

70 Years After the Miraculous Rebirth of Israel—Here's What You Need to Know

On May 8, 1884, in the small village of Lamar, Missouri, a horse and mule trader named John Anderson Truman rejoiced with his wife, Martha, at the birth of a healthy baby boy. Three years earlier a different kind of birth occurred when Tsar Alexander II of Russia was assassinated and the authorities blamed the Jews. A major anti-Jewish pogrom swept across Russia and spread into Eastern Europe, bringing death and mayhem in its wake. As a result of this persecution, leading Jews launched a movement called Lovers of Zion, encouraging Jews to immigrate to their ancient homeland in Palestine.

This was the birth of the modern Zionist Movement.

The story of Harry S. Truman runs in parallel with the Zionist Movement until they eventually meet as the world considered the fate of the Jews after the Holocaust.

The grandchild of pioneers who led wagon trains across “the great American desert” to California, Harry Truman was limited by poor eyesight that caused him to be held back from sports by his protective mother. To fill the hours, young Harry took to reading at an early age, with a particular love for history. He would read through the Bible twice by the time he was 12 years old, and multiple times after. When he was 10, his mother bought him the series, *Great Men and Famous Woman*. Inspired, he dreamed of one day becoming a great military leader.

As Harry matured, so did the Zionist Movement. The Russian Jews who entered Palestine beginning in 1880s were idealistic colonizers determined to tame the land. The soil was sandy and rocky, water was scarce, marshes were full of malaria and the

settlers had little agricultural experience. But soon, the powerful Baron Edmond James de Rothschild became aware of the settlements and was convinced to become a benefactor. With his help, major progress was made and soon thousands of Jews were pouring into "Eretz Israel."

World War I was a key turning point for both Truman and the Zionist Movement. Harry rose to the rank of captain during the heavy fighting in France and learned he had the abilities needed to lead men. The Zionist Movement experienced a major breakthrough in November 1917 with the adoption of the Balfour Declaration, Great Britain's promise of a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine. This promise was then enshrined in international law by the League of Nations in the British Mandate at the San Remo Conference—part of the peace negotiations after the war.

In the following quarter of a century, the Jewish people came perilously close to losing their promised homeland. Then in 1947, the British announced they were turning over the contentious question of Palestine to the United Nations. In November of that year, the U.N. voted to partition the land, giving roughly half of western Palestine to the Jews and half to the Arabs.

The Jews accepted the vote of the U.N. and prepared to become a nation after nearly 2,000 years of exile. The Arabs rejected the plan and vowed to destroy the infant Jewish nation at birth. The British threw up their hands and told the world they were laying down the Mandate and withdrawing from Palestine in the coming months.

By this time Harry Truman had become president of the United States—one of the most unlikely men to rise to the office at a time of crucial importance in world history. But Truman had the advantage of being an expert in his knowledge of both history and the Bible.

Nearly every one of his advisers urged him not to recognize the fledgling Jewish state. Just two days before the end of the British Mandate, Secretary of State George C. Marshall—architect of “The Marshall Plan” and the man Truman called “the greatest man of World War II”—nearly resigned over his opposition. He argued that the United States faced a possible war with the Soviet Union, and it needed to maintain good relations with the Arabs to maintain the flow of oil.

Truman was truly conflicted. As president, he had to make every decision based on what was in the best interest of the United States. He was also greatly concerned about the Jews who had survived Hitler’s Holocaust and the murder of 6 million of their brethren.

At the same time, Truman had been hounded by some disrespectful American Jewish leaders to the point where he had closed the doors of the White House to anyone wanting to discuss the issue. The Zionist leaders were in a panic. No one knew for sure what Truman’s decision would be and the deadline for the British withdrawal was fast approaching. The Zionists knew they would need American support if their new nation was to survive.

In desperation, Zionist leaders called on President Truman’s former business partner and dear friend, Eddie Jacobson, who also happened to be Jewish. The Zionists asked Eddie to convince Truman to meet with the legendary Jewish leader, Dr. Chaim Weizmann—the man who helped to orchestrate the promise of the British to give a home to the Jews in the Balfour Declaration.

Eddie was able to meet with his good friend, Harry Truman in the White House—but the president was adamantly opposed to meeting with anyone on the subject of Palestine. “I suddenly found myself thinking that my dear friend, the president of the United States, was at that moment as close to being an anti-Semite as a man could possibly be,” Eddie would later

write.

Then Eddie had an idea. He noticed a model of a statue of Andrew Jackson mounted on a horse on the president's desk.

"Harry, all your life you have had a hero, Andrew Jackson. Well, I too have a hero, a man I never met, but who is, I think, the greatest Jew who ever lived. ...I am talking about Chaim Weizmann ... he travelled thousands of miles just to see you and plead the cause of my people. Now you refuse to see him because you were insulted by some of our American Jewish leaders, even though you know that Weizmann had absolutely nothing to do with these insults and would be the last man to be a party to them."

"It doesn't sound like you, Harry, because I thought that you could take this stuff they have been handing out to you. I wouldn't be here if I didn't know that, if you will see him, you will be properly and accurately informed on the situation that exists in Palestine, and yet you refuse to see him."

As he finished, Eddie noticed the president drumming on his desk with his fingers. Harry abruptly turned around while still sitting in his swivel chair and gazed out the window. Eddie held his breath.

All of a sudden, Truman swiveled himself around again, looked Eddie straight in the eyes and said the most endearing words he had ever heard from his lips. "You win, you baldheaded so-and-so. I will see him."

Truman met with Weizmann, a man for whom he had a great deal of respect. That meeting helped confirm many of the things that Harry had been pondering regarding the future of the Holocaust survivors, and also the fate of the State of Israel.

In May of 1948, as the British pulled out of Palestine and five Arab nations sat on the border, ready to invade, David Ben-Gurion, the leader of the Jews in Palestine, stood in Tel

Aviv and declared the establishment of the State of Israel.

Then, eleven minutes after Israel officially became a nation at midnight on May 15, 1948, President Harry S. Truman directed the United States to give de facto recognition to the state of Israel. With this act, the U.S. became the first nation to recognize the new Jewish state.

The following year, Israel's Chief Rabbi, Isaac Halevi Herzog, met with the president in the White House and told Truman, "he had been given the task once fulfilled by the mighty king of Persia, and that he too, like Cyrus, would occupy a place of honor in the annals of the Jewish people."

Soon after leaving the White House in 1953, Truman was invited to speak at the Hebrew Theological Seminary in New York City. When he is introduced by his friend Eddie Jacobson as the leader who helped create the State of Israel, Truman snapped, "What do you mean 'helped create'? I am Cyrus!"

As Israel prepares to celebrate the 70th anniversary of her rebirth, watch for the new two-volume biography on Harry Truman and the Zionist Movement from Dr. Craig von Buseck, *I Am Cyrus: The Promise* and *I Am Cyrus: The Rebirth*.

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