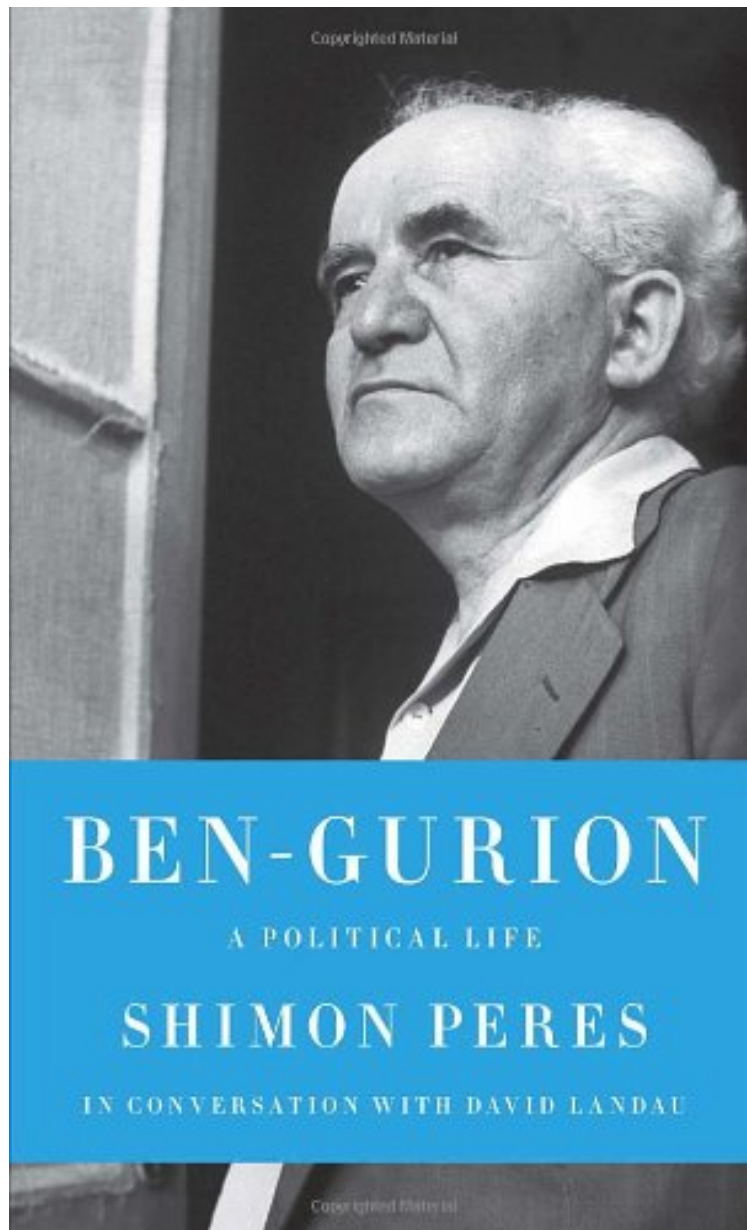


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Ben-Gurion: A Political Life (Jewish Encounters Series)

