

The Crusades and the Jews

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Historical events in the Jewish world in pre-Crusade Europe

1.

The Account of Solomon Bar Simson

Solomon Bar Simson was a member of the Jewish community of Mainz who wrote his Chronicle after 1140. Subsequent additions were made to the Chronicle, including lists of martyrs of Speyer, Worms, and Mainz and details of the self-immolations of Jewish communities. Source: Shlomo Eidelberg, The Jews and the Crusaders: Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusades (Madison: the University of Wisconsin Press).

I will now recount the event of this persecution in other martyred communities as well the extent to which they clung to the Lord, God of their fathers, bearing witness to His Oneness to their last breath.

In the year four thousand eight hundred and fifty-six, the year one thousand twenty-eight of our exile, in the eleventh year of the cycle Ranu, the year in which we anticipated salvation and solace, in accordance with the prophecy of Jeremiah: "Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout at the head of the nations," etc. - this year turned instead to sorrow and groaning, weeping and outcry. Inflicted upon the Jewish People were the many evils related in all the admonitions; those enumerated in Scripture as well as those unwritten were visited upon us.

At this time arrogant people, a people of strange speech, a nation bitter and impetuous, Frenchmen and Germans, set out for the Holy City, which had been desecrated by barbaric nations, there to seek their house of idolatry and banish the Ishmaelites and other denizens of the land and conquer the land for themselves. They decorated themselves prominently with their signs, placing a profane symbol - a horizontal line over a vertical one - on the vestments of every man and woman whose heart yearned to go on the stray path to the grave of their Messiah. Their ranks swelled until the number of men, women, and children exceeded a locust horde covering the earth; of them it was said: "The locusts have no king (yet they go forth all of them by bands)." Now it came to pass that as they passed through the towns where Jews dwelled, they

said to one another: "Look now, we are going a long way to seek out the profane shrine and to avenge ourselves on Ishmaelites, when here, in our very midst, are the Jews - they whose forefathers murdered and crucified him for no reason. Let us first avenge ourselves on them and exterminate them from among the nations so that the name of Israel will no longer be remembered, or let them adopt our faith and acknowledge the offspring of promiscuity."

When the Jewish communities became aware of their intentions, they resorted to the custom of our ancestors, repentance, prayer, and charity. The hands of the Holy Nation turned faint at this time, their hearts melted, and their strength flagged. They hid in their innermost rooms to escape the swirling sword. They subjected themselves to great endurance, abstaining from food and drink for three consecutive days and nights, and then fasting many days from sunrise to sunset, until their skin was shriveled and dry as wood upon their bones. And they cried out loudly and bitterly to God.

But their Father did not answer them; He obstructed their prayers, concealing Himself in a cloud through which their prayers could not pass, and He abhorred their tent, and he removed them out of His sight - all of this having been decreed by Him to take place "in the day when I visit"; and this was the generation that had been chosen by Him to be His portion, for they had the strength and the fortitude to stand in His Sanctuary, and fulfill His word, and sanctify His Great Name in His world. It is of such as these that King David said: "Bless the Lord, ye angels of His, ye almighty in strength that fulfil His word," etc.

That year, Passover fell on Thursday, and the New Moon of the following month, Iyar, fell on Friday and the Sabbath. On the eighth day of Iyar, on the Sabbath, the foe attacked the community of Speyer and murdered eleven holy souls who sanctified their Creator on the holy Sabbath and refused to defile themselves by adopting the faith of their foe. There was a distinguished, pious woman there who slaughtered herself in sanctification of God's Name. She was the first among all the communities of those who were slaughtered. The remainder were saved by the local bishop without defilement (i.e., baptism), as described above.

On the twenty-third of Iyar they attacked the community of Worms. The community was then divided into two groups; some remained in their homes and others fled to the local bishop seeking refuge. Those who remained in their homes were set upon by the steppe-wolves who pillaged men, women, and infants, children and old people. They pulled down the stairways and destroyed the houses, looting and plundering; and they took the Torah Scroll, trampled it in the mud, and tore and burned it. The enemy devoured the children of Israel with open maw.

