

This is the next installment in the “About” series of the Whitestone Podcast—that’s where we profile a person who’s interesting and likely quite valuable for us to think about and reflect upon. And today we’re going to catch up with a man named Heinz. Soon it’ll be clear we can glean some wisdom from surfing through his life, and, frankly comparing his approaches to others in the same arena of vocational life.

Heinz Alfred was born in Germany and was part of a seemingly ordinary family for the time and place...his father a schoolteacher and his mother a homemaker. But Heinz was a Jew in the Hitler era, and his father lost his teaching job because he was Jewish. So, his family immigrated as Jewish refugees to America in 1938, fleeing from Hitler’s regime, persecution, and, in the case of Heinz, actual personal beatings.

Of course, in America, Heinz experienced antisemitism, too, but not to the degree in his native land of Germany. He attended City College in New York City to study accounting but was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1943 during the heart of World War 2. Like for so many others, that changed the trajectory of Heinz’s life. But, by that time of war with Germany, Heinz had his name Americanized from *Heinz* to *Henry*, you know, as in *Henry Kissinger*, considered by many to be the most famous diplomat of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

And the rest of Kissinger’s story during and after World War 2 is engaging. Kissinger’s fluency in the German language put him into military intelligence for the Army in the European theater, where he saw the liberation of a concentration camp that included many fellow Jews. Kissinger said this: “I had never seen people degraded to the level those people were. They barely looked human. They were skeletons.”

After the war, Kissinger’s academic brilliance in political studies culminating in a doctorate at Harvard earned him a slot on Harvard’s faculty and as a consultant or lofty participant in a small blizzard of well-connected agencies and programs. Politically ambitious, Kissinger became a key foreign policy advisor to N.Y. Governor Nelson Rockefeller for eight years—until Rockefeller was defeated nationally by Nixon.

At the time, Kissinger believed Richard Nixon was “the most dangerous of all the men running to be [the U.S.] President.” But Kissinger’s ambition overruled his reservations, and he sought to be in Nixon’s inner circle. And when Nixon was elected President, Kissinger was named the President’s National Security Advisor. Yeah, in 30 years, Henry went from Jewish refugee and lowly immigrant to the U.S. President’s right-hand advisor! Kissinger not only served in that key role for years, Nixon also then named him Secretary of State. And Kissinger also was Secretary of State for Nixon’s successor, President Gerald Ford.

But that sketch cannot do justice to the fuller story of Kissinger. He captured the imagination of many politicians, both in Washington and around the world—his heavily-accented English heard nonstop for years on newscasts and political reports. He flew the world over to meet with the top leaders of the most powerful countries in world history. And he became famous for key initiatives with two of the most brutal political regimes ever—his orchestration of the U.S. opening of frozen relations with Communist China and installing the policy of “détente” with the Soviet Union (modern-day Russia). But Kissinger was also intimately involved in diplomacy and influence in wars in the Middle East and Israel and America’s role in the Vietnam War. And he became known for his support of controversial dictators, invasions, and policies.

But what made Kissinger so versatile was the approach he adopted and practiced—called *Realpolitik*. Here’s the definition of *Realpolitik* as stated in the elite periodical *Foreign Affairs*: “the approach of conducting diplomatic or political policies based primarily on considerations of given circumstances and factors, rather than strictly following ideological, moral, or ethical premises.” Yes, that was generally the reality of *Realpolitik*: détente’s easing of hostility trumped moral or ethical concerns.

Now for quite a period of time, Kissinger pretty much dominated foreign policy around the world, known for his so-called “shuttle diplomacy,” traveling almost nonstop among numerous countries around the world. But, again, notice the definition of *Realpolitik*: Kissinger responded to conflicts with seemingly lesser regard to moral or ethical concerns. And this meant he considered oppressive Chinese leaders or Soviet leaders or dictators the world over as “legitimate” as long as whatever scoundrels with great power

can be labeled as supposedly “legitimate.” For this reason, many on the political left considered Kissinger a “war criminal” for his stances and policies...and many on the political right didn’t trust him either.