Shimon Peres, David Landau

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Shimon Peres, David Landau : Ben-Gurion: A Political Life (Jewish Encounters Series) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ben-Gurion: A Political Life (Jewish Encounters Series):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Eye-witness to history remembers
By Alan A. Elsner
Shimon Peres is the last of the "founding fathers" of Israel and was a close aide to David Ben-Gurion, the George Washington of the reborn Jewish state. In this slim volume, he recalls his impressions of the great man -- who emerges from these pages as a visionary figure of the status of Winston Churchill and Charles de Gaulle. Peres regards Ben Gurion as the indispensable man in the struggle for Israel's independence. Without his leadership, his courage, his indomitable fighting spirit and his sound political judgment, the modern state simply would never have come into being. Peres gives a terse account of Ben Gurion's early days as an youth in Poland and an immigrant to Palestine culled from other sources. He also provides a fairly tiresome account of the factional fighting in the Zionist movement in the 1930s and 1940s. The book achieves real drama and authenticity in its description of the 1948 war of independence and even more so in the 1956 Suez Campaign in which Peres himself was a key player. Peres gives a balanced account of the 1948 war and the creation of the Palestinians refugee crisis. But his account of the Lavon affair which eventually ended Ben Gurion's career is murky and confusing. Interspersed are dialogues on various controversial issues with co-author David Landau. These are interesting but you have to be very well acquainted with the history and the personalities to get anything out of them. That's a general criticism of this book. It's not a real biography and it's not really a good book to start reading about the history of modern Israel. Its value lies in the fact that Peres knew his subject well and was at his side at key times.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. An outstanding biography
By Chemani
This book is extremely good to those people that are interested in Jewish history. It spells out amazing principles of a pioneer, a leader, a statesman and a visionary. It is one of the best books I have ever read. Ben-Gurion was brave, daring as well as very decisive. It's amazing to read of his foresight as well as his strategic plans to birth the Jewish nation. The wisdom of engaging people with divergent views from his as well as interacting with the international community to birth the Jewish nation is amazing. He was not always popular but how he justifies his actions from a leadership perspective is quite interesting. He who reads this book should endeavor, without fail, to read Menachem Begin's books as well. The two viewed the creation of the Jewish state from 2 different perspectives. It is beneficial to see how these political rivals' opinions and differences have helped to shape the Jewish state to this day. These two opinions have birthed all subsequent prime ministers of Israel. These two are must read books.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A biography of the founder of Israel written by a friend and colleague
By Fred Ehrlich
I like this biography although the biographer Shimon Peres hardly could be called objective. This is a relatively short biography of a very determined quarrelsome man of great intellect who was the founding father of the State of Israel. Israel really means the struggle with god. Ben Gurion a Jew from Eastern Europe swayed by the nationalistic fervor of his times and the virulent anti semitism of the times, burnt by the Shoah insisted that Jewish state be resurrected and proclaimed. He was a Great War leader leading his people to repulse many Arab nations attacks while resisting internal divisions by more radical groups such as Irgun. He insisted and obtained control of the army by the government. Out of the desert and malarial swamp he helped build a great nation now an intellectual powerhouse and arguably the most powerful nation in the Middle East. There are many views both negative and positive about his creation but none can deny the miracle. This an excellent short biography of this great leader warts and all.

Part of the Jewish Encounter series
Israel's current president gives us a dramatic and revelatory biography of Israel's founding father and first prime minister. Shimon Peres was in his early twenties when he first met David Ben-Gurion. Although the state that Ben-Gurion would lead through war and peace had not yet declared its precarious independence, the Old Man, as he was called even then, was already a mythic figure. Peres, who came of age in the cabinets of Ben-Gurion, is uniquely placed to evoke this figure of stirring contradictions: a prophetic visionary and a canny pragmatist who early grasped the necessity of compromise for national survival. Ben-Gurion supported the 1947 United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine, though it meant surrendering a two-thousand-year-old dream of Jewish settlement in the entire land of Israel. He granted the Orthodox their first exemptions from military service despite his own deep secular commitments, and he reached out to Germany in the aftermath of the Holocaust, knowing that Israel would need as many strong alliances as possible within the European community. A protégé of Ben-Gurion and himself a legendary figure on the international political stage, Shimon Peres brings to his account of Ben-Gurion's life and towering achievements the profound insight of a statesman who shares Ben-Gurion's dream of a modern, democratic Jewish nation-state that lives in peace and security alongside its Arab neighbors. In Ben-Gurion, Peres sees a neglected model of leadership that Israel and the world desperately need in the twenty-first century.

In revisiting the career of his mentor, Shimon Peres presents a uniquely human portrait of David Ben-Gurion: a master strategist with a long view of history and an abiding vision for Israel's future. Peres brings his nation's founding father to life with the energy, candor, and wisdom he has become known for in his six decades of public service.

