Creation of the State of Israel

Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, the British assumed control of Palestine. In November 1917, the British government issued the Balfour Declaration, announcing its intention to facilitate the "establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people." In 1922, the League of Nations granted Britain a mandate over Palestine which included, among other things, provisions calling for the establishment of a Jewish homeland, facilitating Jewish immigration and encouraging Jewish settlement on the land.

The Arabs were opposed to Jewish immigration to Palestine and stepped up their attacks against the Jews. Following an increase in Arab attacks, the British appointed a royal commission in 1936 to investigate the Palestine situation. The Peel Commission recommended the partition of the country between Arabs and Jews. The Arabs rejected the idea while the Jews accepted the principle of partition.

At the end of World War II, the British persisted in their immigration restrictions and Jewish survivors of the Holocaust were violently turned away from the shores of Palestine. The Jewish Agency and the Haganah continued to smuggle Jews into Palestine. Underground cells of Jews, most notably the Irgun and Lehi, engaged in open warfare against the British and their installations.

The British concluded that they could no longer manage Palestine and handed the issue over to the United Nations. On November 29, 1947, after much debate and discussion, the UN recommended the partition of Palestine into two states one
Jewish and one Arab. The Jews accepted the UN resolution while the Arabs rejected it.

Meanwhile, since the time of the British Mandate, the Jewish community in Palestine had been forming political, social and economic institutions that governed daily life in Palestine and served as a pre-state infrastructure. Zionist leader David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973) served as head of the pre-state government.

The British mandate over Palestine officially terminated at midnight, May 14, 1948. Earlier in the day, at 4:00 p.m., David Ben-Gurion proclaimed the creation of the State of Israel and became its first prime minister. Longtime advocate of Zionism in Britain Chaim Weizmann (1874-1952) became Israel’s first president. On May 15, the United States recognized the State of Israel and the Soviet Union soon followed suit.

The fledgling State of Israel was faced with many challenges. While fighting a war of survival with the Arab states who immediately invaded the new nation, Israel had to also absorb the shiploads of immigrants coming in daily to the Jewish homeland. Many were penniless refugees from Europe broken in body and in spirit. They needed immediate health and social services in addition to acculturation to their new home.