 53-55, 62-63, 207

“At this late and critical juncture in Bulgarian history, the Russians arrived. A Russian army swept through Bulgaria in 1877 and 1878, liberating Bulgaria from Ottoman subjection in order to create a pro-Russian, Bulgarian buffer state against the Turks. **Although the 1878 Treaty of Berlin forced newly independent Bulgaria to cede Thrace and Macedonia back to Turkey—triggering a renewed outbreak of guerrilla war—Bulgarian gratitude to the Russians never entirely dissipated.**

“The wealth of Habsburg Vienna and Budapest was built on the broken backs of their Slav subjects... Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, although modern Croats like to discount it, their forebears were attracted by the prospect of a ‘South Slav (Yugoslav)’ federation with the Serbs, independent of Austria-Hungary. **This feeling grew in 1878, when, at the Congress of Berlin, the Habsburgs grabbed the adjacent territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina (which had just freed itself from the Turks) and soon demonstrated that they could rule just as viciously as the Turks.** In 1908, the

Habsburgs formally annexed Bosnia, whose population consisted of Muslim Slavs and Croats, as well as Serbs.

“Although tolerable on ethnic grounds, the union of Macedonia with Bulgaria created a new and preeminently powerful pro-Russian state in the Balkans that Great Britain, Germany, and (especially) Germany’s ally, Austria-Hungary—with its own Balkan holdings to defend—could not accept. The treaty of San Stefano had to be amended. Jolted by this reality, the German Chancellor Prince Otto von Bismarck-Schonhausen convened a meeting in June 1878 to solve this and other Great Power problems; it became known in history as the Congress of Berlin.

“The Russians did not leave Berlin unhappy. Bismarck compensated them for the loss of Macedonia with new lands in Bessarabia, taken from the Romanians, and in northeastern Anatolia, taken from the Turks. Moreover, the Treaty of Berlin granted full independence to Russia’s Slavic allies, the Serbs. And to compensate Habsburg Austria-Hungary for this new provocation, **Bismarck arranged for Bosnia, the province next door to Serbia, with a Serbian population that also wanted independence, to be transferred from Ottoman rule to Habsburg rule—the immediate cause of World War I. Great Britain, for its part, received from the Turks the island of Cyprus.**

“In October 1908, Bulgaria’s King Ferdinand proclaimed his country’s complete independence... That same week, the island of Crete (still part of Turkey) voted for union with Greece, and the Austrian Habsburgs annexed the Turkish province of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which they had been administering since the conclusion of the Congress of Berlin [1878]... This development, in turn, encouraged Austria-Hungary to annex Bosnia, **inflicting on its Serbian population a tyranny so great that a Bosnian Serb would later assassinate the Habsburg Archduke and ignite World War I.**

“During the years of 1909 through 1912, all three of these states [Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece] built up their armies. In October 1912, they declared war on the Ottoman Empire... The allies’ principle goal was to liberate Macedonia. **The First Balkan War ended in December 1912 with the dissolution of Turkey in Europe.**”

“**In Transylvania, the region lying on the other side of the Carpathians, within the sphere of Central Europe, Romanian peasants labored at the bottom of medieval apartheid system, oppressed by Hungarians and ethnic Germans. ‘The Romanian peasants are like *mamaliga* [corn mush], goes a local proverb; ‘they can be boiled forever without exploding.’ But whenever the peasants did explode, as in the Transylvanian peasant revolts of 1437 and 1514, and the revolts of Wallachia and Moldavia in 1784, the results were horrific... The pattern of Romanian history, as the anti-Ceausecu revolution of 1989 revealed, remains unchanged: long periods of docility interrupted by brief but spectacular eruptions of violence.**

“Turks and Hungarians weren’t the only predators violating local peasants. In The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, czarist Russia invaded Romania half a dozen times. And in 1878, after Romanian troops had helped Russia liberate Bulgaria from the Turkish yoke, Bismarck’s Congress of Berlin thanked them by insisting that they cede Bessarabia to the czar. In Romania, writes the Paris-based columnist William Pfaff, ‘there has always been a popular familiarity with betrayal, and assumption of failure.’

“**The Russian liberation was one of the few happy moments in Bulgaria’s history since the Middle Ages... As Guillermo mentioned, gratitude toward czarist Russia did not prevent Bulgaria from fighting against Russia in World War I.**”

A PEACE TO END ALL PEACE by David Fromkin, 1989, pages 33, 269-270, 281-283

“For decades and indeed centuries before the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, the native regimes of the Middle East had been, in every sense, losing ground to Europe. The Khanates of Central Asia, including Khiva and Bukhara, had fallen to Russia, as had portions of the Persian Empire. **The Arab sheikhdoms along the Gulf coast route from Suez to India had been brought under British sway; and Cyprus and Egypt, though formally still attached to Turkey, were in fact occupied and administered by Britain.** The Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907 brought Afghanistan into the British sphere, and divided most of Persia between Britain and Russia. In the Moslem Middle East, only the Ottoman Empire effectively retained its independence—though precariously, as its frontiers came under pressure.