William Jefferson Clinton
Shimon Peres is a man of awesome accomplishment (a Nobel Peace Prize-winner, by the way), but his most important accomplishment is how he has come to personify the ethic that David Ben-Gurion represents. His book is well worth your time. It was mine.

Richard Cohen, The Washington Post
An urbane account of Israel's first and

longest-serving prime minister by someone who, though nearly 40 years younger, worked closely with him for two decades. It is admiring of Ben-Gurion . . . but it never lapses into hero worship or loses its grip on the historical realities amid which its story is set. Peress personal reminiscences of Ben-Gurion and his entourage are delightful. The Wall Street Journal Invaluable . . . Even readers tired of ideological food fights about Israel of liberals calling conservatives who defend the country fascists, and of conservatives calling liberals who criticize it anti-Semites will find something to like in this unusual primer on the birth of a nation and its most important midwife. Justin Moyer, The Washington Post Shimon Peres, the president (and former prime minister) of Israel, provides an intriguing and intimate political biography of David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister and Peress erstwhile mentor. Readers will enjoy Peress analysis of his relationship with Ben-Gurion and will find his humility appealing. And his emotional admissions elevate this book above a standard biography. Publishers Weekly About the Author Shimon Peres was president of the State of Israel from 2007 to 2014. In 1947, at David Ben-Gurion's request, he was recruited by the Haganah, and he was appointed head of naval services in 1948. Over a long and distinguished political career, he held numerous cabinet-level positions, including foreign minister and defense minister, and served two terms as prime minister. One of the architects of the Oslo Accords, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994. Mr. Peres died in 2016. David Landau was editor in chief of the Israeli newspaper Haaretz from 2004 to 2008. Before joining Haaretz in 1997, Landau was the diplomatic correspondent and managing editor of The Jerusalem Post. He is the author of *Piety and Power: The World of Jewish Fundamentalism* and worked with Shimon Peres on his memoir, *Battling for Peace*. Mr. Landau died in 2015. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION Voyage of Destiny

