

## The Zionist Movement and the Modern Rebirth of the Nation of Israel

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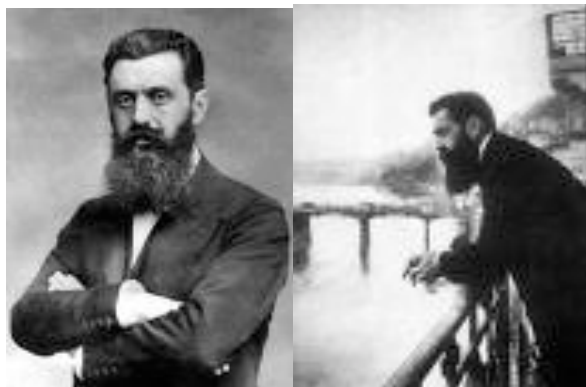
*“For I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you  
into your own land.... And I will give you a new heart and a new spirit  
I will put within you”  
—Ezekiel 36:24, 26*

*This chapter will tell the story of the modern Zionist movement and the rebirth of the State of Israel in the ancient Land of Israel (“Eretz Yisra’el” in Hebrew). The Zionist Movement was the political movement whose goal was to establish a homeland for the Jewish people in “Eretz Israel,” secured by public law. The core idea of the Zionist Movement is in Hebrew “Kibbutz Galuyot”— the “Ingathering of Exiles.” It embodied the ancient and enduring hope, voiced by the prophets of Israel, of the dispersed Jewish people for a return from the four corners of the earth to their ancestral homeland.*

*For the many hundreds, indeed thousands of years of their long Diaspora and in all the lands to which they had been scattered, the Jewish people never forgot about the land of Zion and Jerusalem. In all those many generations, each year at the end of the Passover meal, they declared their hope and prayer, “Next Year in Jerusalem!” As they were going into Exile, God told the people through Jeremiah the prophet, “I have loved you with an everlasting love” (Jeremiah 31:3). In God’s sovereign purposes and through His everlasting love, by the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, the time had come when God by His grace began to fulfill His promises to bring the people of Israel back to the land of Zion.*

*We will look at the life-stories of three of the most influential leaders in this historic restoration movement— **Theodore Herzl, Eliezer Ben Yehudah and David Ben Gurion**. A nation needs a Land, a Language and Law to be viable. These three persons were instrumental in restoring the provision of these three elements, respectively, to the new Jewish state. Each of these men carried a strong sense of destiny.*

### Story - Theodore Herzl (1860-1904): The Seer of the Jewish State



Theodore (Benjamin Ze'ev) Herzl was born to a Jewish family in Budapest, Hungary in 1860. When he was eighteen years old, his family moved to Vienna, Austria-Hungary. Young Theodore was very intelligent and prepared for a law career. After a short time practicing law, he moved into journalism and worked as a correspondent for a newspaper in Paris, France.

While reporting for the newspaper in 1894, Theodore followed the story of the French Jewish Army Captain Alfred Dreyfus, who was falsely accused of spying for Germany. Captain Dreyfus was made to stand trial and was stripped of his rank, and convicted of treason. Dreyfus was sent to the penal colony, Devil's Island, in Guiana.

There were mass rallies in Paris following the Dreyfus trial, with many chanting "Death to the Jews!" When Herzl saw these crowds and heard these chants, it left a deep impression on him. Theodore thought, "*France is the center of civilization! This is where the great Revolution happened, the 'Rights of Man' charter proclaimed, and Napoleon had called the rabbis of leaders of the Jewish community together in Paris to assure us of equality, and freedom! If this happens here, there is no hope for the Jews in Europe!*" He soon grew to believe that anti-Semitism could never be defeated or prevented or cured and that the only way to avoid it was the establishment of a Jewish homeland, a Jewish national state. His vision for a Jewish homeland grew with great intensity and passion within him.

Herzl was a writer, so he began to write about his vision for a Jewish state. By 1896, Herzl had written his most famous book, *The Jewish State (Der Judenstaat* in the original German). Herzl argued in his book that "the Jewish Question" would remain an issue until solved on a political level by the Jewish people once again establishing a country of their own. When his book was translated into English, Herzl became the leading spokesman for Zionism.

Theodore traveled widely visiting Jewish communities throughout Europe. There were Zionist groups and parties forming in Europe and Russia (where violent pogroms were taking place and Jews were murdered) who were also dreaming of a return to the land of their forefathers, then called "Palestine." Soon Herzl's leadership was acclaimed throughout Zionist Jewry. Herzl traveled constantly for the Zionist cause. The number of his supporters grew rapidly and they worked night and day, inspired by his example.

He began to plan the First Zionist Congress, which he convened in Basel, Switzerland in 1897. Jewish leaders from all over Europe attended. Theodore was elected president, a position he held until his death in 1904. For the next six years these Zionist congresses met under Herzl's leadership.