Seven days later, on the New Moon of Sivan - the very day on which the Children of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai to receive the Torah - those Jews who were still in the

court of the bishop were subject to great anguish. The enemy dealt them the same cruelty as the first group and put them to the sword. The Jews, inspired by the valor of their brethren, similarly chose to be slain in order to sanctify the Name before the eyes of all, and exposed their throats for their heads to be severed for the glory of the Creator. There were also those who took their own lives, thus fulfilling the verse: "The mother was dashed in pieces with her children." Fathers fell upon their sons, being slaughtered upon one another, and they slew one another - each man his kin, his wife and children; bridegrooms slew their betrothed, and merciful women their only children. They all accepted the divine decree wholeheartedly and, as they yielded up their souls to the Creator, cried out.- "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One." The enemy stripped them naked, dragged them along, and then cast them off, sparing only a small number whom they forcibly baptized in their profane waters. The number of those slain during the two days was approximately eight hundred - and they were all buried naked. It is of these that the Prophet Jeremiah lamented: "They that, were brought up in scarlet embrace dunghills." I have already cited their names above. May God remember them for good.

When the saints, the pious ones of the Most High, the holy community of Mainz, whose merit served as shield and protection for all the communities and whose fame had spread throughout the many provinces, heard that some of the community of Speyer had been slain and that the community of Worms had been attacked a second time, and that the sword would soon reach them, their hands became faint and their hearts melted and became as water. They cried out to the Lord with all their hearts, saying: "O Lord, God of Israel, will You completely annihilate the remnant of Israel? Where are all your wonders which our forefathers related to us, saying, 'Did You not bring us up from Egypt and from Babylonia and rescue us on numerous occasions?' How, then, have You now forsaken and abandoned us, O Lord, giving us over into the hand.-, of evil Edom so that they may destroy us? Do not remove Yourself from us, for adversity is almost upon us and there is no one, to aid us."

The leaders of the Jews gathered together and discussed various ways of saving themselves. They said, "Let us elect elders so that we may know how to act, for we are consumed by this great evil." The elders decided to ransom the community by generously giving of their money and bribing the various princes and deputies and bishops and governors. Then, the community leaders who were respected by the local bishop approached him and his officers and servants to negotiate this matter. They asked: "What shall we do about the news we have received regarding the slaughter of our brethren in Speyer and Worms?" They [the Gentiles] replied: "Heed our advice and bring all your money into our treasury. You, your wives, and your children, and all your belongings shall come into the courtyard of the bishop until the hordes have passed by. Thus will you be saved from the errant ones."

2.

Paul in Romans: the true children of Abraham are those of the promise, that is, Those who believe in Christ. (Mohammad would swap Isaac for Ishmael).

“We are one bread in Christ that must have one heart” (*Sicut unus panis* [the term is Paul’s] *sumus in Christo, sic et unum cor debemus habere*).

Specifically, Paul spoke of the “little leaven,” the fermentation, that can spoil the whole lump (of dough) (Gal. 5:9), the leaven of corruption and wickedness that ruins the true unleavened Passover **matzah**.

Paul’s extrapolation in I Corinthians 6:15-19 (on the basis of the leaven image of chapter 5) makes the point more forcefully yet; and through proximity, the two chapters, both of which deal with sexual immorality and its effects—and, hence, with carnality and its rejection—become thematically one. “Do you not,” asks Paul, “know that your bodies are limbs and organs of Christ. Shall I then take from Christ his bodily parts and make them over to a harlot? Never! You surely know that anyone who links himself with a harlot becomes physically one with her, but he who links himself with Christ is one with him spiritually. Shun fornication.”

Chrysostom

The late-fourth century John Chrysostom says this outright in the commentary on Matthew 15:24-26 in his **Homilies Against the Jews**:

Although those Jews had been called to the adoption of sons, **they fell to kinship with dogs; we who were dogs received the strength, through God's grace, to put aside the irrational nature, which was ours, and to rise to the honor of sons.** How do I prove this? Christ said: "It is not fair to take the children's bread and to cast it to the dogs." Christ was speaking to the Canaanite woman when He called the Jews children and the Gentiles dogs. But see how **thereafter the order was changed about: they became dogs, and we became the children.**

3

Pope Gregory the Great and the Jews 590-604

GREGORY THE GREAT (590-604) is important in Jewish history because his attitude toward the Jew finally became the official policy of the Catholic church. This policy is an attempt to crystallize the status of the Jew as it had evolved under the Christian Roman emperors of the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries. It is most clearly expressed in the very last paragraph of the letter to Fantinus

The first of the Latin letters given below shows Gregory's distaste for forced baptisms, although he himself was most eager to bring the Jews over to Christianity.

