



## President Harry S. Truman

God put you in your mother's womb so you would be the instrument to bring the rebirth of Israel after two thousand years.

- Isaac Halevi Herzog, the Chief Rabbi of Israel to Truman shortly after his historic decision



President Harry S. Truman was the 33rd President of the United States. He succeeded President Franklin Roosevelt upon his sudden death April 12, 1945. Roosevelt had been President during most of World War II. It was Truman's decisions that shaped the post war world. Perhaps none was more momentous than the Birth of Israel. The Herald-Tribune described it as, "one of the few great acts of courageous collective statesmanship which our shattered postwar world had been able to achieve."

Harry S. Truman was born May 8, 1884 in the rural mid-Western farming community of Lamar, Missouri. He spent most of his youth on his family's farms becoming imbued with mid-Western American values- family, hard work, honesty, a deep sense of doing what was right, loyalty, and even mild anti-Semitism.

When Harry was six, the family moved to a new farm near Independence, Missouri so Harry could attend the Presbyterian Church Sunday School.

Harry graduated high school in 1901. He tried odd jobs, including a stint on the Santa Fe Railroad



Harry Truman's High School Graduation Photo, Santa Fe 1901

where he learned to cuss the most stubborn mule into submission. He returned to the farm five years later, disappointed. Truman had dreamed of going to the United States Military Academy but was rejected. His eyesight was not good enough.

The United States entered World War I in 1917. Truman enlisted. He was sent to Camp Doniphan, Oklahoma for training. Assigned to run the camp canteen, Truman worked with another young soldier, under his command, Eddie Jacobson, whom he grew to trust. The trust grew into a deep friendship that was to last a lifetime. Eddie Jacobson was a Jew from Kansas City, MO. Together they were sent to fight in France. Truman became a Captain of an artillery unit.

After the war, Truman and Jacobson returned to Kansas City. Together they opened a haberdashery. It prospered at first but eventually failed. It took the two men nearly ten years to pay off the debts they incurred together.

Truman turned to local politics after the business failed. His contacts within the Democratic party and the machine politics of Tom Pendergast, aggressively aided his rise to become the U.S. Senator from Missouri in 1934. Until World War II, Truman served without particular distinction. But during the War, as chairman of Truman Committee, he exposed massive waste, fraud, and corruption in wartime contracts. It catapulted him to National attention.

President Franklin Roosevelt was running for an unprecedented fourth term in 1944. Roosevelt wanted a new Vice Presidential candidate to share his fourth run who would not be a threat to his

leadership. He chose Harry Truman. The Roosevelt/Truman ticket won the election.

Roosevelt promptly pushed Truman aside as a virtual non-entity. He kept Truman outside the inner workings of government as World War II raged to its closing months. He even kept Truman completely ignorant of the Manhattan project – the American development of the nuclear bomb.

Roosevelt died unexpectedly of a massive heart attack, April 12, 1945. Harry Truman became President of the United States. Truman commented on his ascension to the responsibilities of the Presidency,

*“I don't know if any of you have had a bale of hay fall on you. Well, I feel like the sun, the stars and all the planets just fell on me.”*

The War in Germany ended a few weeks later, in May. The War against Japan threatened to last much longer and cost hundreds of thousands of lives on both sides. As with any President, he was besieged with multiple demands from numerous interest groups with complicated policy considerations resulting in long-term implications for America and the world. Roosevelt had not wanted to share the burden of leadership with anyone, including his

vice-president. At this pivotal moment, Truman was thrust into the cauldron of power with only his own sense of Mid-Western, Biblical values being his guide to final choices.

Truman had to decide if America would use the nuclear bomb or not against Japan and its citizens. A former soldier, Truman had seen the horror of war first hand. He weighed the considerations. Two nuclear bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan. Tens of thousands of civilians were killed instantly in the mushroom of death, along with the military targets. Japan surrendered.

Years later, Truman commented on his decision,

*“If I don't drop the bomb, so many more of our young men will die in the invasion of Japan; their men too, and women and children. How can I face the people when it's finally over, and say that I had the power to possibly end the war, long ago, spare the lives of their loved ones, and I chose not to use it?”*

Truman faced a world devastated by the horrors of War. There was one horror he was particularly aware of, The Holocaust. The Holocaust was the specific, systematic extermination of the Jewish people in Europe by Nazi Germany, its allied anti-



Truman's Announcement on the Nuclear Bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, August 1945

Semitic willing accomplices, and the grotesque silent acquiescence of millions under the Nazi boot.

The murder of 6,000,000 Jewish human beings in Europe was no secret. It was well known. Roosevelt demanded the Nazis be defeated first. He could or would do little to help the Jews being openly murdered. The slaughter of Jews continued to the last hours of the war.