Palestine was then under the control of the Turkish Ottoman Empire and ruled by the Sultan Abdul Hamid II. Herzl was able to arrange a meeting with the Sultan in Istanbul in 1898, to present a proposal to him for a Jewish national homeland in Palestine. The Turkish Sultan refused to grant the land, saying, "*If one day the Islamic state falls apart then you can have Palestine for free, but as long as I am alive I would rather have my flesh be cut up than cut out Palestine from the Muslim land.*"

Herzl did not give up on the vision that burned in his heart. He worked tirelessly, overworked, to the point of ruining his health and his family life to achieve the goals of the Zionist movement—to build support for the new Jewish national homeland.

Two of Herzl's famous sayings are— "*In Basel I founded the Jewish state. Maybe in five years, certainly in fifty, everyone will realize it.*" ... and this challenge left

to his many Jewish followers, regarding a new state of Israel— *“If you will it, it is no fairy tale!”* This became a popular slogan of the Zionist movement.

Theodore Herzl died of heart failure at the age of 44. He stated in his will that he wanted the simplest of funerals, with no speeches or flowers. He stated, *“I wish to be buried beside my father, and to lie there until the Jewish people shall take my remains to Palestine.”* In 1949, they did. His remains were removed from Vienna and were reburied in Jerusalem.

## Lessons

**1 God spoke to Israel in exile, through Ezekiel the prophet, promising that He would bring them back to the Land.** He said to them while they in the Babylonian Exile, *“I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face”* (Ezekiel 20:35). The “wilderness of the peoples” refers to the worldwide Diaspora of the Jewish people that ensued after the Babylonian exile and continued until through the Zionist movement they began to return to the Land. *“Behold, I will take the people of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side, and bring them to their own land”* (Ezekiel 37:21).

**2 The return from Babylon under Zerubabel, Nehemiah and Ezra did not completely fulfill these prophecies.** A relatively small number of Jews, just under 50,000 Jews returned at that time (see Nehemiah 7, which lists those who returned, totaled in verse 66). The return began at that time; it resumed and picked up pace in the twentieth century, and continues as you read this. Most of the Jewish people stayed in Babylon and continued to spread out across the world. But God said, *“You, O Mountains of Israel, you will put forth your branches and bear your fruit for my people Israel, for they will soon come home. For behold, I am for you... And I will multiply people on you, the whole house of Israel, all of it.”* (Ezekiel 36:8-10) This return— *“from every side”* of *“the whole house of Israel, all of it”* has been set in motion by the Zionist movement and will one day be completed.

**3 It is the church’s responsibility to align herself with God’s purposes and prayerfully support this ongoing restoration of Israel** - The apostle Peter later spoke of the coming, *“restoration of all things spoken of by his holy prophets since the world began”* (Acts 3:21). The Hebrew prophets speak extensively about the return and restoration of Israel. The final phase will be spiritual restoration to God through their embracing Messiah Yeshua, when *“ I will give you a new heart and a new spirit...And I will put my Spirit within you...”* (Ezekiel 36: 26).

**4 Beginning in 1300, the Ottoman Turkish empire expanded to rule over much of Middle East, North Africa, and southern and eastern Europe at its peak in 1700. The Land of Israel was then called Palestine and was acquired by the non-Arab Turkish Ottomans in 1517.** The Ottomans ruled until defeated by the Great

Britain in 1918. Palestine was an unimportant district in the empire. Jewish migration to Turkish ruled Palestine was slowly increasing throughout the nineteenth century, as European Jewish philanthropists such as Moses Montefiore and Edmund de Rothschild helped persecuted and impoverished Jews find settlement there. They were not intending to create a political entity there. Jewish people have lived in the Promised Land continually since the time of Joshua, though at times in very small numbers. But the first modern Jewish settlers did not arrive until the 1870s. In 1880, there were about 80,000 Jews in Palestine.

**5 The first collective farm in modern Israel** - In 1878, the first collective farm, or “moshav” called “Petach Tikva” (Opening of Hope” in Hebrew) was established. Petach Tikva is still a city today in Israel. The goal of these early pioneers was to bring the Jews back to the soil, to work the land. Few Jews had been involved in farming since the Middle Ages. But these pioneers knew that if there was ever going to be a Jewish homeland, Jewish farmers would be needed for the homeland to feed itself. The Zionist pioneers developed another form of collective farm call a “kibbutz”. Many “kibbutzim” (plural) were established throughout the land. These were communal farms, on the socialist model, where meals were shared communally, and childcare was done communally. This was effective strategy for at least two reasons: there could be a better division of labor, and more security from Arab attack in such strong communities.

**6 Herzl is considered the founder of the Zionist movement, which birthed the modern state of Israel.** His birthday is commemorated each year in the modern State of Israel, one week after Israel’s Independence Day.

