Glimpse of Israel: The First Prime Minister – David Ben Gurion

Fourteen people have served as prime minister of Israel. The first prime minister of Israel, known as Israel's Founding Father, was David Ben-Gurion (דָּוִד בֶּן־גּוּרִיּוֹן‎) born (October 16, 1886) David Grun in Płońsk, Poland, part of the Russian Empire.

He was active in Zionist activity while attending the University of Warsaw and arrested twice during the Russian Revolution of 1905 while a member of the Social-Democratic Jewish Workers' Party. In 1906, Grun immigrated to the Ottoman Mutassarifate of Jerusalem (an area that included Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Gaza). He had a job picking oranges in Petah Tikva, then moved to a kibbutz in Galilee in 1907 where he worked as an agricultural laborer and belonged to an armed watchmen's group.

In 1911, he moved to Thessaloniki to learn Turkish and then in 1912, moved to Constantinople to attend law school at Istanbul University. It was there that he adopted the name Ben-Gurion, after a great Jewish hero in the revolt against the Romans. Ben-Gurion also worked there as a journalist. At the start of World War 1, Ben-Gurion was living in Jerusalem, where he created a Jewish militia to help the Ottoman Army.

Deported to Egypt in 1915, he made his way to the United States where he lived for 3 years and raised an army of 10,000 men to fight on Turkey's side. Following the Balfour Declaration (1917), Ben-Gurion switched sides and joined the Jewish Legion of the British Army and fought against the Turks during the Palestine Campaign. He was the leader of the Jewish community in Palestine from 1935 until the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

As head of the Jewish Agency from 1935, he was the leader of the Jewish community in British Mandated Palestine, leading the struggle for an independent Jewish state. He was the Head of the World Zionist Organization in 1946 and on May 14, 1948, he formally proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel. He was the first to sign the Israeli Declaration of Independence which he also helped to write. Ben-Gurion led Israel during the Arab-Israeli War in 1948 and united the Jewish militias to form the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF).

After the war, Ben-Gurion became Israel's first Prime Minister (Mapai Party – Labor) and Minister of Defense. As Prime Minister, he helped build the state institutions, improved relations with West Germany (Reparations Agreement for Nazi crimes during the Holocaust) and oversaw the mass influx of Jews from all over the world.

In 1954 he resigned as Prime Minister but remained a member of the Israeli Parliament (the Knesset). He returned as Minister of Defense in 1955 and later that year became Prime Minister again, responding aggressively to Arab guerilla attacks and in 1956, invaded Egypt (with British and French forces) after Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal.

Ben-Gurion left office in 1963; retired from politics in 1970 and moved to Sde Boker (kibbutz in the Negev desert) where he died Dec 1, 1973.

David Ben-Gurion was named Time magazine's 100 Most Important People
of the 20th century – a most impressive and purpose-driven life.