

# Theodor Herzl Leaving the Synagogue in Basel on the Occasion of the Sixth Zionist Congress (1903)

## Abstract

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Austro-Hungarian Jewish journalist, editor, and political activist Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) worked as a correspondent and later as an editor for the liberal Viennese newspaper *Neue Freie Presse*. Although Herzl had encountered antisemitism as a student at the University of Vienna in the early 1880s, it was not until the Dreyfus Affair of the mid-1890s that he reached the firm conclusion that Jewish assimilation into European society was neither possible nor desirable. (Herzl was a correspondent in Paris around the time of Dreyfus's arrest and would later experience mobs chanting antisemitic slogans.) In 1896, Herzl published the book *The Jewish State*, which advocated the founding of an independent Jewish state and emigration to an independent Jewish homeland.

The following year, Herzl organized the First Zionist Congress, which was held in Basel, Switzerland, and aimed to advance Zionist political goals and strategies. It was there that he was elected president of the World Zionist Organization. Herzl would prove to be a tireless campaigner for the Zionist cause, raising funds, founding the Zionist newspaper *Die Welt*, and lobbying foreign dignitaries. At the Sixth Zionist Congress (1903), shown below, he proposed Uganda as a temporary Jewish refuge, especially for Russian Jews fleeing pogroms. The proposal was met with a storm of protest, however, and was rejected the following year.

In 1904, Herzl died of heart disease at the age of forty-one. At the time of his death, his diplomatic efforts had produced few concrete results. Be that as it may, Herzl transformed Zionism into an organized and internationally recognized movement. It is perhaps worth noting that the Zionist movement itself was symptomatic of a longstanding debate among German Jews throughout the nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries about the possibility and desirability of assimilation. The subject remained highly controversial throughout the First World War and into the Weimar period.

## Source

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