**7 The modern Zionist movement was a political, largely secular national movement for the re-establishment of a new Jewish sovereign nation-state.** It was not a religious Jewish movement, based on the religion of Judaism. He is “the Seer of the Jewish State,” the one whose vision for the new Jewish state was to be finally realized.

**8 Herzl united the Zionist Movement** - He did not secure a charter for a Jewish national homeland in his lifetime. All of his intense political activity for Zionism was condensed into about eight years (1896-1904). During this time, he achieved a remarkable feat— he united the splintered parties of the Zionist movement—the secular, religious, socialists and capitalists— around the common vision for the establishment of Jewish state in the land of Israel. At the First Zionist Congress, in 1897, they established the Zionist Organization, whose name was changed in 1960 to the “World Zionist Organization” (WZO).

**9 Herzl’s last literary work, written in 1902, was a novel devoted to Zionism, entitled “Altneuland” (“Old New Land” in English).** In it, Herzl described an ideal new society, a kind of socialist utopia that would be the realization of the Zionist Dream. Herzl was deeply influenced by the German Enlightenment, so his vision was

not a religious vision. This society would combine modern Jewish culture with the best of the European heritage. It would be a compassionate and advanced society, using science and technology to develop the Land. In the novel he described a “Palace of Peace” built in Jerusalem where international disputes would be settled. At the same time a Jewish temple would be built but on modern principles. His society would have no conflicts between Jewish and Arabs. He did not envision the Jewish state being religious, but there would be equal respect for all religions. It is in this secularized sense that Herzl envisioned Israel becoming “a light to the nations,” as an exemplary modern “enlightened” state.

**10 “The Uganda Program”** - Herzl secured a meeting in Palestine with Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany in 1898, to ask his support for a Jewish state in Palestine. The Kaiser dismissed him with anti-Semitic remarks. Herzl then turned to Great Britain, and received a concrete offer from the British government proposing a Jewish autonomous region in east Africa, in Uganda. Because of the terrible pogroms in Russia in 1903, Herzl proposed the British “Uganda Program” at the Sixth Zionist Congress in 1903, as a temporary refuge for Jews from Russia in immediate danger, stating this would not affect the ultimate aim of Zionism for a Jewish State in “Eretz Israel.” This proposal almost split the Zionist movement, and the “Uganda Program” was finally rejected at the Seventh Zionist Congress in 1905, after Herzl’s death. This showed how deeply connected the Land of Israel is to the Jewish people— Uganda is not Zion. Neither Uganda, nor any other nation would do; only Eretz Israel.

**11 Tel Aviv was founded in 1909** – A “tel” refers to an earthen mound where ancient civilization or city had been, and archaeological excavation is done. “Aviv” is the Hebrew word for “spring.” So, alluding to Herzl’s “Altneuland,” Tel Aviv is built partly on the ruins of ancient Jaffa, and is a new city. It was the first all-Jewish city in 2000 years.

**12 The Major Jewish Immigration Waves** – Zionist immigration to Israel is called “Aliyah” (Hebrew for “going up”). One always goes up to Zion, never “down to,” or “over to” Zion. “Aliyot” is the plural of “aliyah.” There were five major aliyot before the founding of the State of Israel in 1948.

**These were:**

- 1) *The First Aliyah (1882-1903)*- Mostly from Russia, and were country people and so founded new agricultural settlements. Many of these were and are called pioneers (“chalutzim” in Hebrew).
- 2) *The Second Aliyah (1904-1914)*- Mostly Socialist Zionists from East Europe. They began the kibbutz movement (collective farms, larger and more collective than a moshav), and adopted modern Hebrew as their language.
- 3) *The Third Aliyah (1919-1923)*- Mostly from Russia and East Europe, in the wake of World War I. They continued to establish kibbutzim (plural for kibbutz), and some urban centers.

4) *The Fourth Aliyah (1924-1929)*- About 60,000 mainly urban Jews from Poland, escaping anti-Semitism, contribute to the rapid growth of Tel Aviv and other cities.

5) *The Fifth Aliyah (1929-1939)*- Mostly German refugees, escaping Nazism. Many were educated professionals. These 165,000 immigrants were the first large scale influx from central and Western Europe.

**13 The Balfour Declaration (1917) and the Establishment of the State of Israel (1948)** – Great Britain, which controlled Palestine after World War I, formed an official government policy, written by the British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour, and known as the “Balfour Declaration,” which stated, *“His Majesty's government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, ... .”* The Balfour Declaration is of immense importance in the history of modern Israel; it was the stake in the ground, the anchor cast, making the Return to Zion more than just a dream. In 1948, Israel declared its independence and statehood. Though Herzl did not live to see it, but his vision was realized.