But many professional talkers and diplomatic appointees in Washington adored Kissinger because he exalted talking and negotiation as the end-all to keeping the peace. And even though the concentration camps of WW2 Germany blew him away, apparently the Soviets’ gulags and Communist China’s reeducation camps were business as usual. Yes, according to the Oxford dictionary, Kissinger’s policy of détente meant this: *the easing of hostility or strained relations between countries*. But deep political oppression? Handled as *legitimate*. Sadly, this approach made him much admired by many political peers.

Here’s a revealing note to deepen this portrait of Kissinger as a very ambitious world-influencer. He wrote to Israel’s Prime Minister of the early 1970s, a woman named Golda Meir, stating that he was *an American first...U.S. Secretary of State second...and Jew third*. Herself leaving persecution in Russia early on, Meir moved to Milwaukee, then taught in Denver, then ended up in Israel; she reportedly replied to Kissinger that modern Israelis read and live his position backwards, they believe the opposite order: *Jew first*.

Now, two contrasts serve us well here. The first? Kissinger completed his tenure as Secretary of State in 1977—exalted by some for thawing relations with Communist China and for forging détente with the Soviet Communists. But in contrast just four years later, U.S. President Ronald Reagan clearly called out the Soviet Union as an *evil empire* and later called upon that evil empire to “tear down that wall” in Berlin that imprisoned its own people within East Germany. Still, Reagan advocated for peace even while he savvily worked to precipitate the Soviet empire to collapse—and it did just that in the early 1990s. So, Reagan called the Soviets *evil*, then was instrumental in helping win the freedom and gratitude of many millions! But, to Kissinger, the Soviet oppressors holding power were treated as a balance to be kept.

There is a second key contrast between Kissinger and another world-famous government leader. Like Kissinger was displaced from Germany as a teenager, this young man was a Jew displaced from his home, family, and center of worship. And his life adventure was similar to Kissinger’s in that he intimately served the leaders of very powerful nations. But rather than discounting his race, his heritage, and his faith and rather than playing the card of *Realpolitik* like Kissinger, this man doubled down in the face of persecution for practicing his faith. And God honored this Jew...named Daniel!

Similar to what Israel’s Prime Minister Meir advocated, Daniel was a *Jew first*. But deeper than that, as a practicing Jew, Daniel put God first in his life. Sadly, many secularized Jews through the ages have clung to their race and heritage but *have not pursued a relationship with the living God*. Yes, like Henry Kissinger.

Well, Henry Kissinger died in 2024, and in an interview celebrating his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday that year, he once again “held court” in vibrant dialogue and fielded questions about the world’s political landscape—as he had done so for decades. Then the interviewer asked him about faith in God, but Kissinger— usually the smoothly-glib, ready-with-every-answer diplomat—yeah, this time, Kissinger avoided the question, looking visibly uncomfortable. Within a few weeks of that interview broadcast, he died.

Henry Kissinger was revered in some world capitals for decades, many people hanging on his every word. And the policies he effected and endorsed helped a few leaders—certainly some who wielded cruel power that kept countless millions without basic freedoms, many in political prisons and “reeducation camps.”

But here’s the reality of it all: honestly, Henry Kissinger won’t be remembered much 100 years from now, except perhaps by a few historians. *But Daniel will be remembered every day by many millions who read and reflect upon the Bible*. Same for the poor widow who Jesus singled out in the Bible for commendation.

Mark 8:36 (ESV) states this true wisdom: “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?” So. Regarding the exchange between Kissinger and Meir, *what is our personal ranking?* Perhaps like a Kissinger: first American, then executive, then believer? *Or—perhaps a Daniel: believer first...*

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. Henry Kissinger scaled to the highest heights in the world's eyes but did not claim faith at all. But the Bible says: "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" Discuss.
  
2. In his time and place, Daniel scaled to the highest heights, too. Does his example indicate that God-followers can aspire to scale the highest heights of the world...and not only "not forfeit one's soul" but also thrive in following God? Discuss.
  
3. Henry Kissinger ranked himself as an American first, U.S. Secretary of State second, and Jew third. But Israel's Prime Minister Golda Meir essentially responded to Kissinger that, for her, it is "Jew first." Can you fully say you are "Jesus-believer" first and foremost...above family, work identity, ethnicity identity, national identity? Or not. Discuss.