The second letter describes the great Pope's efforts to do justice to the Jews of Palermo, in Sicily. The bishop there, Victor, had seized and occupied a synagogue, and when he saw that Gregory objected, he quickly consecrated it as a church, making its return to Jewry impossible. Gregory attempted to correct this injustice by restoring to the Jews the value of the buildings and by instituting a search for the contents that had been carried off. The reason for this attitude of Gregory was a desire to adhere closely to the principles of the Roman law which already defined the privileges and the disabilities of the Jews. He himself did nothing, however, to improve their legal condition.

I. June 391-GREGORY TO VIRGILIUS, BISHOP OF ARLES, AND THEODORUS, BISHOP OF MARSEILLES, IN GAUL

“Though the opportunity of a suitable time and suitable persons for writing to your Fraternity (a term of respect) and duly returning your salutation has failed me so far, the result has been that I can now at one and the same time acquit myself of what is due to love and fraternal relationship, and also touch on the complaint of certain persons which has reached us with respect to the way in which the souls of the erring should be saved.

Very many, though indeed of the Jewish religion, resident in this province (Rome), and from time to time traveling for various matters of business to the regions of Marseilles, have apprized us that many of the Jews settled in those parts have been brought to the font of baptism more by force than by preaching. Now I consider the intention in such cases to be worthy of praise, and allow that it proceeds from the love of our Lord. But I fear lest this same intention, unless adequate justification from (a verse of) Holy Scripture accompany it, should either have no profitable effect, or there will ensue further (God forbid) the loss of the very souls which we wish to save.

For, when any one is brought to the font of baptism, not by the sweetness of preaching but by compulsion, he returns to his former superstition, and dies the worse from having been born again. Let, therefore, your Fraternity stir up such men by frequent preaching, to the end that through the sweetness of their teacher they may desire the more to change their old life. For so our purpose is rightly accomplished, and the mind of the convert returns not again to his former vomit. Wherefore discourse must be addressed to them, such as may burn up the thorns of error in them, and illuminate what is dark in them by preaching, so that your Fraternity may through your frequent admonition receive a reward for them, and lead them, so far as God may grant it, to the regeneration of a new life. [Though Gregory was ready to force pagans into Christianity, he believed Jews should be converted only by preaching and example.]

II. October 598-GREGORY TO FANTINUS, DEFENSOR* OF PALERMO

A little time ago [in June] we wrote to Victor, our brother and fellow-bishop, that inasmuch as certain of the Jews have complained in a petition presented to us that synagogues with their guest chambers [for the poor and ailing], situated in the city of Palermo, had been unreasonably taken possession of by him-he should keep aloof from the consecration of them [as churches] until it could be ascertained whether this thing had actually been done, lest per chance injury should appear to have been alleged by the Jews of their own [ill] will. And, indeed, having regard to his priestly office, we could not easily believe that our aforesaid brother Victor had done anything unsuitably. But, we found from the report of Salarius, our notary [papal agent], who was afterwards there, that there had been no reasonable...

*Papal administrator

4.

In the third decade of the ninth century, Agobard, St. Agobard, Archbishop of Lyons, declared a verbal war against his opponents. A few years later, in 833, he participated actively in a revolt against the Carolingian Emperor Louis the Pious, (45) motivated in no small part by the Emperor's policy toward the Jews.

In letters to the Palace Clergy, to Louis the Pious himself, and to the Archbishop of Narbonne, Nibridus, Agobard deplored royal behavior. The king had supposedly issued a rescript saying:

"that no one may baptize the slave of a Jew without the consent of his master. At this, we stand dumbfounded that a decision has gone out from the court of the most Christian and most pious emperor which is so contrary to the law of the Church."

"remove this impedimentum from the holy Church."