**14 Herzl is highly honored in modern Israel** - Every fair size town in Israel has a “Herzl Street.” And there is even a whole town named after him, called “Herzliya.”

**15 Mount Herzl** - Herzl’s remains were brought to Israel in **1949** and buried on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem. The “Mount Herzl National Cemetery” is the national cemetery of the State of Israel to this day (comparable to the “Arlington National Cemetery” for the United States). Many famous Jewish and Israeli figures are buried there.

## Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion -Herzl

1. What was the title of Herzl’s most famous book? What year did he write it? What did he argue for in the book? What was his vision?
2. Why did Herzl believe it was no longer possible for Jews to live in Europe?
3. Write a paragraph, based on Ezekiel, arguing that the return to Zion, to the Land of Israel was and is a fulfillment of prophecy.
4. What was remarkable about Herzl’s leadership of the Zionist movement?
5. When and where was the first great gathering of the world Zionist movement? What was it called?
6. What great power or empire declared its intent to support a homeland in Palestine for the Jewish people? What was the declaration called? What year was it declared as policy?
7. Why did the Zionist pioneers establish the communal farms called “kibbutzim”?

## Story - Eliezer Ben Yehudah (1858-1922): The Reviver of Hebrew as a Spoken Language



**Eliezer Ben Yehudah ..... His wife helping with his work**

Eliezer Ben Yehudah was born in Luzki, Lithuania in 1858 as Eliezer Perelman to an Orthodox Jewish family. He was raised in the orthodox Jewish way, nurtured in Hebrew at a very early age. He was a bright boy with high ideals and showed promise of becoming a rabbi. So at age thirteen he was sent to a yeshiva (a rabbinical school) in the nearby city to prepare to become a rabbi. Eliezer was a serious student and worked hard, excelling in his studies. One of his rabbis was a secret “maskil,” a follower of the Enlightenment (the Jewish Enlightenment was called the “Haskalah”). Through the influence of this rabbi, Eliezer became a “free thinker,” questioning and doubting the authority of Orthodox faith and practice.

Yet though Eliezer questioned religion, he also became more and more of a convinced Zionist. He had a growing desire to go live in the land of Israel. When he was seventeen, he had a powerful experience, an overwhelming revelation that changed the course of his life. He said, “... *it was as if the heavens had suddenly opened and a clear incandescent light flashed before my eyes, and a mighty inner voice sounded in my ears: the renascence of Israel on its ancestral soil!*” He wrote this in the cover of his dictionary. This vision burned in his heart, and he later wrote, “*the more the nationalist concept grew in me, the more I realized how important a common language is to a nation.*” He thus dedicated himself to his goal— “*Israel in its own land, with its own language.*” So he decided to move to Paris and go to medical school so he would have a means of support when he settled in Israel. He contracted a mild case of tuberculosis while in Paris.

Eliezer achieved his desire to move to Jerusalem in 1881. He had met Deborah Jonas when a young student in Lithuania. He resumed a friendship with her, romance ensued, and they were married before setting out for Jerusalem. He and his new wife determined that from the time they arrived in Jerusalem, they would speak only Hebrew with every Jew he met; not Turkish, Arabic, Parsi, French or English, *only Hebrew!* When he and Deborah disembarked from the boat in Jaffa, Eliezer talked to a Jewish moneychanger, a Jewish innkeeper, and a Jewish waggoner, all in Hebrew. Together, Eliezer and Deborah established the first Hebrew-speaking home in Eretz Israel. In order to identify more with the Jewish people, the couple changed their names from Pearlman

to “Ben-Yehudah” (“son of Judah” in English). And their son, Ben-Zion (“son of Zion” in English) who later became known by his pen name, Itamar Ben Avi, was born in 1882. He became the first child in modern times to be nurtured with Hebrew as his mother tongue.

Eliezer was a strict father in this matter of “only Hebrew.” When people visited their home that did not speak Hebrew, he would send Itamar to his room so that he would not hear and pick up foreign languages. Once Eliezer returned home, and heard his wife singing a lullaby to their young son in Russian. He rebuked her firmly, saying “*Speak and sing only Hebrew to the child!*” Ben-Yehudah and his Hebrew-speaking family became a living legend, and an example for all Jewish people of the revival of the Hebrew language.

Soon after arriving in Jerusalem, Eliezer was asked to become a teacher at the *Alliance Israelite Universelle School*. He agreed on condition that his courses would be taught in Hebrew. It was the first modern school to offer secular subjects classes in Hebrew language.