As the survivors of the Holocaust emerged from the Death Camps, they were lost again. They could not return to their former countries. Their former homes were destroyed. The local populations did not

want the Jews to return. Pogroms, murderous riots, were recurring when they did try to return. Truman said of the Jews, “they have no place to go.”

Even before the outbreak of World War II, the coming Nazi horror of the Holocaust became evident. The only place in the world that wanted Jews was the tiny strip of land called the Palestinian Mandate that the British supervised under the League of Nations. The British Government had clearly promised the Jewish people a homeland in Palestine, in the famous Balfour Declaration of 1917. Surrendering to Arab demands, the British took 72% of Palestine (1922) and created a Jew free zone, Trans-Jordan. As the black clouds of death enveloped Europe in the 1930’s for Jews, the British gave in again to Arab demands. The Jews were to be barred from escaping death to what was left of Palestine. Truman, an astute reader of history and the Middle East, was very aware of what had happened.

After the end of World War II, the Arabs refused to permit the surviving remnant of Jews to make new homes in Palestine. Once again, the British agreed.

Zionism, its ideals of creating a better home in Palestine for Jews and Arabs alike, was being quashed by the continued relentless flow of hate and anti-Semitism.



Buchenwald survivors arrive in Haifa

Jews, with victimized zealotry, pushed to open the gates of Palestine to the desperate refugees.

Truman was beset by counter forces within his State and Defense Departments to support the Arabs. The Cold War had commenced between Communist Russia and the West. Oil, Arab oil, was more important to the State Department than the few Jews left abandoned and alive in Europe. Truman was pulled by power politics, anti-Semitism and morality.

He waffled between both sides. He prayed but remained fully uncommitted to the United Nations solution to the Jewish-Arab problem in Palestine, partitioning of the remaining parcel of the British Mandate into two states, one Jewish and one Arab. Sabotaged by his own State Department, frustrated by both sides, Truman commented on the Jewish demands:

*“Jesus Christ couldn’t please them when he was on earth, so how could anyone expect that I would have any luck?”*

*I'm so tired and bedeviled, I can't be decent to people."*

Truman closed his doors to the American Jews.

Eddie Jacobson, Truman's lifelong friend, unexpectedly, in a desperate move, came to see him at the White House. The door was always open to Eddie. Jacobson, who had never imposed on their friendship, implored Truman to hear just one old, sick Jew, who had travelled thousands of miles to speak with him.



President Truman and Chaim Weizmann

Truman – told Jacobson –

*"You win, you baldheaded son-of-a bitch. I will see him."*

The next day Chaim Weizmann, the face of Zionist hopes, spoke to Truman.

*"The choice for our people, Mr. President, is between statehood and extermination. History and providence have placed this issue in your hands and I am confident that you will yet decide it in the spirit of moral law,"*

Eleven minutes after midnight, Tel Aviv time, the United States of America became the first country in the world to recognize the new Jewish State.

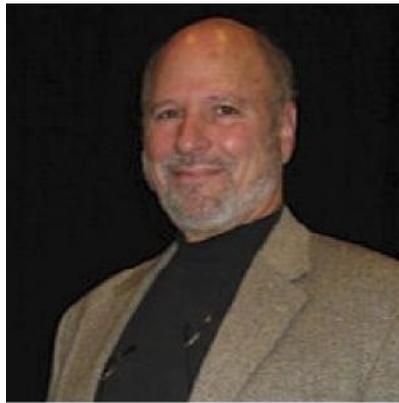
Truman did not even know the name of the only Jewish country in the world until it was announced that night.

Israel, the name that harkened back to the Bible, the historic, eternal Jewish bond to the land, was re-born.

*President Truman did what no Jew could do.*

*Establish yourself through righteousness, distance yourself from oppression.*

.. ISAIAH (54:14)



## About the Author: Jerry Klinger

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Jerry Klinger is President and founder of the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation. The Society has completed projects in 25 states and in four countries.

He was born in Washington, D C and is the son of Holocaust survivors. Jerry was Yeshivah educated and as a young man served in the Israeli army.

As an Associate member of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, in coordination with Chairman Warren Miller, built the Jewish Memorial at the Buchenwald Concentration Camp. President Obama visited the site in 2009.

Jerry periodically writes for the Jerusalem Post Christian Edition. He is the author of over seventy

articles on American Jewish History and Christian Zionist history. Jerry speaks on Christian Zionism and other topics at Churches, schools and Synagogue communities around the U.S.

He is founder of *To Save A Life*, a charity focused on helping small Israeli and American charities. He is a past President of his Synagogue.

Jerry has a BA, and MA degrees from the University of Maryland. He did Doctoral work at the University of Maryland as well. He recently retired as a senior vice president with Merrill Lynch/ Bank of America. Jerry is married to the former Judith Rice. They have three sons, five grandchildren and a small Cockatzu dog named *Norman*.

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