"Omnipotent God has long since prescribed and preordained that you should serve as the pious rector in the future time of perils . . . in the End of Days, . . . {and} matters have at this moment reached that juncture . . . Your <missi> not acting as your agents in all matters, but for the part of another, have showed themselves fierce to Christians and kindly to Jews, especially at Lyons, where they {the <missi>} have construed a persecution against the Church."

"the most reverend governors of the Gallican Church {prescribed in former times}. . . {They} enjoined all social fraternization with Jews . . . prohibited . . . anyone who has become impure through fraternizing and dining with the Jews from breaking bread with any of our priests . . . , {and called it} a sacrilege for Christians to partake of foods coming from . . . Jews; {further, since Jews call our food impure}, we Catholics should begin to be inferior to the Jews, if we partake of those things which they serve to us . . . {It was also ordained} that Jews be denied the privilege of free concourse in streets and markets from Maundy Thursday to the first day of Easter."

"Who can doubt," he wrote, "that for all their deeds the Jews are most properly deserving of the greatest hate . . . They are a match for the evil of Antichrist, presuming to deny that Jesus was Christ . . .

They persist in being the sons of the Devil . . . despising the law, spurning the prophets, persecuting the Church, and blaspheming the very son of God."

However, "Since they {the Jews} dwell among us, we ought not be malignant to them, nor should we threaten their lives, safety or property. Let us observe the convention ordained by the Church, which is explicit in defining how we must be at once cautious but humane in our dealings with them."

5.

GLABER The [word of the attack] spread through the whole world. And by the common consent of all Christians, it was decreed that Jews should be chased out of the lands and cities where they dwelled; and [thus they were and were slaughtered]. . (a few lines down, Glaber says that) [soon Jews appeared again], and he adds that “it was decreed by the bishops that no Christian should associated with a Jew, unless the Jew expressed a desire to convert.”

Utque divulgatum ext per orbem universum comuni omnium Christianorum consensu decretum est ut omnes Judaei ab illorum terris vel civitatibus funditus pellerentur. Sicque universi odio habiti, expulsi de civitatibus, alii gladiis trucidati, alii fluminibus necati, diversisque mortium generibus interempti; nonnulli etiam sese diversa caede interemerunt, ita scilicet ut digna de eis ultione peracta, vix pauci illorum in orbe reperirentur. . . . Tunc quoque decretum est ab episcopis atque interdictum ut nullus christianorum illis in quocumque sociaret negotio [Romano; J. P. Migne Patrologia, Cursus completus, series Latina 221 vols. [Paris, 1844-1902], henceforth, PL 142:658) . . .

WERNER Werner suffers [it is said], in place of Christ (loco Christi): For since the Jews could not have the corpus verum, they took their wrath out on Werner, the corpus mysticum.... Werner suffered, too, as Christ (in Christo), for the blessed child was made part of Christ's body... Werner also suffered for Christ (pro Christo), for since the Jews could not lay their hands on Christ reigning in heaven, they persecuted his Christian devotee. Indeed, he suffered for Christ (pro Christo), for just as Christ underwent the passion so that the Christian could be saved, so Werner underwent a passion for Christ's benefit (propter Christum), so that the faith be exalted.

RUPERT Rupert of Deutz made the same point, although exegetically, in his De Sancte Trinitate. Commenting on Lamentations 4:2-5, Rupert wrote:

Though even the lamia [a kind of female demon] bares her breast to feed her pups, the daughter of my people is cruel like the ostrich. The lamia is a monstrous animal. Its name means tearing<4.>Yet it has a natural affection toward its young [and feeds them]<4.>But the daughter of my people is very cruel and has not even bared her breast [like the ostrich that scatters its eggs in the desert]<4.>On top of that, she killed it, saying, “his blood is on us”

[Matt. 27:25]. [Hence] from then until today, the tongue of the nursing infant clings to its palate; and there is no one to break bread for the children who are asking it. They have too much hunger and thirst to hear the word of God, not because they want the word of God, but because they [the mothers] prefer [the children] to perish rather than to break for themselves the bread of the scriptures that they might live from the marrow of spiritual understanding.

6.

Dispar nimirum est Judaeorum et Sarracenorum causa. In illos enim qui Christianos persequuntur et ex urbibus et propriis sedibus pellunt, iuste pugnatur; hi, vero, ubique parati sunt servire."