Sadly, Deborah died of tuberculosis in 1991. Her younger sister soon offered to marry Eliezer and care for his two small children. She took the Hebrew name “Hemda” and was totally supportive of Eliezer’s calling and work. Eliezer was convinced it was vitally important to his life task to create a Dictionary of all Hebrew words. Think for a moment about the immensity of this task— he set himself to record every Hebrew word, from the earliest Hebrew to the present. But that was the easiest part. He also envisioned inventing new words to represent everything in current life experience, which did not exist in the Hebrew Bible. There would be many volumes. Each volume required funding. Hemda raised funds for the project, making appeals to whoever would listen to her, especially to the affluent and influential in the worldwide Jewish community. So the work of the Dictionary continued. The couple worked tirelessly together - he experiencing constant fatigue and angst over whether the funds could be raised, and struggling with his limited strength to continue on with the work; and she, with a steely and unshakeable determination to somehow obtain the necessary funds and so make possible the fulfillment of her husband's dream.

In 1922, Ben-Yehudah felt so honored and gratified that he succeeded in attaining the decision from Sir Herbert Samuel, the British High Commissioner for Palestine, to make Hebrew one of the three official languages of Palestine. Only a month later, he succumbed to the tuberculosis that had stalked him since his days in Paris. But Eliezer Ben-Yehudah was a blessed man to be able to see his vision and life goal become a reality— “*Israel in its own land, with its own language.*”

## Lessons

**16 Eliezer Ben Yehudah is known as the father of Modern Hebrew.** His life’s work was to revive and renew the Hebrew language to replace Yiddish and other national languages used by the Jewish people in the Diaspora. Hebrew was not a spoken, or “living language” for every day use when he was born; it was strictly the holy language used in synagogue and for religious purposes. Ben-Yehudah understood that for a nation to be revived in its own land, it needed to have its own



language and to develop culture and literature in that language, as well as use it in everyday matters. He knew that the Jewish people must have their own language in order to have a distinct national identity.

**17 Under Ben-Yehudah's vision, leadership, and the campaign he led, the Hebrew language was revived as a spoken language.** Within a period of about forty years, a biblical generation, a core of young, enthusiastic Hebrew-speakers was formed. This is a remarkable achievement and a symbol of the new national identity of Israel.

**18 Ben-Yehudah's plan of action for reviving Hebrew was—"Hebrew in the Home," "Hebrew in the School," and "Words, Words, Words."** He came to realize that Hebrew in the schools was the most important strategy of all. If children could be taught in Hebrew at a young age, they would speak it fluently and use it all their lives. He said in 1886, *"The Hebrew language will go from the synagogue to the house of study, and from the house of study to the school, and from the school it will come into the home and become a living language."*

**19 The invention of new Hebrew words for a modern era** - Because Hebrew had not been spoken in everyday use, there were many objects, activities and cultural factors for which there were no Hebrew words. So, drawing upon the words of the Hebrew Bible, Ben-Yehudah coined new words from the root words. Several words emerged from his training his children in the home to speak only Hebrew, words such as: *doll, ice cream, jelly, omelet, handkerchief, towel, bicycle*, and hundreds more. He labor intensively in researching what modern Hebrew word would be appropriate for something by looking other biblical Hebrew and also Arabic words. This research and then taking the responsibility for deciding upon something, actually creating and establishing the words, was an important component of his angst. It was time-consuming. Each word came with extensive information about it, like an encyclopedia page.

**20 The Hebrew Language Academy** - Ben Yehudah founded the "Va'ad Ha Lashon" (Language Council), which was the forerunner today's "Hebrew Language Academy," the supreme authority and final arbiter for all matters of the Hebrew language today.

**21 The Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew** – Ben Yehudah worked eighteen hours a day to complete his dictionary of Hebrew. This was a monumental task because this was not mere data entry of existing Hebrew words, but the creation of new and appropriate Hebrew words for the modern world. After his death his widow and son continued publishing his manuscripts, a task that was completed in 1959, seventeen volumes in all. The dictionary lists all the words used in Hebrew literature from the earliest Hebrew to modern times.

**22 Ben Yehudah** many streets named after him in the cities of modern Israel. This is so for Herzl and also for Ben Gurion whom we will study next.

### **Questions For Reflection or Group Discussion- Ben Yehudah**

1. What happened when Ben Yehudah was 17 years old that changed the course of his life? What became his lifelong goal after that happened?
2. Why did Ben Yehudah believe it was so important for the Jewish Zionist pioneers returning to the Land to revive the Hebrew language? Do you think Ben Yehudah was right? Why or why not?
3. What was Ben-Yehudah's strategy for actually getting people to speak Hebrew in everyday life?
4. How did Ben-Yehudah create new Hebrew words for modern things?
5. What institution did Ben-Yehudah found, and what did he write that remains to this day? Why are they important?