“In the mid-seventeenth century, two English Puritans residing in Holland—Joanna and Ebenezer Cartwright—petitioned their governments ‘That this Nation of England, with the inhabitants of the Netherlands, shall be the first and the readiest **to transport Israel’s sons and daughters in their ships to the Land promised by their forefathers**, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob for an everlasting Inheritance.’ Guided by the Scriptures, the Puritans believed that the advent of the Messiah would occur once the people of Judea were restored to their native land.

“The idea recurred: in the mid-nineteenth century, the social reformer Anthony Cooper, who became Earl of Shaftesbury, inspired a powerful evangelical movement within the Church of England that aimed at bringing the Jews back to Palestine, converting them to Christianity, and hastening the Second Coming. Shaftesbury also inspired Palmerston, the Foreign Secretary and his relation by marriage, to extend British consular protection to the Jews in Palestine.

“According to the leading authority on Palmerston’s diplomacy, **his policy ‘became connected with a mystical idea, never altogether lost in the nineteenth century, that Britain was to be the chosen instrument of God to bring back the Jews to the Holy Land.’**

“In 1914 the entry of the Ottoman Empire into the war appeared to have brought about the political circumstances in which the Zionist dream at last could be realized. ‘What is to prevent the Jews having Palestine and restoring a real Judea?’ asked H.G. Wells in an open newspaper letter penned the moment that Turkey came into the war.

“A similar thought occurred soon afterward to Sir Herbert Samuel, Postmaster General in Asquith’s Cabinet, one of the leaders of the Liberal Party, and the first person of the Jewish faith to sit in a British Cabinet. In January 1915 he sent a memorandum to Prime Minister Asquith proposing that Palestine should become a British protectorate—and urging the advantages of encouraging large-scale Jewish settlement there. The Prime Minister had just been reading *Tancred*—a novel by Benjamin Disraeli, the nineteenth-century British leader (baptized a Christian, but born of a Jewish family), who advocated Jewish return to Palestine—and Asquith confided that Samuel’s memorandum ‘reads almost like a new edition of *Tancred* brought up to date.’

Until the time of Disraeli, the creation of the empire had been a haphazard and, it was said, an absent-minded affair. Disraeli gave it glamor and focused attention on it.

“General Smuts [1917] had expressed very decided views as to the strategical importance of Palestine to the British Empire.”... With the addition of Palestine and Mesopotamia, the Cape Town to Suez stretch could be linked up with the stretch of territory that ran through British controlled Persia and the Indian Empire to Burma, Malaya, and the two great Dominions in the Pacific—Australia and New Zealand. As of 1917, **Palestine was the key missing link that could join together the parts of the British Empire so that they would form a continuous chain from the Atlantic to the middle of the Pacific.**

“As a Boer, steeped in the Bible, Smuts strongly supported the Zionist idea when it was raised in the Cabinet. As he later pointed out, the ‘people of South Africa and especially the older Dutch population has been brought up almost entirely on Jewish tradition. The Old Testament...has been the very marrow of Dutch culture here in South Africa.’ Like Lloyd George, he had grown up believing that ‘the day will come when the words of the prophets will become true, and Israel will return to its own land,’ and **he fully agreed with Lloyd George that the Jewish homeland should be established in Palestine under British auspices.** Whether or not he originated the idea, Smuts was responsible for finding the formula—acceptable to Woodrow Wilson—under which countries like Britain would assume responsibility for the administration of territories such as Palestine and Mesopotamia: they would govern pursuant to a ‘mandate’ from the future League of Nations.”

Prophetic Perspective

The gem of truth to be found in this chain of history is that while this congress, in 1878, was largely motivated by a desire of European powers for greater prestige and dominance, yet a few key figures had an eye toward a Jewish homeland. The decisions made at this crucial moment in history resulted in two world wars. These wars decimated ancient empires and the struggle has continued in national and ethnic conflicts to the present. Yet providentially, this same repositioning of power opened the door for the Jewish return, resettlement and eventual formation of a Jewish state.

“If their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be, but life from the dead?” Rom. 11:15 (NAS)

— Jerry Leslie



Berlin Congress of Nations 1878