David Ben-Gurion was a mythic figure, the founding father of Israel and a modern-day prophet, but he was also a real man who stormed through history on human legs. It was my great privilege to know him and work with him for many years. This book is not a memoir of my time with Ben-Gurion, but it is inevitably shaped by my time with him. Since his death in 1973, I have thought a great deal about the sort of leader he was: visionary and pragmatic, steeped in Jewish history and yet forward looking and unsentimental. He is our Washington and our Jefferson, and yet in some sense our Lincoln too, for the War of Independence in 1948 brought with it a danger of civil war. He seems to me now to be an emblem not only of the energy that created the State of Israel but also of the sort of leadership that the country so desperately needs if it is to find its way to peace and security. Not all of his assumptions have been borne out by events. But his historic decision to accept the partition of the Land of Israel in order to secure the State of Israel as a Jewish and a democratic state shines forth today as a beacon of statesmanship and sagacity. In order to understand Ben-Gurion, it is necessary to return to the shtetl in Poland where he was born and which stamped him deeply with Jewish feeling, Jewish history, and Zionist fervor. But the place to begin this book is with a boat ride I took from Palestine to Basel in 1946 to attend the first Zionist Congress after the Holocaust. Moshe Dayan and I were among the delegates from the Mapai political party in Eretz Yisrael, though we were much younger than all the others. I represented our youth movement, Hanoar Haoved. We set out from Haifa on a Polish ship. I found myself sharing a cabin with Mapai veterans Levi Eshkol and Pinhas Lavon. They were old hands at this sort of seafaring, and they insisted that we draw lots for the best bunk, the one right under the porthole. As bad luck would have it, I won. I immediately offered the bunk- with-a-view to Eshkol. He kindly but firmly refused. No, he said. You won it fair and square. It's yours. I was all of twenty- three years old and until recently had been used to sleeping on a camp bed in a tent in our edgling kibbutz, Alumot. When our first child, Zviya, was born a few months earlier, my wife and I graduated to a hut with solid walls. Eshkol, then fifty-one, was a senior and respected official in the Mapai-dominated Yishuv, the pre-state Jewish community in Palestine. At the time of our voyage, he also served as secretary- general of the powerful Tel Aviv Labor Council and as a ranking officer in the Haganah, the Yishuv's clandestine defense force. Ben-Gurion regarded him as a trusted lieutenant. I was still weakly remonstrating when Lavon chimed in, Well, if Eshkol won't take it, then, um, I suppose . . . Lavon was forty-two. As a young man in Polish Galicia, he had founded the pioneering Zionist youth movement Gordonia. He had served as co-secretary- general of Mapai and was widely seen as one of the party's brightest hopes. Eshkol turned on him with all his bass-voiced vehemence. What kind of Gordonian values were these? What kind of socialist was he if he blithely proposed to rob me of what was mine by right? And on and on. I listened, silent and aghast, to these luminaries of our movement berating each other in the name of our most hallowed principles. Although still formally a kibbutznik like Eshkol, Lavon was a bit of a dandy. He always left the cabin elegantly and fashionably turned out. I grew ever more aghast as the voyage wore on. I owned two pairs of trousers: khaki work trousers for weekdays and flannels for Shabbat. Interestingly enough, considering what was to happen among us all later, it was Lavon who got me the job as director-general of the ministry of defense in 1953. As a cabinet minister without portfolio in Ben-Gurion's government, Lavon had occasion to fill in for Ben-Gurion at the defense ministry. (In addition to being prime minister, Ben-Gurion was also defense minister.) I was at the time acting director-general. Lavon said he wanted to give me the permanent appointment. I want to appoint Shimon, he told Ben-Gurion. Appoint him what? Appoint him director-general. But he is director-general. No, he's only acting director-general. Ben-Gurion called me into his office. Why didn't you tell me? he asked.***The Basel Congress of 1946 was the scene of high drama, great rhetoric, and fateful decisions. But for me the most memorable moment was when Ben-Gurion's wife, Paula, ushered and fuming, strode into the basement of the convention hall where Mapai was holding its