### **Story - David Ben Gurion (1886-1973): First Prime Minister of the New State of Israel.**



**David Ben Gurion..... Declaring Independence for the new State of Israel on May 14, 1948 (under a portrait of Herzl), .... and on the cover of TIME Magazine.**

David Ben Gurion was born David Gruen (Green) in Plonsk, Poland in 1886. His father was a lawyer and a leader in the local Zionist movement, called “Lovers of Zion” (“Chovavei Zion” in Hebrew). Young David was deeply saddened by the death of his mother when he was eleven years old. But he followed the example of his father and very

early became an ardent Zionist. While a student at the University of Warsaw, David joined the Marxist “Workers of Zion” (“Poalei Zion” in Hebrew) movement in 1904.

David decided to immigrate to Turkish Palestine in 1906. Upon arriving he first found work in picking oranges in the agricultural settlements. His vision for the establishment of Jewish state was strong, and this gave him energy and purpose. He believed Jews must work the land. He joined a volunteer force called *Ha Shomer* (the Guard) to guard the isolated Jewish agricultural settlements. He spoke frequently of his belief that Jewish people are capable of all types of work, not just those jobs to which they were restricted in anti-Semitic Europe. In 1912 he moved to Constantinople (now Istanbul) to study law at Istanbul University. This was where he adopted the Hebrew name “Ben-Gurion” (which means “son of a lion”).

He was back in Palestine by 1915 but was expelled by the Turkish authorities on suspicion of his Zionist and pro-Allied activities. He sailed to New York, where he met his wife to be, Paula Munweis. Paula shared David’s Zionist dream, and they were married in 1917. He sought to mobilize volunteers to enlist in the British Army to fight the Turks for the liberation of Palestine. He joined the Jewish Legion of the British forces but by the time he arrived in Palestine, World War I was over. Great Britain defeated the Turks, and had acquired the governing mandate for Palestine from the League of Nations. Ben Gurion knew that the work of realizing the Jewish national home had begun in earnest.

Ben Gurion’s vision, intelligence, energy and courage soon brought him recognition as one of the major leaders of the Jewish Zionist community in Palestine. During the late 1930s, when the number of Jewish settlers was increasing, the Arabs began to riot, attack and murder Jewish people. Ben Gurion counseled the Jewish communities not to retaliate, but only to defend themselves. But as years went on, and he could see the Arabs were not willing to negotiate or cooperate and continued and they they continued with their murderous attacks, Ben Gurion took a harder line policy. He said to one of his colleagues, *“Let me first tell you one thing: It doesn't matter what the world says about Israel; it doesn't matter what they say about us anywhere else. The only thing that matters is that we can exist here on the land of our forefathers. And unless we show the Arabs that there is a high price to pay for murdering Jews, we won't survive.”* Ben Gurion then worked hard to build an effective military defense force.

Ben Gurion continued over the next decade to work tirelessly, leading the Jewish community in Palestine. He gave direction to many meetings of the People’s Council, representing the Jewish community of Eretz Israel and the Zionist movement.

Progress was made. By November, 1947, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the resolution to support a Jewish state. Many tears of joy were shed as “HaTikva” was sung, the words, *“to be a free people in our own land.”* There was the feeling that all Jewish history was directed to this moment. Golda Meir, a member of the People’s Council, and who would later become the first woman prime minister of Israel, said, *“For two thousand years we longed for deliverance. We waited for this great day with awe. Now that it is here it is so wondrous that it surpasses human expression.”*

On Friday afternoon, May 14, 1948, invited guests arrived at the Tel Aviv Museum. They were asked to keep the purpose of their invitation a secret. But half the city turned out to wait for them. The atmosphere was electric. At about 4:00 p.m., David Ben Gurion, whose entire life had been directed toward this moment, came to the lectern.

Standing beneath a portrait of Herzl, he began to read the *Declaration of Independence* of the new Jewish state. Following is some of what he read,

*“Eretz Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books. ... We... hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish State in Eretz Israel, to be known as the State of Israel... Placing our trust in the Almighty, we affix our signatures to this proclamation... .”*

*The State of Israel will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of Exiles ... it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel...”*

For the first time in 2000 years, the Jewish people had a home of their own! One by one the members of the People’s Council signed the Declaration. Golda Meir said, *“First I wept. Since then I don’t believe I have cried.”* Rabbi Fishman-Maimon blessed saying, *“Blessed are you LORD our God, King of the Universe, for granting us life, for sustaining us, and for helping us to reach this day.”*

As prime minister of Israel, Ben Gurion recognized the challenge of making the desert bloom as an area where the Jewish people could make a contribution to humanity as a whole. Calling for settlement and development of “the Negev,” the large southern desert of Israel, he set a personal example by building his own home in the Negev, in a kibbutz called “Sde Boker,”(Morning Field” in English) and living there when his public life allowed. In 1970, Ben Gurion finally retired from public life for good, and returned to Sde Boker, where he passed away in 1973.

He was known to say, *“Israel has created a new image of the Jew in the world - the image of a working and an intellectual people, of a people that can fight with heroism.”*

Another well-known quote by Ben Gurion is *“Any one who does not believe in miracles is not a realist.”* And indeed, being a key player in the astounding miracles of the rebirth of the Jewish homeland after 2000 years, as was Ben Gurion, it would not be realistic to say that miracles do not happen. The rebirth of an ancient nation its ancestral land against such tremendous adversity is indeed a modern miracle.

## **Lessons**

**24.22 Ben Gurion emerged as a major Zionist leader in the 1920s.** The Zionist movement grew substantially in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1921, Ben Gurion helped create the “Histadrut” (National Labor Federation), which became a major force in the development of the Jewish community moving toward capability of statehood. The Histadrut was an effective organization of most all of the Jewish community affairs, and became known as a “state within a state.” In 1935, Ben Gurion became the chairman of the “Jewish Agency,” a role in which he served until the creation of the state of Israel in 1948.

**24.23 Ben Gurion believed the Arabs had no historical claim to the land of Israel.** The land had never been home to an independent Arab state, and even when it had been part of an Arab Empire it had never been an important district. Since 1517, the non-Arab Turks had ruled the land.

**24.24 There had been Jewish and Arab cooperation for many years in the land.** But Jewish people continued to settle and buy up land in Palestine and to develop successful agricultural operations and other urban business enterprises. The Arabs were becoming frustrated and felt they were being left out. During the years 1936-1939, the Arabs began to conduct strikes, and to attack Jewish businesses, farms and homes. They burned Jewish fields on the kibbutzim. Rioting continued and developed into a general revolt. Ben Gurion advocated a policy of restraint by the Jewish community.

**24.25 Ben Gurion later adopted policies of stronger military response, a firm hand in dealing with Arab attacks and terrorism.** He established the policy of meeting every Arab attack with a strong military response. This has remained the policy of Israel to this day.

**24.26 Ben-Gurion led the Jewish community in Palestine after World War II in its successful struggle against the British Mandate and toward the establishment of the Jewish state.** By 1948, in accordance with the decision of the United Nations General Assembly, with the support of the United States and the Soviet Union, the State of Israel was established. On this same day, he became the first Prime Minister of the independent State of Israel.

**24.27 On November 29, 1947 the United Nations General Assembly voted to enact a partition plan to create both a Jewish state and an Arab state in Palestine.** While the Arabs totally rejected the plan, the Jewish community accepted it. By March 1948 over 1,200 Jews had been killed in Arab attacks, half of them civilians.

**24.28 On May 14, 1948, the last day of the British Mandate's authority, David Ben Gurion declared to the Jewish people and to the world, the establishment and independence of the Jewish state.** For the first time in 2000 years, the Jewish people had a home of their own! They, and many Bible-believing Christians embraced with a "Yes" the words of Isaiah 66:8 *"Who has heard such a thing? ... Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment? For as soon as Zion was in labor she brought forth her children."* On this same day, Ben Gurion became the first prime minister of the state, and formed a provisional government.

**24.29 On the very next day after the Declaration of Independence, May 15, 1948, the last of the British left, and five Arab armies attacked the infant country**

**of Israel, beginning Israel's War of Independence.** The new state belonged to the Jewish people only as long as they could defend it. Egyptian air raids against Israel began that very night. The Arabs were bent on destroying all Jewish settlements. Azzam Pasha, the secretary-general of the Arab League said on the radio, "*This will be a war of extermination and a momentous massacre.*" Five million Arabs had declared a holy war against the 600,000 Jews. But the Israeli forces had the upper hand, and were victorious by July of 1948. The Ben Gurion saying, "*Any one who does not believe in miracles is not a realist*" surely describes this astounding outcome. As in days of old, as in the days of Queen Esther, God was with His Jewish people, and gave them victory.

**24.30 One of the difficult decisions of Ben Gurion's leadership was called the "Altalena Affair" in which he had to use force against fellow Jews.** During the years just before the state was born, there were several different Jewish militias, or defense forces. The main one was called the "Haganah." Another that was more radical was called the "Irgun" commanded by Menachem Begin. After the birth of the state, Ben Gurion realized that it was necessary to unite all the armed forces under one army. In June, 1948, Menachem Begin had ordered a ship named the "Altalena," loaded with arms for his Irgun fighters, to come and land near Tel Aviv. Ben Gurion sent word to Begin, ordering him to hand over the weapons to the Israeli government, or they would be forced to do so. Begin failed to respond so a clash ensued. Ben Gurion sent units of the "Israel Defense Forces" (IDF) to the beach area, which shelled the Altalena. Sixteen Irgun fighters were killed in the shelling and firing. Ben Gurion was grieved that Jewish fighters were killed on his orders. But he and his government believed it was necessary to establish the government's authority, discourage rival factions, and unite all the military into one army- the IDF.