caucus. She marched over to Arieh Bahir of Kibbutz Akim, a loyal Ben-Gurionist, and said in Yiddish, Arieh, er is meshugge gevoren! (Arieh, hes gone mad!) Where is he? Arieh asked. In the hotel, Paula said. Bahir turned to me. Come on, lets go, he said. We made our way over to the Drei Knige Hotel, which was where Herzl stayed during the First Zionist Congress in 1897 and where that famous picture of him looking pensively out over the Rhine was taken. We climbed the stairs to Ben-Gurions room and knocked on the door. No answer. Bahir turned the knob and walked in. I followed gingerly behind. Shalom, Ben-Gurion! Arieh said. Ben-Gurion didnt bother to turn round. He was packing his suitcase, determined to turn his back on Basel. Eventually he asked, Are you coming with me? Yes, replied Bahir without hesitation. But where are you going? I am going to create a new Zionist movement, Ben-Gurion said. Nothing will come of this congress. The leaders are paralyzed by fear and inertia. I had incredible chutzpah. Ben-Gurion hardly knew me, but I said, Yes, well go with you. But Ive got a request: Speak to the delegation this evening. He agreed, and we went back with him to that tension-lled basement. That congress in Basel was in many ways the dening moment for Zionism and for Ben-Gurion. Our picture of the Shoah, as the Holocaust was called in Hebrew, was complete by then, in all its ghastly details. During World War II the information available had always been only partial and sporadic. We did not have a full picture, in real time, of the magnitude of the disaster that had befallen the Jewish people. Soon after the war ended, Ben-Gurion had gone to visit the campsboth the Nazi death camps and the displaced-persons camps, where the survivors were being held by the Allied armies. As chairman of the executive of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, he was escorted personally by General Dwight Eisenhower, the supreme allied commander. Eisenhower made a very deep impression on him. All his life, and whatever the tensions that arose between them, Ben-Gurion never stopped praising him. He would on many occasions recall (as Barack Obama did in his speech at Buchenwald in 2009) how Eisenhower had forced the local Germans to visit the liberated camps and see for themselves the piles of corpses and the skeletal survivors. In his speech Obama quoted Eisenhower as saying at the time that he was concerned that humanity would forget what had been done in these places, and he was determined to never let that happen. Ben-Gurion was hugely impressed and moved by this act of Eisenhowers, both for its humanitarian quality and for its historic significance. Ben-Gurion returned to Jerusalem shocked to his core, both by what he had seen in the camps and by a more thorough understanding of how the reaction of the rest of the world had contributed to the fate of Europes Jews. Not only had the Allies failed to save them; not only had they failed to bomb the death camps or the railway lines; but British warships had kept the gates of Palestine shut to any Jews who managed to escape from the European hell. His conclusion was stark and unequivocal: We must have our independent state at once. That was the underlying issue of conflict at the congress: lealtar, to establish a state immediately, as Ben-Gurion demanded; or to wait, as Chaim Weizmann, the venerable president of the World Zionist Organization, advocated. To Ben-Gurion, the Biltmore Program had meant partition of Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state. He was absolutely as clear as day about that. And now lealtar meant put this into effect immediately. But there lay the problem: Both the right and the left opposed partition. Today it is almost incomprehensible, but at that time Yitzhak Tabenkin, the leader of the left-wing Siah Bet, opposed the immediate establishment of an independent Jewish state on a portion of the British Mandate. He preferred an international mandate over the whole land. He thought the most important thing was to preserve shleimut haaretz (the integrity of Eretz Yisrael), even if we werent independent. In the meantime, he reasoned, we would bring in immigrants, build new settlements, and continue creating facts on the ground until a state came into being somehow, in the undened future. Ben-Gurion replied that without a state we would not be able to open the gates of Palestine to immigrants, including the Holocaust survivors clamoring to get in. Tabenkins ideological orientation was to the world of tomorrowmeaning universal socialism, as preached by the Soviet Union. Thats also hard to comprehend now. He once assured me that Lenin was the greatest statesman of the twentieth century. In some of the kibbutzim of the Hakibbutz Hameuchad confederation, there were pictures of Stalin hanging on the walls, as there were in some of the kibbutzim of Hashomer Hatzair, the Mapamafliated pioneering movement. Mapams leader, Meir Yaari, preferred a binational, Jewish-Arab state to partition. Moshe Sneh, who was nominally a General Zionist and whom Ben-Gurion had installed as the commander of the Haganah, was also inclining toward Communism by this time. Snehs analysis was that Russia would win the Cold War and would ultimately therefore control the Middle East. The only one who got it right was David Ben-Gurion. He had said early on during World War II, better a state on part of the land than the whole land and no state. But the opposition to Ben-Gurion wasnt only from the political parties on the left and from the Revisionist and religious parties on the right. It also came from within his own party. The so-called Gush, the tough Mapai machine politicians, were with Ben-Gurion, including people like Shraga Netzer and his wife, Dvora. But many people in Mapai supported Weizmann, who still looked to Great Britain, despite everything, to support the Zionist cause. Eshkol, as usual, was in the middle. Golda Meir was initially against partition. It was she who had chaired that crucial session in that Basel basement. She ran it with an iron hand. But in the end she sided with Ben-Gurion. By dawn the party was with him. The third and crowning phase of Ben-Gurions remarkable career of Jewish leadership was at hand. For thirteen years, from 1922 to 1935, as secretary-general of the Histadrut, he had built up and led the Labor Zionist camp in the Yishuv. For the next thirteen years, as chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive, he had led the ght for immigration and independence, both at home and on the world stage. Now he was about to embark on thirteen extraordinary years of constructing and

consolidating the Jewish state, in war and in peace.