**24.31 Ben Gurion was the first prime minister of Israel, serving in the position from 1948-1954 and then again from 1955-1963.** As prime minister, he exerted major influence in establishing the institutions and infrastructure of the new nation. He said, "*To maintain the status quo will not do. We have set up a dynamic State, bent upon creation and reform, building and expansion.*" He oversaw the build-up of Israel's strong military, the IDF, as well as the National Water Carrier (which pipes water from the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River to the arid settlement areas in the south of the country). He called for pioneering development in the Negev, the large desert area of the south.

**24.32 The "Ben Gurion International Airport"** - Named after him in 1973, it is the largest and busiest airport in Israel today. Also, most cities in Israel have streets named after Ben Gurion, Israel's beloved first prime minister.

**24.33 David Ben Gurion was named as one of *TIME Magazine's 100 Most Important People of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*.** He was called by Golda Meir, who became the only woman prime minister of Israel, so far (in office from 1969-1974)— "*the greatest Jew of our generation.*"

## Recommended Reading

Baron, David. *Israel in the Plan of God*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1983.  
(Originally published: London: Morgan & Scott, 1925)

Collins, Larry and Dominique Lapiere. *O Jerusalem: Day by Day and Minute by Minute the Historic Struggle for Jerusalem and the Birth of Israel*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1972.

Peters, Joan. *From Time Immemorial: The Origins of the Arab-Jewish Conflict*. Chicago: JKAP Publications, 1984.

Sachar, Howard M., *A History of Israel From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time. Second Edition, Revised and Updated*. New York: Alfred A. Knoph, 2002.

Spector, Stephen. *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2009.

St. John, Robert. *Tongue of the Prophets*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1952 (out of print).

\* This is the definitive biography of Ben Yehudah and of the story of the modern revival of the Hebrew language.

## Questions For Reflection or Group Discussion- Ben Gurion

1. On what day and year did Ben Gurion announce the establishment of the new Jewish State of Israel to the world?
2. What happened on the day after Ben Gurion declared the independence of the new State of Israel? How did Ben Gurion deal with it?
3. Why can Ben-Gurion be considered the man who did more than any other to actually establish the infrastructures and institutions of the new state of Israel?
4. What were some of the development projects Ben-Gurion championed and oversaw?
5. What did Ben Gurion mean when he said, “*Israel has created a new image of the Jew in the world*”?
6. Do you think Golda Meir was correct when she said that David Ben Gurion was “*the greatest Jew of our generation*”? Why or why not?

## Insights for Witness Among Jewish People

**1. Be supportive of the State of Israel in your attitude and speech. Learn about the founders of the state and speak honorably of Israel’s heroes.** Be able to tell the story of the rebirth and founding of the State of Israel. To win Jewish hearts, it helps to value

and honor what they value. Israel is central to the hearts of virtually all Jewish people. Let Jewish people criticize the Israeli government, rather than you. They are good at it.

**2. Learn the National Anthem of the State of Israel – “Ha Tikva” (The Hope).** It was used popularly at the First Zionist Congress in 1897, unofficially adopted by the new state in 1948, and officially adopted in 2004. Knowing this (best in Hebrew if you can), will make a favorably impact on your Jewish friends. Here are the lyrics in English:

*“In the Jewish heart  
A Jewish spirit still yearns  
And the eyes look east  
Toward Zion...  
Our hope is not lost,  
Our hope of two thousand years,  
To be a free people in our land,  
In the land of Zion and Jerusalem”*

**3. In your discussions with Jewish people about Israel, try to find an opportunity to raise questions that show them that something is missing in the restoration of Israel, which is their restoration to God through the Messiah.** You can tell them how you believe what is needed for Israel to be fully restored as a nation and to fulfill her God-given destiny, is four factors (all starting with “L” in English):

**1. Land** - God used Herzl as the visionary for the restoration to the land.

**2. Language** - God used Ben Yehudah as the restorer of Hebrew as a spoken language.

**3. Law** - God used Ben Gurion as the restorer of “law” in the sense of civic law, primary infrastructure and institutions for the restored nation of Israel.

**4. LORD-** God promised that the final phase of restoration will be **spiritual** restoration to God, when “ *I will give you a new heart and a new spirit...And I will put my Spirit within you...*” (Ezekiel 36: 26). This comes through embracing the Jewish Messiah Yeshua. Share with them about the Messianic Jewish movement in Israel, in which there are nearly 20,000 Israeli Jewish followers of Messiah, and that this movement is growing. They are the true faithful remnant of Israel. Your Jewish friend can be a part of it!

**4. Ask God to help you and your group to make a habit of praying from the heart this prayer, and let your Jewish friends know you are praying thus for Israel:**

*“For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent,  
And for Jerusalem’s sake I will not be quiet,  
Until her righteousness goes forth as brightness,  
And her salvation as a burning torch.”  
(Isaiah 62:1)*